

6/8/23 Thursday

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

'Totally False': Cuba Swats Down US Media Reports of Hosting Chinese Spy Base

Ever since it overthrew a pro-US dictatorship in 1959, the US has sought to sabotage the Cuban socialist revolution, driving Havana into the arms of Moscow and more recently Beijing. The sanctions “blockade” has made everyday life on the island a struggle, with 243 new sanctions introduced in the last six years.

Havana strongly rejected reports in US media on Thursday that claimed China had penned a deal worth “several billion dollars” with Cuba to place a signals intelligence base on the island, which sits roughly 100 miles south of Florida.

The report was based on the words of “US officials familiar with highly classified intelligence,” who claimed the intel was “convincing.”

However, John Kirby, the spokesperson for the White House National Security Council, told reporters that the report was “not accurate” - words the NSC separately told two US media outlets on Thursday as well.

Carlos de Cossio, Cuba’s Vice-Minister of Foreign Relations, called the report “totally false and unfounded information.”

“Regardless of the sovereign rights that Cuba has in defense matters, our country is a signatory to the Declaration of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace, signed in Havana in January 2014,” he noted. “By virtue of it, we reject any foreign military presence in Latin America and the Caribbean, including that of numerous US military bases and personnel, especially in the military base that illegally occupies a portion of the national territory in the province of Guantanamo.”

“Such slanders have been fabricated by US officials apparently familiar with intelligence information, such as those regarding alleged acoustic attacks against US diplomatic personnel,” de Cossio said, referring to the mythical Havana Syndrome, which was disproven by multiple investigations, including eventually one by the US State Department.

“All are fallacies promoted with the perfidious intention of justifying the unprecedented intensification of the blockade, destabilization and aggression against Cuba and to deceive the public opinion of the United States and the world. The hostility of the United States against Cuba and the extreme and cruel measures that cause humanitarian damage and punish the Cuban people cannot be justified in any way,” de Cossio added.

'An Imminent Threat'

The fury came swiftly from Republicans, who rushed to condemn US President Joe Biden for supposedly neglecting the “threat” posed by Cuba.

After Biden took office in 2021, he maintained the [243 coercive sanctions](#) against Cuba that were added by his predecessor, Donald Trump, as a major reversal in policy from the rapprochement seen when Barack Obama was US president.

Following protests in the country in the summer of 2021 that were supported by the US, Biden added even more sanctions, refusing to lower them either in response to the COVID-19 crisis or when a catastrophic fire broke out at the country's main oil offloading facility the following year. Earlier this year, relations began to warm ever so slightly, with the US embassy in Havana hosting several cultural exchange events with the Cuban government and relaunching its visa and consular services after a yearslong pause.

US Rep. Carlos Gimenez (R-FL), a Cuban-born US lawmaker who represents the congressional district closest to Cuba, told the White House that the action "poses an imminent threat" to the United States and a "direct threat" to his constituents and to tourists in the region.

"The Castro regime in Cuba is a listed State Sponsor of Terrorism that actively pursues opportunities to undermine the United States and threaten the safety & wellbeing of our citizens. Allowing Communist China to establish a base in Cuba is only the latest example of the Castro regime's long history of coercive, anti-American pursuits," the letter said, which was obtained by US media.

He added that "Communist China is proactively undermining the United States across the Western Hemisphere and I urge this Administration to build a robust, comprehensive, and expedient strategy to counter the CCP's [Chinese Communist Party, also CPC] malign influence with neighboring states."

He urged Biden to "condemn this blatant threat to our national security interests" and to impose new sanctions, either on Cuba or China.

In a separate video message also obtained by US media, Gimenez said: "It should give President Biden and Secretary Blinken you know, maybe a second thought, on maybe whether to reestablish ties with Cuba, open up dialogue with Cuba."

Strategic Competition

The US has a military facility in Cuba at Guantanamo Bay, which it operates without Havana's permission, and has a ring of bases surrounding China in Korea, Japan, and the Philippines, and has turned the island of Taiwan - a Chinese province in rebellion - into a pro-US garrison state. The US Navy [routinely flies spy planes](#) just miles off the Chinese coast, including signals intelligence aircraft engaged in the same kind of peeping that the alleged Cuba base would perform.

Cuba was [placed on the State Department's](#) list of state sponsors of terrorism in January 2021 as then-US President Donald Trump was preparing to leave office. The justification was a refusal by Havana to surrender leaders of the Colombian National Liberation Army (ELN) who had traveled there in good faith for peace talks [with the Colombian government](#) in 2019. When Bogota launched a new surprise attack on the ELN bases during the talks, the delegates stayed in Cuba for safety reasons.

The media leak came only a day after news that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was rescheduling his postponed trip to Beijing.

The foreign ministry was originally slated to meet with Xi and other Chinese leaders in February, but [that was put on ice](#) after a high-altitude balloon, which Beijing said was a scientific balloon blown off course but which Washington alleged was a spying device, drifted across the United States. The US Air Force shot the balloon down and claimed it was just one airship in a vast Chinese spy balloon program.

Last month, White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan told Wang Yi, the CPC's foreign policy chief and former Chinese foreign minister, that Washington was looking to "[move beyond](#)" the balloon incident.

The State Department has made no announcement about the impact of the reported Havana-Beijing deal on Blinken's schedule.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Rasmussen 'Out of His Mind' for Thinking NATO Should Commit Troops to Ukraine

If Poland or other Eastern European states were to try and send troops into Ukraine, it would make widening the war almost inevitable, including into their own countries, a former Pentagon analyst told Sputnik. Fortunately, few in Brussels are likely to take the "insane" advice of the former NATO chief that suggested it.

On Wednesday, former NATO Secretary General Anders [Rasmussen told reporters](#) that several Eastern European members of the alliance were prepared to send troops into Ukraine to support the government of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky if Washington refuses to give Kiev certain security guarantees at the forthcoming summit in Vilnius next month.

"If NATO cannot agree on a clear path forward for Ukraine, there is a clear possibility that some countries individually might take action," Rasmussen said. "We know that Poland is very engaged in providing concrete assistance to Ukraine. And I wouldn't exclude the possibility that Poland would engage even stronger in this context on a national basis and be followed by the Baltic states, maybe including the possibility of troops on the ground ... I think the Poles would seriously consider going in and assemble a 'coalition of the willing' if Ukraine doesn't get anything in Vilnius."

Michael Maloof, former senior security policy analyst in the Office of the US Secretary of Defense, told Sputnik on Thursday that "for Rasmussen to make such irresponsible comments either tells me he had a bad day or he's just out of his mind."

"As a practical matter, it will not be done. I think he's out of his mind. And I think to try and engage and involve Europe further into that conflict is insanity."

The Brussels-based alliance operates off a principle of collective self-defense, meaning an attack on one member state is interpreted as an attack on all 31 member states. It's unclear if NATO would attempt to trigger the rule, known as "if a member's troops come under fire while operating in another non-member country's territory. Ukraine has long sought membership in the alliance, but so far been rebuffed due to ongoing problems with corruption and its unresolved territorial disputes with the Russian Federation.

"What it seems to represent, I think, is that the eastern part of Europe is basically trying to take over NATO in terms of direction and influence. And also, Poland especially, has designs on the western part of Ukraine. I don't think their intention would be to defend Ukraine, I think it is to take it apart."

"Once you put NATO troops in Ukraine, they then become targets, and that will almost definitely guarantee that the conflict will have widened, and it will be on NATO," Maloof said, adding that "all the NATO countries have to agree to it. So as a practical matter, I just don't see it."

"Unless they do what the United States did when we invaded Libya, going with the so-called 'countries of the willing'. If that happens, you might as well just kiss NATO goodbye. NATO will be over. And for that matter, the conflict indeed will enlarge. It will definitely bring in Belarus, it'll bring in the Central Asian countries - I mean, this thing could just blow out of control entirely. And it'll be on Europe's head."

Maloof said Rasmussen, who previously served as NATO's secretary general from 2009 to 2014 and was also the Prime Minister of Denmark, "should know better, frankly," than to make such a comment.

"I think it's desperation on the part of Europe generally. I think it represents a desperation that Ukraine is not winning. And I think that's what it basically shows. And so they're trying to look for all avenues to try and help Ukraine. Their stockpiles of spare weapons are depleting very, very quickly. So are ours," Maloof said.

"We can't continue, the United States cannot continue to endlessly backfill those countries [weapons supplies] and not have them take up their fair share of the load, if that's the policy approach that they want to take. But they're in a bind. Their industries can't support this any longer. And in some cases they've completely depleted their storages in stockpiles of weapons, including ammunition. I mean, it's an insane thing. And I think it's just a call of desperation."

Maloof dismissed Rasmussen's suggestion that NATO give Kiev written security guarantees, which only alliance members can receive.

"I don't think we have any hold on Ukraine. Ukraine has no hold on NATO. So I don't see where we have any obligation to do anything as an alliance, as the NATO alliance, toward Ukraine - because they're not members, pure and simple. They've got to get over it. They are NATO wannabes. They are not members of NATO. Period. End of story."

Indeed, if Brussels did so, it would be "totally disastrous," he noted.

"I can't imagine that NATO would seriously consider it, even though Rasmussen formerly was in charge. I just can't imagine that the NATO countries would even contemplate anything like that considering their own situation. They've already gone up far enough out on a limb that they're basically sawing it off on the wrong side. And they have to consider their own population and their preservation and their quality of life."

