

2/16/24 Friday

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A Worrying Sign: US Wholesale Inflation Accelerated in January

On paper, the job market appears strong and wages are reportedly climbing, but Americans are still feeling a pull on their wallets as they struggle to afford basic needs such as energy, shelter, and food. US President Joe Biden even admitted last week that “prices are still too high”.

On Friday, the [US Labor Department](#) reported that its producer price index (PPI)---which is used to track inflation before it reaches consumers---rose 0.3% between December and January (an annual increase of 0.9%) after falling -0.1% from November to December.

The report is poor news for the US Federal Reserve which expected more moderate rates through the year, as they continue to struggle to reach their goal for 2% inflation. Apart from food and energy, core PPI increased by 0.5%, and when also excluding trade services, the core PPI rose by 0.6%, which is the biggest one-month advance since January 2023.

The consumer price index (CPI)---which measures what consumers pay when checking out---rose 3.1% in January when compared to a year earlier, but is down from 3.4% in December.

“Inflation is back, not in a big way, but it is also true that it is not going away and could yet wreak havoc on the broader economy where higher factory prices increase inflation at the consumer level,” wrote [Chris Rupkey](#), an economist for FwdBonds, on Friday.

While [inflation](#) for most goods and services stayed under 10%, some key items saw prices soar for January 2024 when compared to January of last year. Those included: frozen juices and drinks which rose 29% (due to storms and poor weather in Florida and Brazil which affected the production of oranges), uncooked beef steaks were hiked 10.7%, and food from vending machines and mobile vendors rose 10.6%

Motor vehicle insurance also rose 20.6% compared to the year prior, household item repairs rose 18.2%, admission to sporting events bumped up 13.5%, tax return preparation and other accounting fees rose 11.2%, veterinarian services rose 9.6%, non prescription drugs rose 9.2%, and outpatient hospital services rose 8.3%.

[Mark Zandi](#), a chief economist at Moody’s Analytics, said that disappointingly, inflation rose from December to January for basic needs including shelter, food, and electricity. Shelter inflation is up 6% in the last 12 months, and is the largest component of any household’s budget. At the end of January the US even recorded an [unprecedented number of unhoused people](#), as well as the oldest age for the median renter.

“You get zigs and zags in all these data, and this was just a zag,” Zandi explained. “The bottom line: Inflation continues to moderate. It’s still uncomfortably high — though ... moving in the right direction.”

The report could put pressure on the Federal Reserve to retain their high interest rates for a longer period. Either way, inflation will certainly continue to be a political talking point as the US rounds the corner for their 2024 presidential election.

“Prices are not going up as quickly, but wages still haven’t caught up to the inflation we’ve seen over the last couple of years,” said [EJ Antoni](#), a Heritage Foundation public finance economist. “That’s a big reason why people are so down on this economy and will continue to be so until that changes.”

While Biden has been able to hold off a recession following the COVID-19 pandemic, prices are still exceeding what Americans make—a point that Republicans will be sure to put pressure on. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen will [reportedly](#) make appearances in the swing states of Pennsylvania and Michigan this week in an effort to campaign for Biden.

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Plastics Cannot Be Recycled and Producers Know This, Report Claims

The Center for Climate Integrity (CCI) released a report on Thursday which details how the plastics industry has evolved its marketing pitch in order to circumvent public backlash and potential regulation.

According to a [report](#) by the CCI, despite their knowledge that recycling plastics is not technically or economically practical, petrochemical companies have continued to push “fraudulent” marketing and public outreach campaigns to convince consumers otherwise. Doing so, the report says, has stalled legislative and regulatory action that could have addressed plastic waste and pollution long ago.

“Fossil fuel and other petrochemical companies have used the false promise of plastic recycling to exponentially increase virgin plastic production over the last six decades, creating and perpetuating the global plastic waste crisis and imposing significant costs on communities that are left to pay for the consequences,” the CCI wrote.

More than 99% of plastics are produced from fossil fuels, the report continues. Though there are thousands of different types of plastic, the majority of these cannot be “recycled”. And despite efforts to convince consumers otherwise, the recycling rate in the US for plastics in 2021 was estimated to be only 5% to 6%.

After a 10-year review on plastics, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) concluded that there are only two types of plastics that can be turned into high quality objects: PET and HDPE, which are both commonly used to make plastic containers and bottles.

Meanwhile, any other form of plastic is incinerated or sent to landfills, because even though some plastics are recyclable in theory, they are not actually recycled in practice due to purity requirements that are not practical—for example, a green PET bottle cannot be recycled with a clear PET bottle. The quality of the plastic also degrades as it is recycled, which limits its use in its next life. And ultimately, recycled plastic materials will still end up in the landfill.

The toxicity of the plastics also creates issues during the recycling process. The chemical additives in plastics include stabilizers, plasticizers, coatings, catalysts, and flame retardants as well as possible contamination by whatever that plastic contained such as cleaning solvents or pesticides. This means a majority of plastics cannot be recycled into food-grade packaging, or other products that interact with food.

The cost of recycling plastics is also much higher than what it costs to produce new plastic. “The recycling process—from collection to sorting to processing to transport—requires more time, labor, and equipment to achieve a lower quality and less efficient output than the process of making virgin resin from fossil fuels,” the report explains.

The sales pitch which falsely claims that plastics can be recycled was first created and perpetuated by petrochemical companies, the report says.

“...the plastics industry has employed a familiar playbook for more than 50 years to escape accountability. Petrochemical companies—independently and through industry trade associations and front groups—have deceived consumers, policymakers, and regulators into believing that they could address the plastic waste crisis through a series of false solutions,” the CCI wrote.

Beginning in the 1950s, petrochemical companies realized that if their products could be thrown away, this would ensure a steady, growing demand for them. At the same time, instances of children suffocating on reusable plastics led the plastic industry to claim that the bags were meant to be thrown out, which shifted the blame from the company to parents. As a result, from 1960 to 1970 plastic packaging production jumped from 10% to 25%.

But then in the early 1970s, plastics were identified as a key issue in the solid waste crisis. To confront public backlash and government regulation, plastic companies came up with two solutions: landfilling and incineration. By the mid-1980s it was clear that neither of these efforts would ensure the public that there was a credible solution to the plastic waste issue. It was then that the plastics industry turned to their current recycling campaign, which was successful in “deceiving” the public about the viability of plastic recycling by the early 1990s, the report says. “They’re viewing it as a communications problem, but there’s another problem and they haven’t devoted, in my opinion, the kind of energy and creativity and ingenuity to the real problem that they are devoting to the communications part,” said Lewis Freeman, who had served as a Vice President at the Society of the Plastics Industry (SPI) from 1978 to 2001. The SPI was responsible for first launching its public relations campaign in the 1950s which led to the rise of disposable plastics.

“In 30 some-odd years, there have been some slight improvements in the amount of plastics recycling, but for all the effort and the money they spent, they haven’t moved the needle hardly at all. If they used the same measure of success and failure they do in running the rest of their business, they’d be out of business,” Freeman added.

According to the CCI, around 2015 the attention to microplastics and an increasing visibility of ocean plastics and their impact on wildlife increased and led to public outrage. In response, plastic companies have tried to resell and rebrand failed technology they have used in the past as “new” in their campaign surrounding plastic recycling.

“Companies like ExxonMobil, Shell, Chevron Phillips, and Dow—independently and through their industry trade associations—have colluded to deceive the public for half a century, despite extensive evidence that recycling is not a viable solution to the plastic waste problem,” the CCI wrote.

“Fossil fuel and other petrochemical companies should now be held accountable for their deliberate campaign of deception and the resulting harms, much like tobacco and opioid companies that employed a similar playbook,” they added.

The American Chemistry Council's Plastics Division and its member companies defended themselves against the report in a statement on Thursday.

"Unfortunately, this flawed report cites outdated, decades-old technologies, and works against our goals to be more sustainable by mischaracterizing the industry and the state of today's recycling technologies," said America's Plastic Makers President [Ross Eisenberg](#). "This undermines the essential benefits of plastics and the important work underway to improve the way plastics are used and reused to meet society's needs."

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Your Memory Against Mine - Cartoon

Hur released his 388-page report following a yearlong investigation into Biden's unauthorized removal, retention and disclosure of classified documents earlier this month. The damning report did not seek charges, but legitimized the public opinion that Biden is too old to be sitting in the Oval Office.

US President Joe Biden lambasted special counsel [Robert K. Hur](#) during a press conference for raising the subject of his son's death during his interview last October. But sources say it was actually Biden who brought up the topic in the first place.

"There's even a reference that I don't remember when my son died. How in the hell dare he raise that," Biden fumed in a statement to reporters during an impromptu White House press conference last Thursday. "Frankly, when I was asked the question, I thought to myself it wasn't any of their damn business."

But it was Biden who raised the subject of Beau Biden's death after he was asked about his workflow at a Virginia rental home from 2016 to 2018, sources told a [US news](#) outlet. During this time, Biden was working alongside a ghost writer on a memoir about losing his son to brain cancer. The reason this is relevant is because investigators had a 2017 recording showing that Biden had told the ghost writer that he had found "classified stuff" in the rental.

Biden then tried to recall that period, and it was at that point that he appeared confused about when his son had died, sources say. He was able to remember the date, May 30, but not the year—2015.

Hur's report paints an image of a president who is mentally unfit to be in such a high position of power, writing: "Mr. Biden would likely present himself to a jury, as he did during our interview with him, as a sympathetic, well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory". But the special counsel has also been criticized for his report in which he made too many "gratuitous remarks" about Biden that were "flatly inconsistent with long standing DOJ traditions", said former Attorney General Eric Holder.

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Trump Unveils Sneaker Line After Being Found Liable for Hundreds of Millions of Dollars

On Friday, Trump was ordered to pay nearly \$355 million in his New York civil fraud trial. His legal troubles have now amounted to a debt that exceeds a half-billion dollars.

Former President Donald Trump unveiled a new line of sneakers at Sneaker Con in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on Saturday, a day after he was ordered to pay hundreds of millions of dollars in a New York civil fraud trial.

The line features three different types of shoes: a pair of high tops, a pair of red athletic shoes and a pair of white athletic shoes. The shoes range in price from \$199 to \$399. The high top sneakers are named the "Never Surrender High Top Sneaker", are gold, and feature a "T". They are priced at \$399.

The former president was met with cheers as well as boos as he unveiled his new sneaker line. Along with the sneaker line, Trump is also selling a "Victory47" perfume and cologne for sale at \$99 each. Trump would be the 47th president if elected. And while these new lines are said to have nothing to do with Trump's presidential campaign or the Trump organization, Trump campaign officials have promoted the line on social media, according to a not-for-profit American [news agency](#).

"This is something I've been talking about for 12 years, 13 years, and I think it's going to be a big success," said [Trump](#), during the unveiling of his sneakers.

According to the website that is selling his products, they are "trademarks of CIC Ventures LLC. Trump Sneakers are not designed, manufactured, distributed or sold by Donald J. Trump, The Trump Organization or any of their respective affiliates or principals. 45Footwear, LLC uses the Trump name, image and likeness under a license agreement."

The former president, 77, is running in the US presidential campaign this year and it is predicted that his top competitor will be US President Joe Biden, 81, who is running for a second term. The current president's campaign spokesperson Michael Tyler, criticized the former president's sneaker launch.

"Donald Trump showing up to hawk bootleg Off-Whites is the closest he'll get to any Air Force Ones ever again for the rest of his life," he said, as a reference to the Nike sneaker, as well as the presidential air transport fleet.

The former president now owes a roughly combined \$438 million following two criminal trials: one in which he was ordered to pay \$83.3 million to the writer E. Jean Carroll for defamation, and \$355 million in penalties that he was ordered to pay on Friday after a judge ruled that Trump had lied about his wealth for years in an effort to dupe banks and insurers. That, in combination with interest, means Trump's debt now exceeds a [half-billion dollars](#).

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Alexander the Great's Father Discovered in Tomb, Study Claims

King Philip II of Macedonia was assassinated in 336 BC in Aegae at the age of 46. He was the 18th king of Macedonia, and ruled from 359 until 336 BCE after succeeding his brother, and is credited with the military knowledge he used to expand his empire.

Archaeologists first made the discovery of three royal tombs containing the remains of the family of Alexander the Great in the 1970s. But since its discovery, researchers have debated which members of the royal family were buried in which tombs. A controversial [new study](#) claims a previous study incorrectly identified the remains.