"Europe today in its quality of life has declined so much as a result of this war because they voluntarily decided to cut off their nose to spite their face just to send a message to Russia that 'we don't need or want your energy any longer'. But look [at] what they did to themselves, to the people. Now, some of those countries are in a recession and their industry cannot support such a thing. I mean, they are out of their minds if they give this serious contemplation."

Maloof said that if Poland and Baltic states did send troops into Ukraine, they "would then become the subject to any consequences deriving from that decision and that would include conflict on their own soil.

Russia isn't all that far away and they have [hypersonic missiles](#) and they can travel within seconds, given the proximity and locations. So they've got to really, really give this serious thought and start climbing down off of their high horse and start looking at reality and not ideology."

Most of the territory now under Kiev's control was historically ruled from Warsaw and Krakow before being ceded to the Russian Empire in the late 18th Century, and ethnic Poles continued to live in those lands afterward. In the 20th century, when Nazi Germany invaded and occupied Soviet Ukraine, Nazi collaborationist forces like the Ukrainian Insurgent Army carried out genocidal massacres of Poles in western Ukraine alongside other non-Ukrainian ethnicities, such as Russians and Jews.

Turning to the previously-raised question of Warsaw's territorial desires in Ukraine, Maloof noted the government of Polish President Andrzej Duda was already issuing passports to ethnic Poles in western Ukraine.

"They basically want to start picking apart what is western Ukraine along with Hungary and Romania. They have historical ties. There are ethnicities in those areas that now live in those areas, pretty much like Russian-speaking people are in the eastern part of the country. I see the 19th century coming back to life. All of these connections go back and even further. So it's like revisiting history," he explained.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

'Teflon Don' Frustrates Ron - Cartoon

By - Ted Rall

Former President Donald Trump announced on Truth Social late Thursday that he had been informed that he is being indicted for his alleged mishandling of classified documents and obstruction of justice.

Trump's closest opponent for the Republican nomination for president, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis has oscillated between praising and criticizing Trump. In 2018, Trump endorsed DeSantis for governor, a move he now says he regrets.

The former president has lived up to his nickname "Teflon Don." Despite a previous indictment, two impeachments while in office and several investigations that may lead to more indictments, Trump had remained popular in Republican circles, putting his primary opponents in the awkward situation of publicly defending their opponent in an attempt to not anger Trump supporters.

Trump's other Republican opponents have also been struggling with how they balance criticism and praise for Trump, who is still very popular with Republican voters.

On Wednesday, before the indictment became public knowledge, Trump's former Vice President Mike Pence, who is also running, said Trump is not above the law but that the Department of Justice should not indict him because of "unique circumstances."

In response to the announcement, DeSantis [questioned](#) the "uneven application of the law" for Republicans and Democrats.

"Why so zealous in pursuing Trump yet so passive about Hillary or Hunter?" DeSantis said, adding that he would bring "accountability" to the White House if he wins the 2024 election.

After Trump's first indictment, DeSantis indicated he would not assist the federal government in extraditing the former president from Florida.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Report: US Lawmakers Have Proposed 185 Laws in 2023 That May Be Used to Subvert Elections

According to a poll conducted in March, 63% of Republicans and Republican-leaning Independents do not believe Joe Biden won the 2020 election legitimately.

185 bills across 38 states have been introduced to state legislatures since the start of this year that could be used to subvert elections, an analysis by three nonpartisan organizations revealed on Thursday.

The States United Democracy Center, Protect Democracy and Law Forward noted in their findings that 15 of the bills have already been enacted. Three additional bills were passed by the state legislature but were vetoed by the state's governor.

While most candidates who denied the 2020 election lost their bids in key battleground states, the bills showcase that the movement is still alive, particularly in Republican strongholds. "In fact, legislators are coming up with new ways to interfere with elections," Maya Ingram, a senior policy development counsel at the States United Democracy Center said.

The report also notes that 2020 election deniers won key seats in state legislatures and other positions, and that bills that could be used to usurp elections are being introduced at the same rate as their previous report found two years ago.

The study defined subversion as any bill that attempts to do one of five things: usurping control over election results, requiring partisan or unprofessional election audits or reviews, seizing power over election responsibilities, creating unworkable burdens in election administration, or imposing disproportionate criminal or other penalties.

The state that scored the worst is Texas, which has pending or passed bills that meet all five criteria, the only state to do so.

Texas' HB 5082 allows the secretary of state to order new elections in counties with a population over 1 million—which only applies to six of the 254 counties in Texas—when there is "good reason" to believe those counties ran out of ballots during voting hours and were not replenished within an hour. Some of those counties lean Democratic, while the secretary of state and governor who appointed her are currently Republicans.

Arizona's SB 1695 would prohibit election officials from canvassing the election if an election official has violated any election law or provision of the Election Procedures Manual, even minor infractions, and enough voters claim disenfranchisement. That will cause the canvass to be delayed until a special master is appointed to review affidavits and other facts.

If the court declares a "failed election," it can order a new one. In Arizona, a voter can be considered disenfranchised if they have to wait in line for more than 90 minutes.

While the study says requiring election officials to follow the rules and reduce voting lines are noble goals, it argues the law is structured in a way that would enable the special master to hijack the election and “overturn the will of the voters.”

Arizona HB 2078 allows candidates, chairs of political parties and chairs of ballot measure political committees to request an audit on elections by the secretary of state but does not set a standard for what is required to institute the audit.

Several states, including Arizona, South Carolina, and Virginia have introduced bills that would ban the use of machines to count votes, forcing them to be counted by hand instead, which could delay election results and is more prone to errors. Arizona’s bill, HB 2100, goes a step further, mandating that they be counted by hand within 24 hours after the polls close, something experts say is a physical impossibility, according to the study.

In Florida, the state legislature has empowered the state’s attorney with expanded powers to prosecute election fraud, even though such cases are extremely rare. The bill was quickly passed after a court ruled that some of the 20 people arrested by Florida for election fraud could not be prosecuted by the state attorney because he lacked jurisdiction.

In that case, all 20 Floridians were former felons who thought they had the right to vote.

In 2018, Florida voters passed an initiative restoring voting rights for some felons, but Florida has not set up a system to inform felons if they are eligible.

In some of the cases, the accused had been given voter documents by the state, including voter registration cards, and were told by state officials that they could vote.

“Rather than fix Florida’s complex and unnavigable system for people with past felony convictions to determine their voting eligibility,” the ACLU Florida office said in a statement about the law, “this new law gives Governor [Ron] DeSantis and his political allies more authority to prosecute alleged voting misconduct that a local prosecutor might not be willing to prosecute because the evidence fails to show an individual willfully broke the law.”

The report alleges that such laws will have an effect on the 2024 election and could alter voting habits or reduce turnout. While the study says it is unlikely that election subversion will “be as blatant as throwing out the election results altogether and installing a hand-picked winner,” but will instead cause “disorder and confusion.”

“Any of these scenarios could create a pretext for partisan actors to throw up their hands, declare that the will of the people is for them to discern, and subvert an election,” the report says.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Mar-a-Lago Indictment Designed to Make Trump Reelection 'Impossible'

Former US President Donald Trump earlier reported that his legal team had been informed that he was being indicted over his retainment of classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago residence. The revelation came just after it was reported prosecutors had formally informed Trump’s lawyers that he was the subject of their Florida investigation.

Michael Shannon, a political commentator and columnist for Newsmax, told Sputnik that he believes the investigation into Trump's handling of classified documents and alleged obstruction of justice is part of a larger politically-motivated scheme designed to prevent the former president from running for his old seat in the 2024 election.

"This is all part of the process to indict Trump and make it difficult — if not impossible — for him to run for reelection," Shannon asserted. "The entire investigation, raid on Mar-a-Lago and subsequent developments are entirely political and constitute a genuine attack on democracy." Shannon pointed to classified documents that were found at US President Joe Biden's Delaware home and at the Biden Penn Center in Washington, DC, as evidence that the Mar-a-Lago investigation is politically driven.

Earlier reports revealed that documents had been retrieved from the garage area of one of Biden's homes, a development that later saw the president joke that they were secured along his beloved Corvette.

"Joe Biden is a Democrat and therefore his classified documents are a mere oversight and not the foundation-shaking treachery Trump's documents represent," Shannon said.

The commentator added that while classified documents were also found in the possession of former US Vice President Mike Pence, "the left doesn't view him as a threat to Biden, the Pence documents are also no big deal."

However, Shannon warns liberals that their attempts to stop Trump may end up saddling them with a president they like even less.

"The goal is to make it impossible for Trump to win the presidency again, but success for the left could well turn out to be a Pyrrhic victory. If Trump doesn't run, that makes it much more likely that Gov. Ron DeSantis will be the nominee for Republicans."

According to Shannon, DeSantis would be a more formidable opponent in 2024 and in a potential 2028 contest because he would "be a much more effective president" than Trump. As for how the case will go, Shannon insists it depends on where the trial is held, something that remains an open question.

"A Washington, DC jury will be happy to give the death penalty to Trump, just as we saw in New York," Shannon said. "A Florida jury will be less likely to convict. I'm betting the feds will be trying their best for a DC jury."

Trump was recently indicted on more than 30 charges related to business fraud in New York, and he was also found liable for sexual assault by a Manhattan jury in a civil case.

Most obstruction statutes state that the venue of the trial depends on where the subpoena was issued. However, in previous cases, the US Court of Appeals for the DC circuit court has ruled that the trial's venue should be where the alleged obstruction took place.