The burial site where the members of the Macedonian royal family are believed to rest is known as the "Great Tumulus". The site is located in the archaeological site of Aega and was the first capital of Macedonia. It can be found next to the modern town of Vergina in Northern Greece, and 65 km (40 miles) west of Thessaloniki.

At the site are three tombs that were built sometime during the fourth century BC, and upon their initial discover it was assumed that the remains included King Philip II (Alexander the Great's father, Alexander IV (the posthumous son of Alexander IV), and King Philip III Arrhidaeus (the elder half-brother of Alexander the Great).

In the new study, led by Antonios Bartsiokas, a professor of anthropology at the Democritus University of Thrace in Greece, the researchers believe King Philip II and King Philip III Arrhidaeus were misidentified as each-other.

"The skeletons studied are among the most historically important in Europe," says [Bartsiokas](#) and fellow researchers. "We have focused our discussion on the scientific facts and historical evidence that impacts acceptance or rejection of the location of King Philip II of Macedonia." While most scholars agree that the third tomb—Tomb III—belongs to Alexander IV, the identities of the first two tombs have remained unresolved. The new study claims that Tomb I belongs to Alexander the Great's father, and Tomb II belongs to the historical figure's half-brother.

The first tomb also contains the remains of a young adult female and her baby. Researchers believe these remains belong to King Philip II's wife, Cleopatra, and their newborn child.

Bartsiokas reasons that this is the identity of the young female and not Euridice as was previously believed—the wife of King Philip III—as Cleopatra was assassinated along with her newborn child, Bartsiokas explains.

[Philip II](#) also suffered a severe injury to his left knee, which skeletal evidence shows, the study adds.

"His skeletal evidence and the pattern of his cremated bones have been shown to be consistent with the circumstances of the death of King Arrhidaeus and his wife," Bartsiokas said.

"Tomb I was a very small and poor tomb and Tomb II was very big and rich. This ties with the historical evidence that Macedonia was in a state of bankruptcy when Alexander started his campaign and very rich when he died. This is consistent with Tomb I belonging to Philip II and Tomb II belonging to his son Arrhidaeus."

"We have provided compelling evidence from multiple sources that shows conclusively that Philip II was buried in Tomb I," the study argues. "Our hypothesis of Philip II in Tomb I remains unchallenged in peer-reviewed literature and we believe the available evidence is conclusive."

[Alexander the Great](#) was born in 356 BCE at Pella in Macedonia to Philip II and Olympias. He was tutored by Aristotle from the age of 13 to 16. When he was older, he fled with his mother to

Epirus following his parent's divorce. After reconciling with his father, King Philip II was assassinated and Alexander became king. Alexander died at the age of 32, but the cause of his death has been widely debated. His tomb is also considered to be lost to history.

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Raw Sewage Found Near US-Mexico Border Is a 'Public Health Crisis'

The report noted an instance in which bottlenose dolphins were found stranded in San Diego after dying from sepsis caused by a bacterium that is usually transmitted through contact with feces or urine in contaminated water, food or soil.

Public health researchers at the San Diego State University are raising the alarm after publishing a [report](#) which claims that billions of gallons of sewage is flowing through the Tijuana River, and as a result is exposing communities located at the US-Mexico border to a series of harmful pathogens.

The report notes that the Tijuana River and Estuary (TJRE) in the US, which empties in to the Pacific Ocean at Imperial Beach in California, "is severely contaminated by untreated sewage, industrial waste, and urban run-off due to inadequate infrastructure and urbanization and the watershed is classified as an impaired water body according to the US Clean Water Act," the report writes.

"This contamination is a [persistent environmental and public health threat](#) with major economic, legal, social, and health implications for the nearby California communities such as San Ysidro and Imperial Beach," the report continues.

The health threats posed to those living nearby come from pollutants arising Mexico, including "human and livestock diseases eradicated in California, pathogens carrying antibiotic-resistant genes, and industrial and municipal chemicals not permitted to be discharged into the environment in California".

Current regulation is inadequate, the report says, but they add that "multiple studies" over the last decade by their own team at the university shows the presence of pathogens including SARS-CoV-2 and Hepatitis, and antibiotic resistant strains of E. coli and legionella in samples taken from the river which pose a risk to both humans and aquatic animals.

Health concerns posed to the public could include tuberculosis, the report found. Mixed into the sewage also, were toxic chemicals including banned pesticides like DDT and chlordane and heavy metals, all of which were probably the result of urban runoff from industrial waste, the researchers write.

The report adds that the [dangerous health concern](#) will only worsen, as extreme weather like heavy rainfall tied to climate change could cause further damage to aging infrastructure and continue to overwhelm systems on both sides of the border. The wastewater has also resulted in more than 700 consecutive days of beach closures in San Diego county in California.

The researchers note that those who live and work near the contaminated water are at-risk for health issues, not just those who go to the beach for swimming or surfing. For years, locals who

live in communities near the Tijuana River runoff have been raising alarms about the contamination.

“This is not a trickle of contamination,” said Paula Stigler Granados, an associate professor in San Diego State University’s School of Public Health and the report’s lead author. “This is a large amount of contamination over a long period of time.”

Paloma Aguirre, the mayor of Imperial Beach, a town north of the Mexican border, said that the town is “unfortunately” the poster child for what an “environmental justice looks like”. She adds that the issue would require the US government and the Mexican government to work together, further complicating the issue.

In [January](#), Mexico broke ground on a long-awaited replacement for a damaged wastewater treatment plant in Baja, California that they say will reduce the discharge of sewage affecting San Diego and Tijuana shorelines.

The US government approved a \$300 million fund to expand a wastewater treatment plant in San Ysidro, San Diego, but a government memo leaked by a San Diego media company said the facility needs so much repair that the funds would be contributed to just maintaining the existing infrastructure.

Aguirre and other local officials pushed for an additional \$310 million in federal funding, which US President Joe Biden included in an October emergency supplemental funding request that still needs to be approved by Congress, according to a separate [report](#).

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Oregon Eyes Re-Criminalizing Illicit Drugs Shortly After Passing Most Liberal Drug Law

In 2020, Oregon passed a ballot measure that created the most liberal drug law in the US, but lawmakers are now doubting its efficiency as drug overdose deaths increase.