If prosecutors want to charge Trump for steps he took to conceal the documents after the subpoena demanding their return was issued, then it is possible Florida will be the venue.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Trump Says He's Been Indicted Over Mar-a-Lago Docs, Told to Appear Tuesday in Court

The announcement comes a day after reports revealed that Trump's legal team had been notified they were the subject of an investigation over the doc seizures. The former president is now expected to appear in court on June 13.

Former US President Donald Trump revealed late Thursday that his legal camp has been informed he's been indicted over classified documents retrieved by FBI agents at his Mar-a-Lago residence.

Trump made the announcement on his Truth Social account, a social media site he owns. Spanning over three posts, Trump railed against the indictment, calling it politically motivated and a "DARK DAY" for the United States.

"The corrupt Biden Administration has informed my attorneys that I have been Indicted, seemingly over the Boxes Hoax, even though Joe Biden has 1850 Boxes at the University of Delaware," Trump wrote. "I never thought it possible that such a thing could happen to a former President of the United States."

The one-time commander-in-chief went on to underscore that he is "an innocent man," adding that he has been summoned to appear at a federal courthouse in Miami, Florida, on Tuesday at 3 p.m. local time.

In a video posted to Truth Social about 40 minutes after his first post, Trump called the indictment "election interference of the highest level. There has never been anything like what's happening. I'm an innocent man, I'm an innocent person."

"I am innocent and we will prove that very, very soundly and hopefully very quickly," he stressed. Trump is being investigated for his handling of classified documents after he left the White House and obstruction of justice. Last year, the FBI raided his Mar-a-Lago estate, seizing thousands of documents, including about 100 that had classified markings.

Court documents also showed that the FBI had subpoenaed security footage from Mar-a-Lago, and alleged that he moved the documents out of a storage room at the estate in an effort to obstruct the investigation.

Trump has claimed that he declassified the documents through the use of his then-presidential powers; however, a recently released audio tape saw Trump in 2021 discussing a Pentagon document that he said was still classified.

Unconfirmed early reports have suggested that Trump has been indicted on seven charges, some of which are said to include the willful retention of national defense information, corruptly concealing documents, conspiracy to obstruct justice and false statements.

The US Department of Justice has not confirmed Trump's indictment, nor offered any confirmation on what specific charges Trump may face.

Trump further asserted in his social media posts that he received "far more votes than any sitting president in the history of our country," adding that he is leading in the polls against "all candidates, both Democrat and Republican."

His comments echo Newsmax columnist Michael Shannon, who told Sputnik earlier Thursday that the indictment and everything surrounding it was politically motivated.

"This is all part of the process to indict Trump and make it difficult — if not impossible — for him to run for reelection," Shannon told Sputnik. "The entire investigation, raid on Mar-a-Lago and subsequent developments are entirely political and constitute a genuine attack on democracy."

Like Trump, Shannon also pointed out that US President Joe Biden also retained classified documents at his residences and offices from his time as vice president during the Obama administration.

"This is indeed a DARK DAY for the United States of America," Trump wrote. "We are a Country in serious and rapid Decline, but together we will Make America Great Again!"

The former president has faced multiple and piling legal issues since leaving office in 2021. In late March, he was indicted in New York on more than 30 counts related to business fraud. He was also found liable of sexual assault in a civil case stemming from an encounter with a New York City columnist in the early 1990s.

There are other cases that are still under investigation which may result in more charges for Trump. Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg is looking into his role in providing hush money payments to adult film actress Stormy Daniels, who alleged she had an affair with Trump. Prosecutors are looking into those payments to see if they violated campaign finance regulations.

Additionally, Atlanta-area District Attorney Fani Willis is investigating alleged efforts by Trump and his allies to overturn the 2020 presidential election in that state.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Americans' Rating of State of Moral Values at 22-Year Low – Poll

WASHINGTON, June 9 (Sputnik) – Fifty-four percent of Americans qualify the state of moral values in the country as "poor," which is a 22-year low, according to a Gallup poll published on Friday.

The poll asked respondents how they would rate the overall state of moral values in the country as of today – "excellent," "good," "only fair," or "poor."

"Americans' already poor ratings of the state of moral values in the U.S. have fallen further to the lowest point in Gallup's 22-year trend. The 54% of U.S. adults who rate moral values in the country as 'poor' marks a four-percentage-point increase since last year and the first time the reading has reached the majority level," the pollster said.

Another 33% said US moral values are "only fair," with only one tenth saying they are "good" and a mere 1% describing them as "excellent."

Since 2002, an average of 43% of US adults have described the state of moral values as poor, 38% as only fair and 18% as good or excellent.

The downward trend can be attributed to a change in views among the independents, with 51% of them, an increase of seven percentage points from last year, saying that the situation is poor, the poll showed. In addition, both Republicans and Democrats have added two percentage points to their negative views, to reach 74% and 38%, respectively.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file

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

Canada Extends Tariff Waiver on Ukrainian Goods Until June 2024 - Freeland

WASHINGTON, June 9 (Sputnik) – Canada has extended the tariff waiver on Ukrainian goods by one year, the Office of Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland said on Friday.

"The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the Honourable Chrystia Freeland, today announced that Canada will extend the Ukraine Goods Remission Order until June 9, 2024. This will ensure the continued tariff-free import of Ukrainian goods to Canada, including steel and in-quota supply-managed goods," Freeland's office said in a statement.

The decision builds on the Canada-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement (CUFTA) and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's commitment to modernizing the deal, the statement added.

Since CUFTA came into force in 2017, 99.9% of imports from Ukraine, including fish, seafood, sunflower oil, as well as the same portion of the country's agricultural and manufactured products have been exempted from tariffs.

The temporary duty relief on Ukrainian goods is part of Canada's commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and democracy, the statement noted.

First introduced on June 9, 2022, Ukraine Goods Remission Order is aimed at supporting the Ukrainian economy amid Russia's special military operation by increasing its exports to Canada.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

One UN Peacekeeper Killed, 4 Injured in Attack in Northern Mali – MINUSMA

UNITED NATIONS, June 9 (Sputnik) - One peacekeeper was killed and another four sustained serious injuries in an attack on a UN convoy in northern Mali on Friday, the UN's peacekeeping mission in the country said.

"Today, 09/06, one of our patrols near #Ber town, North of #Mali was targeted by a complex attack. It encountered an Improvised Explosive Device followed by a direct arm fire attack. Preliminary information: 1 #peacekeeper killed and 4 seriously injured. Updates will follow," MINUSMA wrote on social media.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Pentagon Preparing New \$2Bln Air Defense Package for Ukraine - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 9 (Sputnik) - The Pentagon may announce as early as Friday a long-term arms package for Ukraine that includes air defense munitions worth over \$2 billion, Bloomberg reported citing administration officials.

The package will include Raytheon and Lockheed Martin missile systems, the report said on

Thursday.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Trump Says Informed of Indictment Over Classified Docs, Summoned to Court on Tuesday

(Updates with details in paras 4-6)

WASHINGTON, June 9 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump announced that he has been indicted in a federal investigation over alleged mishandling of classified documents at his Florida residency and is summoned to appear in court on Tuesday.

"The corrupt Biden Administration has informed my attorneys that I have been Indicted, seemingly over the Boxes Hoax, even though Joe Biden has 1850 Boxes at the University of Delaware, additional Boxes in Chinatown, DC, with even more Boxes at the University of Pennsylvania, and documents strewn all over his garage floor where he parks his Corvette, and which is 'secured' by only a garage door that is paper thin, and open much of the time," Trump said via Telegram on Thursday.

Trump added that he has been summoned to appear at the federal courthouse in Miami on Tuesday at 3:00 p.m. EST (7:00 p.m. GMT).

ABC News, citing sources, reported that Trump is facing seven counts that include willful retention of national defense information, corruptly concealing docs, conspiracy to obstruct justice, and false statements.

Trump expressed despair over the indictment, pointing out that he is being prosecuted as polls show is by far the leading candidate among both Republicans and Democrats.

"This is indeed a dark day for the United States of America," Trump said. "We are a country in serious and rapid decline, but together we will make America great again."

Trump has denied any wrongdoing in the classified documents case and the other three criminal probes he is involved in, including charges of falsifying business records and the former president's alleged involvement in the events on Capitol Hill on January 6, 2021.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Trump Says Informed of Indictment Over Classified Docs, Summoned to Court on Tuesday

WASHINGTON, June 9 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump announced that he has been indicted in a federal investigation over alleged mishandling of classified documents at his Florida residency and is summoned to appear in court on Tuesday.

"The corrupt Biden Administration has informed my attorneys that I have been Indicted, seemingly over the Boxes Hoax, even though Joe Biden has 1850 Boxes at the University of Delaware, additional Boxes in Chinatown, DC, with even more Boxes at the University of Pennsylvania, and documents strewn all over his garage floor where he parks his Corvette, and

which is 'secured' by only a garage door that is paper thin, and open much of the time," Trump said via Telegram on Thursday.

Trump added that he has been summoned to appear at the federal courthouse in Miami on Tuesday at 3:00 p.m. EST (7:00 p.m. GMT).

Trump has denied any wrongdoing in the classified documents case and the other three criminal probes he is involved in, including charges of falsifying business records and the former president's alleged involvement in the events on Capitol Hill on January 6, 2021.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Blinken Planning to Visit China As Soon as Next Week - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 9 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is scheduled to potentially visit China as soon as next week, Politico reported citing two people familiar with matter.