The US state of Oregon passed their Ballot Measure 110—or the Drug Addiction Treatment and Recovery Act—just over three years ago. The measure is one of the most liberal drug laws in the US, decriminalizing the possession of small amounts of illegal drugs such as cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin and fentanyl, while using hundreds of millions of dollars in cannabis taxed to aid addiction recovery. But now, Oregon lawmakers may reverse their stance on the bill this legislative session.

Under Measure 110, police were ordered to issue citations of \$100 along with a card that has the hotline number for addiction treatment services. If a person called the hotline, they could be allowed to have that citation dismissed and not pay the \$100. Oregon data revealed that only 4% of people who received the citation actually called the hotline, per one [report](#), as the tickets went unpaid.

“We’ve talked to exactly two people that have actually called that number,” said Sergeant Jerry Cioeta of the Portland Police Bureau, adding that last year his squad handed out more than 700 tickets “and got absolutely nowhere with it.”

Oregon lawmakers are now considering re-criminalizing illicit drugs as they believe the lax approach isn’t working. According to an Oregon public media [report](#), there has been evidence of

drug addicts seeking out treatment, but the effort to fortify the police's ability to help people to seek treatment has not been successful. At the same time, an increase in drug overdose deaths has been noted by state lawmakers.

But lawmakers also declined to fund a proposed \$50,000 online course that would have instructed police officers on how to enforce the new law, adds the report from Friday. Even though police leaders campaigned against the ballot measure before it was passed. Lawmakers believed the funding should go towards treatment instead of training police to help people seek treatment.

Lawmakers in Oregon are expected to vote on a bill to re-criminalize illicit drugs, with Democrats pushing for a bill that would make small-scale drug possession a low-level misdemeanor, punishable by up to 30 days in jail with the opportunity to seek treatment instead of facing charges. The bill would also carry harsher sentences for those who sell drugs, offer wider access to medication for opioid addiction and would expand recovery and housing services as well as drug use prevention programs.

Meanwhile, Republicans in Oregon would like to push for harder punishments including up to a year in jail for drug possession, with the option for treatment and probation as opposed to jail. "It's not actually going to save lives or help people get into services. It's going to create barriers to housing and employment, which is what criminal records do," said advocate Tera Hurst of the proposed bill.

Drug overdose deaths in Oregon increased by a third from 2019 to 2020, that percentage swelled to another 44% in 2021, marking over 1,000 deaths in 2021, according to the Oregon Health Authority.

A [report](#) from last week, however, claims that the lax drug laws are not linked to drug related deaths in Oregon. One study, the report says, shows that just 1.5% of the 468 drug users in eight Oregon counties began using drugs after Measure 110 went into effect.

Instead, the report blames the bill for not addressing the issue of the unpredictable potency of illegal drugs, as chances of being killed by illicit drugs purchased on the black market is greater than when prescription drugs—which are legally produced—are misused.

This crackdown on legally produced drugs coincided with the rise of [illicit fentanyl](#), which is more potent than heroin. As opioid prescriptions decreased, opioid-related deaths increased, the report claims, basing their findings on data from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

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Second-Largest Hospital in Gaza Not Functional After IDF Raid, Says WHO Head

The hospital is the Gaza Strip's second-largest in the southern Khan Younis city and it is where 200 patients now remain.

Gaza's al-Nasser hospital is no longer functional following an Israeli raid, wrote Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the head of the World Health Organization (WHO), on Sunday. Scores

of people including patients and doctors were arrested during the raid, the Gaza Health Ministry and a senior UN official said.

The head of WHO said that a team from the organization was barred from entering the facility on Friday and Saturday “despite reaching the hospital compound to deliver fuel alongside partners”. He said that the delays will cost patients their lives, and added that there are still 200 patients in the hospital; 20 of whom need to be “urgently referred to other hospitals to receive health care.”

The hospital also acted as a shelter for Palestinians who had been displaced due to the war. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) entered the complex on Thursday, excusing their actions based on claims that hostages taken by Hamas were being held there. They also said their raid was “precise and limited” and accused [Hamas](#) of “cynically using hospitals for terror”. The deadly raid followed a weeks-long siege that intensified this week.

Seven patients died at the hospital on Friday after Israeli troops stormed it and a power outage caused the oxygen to shut off, reported [Al Jazeera](#) quoting Ashrag al-Qudra, a spokesperson for the Gaza Health Ministry, adding that there are just now four medical staff able to care for patients.

Al-Amal Hospital, the only other major medical facility still operational in Khan Youni, is also under attack by Israeli forces. On Sunday, the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) said that the IDF had targeted the third floor of the hospital with artillery fire after coming under a weeks-long siege.

[Al Jazeera](#) also reported that the IDF have increased their attacks on Palestine from the air, land and sea. The forces are expanding their hold on Khan Yunis as they move further south into Rafah, where more than 1.4 million Palestinians are sheltering.

“In the overnight [air] attacks on Rafah, we’ve seen the horror of displaced Palestinians trying to find shelters in the city where they were ordered to evacuate and told it would be a ‘safe zone’ only to find themselves targeted and killed inside their homes,” reporter Hani Mahmoud said on [Sunday](#).

“On top of that, there is a lack of available medical staff and a shortage of medical supplies, which literally leaves people lying on the floors of hospitals for hours, waiting for help. Israel has put restrictions on the delivery of aid worsening the shortage.”

A [report](#) from last week showed Israeli forces shooting a Palestinian hostage in cold blood after sending him into the al-Nasser Hospital to warn others to evacuate.

The UN, the US, and other Israel allies said they would not accept an invasion of Rafah while Israel has announced that they will push their offensive into the city if Hamas does not return their hostages by [Ramadan](#).

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin [Netanyahu](#) also said that any further negotiations over a cease-fire would not be productive given what he said were Hamas’s “delusional demands” which include Israel’s retreat from Gaza and the release of Palestinians from Israeli prisons. The death toll from Israeli strikes in Gaza has now risen to nearly 29,000 people with more than 68,000 people being wounded since the conflict first broke out, according to the enclave’s health ministry.

Hamas launched a large-scale rocket attack on October 7, 2023 and breached the border, killing 1,200 and abducting 240 hostages.

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Presidential Candidates Should 'Probably' Take Cognitive Test - Former First Daughter

At the time, Reagan was the oldest person to ever be elected president at the age of 69. He developed Alzheimer's in 1994 and died 10 years later. There have been rumors and speculation that his symptoms began while he was in office, which his doctors and spokespeople have denied.

During an interview with an American network, the daughter of former US President Ronald Reagan, Patti Davis, admitted that the presidential candidates should "probably" be given a cognitive test before running for the position.

"Probably. Yeah. I mean, in just what we know about what age can do. It doesn't always do that, but it would probably be a good idea," [Davis](#) said while promoting her new book. "My father was 77 when he left office after two terms. It seems so young now, doesn't it?"

US President Joe Biden is 81-years-old, and former President Donald Trump is 77-years-old. If either Biden or Trump were to be elected to office again, they would both be in their 80s by the end of their presidential terms.

The former first daughter, whose father was president from 1981 until 1989, also said that if he were alive today he would be "appalled" by today's politics.

"It was more civilized," said Davis of her father's political time.

Reagan has remained somewhat of a legacy figure for the Republican Party, and Trump's slogan 'Make America Great Again' was based on a Reagan catchphrase during his 1980 presidential campaign bid.

"He didn't understand lack of civility, he didn't understand attacking another person. I mean, he could be pretty pointed in what he would say about someone else but he didn't understand cruelty, and that's what we're dealing with now," she continued.

"I think he would be really scared for our democracy," the actress and author added. Davis did not mention Trump by name, but she has been a sharp critic of the Republican in the [past](#).

"Fear morphs into anger, it just does, it's not sustainable. We don't want to be afraid, we don't mind so much being angry. And there are people on the political stage and on the public front who understand very well that synergy between fear and anger and who are masterful at exploiting it."

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Western Media Prefers Interview With 'Evil' Hamas Over Russian President

The fact that a mainstream journalist can air an interview with a Hamas fighter and not with the Russian president reveals the extent of the demonization the leader faces in Western media. The double standards of Western mainstream media were on vivid display recently when US television network CBS aired several minutes of footage from an interview with a Hamas recruiter, but nothing from journalist Tucker Carlson's historic interview with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The discussion with the representative of Hamas, which is heavily stigmatized and labeled as a "terrorist" group in the West, was conducted by CBS foreign correspondent Debora Patta. Clips from the interview were aired twice on CBS news broadcasts – once on the network's [morning](#) news program and again on an evening news [broadcast](#). The sitdown also formed the basis of an article on CBS' website.

In total, more than 12 minutes of television coverage were dedicated to the interview.

The network's coverage was peppered with loaded language and inaccuracies typical of Western media when covering the Palestine-Israel conflict; for instance, Patta called the Hamas member's statement that the group killed no civilians during their October 7 operation a "blatant lie." Reporting in recent months has revealed that Hamas' operation targeted Israeli military and police installations, while an investigation in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz discovered that many of the most sensational claims about events that day were [fabricated](#) by a discredited Israeli organization known as Zaka.

With many of the [civilian casualties on October 7](#) caused by IDF crossfire and others likely attributable to non-Hamas groups, the statement that Hamas was directly responsible for no civilian casualties on October 7 remains plausible.

Still, if CBS' reporting on Hamas remained as flawed as ever, at least the network conducted reporting on the group.

Meanwhile, the major broadcaster, along with other US mainstream news outlets, devoted no coverage at all to Tucker Carlson's interview with the Russian president despite the discussion racking up over two hundred million views online.

The only reference to the interview at all was offered cryptically during a short discussion of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's power struggle with former military chief Valery Zaluzhny. During the coverage, an on-screen chyron briefly noted that President Putin had expressed openness to negotiation on the Donbas conflict – a revelation that emerged from Carlson's historic sitdown.

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High Stress and Low Morale Plague US Navy - Survey

A poll uncovered significant problems within the armed forces branch.

A new survey of US Navy servicemembers reveals significant culture and morale problems within the institution.

Sailors reported experiencing high levels of stress in the Navy's 2023 Health of the Force survey, with 37% of respondents reporting they were "severely" or "extremely" stressed. The number is an increase of more than 10% since 2019.

High stress was revealed to be a higher concern for lower ranking Navy members.

Additionally, high levels of burnout – defined in the report as a combination of exhaustion and disengagement from daily work – were reported by more than a quarter of sailors. The figure also represents a significant increase from 2019, with low staffing levels implicated as a primary cause.

The dissatisfaction with culture extended to other areas as well, with the report admitting that servicemembers' satisfaction with work-life balance remains "suboptimal."

The Navy and other branches of the US armed forces have [faced challenges in meeting recruiting targets](#) for several years, falling short by thousands of recruits. The shortfall has forced the Navy and other armed forces branches to repeatedly lower their standards in terms of fitness, education, and criminal history.

The Army has offered significant [cash bonuses](#) to attempt to lure back former troops who have left the service.

Prejudice is observed as a major problem that may discourage women and racial minorities from enlisting or remaining in the US military. Only 17% of Black servicemembers interviewed agreed that "racism is not a problem in the Navy." Only 13% of women agreed that sexism is not a problem.

The military has been forced to take steps to confront both problems in recent years, with sexual assault recognized as a major [issue](#) in the US armed forces. The Army finished a multi-year process of renaming bases last year that for decades carried the names of leaders of the Confederacy.

It was recently revealed that Americans' confidence in the US military is at its [lowest point](#) in two decades with widespread dissatisfaction over the country's decades-long engagement in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. Confidence among Republicans has fallen sharply as adherents of Donald Trump's "America First" philosophy have questioned the prioritization of military spending over domestic concerns.

The United States has led campaigns of regime change and political subversion in numerous countries, including Haiti, El Salvador, Afghanistan, Iraq, Bulgaria, Panama, Nicaragua, Libya, Morocco, Grenada, Angola, Australia, Guatemala, Bolivia, Greece, Chile, Uruguay, Ghana, Indonesia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Peru, Brazil, the Congo, Ecuador, France, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Italy, Syria, Costa Rica, Iran, Albania, Korea, the Philippines, and China, according to numerous records, including such authors as William Blum and Phillip Agee.

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Ukraine Adopts Tactic Used by German Nazis in WWII - Report

As the Kiev regime is forced into a defensive footing, observers note the similarities between the current conflict and Russia's Great Patriotic War.

“History doesn’t repeat itself, but it often rhymes,” claimed American author Mark Twain, riffing on an observation made by Marx, Hegel, and others. The statement seems apt in recent weeks as the besieged Ukrainian military increasingly adopts defensive strategies pioneered by its Nazi forebears as its position in the Donbass becomes [increasingly untenable](#).