The report said on Thursday that the State Department is still working on finalizing details.

In February, an alleged Chinese surveillance balloon flew across the continental United States, including near sensitive military sites. President Joe Biden authorized the US military to shoot down the balloon over the Atlantic Ocean and recover the wreckage for further analysis. China maintains that the balloon was a civilian airship engaged in scientific research.

The balloon incident prompted Blinken to cancel a previously scheduled trip to China

6/8/2023 7:03:04 PM -04:00

California Governor Proposes Constitutional Amendment to Restrict Gun Access

WASHINGTON, June 9 (Sputnik) - California Governor Gavin Newsom proposed a 28th amendment be added to the US constitution that will restrict gun ownership by raising the minimum purchasing age and banning assault weapons, among other provisions.

"I'm proposing the 28th Amendment to the United States Constitution to help end our nation's gun violence crisis," Newsom said in a tweet on Thursday. "The American people are sick of Congress' inaction."

In addition to raising the minimum gun buying age to 21 and banning the civilian purchase of assault weapons, the amendment if ratified will require universal background checks and impose a "reasonable" waiting period for gun purchases.

Newsom told NBC he proposed the measure because the US is facing an "existential crisis" of mass shootings.

The National Rifle Association (NRA) was quick to react to Newsom's proposal.

"California is a beacon for violence because of @GavinNewsom's embrace of policies that champion the criminal and penalize the law-abiding. That is why the majority of Americans rightfully reject his California-style gun control," the NRA said in a tweet.

In order to pass the 28th Amendment, the governor and California lawmakers would need to

kick off a national convention to introduce and discuss the measures to the US Constitution. Two-thirds of all state houses would need to agree to the initial meeting, and an additional 75 percent would need to throw their support behind the amendment before it became law.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

House Democrats Accuse FBI Agent of Lying to US Congress About Media Leaks - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 9 (Sputnik) - House Democrats are accusing a suspended FBI agent who testified to Congress as a whistleblower of lying to lawmakers about purported leaks of sensitive information to the press, NBC News reported, citing a copy of a letter from the lawmakers.

Last month, suspended FBI agent Garret O'Boyle provided testimony to the House Select Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government alongside another suspended FBI agent and a former agent, who discussed matters related to the January 6 US Capitol riot.

FBI Executive Assistant Director for Human Resources Jennifer Moore reportedly provided testimony to the Weaponization Subcommittee indicating that O'Boyle was suspended for allegedly leaking sensitive information to media organization Project Veritas.

In turn, Representative Jerry Nadler and Delegate Stacey Plaskett sent a letter to US Attorney General Merrick Garland on Thursday to express concerns about O'Boyle potentially lying to Congress.

The letter alleges that O'Boyle lied to the panel by claiming that he did not provide information to members of the media prior to his suspension from the FBI, the report said. The lawmakers are referring the matter for review by Garland, the report said.

The FBI was able to determine that O'Boyle acted as a whistleblower source for a May 12, 2022 Project Veritas video, Moore reportedly testified. The FBI suspended O'Boyle on September 23.

The FBI's probe into the matter also revealed that O'Boyle removed sensitive information from agency computers and provided it to Project Veritas without authorization, Moore said.

A spokesperson for O'Boyle denied the assertion that he lied to lawmakers about his suspension or that he leaked sensitive information to any media outlet, the report said.

"Democrats are so desperate to distract from Justice Department wrongdoing that they're willing to embarrass themselves with frivolous attacks on brave FBI whistleblowers," Weaponization Subcommittee spokesperson Russell Dye also reportedly said.

A Justice Department spokesperson confirmed receipt of the lawmakers' letter but declined to comment on the matter, the report added.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

General Motors Says Working With Tesla to Adopt North American Charging Standard for EVs

WASHINGTON, June 9 (Sputnik) - American automotive company General Motors (GM) will work with Tesla to integrate the North American Charging Standard (NACS) connector design into its electric vehicles (EVs) in the coming years, GM said in a statement.

“GM announced today a collaboration with Tesla to integrate the North American Charging Standard (NACS) connector design into its EVs beginning in 2025. Additionally, the collaboration will expand access to charging for GM EV drivers at 12,000 Tesla Superchargers, and growing, throughout North America,” the statement said on Thursday.

Earlier this year, Ford Motor Company also announced plans to integrate the NACS connector design into future EVs.

The Tesla Supercharger Network will be open to GM EV drivers starting in 2024 and will initially require the use of an adapter, the statement said. Starting in 2025, the first GM EVs will be built with a NACS inlet for direct access to the chargers, the statement said.

GM will also integrate the Tesla Supercharger Network into its vehicle and mobile apps, the statement said.

“Our vision of the all-electric future means producing millions of world-class EVs across categories and price points, while creating an ecosystem that will accelerate mass EV adoption,” GM Chair and CEO Mary Barra said in the statement. “This collaboration is a key part of our strategy and an important next step in quickly expanding access to fast chargers for our customers.”

The agreement helps move the EV industry toward a single North American charging standard, Barra added.

The agreement complements GM’s ongoing investments in charging and builds on the more than 134,000 chargers currently available to GM EV drivers, the statement said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Ukraine's UN Envoy Says Investigation of Kakhovka Dam Attack 'Not Possible'

UNITED NATIONS, June 9 (Sputnik) - Ukraine believes that an investigation to find out who was behind the destruction of the Kakhovka dam is not possible due to Russia’s presence in the area, the Ukrainian Permanent Representative to the UN Sergiy Kyslytsya told reporters.

"As you logically can conclude that any investigation, under the current circumstances of occupation and non-cooperation of the occupational authorities, is not possible," Kyslytsya said on Thursday.

Ukraine also calls for unimpeded access for humanitarian access to the Kherson region, he added.

The upper part of the Kakhovka HPP was destroyed overnight on Monday into Tuesday. The Novaya Kakhovka city authorities later confirmed that the dam was destroyed only partially, but that it caused an uncontrollable outflow of water to towns downstream.

Moscow and Kiev blamed each other for the incident. Authorities in some of the affected areas have started evacuating the population.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, June 9 (Sputnik) –

US-UK COOPERATION

* Washington and London will expand their data sharing in order to identify entities financially aiding Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, a joint US-UK declaration said on Thursday.

* US President Joe Biden on Thursday said he remains open to the possibility of NATO having a British Secretary-General come this fall, saying "that remains to be seen," when asked about the matter during a joint press briefing with British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

* Biden will ask the Congress to add the United Kingdom as a "domestic source" within Title III of the Defense Production Act to deepen industrial base collaboration, according to a joint US-UK declaration.

* The United States and United Kingdom launched a new plan to enhance the bilateral economic relationship that recognizes close ties between the two countries, the UK Embassy said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* US President Joe Biden said on Thursday that he believes he will continue to have support from Congress to provide additional assistance to Ukraine regardless of some lawmakers questioning spending.

* The Ukrainian military lost over 350 servicepeople and more than 30 people, including three Leopard tanks, during an offensive attempt in the Zaporizhzhia Region, Col. Gen. Alexander Romanchuk, the commander of the Russian armed forces in the region, said.

* Biden said that he discussed steadfast US-UK support for Ukraine during Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's visit to the White House.

* Up to 1,500 Ukrainian military attempted to break through Russian defense lines in the Zaporizhzhia direction on Wednesday night, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said.

* Ukraine has lost 945 military, 33 tanks, 28 infantry fighting vehicles, as well as other weapons during the fighting that took place on June 7, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said.

INCIDENT AT KAKHOVKA HPP

* The United States has not yet determined whether Ukrainian or Russian forces were responsible for damage to the Kakhovka hydroelectric power plant, which has led to an uncontrollable water flow downstream, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said on Thursday.

* Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed by phone with Vladimir Saldo, the acting head of the Russia-controlled part of the Kherson region, the situation in the region after the destruction of the Kakhovka HPP, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

* Russian Federation Council declared on Thursday that the responsibility for the destruction of the Kakhovka HPP lies with Kiev.

ROMANIA'S DECISION TO EXPULSE RUSSIAN DIPLOMATS

* The Romanian Foreign Ministry said on Thursday that it informed Russian ambassador Valery

Kuzmin that over 50 employees of the diplomatic mission should leave the country within 30 days.

* In total, 21 Russian diplomats and 30 technical staff members will leave Romania at Bucharest's request, Russian ambassador Valery Kuzmin said.

* Russia considers Romania's decision to expel diplomats another hostile step that will further deteriorate Moscow-Bucharest relations, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

* Moscow will respond to Bucharest's decision to expel over 50 Russian embassy employees from the country, the Russian Foreign Ministry told Sputnik.

RUSSIAN ENERGY POLICY

* Russia is discussing new long-term LNG supply contracts with Asia-Pacific countries, as well as the participation of Asian investors in Russian LNG projects, Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said.

* Russia increased the supply of oil to India by 19 times in 2022, while the deliveries of oil products and coal were up by two and three times, respectively, Novak said.

* Rosneft has confirmed the transportation of 30 million tonnes of oil to China through Skovorodino-Mohe oil pipeline for 2023, Novak said.

* Russia received over 20 requests from different countries for the supply of oil, petroleum products, liquefied natural gas (LNG) in 2022, and has prospects to expand exports, Novak said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Oil Hits One-Week Low on Report of Iran Nuclear Deal, Later Denied by White House

NEW YORK, June 8 (Sputnik) - Oil prices hit a one-week bottom on Thursday before settling off their lows as the White House called "false and misleading" a report that the United States and Iran had agreed to a nuclear deal that would let the Islamic republic legally export some of its sanctioned oil.