A [story](#) in US media Saturday, unique in its willingness to observe the similarities between the Kiev regime and German Nazis, noted Ukraine's armed forces are “shifting to a defensive strategy that failed Nazi Germany” in World War II. In an instance of striking historical rhyme, Kiev’s strategy is likely to fail for much the same reason the Nazis’ did.

“Active defense was understood to be generally applicable to divisions, corps and field armies,” said retired US Army colonel Douglas Nash, describing a military tactic pioneered by Nazi Field Marshal Erich von Manstein. Von Manstein developed the tactic late in World War II, when the Soviet Red Army went on the offensive after repelling German troops in Stalingrad.

Outnumbered by the Soviets, the Nazis were forced to devise new tactical maneuvers accounting for shortages in soldiers and equipment.

But although the ranks of the [German army](#) were rapidly diminishing, the Nazis were still able to gather enough men to execute von Manstein’s complex counterattacks. Nash claims the Ukrainian “squads, platoons, companies and battalions” amassed for the regime’s “mobile defense” operations have been far too small to succeed.

New technology has further undermined Ukraine’s desperate strategy. Russian drones have made battlefield maneuvers difficult for Ukrainian forces which has been under constant surveillance and [relentless attacks from the sky](#) by unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). Guided missiles are also able to strike troops from dozens of miles away. These realities have forced Ukraine to adopt a more static trench warfare strategy.

Politics have also limited the set of tactics Ukrainian commanders are willing to use. The Nazis’ active mobile defense strategy required a willingness to cede ground – at least temporarily – to set a trap for advancing Soviet troops. That’s an unappealing prospect for Ukrainian leaders as the country’s military has lost [thousands of soldiers](#) in attempts to capture and hold significant cities.

Like the Nazis driven back towards Berlin after 1943, the Ukrainian military is increasingly forced to defend a large area of land with a small number of troops. Once again Russia’s thoughtful strategy is playing a key role in its favor, with Moscow’s troops able to outperform their opponent even after two years of fighting.

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US Sanctions on Russia Drive Up Energy Costs in Europe – And America Too?

Policy designed to hurt Russia is harming average consumers, in both Europe and America. In the 1970s, comedian George Carlin described the United States as “nothing more than an oil company with an army,” observing the country’s [history of imperial ambition](#) driven by its struggle for global resources. In 2024 fossil fuels continue to play a major role in US politics, and one policy in particular has been blamed for causing hardship on both sides of the Atlantic.

The US and the European Union unveiled multiple rounds of [sanctions](#) on Russia in 2022 after the country intervened against Ukrainian nationalists in the Donbass. The policy has been widely blamed for driving energy costs sky high across Europe, with devastating consequences for German industry. But some claim the sanctions have harmed American consumers as well by subjecting US-produced gas to the whims of the global market.

Clark Williams-Derry of the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis is a critic of global exports of US liquified natural gas, which have surged with the advent of the sanctions. Williams-Derry [points](#) to several global phenomena he claims now have the potential to raise US energy prices: “a coal crisis in China, a cold snap in Asia, unrest in the Middle East, a pipeline explosion in Europe.”

“Anytime global gas markets sneeze, we’re going to catch a cold,” said the expert.

Such wasn’t always the case. As recently as 2007 the United States [exported](#) less than one trillion cubic feet of natural gas annually, a small portion of the world’s total energy supply. Now that amount has risen more than eight-fold with the country exporting an estimated 6.9 trillion cubic feet of liquified natural gas in 2022, making it one of the world’s top sellers of the fuel.

The change owes to the efforts of former US President Barack Obama, who made increased domestic fuel production a priority during his presidency. Despite his party’s liberal reputation of pro-environment policy, Obama frequently took [credit](#) for encouraging the boom.

The increased production and exports have created a windfall for fossil fuel companies and their shareholders, but many argue the policy has been bad for consumers.

“It doesn’t matter if it’s the middle of winter here – peak demand, inventories are low, prices are high – [foreign] countries will buy it away, drive up [the] price of gas and electricity,” said Paul Cicio of the Industrial Energy Consumers of America (IECA), which lobbies for cheap fuel prices for US industry.

Benjamin Leibowicz, a professor of energy policy at the University of Texas at Austin, agrees, noting, “if there are more gas consumers and higher demand, that translates to higher prices.” One policy that would immediately lower energy prices in the United States and throughout the world would be to remove sanctions on Russian gas, increasing the global energy supply and driving prices back down. But such a policy rethink would undoubtedly harm the profits of powerful donors and interest groups.

It would also mark a retreat from the current trend towards demonization of Russia, which is currently enjoying its status as the United States’ hated enemy du jour.

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New York Governor Forced to Apologize After Defending Israel’s Destruction of Gaza

A US governor defended Israel’s assault on the Gaza Strip while speaking in front of a group of wealthy donors.

A controversial US governor was forced to [apologize](#) Friday after justifying Israel’s mass killing of civilians in the Gaza Strip, which has been described as genocidal by international experts.

New York State Governor Kathy Hochul issued a statement expressing regret over remarks made at a fundraiser for the United Jewish Appeal-Federation of New York, a Zionist organization.

"If Canada someday ever attacked Buffalo [New York], I'm sorry my friends, there would be no Canada the next day," said Hochul at the event, justifying the Israeli regime's largescale destruction of Gaza. "That is a natural reaction."

The comment quickly spread on social media where users denounced Hochul's insensitivity towards the massive loss of Palestinian life. Nearly 29,000 people have been killed in Israel's military operation in Gaza, with around 70% of the dead estimated to be women and children. Relief organizations have warned the population of the besieged enclave faces mass famine as [Israel strictly limits the amount of aid allowed to enter](#), with some residents already reportedly dying of starvation.

Hochul also faced local opposition to her comments; New York is home to a significant Arab-American population as well as a large Jewish population. Hochul made a visit to Israel in October at the behest of the parent group of the United Jewish Appeal-Federation of New York, which funds trips by political leaders to the country. Hochul opted to pay for the junket with state taxpayer funds.

"While I have been clear in my support of Israel's right to self-defense [sic], I have also repeatedly said and continue to believe that Palestinian civilian casualties should be avoided and that more humanitarian aid must go to the people of Gaza," read Hochul's statement Friday. The politician apologized for her "poor choice of words," claiming she used "an inappropriate analogy that I now realize could be hurtful to members of our community."