New York-traded West Texas Intermediate, or WTI, crude settled down \$1.24, or 1.17%, at \$71.29 per barrel. The benchmark for US crude plunged to a one-week low of \$69.09 earlier, breaking its key \$70 psychological support.

London-traded Brent crude officially finished the day down 99 cents, or 1.3%, at \$75.96. The session low for the global crude benchmark was \$73.61, breaking its \$75 support.

Both WTI and Brent hit one-week lows after the Middle East Eye website said Iran would commit to cease enriching uranium to purity of 60% or above and would continue cooperation with the UN nuclear watchdog in return for being allowed to export up to 1 million barrels of oil per day.

Tehran would also gain access "to its income and other frozen funds abroad," the report said. It cited two unnamed sources as saying Iran and the United States were "nearing a temporary deal that would swap some sanctions relief for reducing Iranian uranium enrichment activities." The report also said "the two sides have reached an agreement on a temporary deal to take to

their respective superiors."

The White House outrightly dismissed the story.

"This report is false and misleading," a spokesperson for the White House National Security Council said in comments carried by Reuters, referring to the report that appeared on the Middle East Eye website. "Any reports of an interim deal are false."

Notwithstanding crude's rebound from Thursday's lows, fundamental worries about supply-demand continue to weigh on the market, said analysts.

"While we wait to see if US-Iran nuclear negotiations get anywhere after this, today's price move tells you there are so many things that aren't well with the oil market despite Saudis attempts to push it higher with one promised production cut after another," John Kilduff, partner at New York energy hedge fund Again Capital, said in a text message to Sputnik.

Saudi Arabia said on Sunday it would take off another million barrels per day from its production in July, effectively removing some 2.5 million barrels per day since October from its normal daily output of 11.5 million barrels. The Saudi pledge came after its 12 partners in OPEC, or the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, and 10 other allies, including Russia, in OPEC+ alliance decided to stay pat on production.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Blinken Expresses Concern for Ukrainians Impacted by Destruction of Kakhovka Dam

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, in a telephone conversation with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, expressed concern for Ukrainians impacted by the destruction of the Kakhovka dam and offered Washington's support, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Thursday.

"The Secretary expressed his concern for the thousands of Ukrainians impacted by the recent destruction of the Kakhovka dam, offering further U.S. support for those affected," Miller said.

Blinken and Kuleba also discussed the latest developments in the conflict, he added.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Don't Bet Against America or Its 'Hard-Working' People - Biden Says in Op-Ed

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - Betting against America or its people is never a good idea as both prevail in the toughest of challenges, President Joe Biden said in an opinion piece published in the Wall Street Journal Thursday.

"I wrote in these pages a year ago that with the right policies, the US could make a transition from rapid recovery to stable, steady growth with lower inflation, sustaining the historic economic gains that American workers had achieved," Biden said. "Our hard-won progress over the past two years has reaffirmed my bedrock belief that it is never a good idea to bet against hard-working Americans or the American economy."

The president said many economic forecasters and commentators opined that his planned economic transition of building from the “middle out and the bottom up” will fail; that proposed investments in clean energy and manufacturing won’t become law and that a “manufactured debt-limit crisis” will lead to recession.

On the contrary, the economy created more than 13 million jobs, including nearly 800,000 positions in manufacturing, and the labor growth was equitable as well, with ultra-low unemployment among disadvantaged groups like African-Americans, Hispanics, the disabled and women, Biden said. He added that the jobless rate has remained below 4% for 16 months—a level that the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said wouldn’t be reached until 2026. “Our economic recovery has been the strongest of any major economy,” the president said. “My goal now is to protect and build on this progress.”

He also pointed to the bipartisan successes of his administration in getting a debt ceiling deal between his Democratic Party and rival Republicans done. “Neither side got everything it wanted, but the American people got what they needed.”

The US Senate approved last week the debt ceiling deal between the White House and congressional Republicans. The resolution ended a weeks-long stand-off that risked triggering an unprecedented default in the world’s largest economy.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Pentagon Says Was Not Aware of US Military Drag Events Until Spring Congressional Hearing

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - US Defense Department leaders were not aware of the practice of US military-backed drag shows events until lawmakers informed them during a congressional hearing earlier this year, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said on Thursday.

“We became aware of the drag events during an April [sic] congressional hearing, that there were drag events scheduled to take place at DoD installations and facilities, and so the Secretary [Lloyd Austin] advised that the department will not host such events,” Ryder said during a press briefing.

The policy of not hosting drag events at US military installations is “long standing,” Ryder added.

The statement comes amid so-called lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Pride Month, which Ryder said the Pentagon recognizes.

In late March, US Congressman Matt Gaetz informed Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley about the events during a House Armed Services Committee hearing.

Milley requested copies of reports on the matter noting that it was the first time he was hearing of the events and that he does not agree with the practice. Austin denied that the Pentagon funds or supports such activities.

Earlier this month, US Congressman Chip Roy sent a letter to Austin requesting a list detailing Pride Month events associated with the Pentagon and their related costs.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Senators Introduce Bipartisan Bill Allowing Transfer of Illicit Assets to Aid Ukraine

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - US Senators Joe Manchin, Richard Blumenthal, Mike Rounds, and Lindsey Graham introduced a bipartisan bill on Thursday that would largely expand the current categories of forfeited property to be transferred to aid Ukraine.

"This bipartisan legislation will authorize the DOJ to expand its ability to seize Russian assets and send them directly to Ukraine for defense and rebuilding. I am committed to bringing this legislation across the finish line to reaffirm our long-term commitment to the Ukrainian people and our leading role in the fight to defend democracy," said Senator Manchin.

Called the Transferring Illicit Assets to Ukraine Act, the bill would allow the Justice Department to transfer far more assets from 'bad actors' to support Ukraine.

"Our measure – targeting the ill-gotten profits of oligarchs, sanctioned companies, and others supporting Russia's war machine – gives DOJ the tools it needs to embolden our allies. This is a critical time for Ukraine's fight for freedom. I'm proud to join my colleagues in this bipartisan effort," said Senator Blumenthal.

The bill would require a report from the Attorney General, Secretary of the Treasury, and Secretary of State outlining a plan for implementing the expanded authority, in addition to requiring semiannual reports from those same entities on how the expanded authority is being used to benefit Ukraine.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US, UK Agree to Boost Effort to Identify Entities Financially Supporting Russian Military

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - Washington and London will expand their data sharing in order to identify entities financially aiding Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, a joint US-UK declaration said on Thursday.

"We will continue to coordinate our work to tackle sanctions evasion and intend to jointly target those facilitating Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine in Russia, Belarus, and in third countries, including those who help Russia acquire goods and technology that support Russian aggression," the declaration said. "We intend to enhance our ability to collect, analyze, and share information and data with a financial sanctions nexus from our financial institutions and businesses, including for identification of companies and individuals financially supporting or facilitating payments to Russia's war machine."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file

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

US Has Not Determined Whether Ukraine, Russia Behind Kakhovka HPP Damage - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The United States has not yet determined whether Ukrainian or Russian forces were responsible for damage to the Kakhovka hydroelectric power plant and dam, which has led to an uncontrollable water flow downstream, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said on Thursday.

"We have not at this time. We're still continuing to look at that," Ryder said during a press briefing, when asked if the Pentagon has yet to assess who was responsible for damaging the Kakhovka dam.

On Tuesday, the power station and dam were damaged in what Russia has alleged was an attack by Ukrainian forces, characterizing it as an act of terrorism on civilian infrastructure. Ukraine has claimed Russia was responsible for the incident.

The US has not ruled out the possibility the damage was an accident as it continues to assess the situation, the State Department said earlier this week.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden, When Asked if Time for British Secretary-General: 'Maybe, That Remains to be Seen'

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Thursday said he remains open to the possibility of NATO having a British Secretary-General come this fall, saying "that remains to be seen," when asked about the matter during a joint press briefing with British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

"Maybe, that remains to be seen. We're going to have to get a consensus within NATO to see that happen. They have a candidate who is a very qualified individual, but we're going to have a lot of discussion between the US and NATO to determine what the outcome of that will be," Biden said.

Having already raised the topic during the sidelines of the G7 summit in Hiroshima, Sunak was expected to try and convince Biden during his state visit to Washington to support the candidacy of UK Defense Secretary Ben Wallace for the post of new NATO secretary general.

Incumbent NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg was supposed to resign on October 1, 2022, but in March of the same year, the leaders of NATO member states decided to extend his mandate until September 30, 2023.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden Calls Burisma Bribery Scheme Allegations 'Bunch of Malarkey'

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Thursday refuted as nonsense Republican allegations that an FBI document reveals he and Hunter Biden were involved in a bribe scheme with Ukraine energy firm Burisma.

US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene earlier in the day said FBI documents reveal that Ukrainian energy industry holding company Burisma paid then-US Vice President Joe Biden and his son Hunter Biden a total of \$10 million to help end a probe into the company by former Ukrainian Prosecutor General Viktor Shokin.

"It's a bunch of malarkey," Biden said during a press conference alongside UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

The FBI made the document accessible to lawmakers following threats by the House Oversight Committee to hold FBI Director Christopher Wray in contempt of Congress for failing to comply with a subpoena for the document.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden to Ask Congress to Add UK as 'Domestic Source' in Defense Production Act - Statement

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will ask the Congress to add the United Kingdom as a "domestic source" within Title III of the Defense Production Act to deepen industrial base collaboration, according to a joint US-UK declaration.

"The President plans to ask the United States Congress to add the United Kingdom as a 'domestic source' within the meaning of Title III of the Defense Production Act," the two countries said in The Atlantic Declaration.

The two countries are also taking steps to streamline bilateral defense trade, including by modernizing export control laws to enhance collaboration between and among AUKUS nations, according to the declaration.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Top US Defense Officials to Travel to Brussels for Ukraine Aid, NATO Meetings - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley will travel to Brussels next week for a meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said on Thursday.

"Secretary Austin will travel again next week to Brussels, where he and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Milley will host an in-person meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group on June 15, followed by the NATO Defense Ministers meeting on June 16," Ryder said during a press briefing.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise

Rossiia Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US, UK to Immediately Launch Negotiations on Critical Minerals Deal - British Embassy

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The United States and United Kingdom, as part of a new economic framework between the two countries, will immediately launch negotiations to develop a critical minerals agreement, the UK Embassy said on Thursday.

"An innovative approach targeting specific areas for economic advancement," the UK Embassy said in a press release. "It also includes the immediate launch of negotiations on a Critical Minerals Agreement."

According to a joint statement from the White House, the talks will target five relevant critical minerals most important for electric vehicles - cobalt, graphite, lithium, manganese, and nickel.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiia Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Pentagon Failing to Control Soaring Costs, Delays on New Weapons Programs - Report

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The Department of Defense still suffers from a weapons procurement program that is far too slow, suffering from massive delays and cost overruns and it remains on a "high risk" government list, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) warned in a report on Thursday.

"The Department of Defense's weapon systems acquisition process is still too slow," the report said. "We found that delivery of weapon systems continues to take longer than planned, affecting [the department's] ability to meet threats."

Of the 16 rapid prototyping efforts included in both GAO's current and prior assessments, six have delayed planned operational demonstrations by at least 12 months, the report noted. Supplier, software, and design problems drove the delays, the GAO explained.

"Over half of the 26 major defense acquisition programs GAO assessed ...had yet to deliver operational capability reported new delays. ...Net costs for the 32 major defense acquisition programs that GAO assessed both this year and last year increased by \$37 billion," the report said.

In one example of expensive and long overdue major programs, the US Navy now expects to complete operational testing of its first Zumwalt-class destroyer only in December 2023, a further additional years behind schedule as it faces critical technology delays to install the future Conventional Prompt Strike hypersonic weapon system, the report said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiia Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US, UK to Launch Civil Nuclear Partnership, Keep Russia Out of Market - Joint Declaration

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The United States and the United Kingdom will launch a new civil nuclear partnership to support net zero ambitions and seek to keep Russia out of the global civil nuclear power market, a US-UK joint declaration revealed on Thursday.

"We are launching a civil nuclear partnership overseen by senior officials in both governments," the joint declaration states. "The JAG will also be mobilized to set near-term priorities for joint action to encourage the establishment of new infrastructure and end-to-end fuel cycle capabilities by 2030 in both continents, and substantially minimize reliance on Russian fuel, supplies, and services."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Ready to Provide Canada With Any Additional Help in Fighting Ongoing Wildfires - Biden

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Thursday he offered Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau any additional help to fight the ongoing wildfires raging throughout the country, particularly those in Quebec.

"Yesterday I spoke with Prime Minister Trudeau and offered any additional help Canada needs to rapidly accelerate the effort to put out these fires, particularly those in Quebec, where the fires are having the most direct impacts on American communities," Biden said in a statement.

Biden added he has left instructions for the National Interagency Fire Center to quickly address Canadian requests for additional help, including firefighters and air tankers.

The President has also asked from the US Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg to provide him with updates on efforts to manage air traffic which has been greatly impacted by lowering air quality resulting from massive smoke clouds coming from Canada.

Biden pursued saying that air quality monitoring is being done by the Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Michael Regan, who's been asked to provide the US public with updates relevant to affected zip codes.

According to the Canadian Ministry of Emergency Preparedness, there are currently over 410 active wildfires that have devastated Canadian forests in the last several weeks from the Canadian province of British Columbia to Nova Scotia.

The smoke has also compromised the air quality of over 100 million US citizens across 18 states.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

UK, US Launch First-of-Its-Kind Economic Partnership Recognizing Alliance - Embassy

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The United States and United Kingdom on Thursday launched a new plan to enhance the bilateral economic relationship that recognizes the close ties between the two countries, the UK Embassy said on Thursday.

"UK and US Launch First-Of-Its-Kind economic relationship," the UK Embassy said in a press release. "'Atlantic Declaration' agreed by the PM and President at the White House today lays out a new action plan for cooperation on biggest economic challenges of our time. Declaration recognizes the close UK-US relationship and establishes a new approach which will allow both countries to move faster and co-operate more deeply."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden Says Key Piece of Enhancing US-UK Ties is Boosting Critical Mineral Supply Chains

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Thursday that one of the critical elements contributing to the enhancement of the US-UK relationship is the two countries working together to strengthen critical mineral supply chains.

"A key piece of enhancing bilateral relationship is working together to strengthen our critical mineral supply chains and to make them more resilient. So we're not dependent on any one country to meet our goals," Biden said during a joint press conference with Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

The UK embassy in the US in a tweet said the two countries will launch negotiations on a critical minerals agreement. According to a joint statement from the White House, the talks will target five relevant critical minerals most important for electric vehicles – cobalt, graphite, lithium, manganese, and nickel.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US, UK Will Continue to Underline That Food Supplies Not Target of Sanctions - Declaration

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The United States and United Kingdom in a joint statement on Thursday said they will continue work to underline that food supplies are not targeted in Western sanctions imposed on Russia.

"We will also continue joint work to underline that food supplies are not the target of our sanctions," the joint declaration states.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden Says Believes Will Continue to Have Support From Congress to Fund Aid for Ukraine

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Thursday that he believes he will continue to have support from Congress to provide additional assistance to Ukraine regardless of some lawmakers questioning spending.

"I believe we will have the funding necessary to support Ukraine as long as it takes and I believe that support will be real even though you hear some voices today on Capitol Hill about whether or not we should continue to support Ukraine and for how long we should support," Biden said during a press conference alongside UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Sports Events Delayed, Attractions Closed in US Capital Area Amid Air Quality Crisis

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - Sports events are being delayed, public attractions closed, and outdoor school activities remain canceled due to hazardous air quality conditions in the US capital city and surrounding suburbs, while authorities continue to issue health alerts.

The government of the US state of Virginia has issued the second-high purple air quality alert for the state's suburbs of Washington, DC, the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) said on Thursday.

The level of air pollution caused by smoke from wildfires in Canada reached in Northern Virginia 249, which qualified as "very unhealthy," coming close to the most dangerous zone - the maroon level - that begins at 300.

"People with heart or lung disease, older adults, and children should avoid all physical activity outdoors. Everyone else should avoid prolonged or heavy exertion," the DEQ said.

This is the poorest air quality level in the national capital's area in history, according to media reports.

As of mid-afternoon the Washington, DC air quality threat level was over 200.

High air pollutions lead to changes in Washington's everyday life. The Major League Baseball (MLB) had to postpone the Washington Nationals game.

"Major League Baseball on Thursday announced the postponement of today's scheduled game between the Arizona Diamondbacks and the Washington Nationals at Nationals Park... This postponement was determined following conversations throughout the day with medical and weather experts and the two impacted Clubs regarding clearly hazardous air quality conditions in Washington, DC," the Nationals said in a statement.

The National Zoo also closed its doors while DC public school outdoor activities remained canceled.

"Due to the poor air quality in Washington, DC, the Zoo is closed today, Thursday June 8, for the safety of our animals, our staff and our guests," the statement said.

Local authorities expect that the situation in the region will improve by Friday.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden Says Discussed With Sunak 'Unwavering' Support for Ukraine

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden said that he discussed steadfast US-UK support for Ukraine during Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's visit to the White House on Thursday. "We also discussed our unwavering support for people to create and defend or defend themselves against brutal aggression," Biden said during a joint press conference.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Air Force Failing to Track, Control Satellites Despite \$1.7Bln Spending - Report

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The US Air Force still lacks the capability to adequately track and control satellites in orbit after already spending \$1.7 billion on a modernization program to do so, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) said in a report on Thursday.

"The \$1.7 billion the Department of Defense already spent to replace SPADOC [Space Defense Operations Center] and provide modern systems has not delivered needed capabilities to the warfighter and Space C2 [the replacement modernization program] continues to struggle," the report said.

Between 2000 and 2022, the Department of the Air Force spent over \$1.7 billion to replace its systems that track and control satellites, the GAO acknowledged. The Defense Department began the Space C2 program in 2018 to improve space command and control activities but it has suffered major delays and still failed to deliver key capabilities, the report said.

"Space C2 is taking steps to refocus, but its plans still appear optimistic; and it is far from certain that Space C2 will deliver ATLAS [Advanced Tracking and Launch Analysis System] by the fall of 2023 ... Space C2's November 2021 program office cost estimate for these efforts is not reliable and raised concerns with the program's schedule that persist," the GAO said.