The incident demonstrates the tightrope Democratic Party politicians walk in their attempts to navigate the contentious issue. Jewish Americans are generally considered a reliable Democratic Party constituency, and Zionist organizations such as AIPAC play a significant role in funding political campaigns in the United States. But Democrats face growing opposition to their support for Israel from Arab-Americans, who make up a large voting bloc in key swing states such as Michigan.

New York is home to hundreds of thousands of people of Arab ancestry, including populations from Syria, Lebanon, and other Middle East countries. Cities across the state and the country have been rocked by large protests in recent months demanding an Israeli ceasefire.

Israel has bombarded the Gaza Strip in retaliation for an October 7 attack by the group Hamas, which targeted military installations tasked with policing the occupied Palestinian enclave.

Israel has controlled Gaza and the West Bank, which are considered Palestinian territory under international law, since 1967, and has occupied greater Palestine since the establishment of the state in 1948. The country's establishment followed the [Nakba](#), the Arabic term for the campaign of mass killing and ethnic cleansing that removed hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their ancestral lands.

Although Zionists sometimes attempt to defend Israel as a project of indigenous "decolonization," the movement's founders explicitly understood it as a colonial endeavor.

Theodor Herzl, the father of Zionism, envisioned the project in explicitly racist terms, describing his desired Israeli state as an outpost of European civilization in the Arab world.

Herzl once [sought](#) advice for his imperialist project from Cecil Rhodes, writing an admiring letter to the infamous British businessman and namesake of the white supremacist state Rhodesia.

Decades later, Israel still finds its primary source of financial and military support in former colonial powers in Western Europe and the [United States](#).

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US Detects First Houthi Underwater Drone While Conducting New Round of Strikes

The United States escalated tensions in the Red Sea on Saturday with a strike on the Houthis as the Yemeni movement continued its resistance against Israel's destruction of Gaza.

The US conducted five strikes in total, three of them against Houthi anti-ship missiles, one against a surface drone ship, and one against an underwater drone vessel.

"CENTCOM identified the anti-ship cruise missiles, unmanned underwater vessel, and the unmanned surface vessel in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen..." read a statement from US Central Command, while claiming the Houthi presence was "an imminent threat to US Navy ships and merchant vessels in the region" and labeling the US response as "self-defense strikes."

"These actions will protect freedom of navigation and make international waters safer and more secure for U.S. Navy and merchant vessels," the [statement](#) read, without clarifying the justification for US Navy ships' presence in the Red Sea. The body of water lies between the continents of Asia and Africa in the Indian Ocean, thousands of miles away from the United States.

The Ansar Allah movement, known in the West as the "Houthis," [has attacked](#) Israel-linked ships in the Red Sea since Israel's military operation in the Palestinian Gaza Strip began last October. The group, which controls large portions of Yemen, cites governments' obligation under international law to prevent genocide, a term that numerous organizations have claimed [applies to Israel's actions](#).

Israel has killed nearly 29,000 in their assault on Gaza, with around 70% of the casualties said to be of women and children, according to the enclave's health ministry. International organizations have warned that residents of the territory face mass death from starvation as Israel limits the amount of food and other supplies entering the enclave.

Earlier Sunday it was reported that multiple patients have died at Gaza's Nasser Hospital as the medical facility has run out of oxygen. Israel has destroyed most of the hospitals in the Gaza Strip, often claiming they serve as headquarters for the Hamas resistance movement. Some journalistic [investigations](#) by international news organizations have called such claims into question.

The United States has struck dozens of Houthi targets in recent months as the Biden administration continues to support Israel with lethal aid. The Houthis' resistance campaign, which originally only targeted Israel-linked ships, has expanded to bar ships of US and UK origin from the Red Sea as well after the US-led attacks.

No casualties have been reported as a result of the Houthis' blockade of the body of water. Meanwhile, US attacks across the region have killed [dozens](#) as countries throughout the Middle East [reject](#) the American presence.

US corporate media outlets have [stationed](#) “journalists” on board US vessels near the Red Sea in recent weeks in an attempt to more faithfully convey military propaganda. The US armed forces have increasingly used the tactic of “embedding” media correspondents with troops in recent decades after more impartial reporting during the Vietnam War undermined America’s military efforts, which [killed](#) as many as 3 million.

US Central Command is one of multiple unified combatant command organizations the US armed forces operate to project military power around the world. The United States carves up the globe into six areas with their own geographic command units, including Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), Africa Command (AFRICOM), and Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM).

US Central Command (CENTCOM) focuses specifically on the oil-rich Middle East region, which the United States has attempted to [dominate](#) for decades through coups and political subversion.

Additionally the US military operates a Space Command (SPACECOM) division and so-called functional combatant commands, including Cyber Command (CYBERCOM), Strategic Command (STRATCOM), and Special Operations Command (SOCOM).

Israel has been a particular focus of US support in recent decades, with the United States recognizing the utility of backing the [neo-colonialist](#) movement as a way to ensure Western influence in the Middle East.

A [report](#) from the US Congress’ Congressional Research Service documents hundreds of instances of the use of the United States armed forces around the globe. Each occasion is typically justified under the claim of “protecting American interests,” which usually refers to the commercial interests of US businesses.

The United States has led campaigns of regime change and political subversion in numerous countries, including Haiti, El Salvador, Afghanistan, Iraq, Bulgaria, Panama, Nicaragua, Libya, Morocco, Grenada, Angola, Australia, Guatemala, Bolivia, Greece, Chile, Uruguay, Ghana, Indonesia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Peru, Brazil, the Congo, Ecuador, France, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Italy, Syria, Costa Rica, Iran, Albania, Korea, the Philippines, and China, according to researcher William Blum, who extensively documented such efforts in his acclaimed and eye-opening book Killing Hope.

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Spy Versus Spy: Chinese Intelligence Agency Slams CIA

China’s Ministry of State Security posted a rare bilingual article on the WeChat platform Sunday criticizing the US Central Intelligence Agency’s (CIA) recent focus on China.

The strongly-worded missive accused the CIA of hypocrisy, noting that the United States has invested significant amounts of resources to gather intelligence in China while simultaneously criticizing China’s counterespionage efforts.