Current US satellite tracking systems are well beyond their expected service lives and Space C2 is now introducing additional risk to its development because the program lacks information that shows how it plans to address ongoing or incomplete work along with future work to meet requirements, the report said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

FBI Doc Alleges Biden Family Received \$10Mln From Burisma to End Ukraine Probe - Lawmaker

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - Ukrainian energy industry holding company Burisma allegedly paid then-US Vice President Joe Biden and his son Hunter Biden a total of \$10 million to help end a probe into the company by former Ukrainian Prosecutor General Viktor Shokin, US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene said on Thursday.

Shokin was removed by the Ukrainian Parliament in March 2016 after the Obama administration withheld loan guarantees in an attempt to pressure the government to oust the top prosecutor. Shokin had been investigating Burisma executive Mykola Zlochevsky over money laundering, tax evasion and corruption allegations.

Hunter Biden was hired to Burisma's board to "make the problems go away" regarding Shokin's investigation, Greene said. The owner of Burisma claims to have paid \$5 million to Hunter Biden and \$5 million to Joe Biden to get Shokin fired and end his probe into the company, Greene said.

"[The head of Burisma] told the informant that he has two pieces of evidence showing proof of payment to Hunter, and specifically, Joe Biden," Greene told reporters after viewing an FBI document containing an informant's claims about potential Biden family corruption.

The FBI made the document accessible to lawmakers following threats by the House Oversight Committee to hold FBI Director Christopher Wray in contempt of Congress for failing to comply with a subpoena for the document.

Greene characterized the alleged actions as a "political bribery pay-to-play scheme" and "shocking." Lawmakers will continue to follow this investigation, Greene said, urging the FBI to continue cooperation.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Blinken in First Call With New Turkish Colleague Emphasizes Need for Sweden to Join NATO

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in his first telephone conversation with newly appointed Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan emphasized the need for Sweden to join NATO as soon as possible, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Thursday.

"They also highlighted the importance of NATO unity, and Secretary Blinken emphasized the need for Sweden to join the NATO Alliance as soon as possible," Miller said in a statement.

The two also discussed a range of regional matters and the importance of bilateral relationship, including defense cooperation, the statement added.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

UN Continues Discussions to Facilitate Russian Grain, Fertilizer Trade - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, June 8 (Sputnik) - UN Conference on Trade and Development Secretary-General Rebeca Grynspan is continuing discussions with all the parties on facilitation of Russian grain and fertilizers trade, UN Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Thursday.

"We're continuing our discussion with all the parties... Rebeca Grynspan will be meeting with the Russian delegation in Geneva tomorrow as part of our routine contacts on our efforts to facilitate the trade in Russian fertilizer and Russian grain," Dujarric said at a briefing.

Also the Joint Coordination Center personnel continue their negotiations on the export of ammonia, he added.

In mid-May, the grain deal was extended until July 17 without any changes. The Russian Foreign Ministry has warned that if the problematic issues with the deal, including Moscow's demand to reconnect the Russian Agricultural Bank to the SWIFT system and relaunch the Togliatti-Odessa ammonia pipeline, are not addressed within two months, the deal will be terminated after July 17.

The grain deal was brokered by the United Nations and Turkey in July 2022 to facilitate the export of Ukrainian agricultural products from Black Sea ports amid the military operation launched by Russia in Ukraine in February that year. The package agreement also includes a memorandum of understanding between Russia and the United Nations to unblock Russian grain and fertilizer exports via the Black Sea, which, according to Moscow, has not been implemented due to Western sanctions.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

UN on Ukraine Troop Nazi Symbols: 'We Stand Against Nazism'

UNITED NATIONS, June 8 (Sputnik) - The United Nations stands against Nazis as a matter of principle in light of photographs showing Ukrainian soldiers wearing Nazi symbols, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Thursday.

The New York Times reported that some Ukrainian soldiers were wearing Nazi symbols on the frontline. Symbols donned by some forces in Ukraine include the skull-and-crossbones patch of the Nazi Totenkopf and the so-called "black sun" associated with Nazi SS chief Heinrich Himmler and various neo-Nazi movements, according to the report.

"We stand against Nazis and symbols of Nazis," Dujarric said at a briefing when asked about the report.

The UN spokesperson also said they had no way to verify the reports.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has in part tied Russia's special military operation to the Ukrainian government's support of neo-Nazi factions, linked to the larger objective of protecting populations subjected to targeted violence by the regime in Kiev.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Trump Seeks New Trial in \$5Mln E. Jean Carroll Sexual Assault Lawsuit - Filing

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump is seeking a new trial in the civil lawsuit by writer E. Jean Carroll, which resulted in a jury ordering Trump to pay \$5 million in damages last month, according to a court document filed Thursday.

"I respectfully submit this Declaration in support of Defendant Donald J. Trump's motion for an Order... granting a new trial or remittitur, with such other and further relief as the Court deems just and proper," Trump's attorneys said in a filing.

Last month, a federal jury in the state of New York found it more likely than not that Trump is liable for battery based on Carroll's accusations of sexual abuse in a dressing room in 1996, ordering the former president to pay \$2 million in damages.

In addition, the jury found Trump liable for defamation, ordering him to pay approximately \$3 million more in damages for publicly denying the accusations against him.

The court should order a new trial on damages or grant remittitur on the grounds that the jury found that Carroll was not "raped" as alleged, but rather, sexually abused, a separate filing said.

An award of \$2 million is "grossly excessive" under applicable case law based on the jury's findings, the filing said. Moreover, the \$2.7 million in compensatory damages for the defamation claim was based on "pure speculation" and violates due process standards, according to the filing.

A new trial or remittitur are appropriate in cases where a jury's reward is "entirely out of proportion" to a plaintiff's injuries and was "motivated by sympathy rather than evidence of harm," the filing added.

Following the jury's verdict last month, Trump said he had "absolutely no idea" who Carroll was, calling the decision a "disgrace" and part of a larger "witch hunt" against him.

In response, Carroll filed a court document seeking further damages from Trump for the post-verdict statements in an effort to punish him and deter further defamation.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Supreme Court Strikes Down Alabama Voting Map That Threatened to Disenfranchise Blacks

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court on Thursday struck down a map drawn by Alabama's Republican-dominated legislature of congressional voting districts that civil rights activists and other critics assert discriminated against the state's Black voters.

In a surprise move, two conservative Supreme Court justices sided with the liberal minority in a 5-4 decision striking down the map. The majority sided with a District Court panel in opposing the maps that appeared designed to dilute the power of Black voters by dividing them into districts where white voters dominate.

"The District Court concluded that plaintiffs had carried their burden at the totality of circumstances stage given the racial polarization of elections in Alabama, where 'Black Alabamians enjoy virtually zero success in statewide elections' and where 'Alabama's extensive

history of repugnant racial and voting-related discrimination is undeniable and well documented," Chief Justice John Roberts said, writing for the majority, in a court opinion. "The [Supreme] Court sees no reason to disturb the District Court's careful factual findings."

The Supreme Court affirmed the District Court's finding that plaintiffs demonstrated a reasonable likelihood of success on their claim that the Alabama law violates Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The ruling means that the map of seven congressional districts, which skew heavily in favor of Republicans, must be redrawn.

The six conservatives on the 9-seat high court have a record of gutting voting rights laws, hence the fact Roberts and Justice Brett Kavanaugh - both right-leaning - joined the court's three liberals in the majority came as an unexpected victory for the Biden administration.

US Attorney General Merrick Garland applauded the decision as a rejection of efforts to erode fundamental voting rights.

"All eligible voters must be able to exercise their constitutional right to vote free from discrimination based on their race," Garland said in a statement.

Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall said that while the majority's decision is disappointing, "this case is not over."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Education Department Creating Position to Address LGBT Book Bans - White House

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Education is creating a new position to address efforts by local and state officials to restrict access to books with certain lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) content in schools, the White House said on Thursday.

"The Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights is announcing that to support its ongoing work to defend the rights of LGBTQI+ students and other underserved communities, it will appoint a new coordinator to address the growing threat that book bans pose for the civil rights of students," the White House said in a fact sheet on new actions to aid the LGBT community, announced during so-called Pride Month.

The Education Department coordinator will help to provide training to schools nationwide on how book bans that "target specific communities and create a hostile school environment" may violate federal civil rights laws, the statement said.

The United States has seen an increase in school book restrictions that disproportionately target LGBT communities and communities of color, the statement said.

Last month, a group of organizations led by free expression advocacy group PEN America launched a lawsuit in the state of Florida to prevent a local school district from restricting books based on state laws.

The school district targeted in the lawsuit restricted access to certain books that could be challenged under Florida laws banning the distribution of materials "harmful to minors" and guaranteeing parental rights in education.

The lawsuit alleges violations of the plaintiffs' First Amendment rights to freedom of speech and

information, as well as violations of their Fourteenth Amendment right to equal protection under the law.

The lawsuit comes amid a number of efforts around the US to restrict access to books with explicit sexual content and controversial gender ideology in school libraries and curriculums.

Earlier this month, the Southern Poverty Law Center civil rights organization included a number of groups involved in the effort, the largest being Moms for Liberty, on its list of extremist anti-government groups.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Kirby Says Reports of China Plans to Build Spy Facility in Cuba 'Not Accurate'

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) – The White House is aware of media reports about China and Cuba allegedly reaching a multibillion deal to build a facility on the island to spy on the United States, but considers them inaccurate, Coordinator for Strategic Communications at the National Security Council John Kirby said on Thursday.

"I've seen that press report. It's not accurate," Kirby told MSNBC. "We have been concerned since day one of this administration about China's influence activities around the world, certainly in this hemisphere, and in this region. We're watching this very, very closely and we ... will continue to take steps to mitigate any potential threat that those activities might pose."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Authorities Issue Air Quality Alerts For Mid-Atlantic Due to Canada's Wildfire Smoke

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) – US authorities issued on Thursday high air quality alerts for almost the entire Mid-Atlantic region covered by smoke from wildfires in Canada.

"Unhealthy air quality alerts produced by the EPA [Environment Protection Agency] are in effect for many high population urban centers along the I-95 [major interstate highway] corridor. Hazy conditions extend into the central U.S.," the National Weather Service said in a statement.

A persistent low pressure system in the Northeast combined with large wildfires in Canada has resulted in deep plumes of smoke spreading into the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, and Ohio Valleys, it added.

The worst air quality index, 353, has been registered in Susquehanna Valley in Pennsylvania. In Washington, DC and its suburbs in Virginia pollution level reached 293, while in a dozen of other locations across the country it remains above or near 250, according to the EPA information.

The situation in New York City has improved since Wednesday but remains "unhealthy". The average air quality index there is 215, but some areas have lower levels, from 170-190, the local authorities said.

Earlier, a Sputnik correspondent reported, that there is already less smoke than a day before, but a light haze is continuing to cover the city. To decrease pollution, local authorities urged residents to avoid driving cars and use public transportation instead.

The Maryland government issued red alerts for most parts of the state, including all national capital suburbs. In some areas, local authorities allowed people to use public transportation for free in order to minimize the amount of time residents would have to be outside walking.

The situation is expected to improve by Friday, but even then, the air quality may remain unhealthy for certain groups of the population, the National Weather Service said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Deployment of \$96Bln Sentinel ICBMs One Year Behind Schedule, Targets 2030 - GAO

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The United States' deployment of the new Sentinel intercontinental ballistic missile, designed to replace the aging fleet of Minuteman III missiles, may miss its target date of May 2029 by one year, the Government Accountability Office said in a report on Thursday.

"Sentinel is behind schedule due to staffing shortfalls, delays with clearance processing, and classified information technology infrastructure challenges. Additionally, the program is experiencing supply chain disruptions, leading to further schedule delays," the report states.

Previous estimates stated that the development phase would last 106 months, but the new GAO report shows the planned cycle time has been extended to 118 months.

The program expects Sentinel's first flight and full functional tests between 2024 and 2025, the report added.

The Sentinel program is an effort to modernize the United States' nuclear arsenal, a total replacement of the US intercontinental ballistic missile system infrastructure, including 400 missiles, 450 silos, and more than 600 facilities over a 31,900 square-mile landmass, according to the report.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

IMF to Consider \$900Mln Tranche For Ukraine in Late June - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) – The International Monetary Fund (IMF) Executive Board will consider the disbursement of a \$900 million tranche for Ukraine in late June, IMF spokesperson Julie Kozack said on Thursday.

"On May 30, IMF staff and the Ukrainian authorities reached a staff-level agreement on an updated set of policies for the first review under the four-year EFF [Extended Fund Facility] arrangement. All quantitative performance criteria for end-April and structural benchmarks through end-May were met, and this paves the way for the Executive Board's consideration,

which is tentatively scheduled for the end of June," Kozack told reporters.

It would enable the disbursement of about \$900 million, she added.

Kozack pointed out that the Ukrainian economy is continuing to show "remarkable resilience" and is on track for a gradual recovery in 2023.

However, the assessments were made before the recent attack on the Kakhovka hydroelectric power plant, she noted, adding that the IMF is very concerned by its socioeconomic and environmental impact.

The fund is following the situation very closely, but it is too early to assess the damage to the economy, the spokesperson added.

In March, the IMF Executive Board approved a four-year funding arrangement for Ukraine worth \$15.6 billion.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Milley Tells War College Grads That Russia, China to Present Challenges in Years Ahead

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - Russia and China will continue to pose security challenges to the United States in the decades ahead as the world becomes increasingly multipolar, US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley said on Thursday.

"The geopolitical situation is changing in very fundamental ways," Milley said during a speech at the National Defense University graduation ceremony. "It is increasingly clear that we are really in a multipolar international environment with at least three great powers: the United States, China and Russia; and three is more complicated than two, and certainly much more complicated than one."

The National Defense University, which is funded by the US Defense Department, is constituted by five colleges, including the National War College, Joint Forces Staff College and College of International Security Affairs.

China is on a path to confrontation with both its neighbors and the US, Milley said. China intends to be a regional hegemon in the Western Pacific and Asia within a decade, and to exceed overall US military capability by mid-century, Milley said.

However, conflict between the US and China is neither imminent nor inevitable, Milley added.

Russia is likely to remain a threat to peace in Europe for "many years" to come, Milley said. The US and its allies will need to maintain a strong deterrence posture to avoid continent-wide conflict, Milley said.

Moreover, the nature of warfare is changing alongside advancements in technology such as robotics and artificial intelligence, Milley said.

Portions of the Air Force, Navy and Army are set to become crewless or partially crewless in the years ahead as robotics become increasingly used for defense applications, Milley said.

The US needs to significantly modernize its military forces over the next 10-15 years in order to keep pace with the changing nature of warfare and deterrence, Milley said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise

Rossiia Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

ISIS Remains Active Threat Despite Severe Losses of Leadership, Territory – Blinken

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) – The Islamic State (IS, banned in Russia) remains an active threat despite severe losses of its leadership and territories taken by the international coalition to defeat the terrorist group, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Thursday.

“While our coalition has taken back the territory that ISIS wants controlled, and inflicted severe losses on his leadership, ISIS nonetheless remains an active threat,” Blinken said during a joint press conference in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia when asked about the human rights in the country.

Earlier in the day, the United States designated two leaders of the Islamic State (IS, banned in Russia) as global terrorists, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a statement on Thursday.

The two designated leaders of the terrorist group are Abdallah Makki Muslih al-Rufay’l, the Iraq-based ISIS GDP Bilad al-Rafidayn Office emir, and Abu Bakr ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Ali al-Mainuki, the Sahel-based IS GDP al-Furqan Office senior leader, according to the statement.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiia Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Not Asking Anyone to Choose Between US, China - Blinken

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The United States is not asking any nation to choose between Washington and Beijing, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Thursday during his trip to Riyadh.

"With regard to China, we've also been very clear we are not asking anyone to choose between the United States and China. We are simply trying to demonstrate the benefits of our partnership and the affirmative agenda that we bring and what we are trying to bring and what we are trying to do," Blinken said during a joint press conference with Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiia Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Saudi Foreign Minister Says Syria Made Very Clear Commitments to Meet Expectations

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - Syria made very clear commitments to meet the expectations of the region and the international community amid its return to the Arab League, Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan said on Thursday.

"You all have seen the statement issued after our meeting in Oman, which we held before the return to the Arab League, in which Syria made very clear commitments on all of those fronts to

work with us to address them in a way that meets the expectations not just of us and the region but of the international community," the minister said during a joint press conference with Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Riyadh.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Saudi Arabia Says China Important Partner as Blinken Visits Riyadh

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - China is an important partner for Saudi Arabia and cooperation with Beijing will likely to expand, Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan said on Thursday at a joint press conference with Secretary Antony Blinken.

"China is our largest trading partner ... China is an important partner for the kingdom and most countries in the region," the minister said at the press conference in Riyadh. "I think that partnership has given us and China significant benefits and that cooperation is likely to grow just because China's economic impact in the region and beyond is likely to grow as its economy continues to grow."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Saudi Arabia Open to Talks on Human Rights, Does Not Respond to Pressure - Top Diplomat

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) – Saudi Arabia is always open to having a dialogue with its friends on the human rights situation in the kingdom, but does not consider pressure to be helpful and will not respond to it, Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan said on Thursday.

"We are always open to having a dialogue with our friends, but we don't respond to pressure when we do anything. We do it in our own interests, and I don't think that anybody believes that pressure is useful or helpful," Faisal bin Farhan said during a joint press conference with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Riyadh, when asked about human rights in the country.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Designates Two IS Leaders as Global Terrorists - State Dept

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The United States has designated two leaders of the Islamic State (IS, banned in Russia) as global terrorists, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a statement on Thursday.

"At today's D-ISIS Ministerial, Secretary Blinken announced the designation of two ISIS GDP leaders as Specially Designated Global Terrorists under Executive Order 13224, as amended:

Abdallah Makki Muslih al-Rufay'i is the Iraq-based ISIS GDP Bilad al-Rafidayn Office emir. Al-Rufay'i was previously the wali of ISIS's Iraq Province," Miller said.

The second person designated by Washington is Abu Bakr ibn Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Mainuki, who is based in Sahel and is an IS GDP al-Furqan Office senior leader, Miller added.

Miller pointed out in the statement that IS remains an active threat to peace and stability while also maintains connections to the global financial system in order to fund its activities.

"ISIS Core has relied on its regional General Directorate of Provinces (GDP) offices to provide operational guidance and funding around the world," Miller added. "The United States will continue to designate ISIS's senior leadership to disrupt the group's terrorist activities."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Saudi Arabia Would Prefer to See US Bid to Build Its Nuclear Program – Foreign Minister

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) – Saudi Arabia would prefer to see the United States as one of the bidders to build its domestic civil nuclear program, Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan said on Thursday.

"It's no secret that we are developing our domestic civil nuclear program. We would very much prefer to be able to have the US as one of the bidders for that program. There are others that are bidding and, obviously, we would like to build our program with the best technology in the world," the minister said during a joint press conference with Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Riyadh.