“You can do anything for intelligence while I shall do nothing against espionage?” [read an excerpt](#) from the post. “In recent years, the US, on the one hand, started intelligence wars,

sparing no efforts to step up its espionage against China and, on the other hand, 'brought suit against its victims,' scandalously smearing China's justifiable defense and trying to misrepresent the Counterespionage Law of [China] as an 'evil law.'"

The article refers to a revamped Chinese anti-spying law passed by the country's National People's Congress last year, which prompted criticism from US officials. China has claimed the legislation is necessary to protect the country from espionage as it becomes a major world power.

China discovered and infiltrated the CIA's spy [network](#) in the country more than a decade ago, leading to dozens of prosecutions. But the US intelligence agency has boasted of rapidly rebuilding its efforts in China in the years since.

CIA Director William Burns said the agency had recently doubled the percentage of its budget devoted to China in a recent article in US media. Burns has reportedly directed every division within the CIA to contribute towards its anti-China efforts, writing of the "daunting geopolitical challenges" of China's rise in a world "in which the United States no longer enjoys uncontested primacy."

The decree has led to a surge in hiring of Mandarin speakers throughout the agency.

China's Ministry of State Security said the CIA's anti-China crusade represents "another typical case of hegemonic, domineering and bullying practices of the US." Previously the agency has accused the CIA of promoting a "Cold War mindset" against the country. The CIA's China Mission Center is the only division within the agency to have ever been established to target a specific country, the Chinese Ministry of State Security noted.

Anti-China narratives have pervaded Western media in recent years as the country solidifies its status as the world's [largest](#) economy by Purchasing Power Parity (PPP). Recently, Western media has been [forced](#) to [admit](#) that accusations about China's supposedly "Orwellian" social credit system are mostly exaggerated or fabricated.

Western media still often parrots discredited claims of of the so-called "Uyghur genocide" in Xinjaing even as the United States backs Israel's mass killing campaign in the Gaza Strip. China has been engaged in an anti-terrorism campaign against religious extremists in the region for the last decade.

Claims of Uyghur "genocide" emerged around the same time former US President Barack Obama announced his planned foreign policy "pivot to Asia" to combat China's rise. China has rejected the claims, as have numerous Muslim-majority countries that have investigated the issue.

A few years ago the National Endowment for Democracy, a CIA-connected US government organization that foments color revolutions in various countries, [admitted](#) it had been funding Uyghur separatist groups since 2004. The strategy mirrors covert regime change attempts the agency has sponsored in various countries around the globe.

The United States has regarded China with hostility since its 1949 revolution, constantly sending spy planes to surveil the Asian country throughout the 1950s. A decade later the country suffered a massive famine, worsened by a tight US embargo that prevented the country from importing food. In 1990s, US-China relations deteriorated.

The CIA has been widely criticized for its [conduct](#), which includes torture, assassinations, human experimentation, sexual abuse, infiltration of foreign and US media, plane hijacking, drug trafficking, terrorism, domestic spying, foreign spying, spying on members of Congress, lying to

Congress, recruitment of Nazis, illegal funding of death squads, and political interference and coups in various countries.

The agency is legally forbidden to operate domestically, but was revealed to have done so as recently as 2016 when the CIA spied on former President Donald Trump's presidential campaign.

The agency is joined by various other US intelligence and police organizations, including the Federal Bureau of Intelligence (FBI), the National Security Agency (NSA), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, all of which possess significant capabilities to spy on American citizens and surveil communications around the globe.

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Another Headache for Biden as Democratic Lawmaker Urges Vote Against President

Observers say the president faces a difficult path to reelection amidst opposition from various elements of the Democratic Party's traditional coalition.

In the latest example of opposition to US President Joe Biden from within his own party, Democratic Representative Rashida Tlaib publicly urged Michigan voters to oppose the president in the state's primary election next week.

Rep. Tlaib made the call Saturday in a [video](#) posted by the Listen to Michigan campaign on the X social media platform. Listen to Michigan is an organization of pro-Palestine activists in the state organizing opposition to Biden's support for Israel's deadly campaign in Gaza, which has killed some 29,000 people.

"It is important as you all know to not only march against the genocide, [to] not only make sure that we're calling our members of Congress and local electeds and passing city resolutions all throughout our country, it is also important to create a voting bloc – something that is a bullhorn to say 'enough is enough,'" said Tlaib, the first Palestinian American member of US Congress. "We don't want a country that supports wars and bombs and destruction," she added. "We want to support life. We want to stand up for every single life killed in Gaza."

Tlaib and other activists are urging Democrats to vote "uncommitted" in the party's presidential primary election next Tuesday rather than supporting Biden or any of his challengers. Activists portray the move as a show of opposition to the president's handling of the Palestine-Israel crisis. Biden has attempted to express modest criticism of Israel through leaked statements to the press alleging consternation with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, but the US president has continued to back the country with the frequent provision of financial support and lethal aid.

In December the Biden administration even [bypassed](#) Congress to rush an "emergency" arms shipment to Israel, with Secretary of State Antony Blinken [affirming](#) the move was necessary in response to an alleged imminent security threat to the United States. Observers have noted Blinken could be impeached on perjury charges for the dubious claim, which is unlikely to

generate opposition given the significant influence of AIPAC and other Zionist groups in US politics.

“This is the way you can raise our voices,” Tlaib continued. “Don’t make us even more invisible. Right now we feel completely neglected and just unseen by our government. If you want us to be louder then come here and vote ‘uncommitted.’”

Tlaib made the statement standing outside of an early voting location in Dearborn, a major hub of the Arab American community in Michigan. Pro-Palestine activists have warned Biden that his unrelenting support for Israel could cost him reelection in November, with Michigan representing a crucial swing state for the president. Former President Donald Trump won Michigan in 2016 with a margin of just 10,700 votes; Michigan has an Arab American [population](#) of some 211,000. Tlaib has faced opposition within the Democratic Party for her championing of the Palestinian cause. In November the congresswoman, one of just three Muslims currently serving in Congress, was censured by the US House of Representatives for her use of the protest chant “from the river to the sea.”

In order to delegitimize pro-Palestine activism, Zionist groups have claimed the phrase is an antisemitic statement intended to express support for genocide of Jewish people. The chant actually refers to the geographic location of Palestinians’ ancestral home between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, where Palestinians currently lack full human and political rights. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were [killed and driven out of the area](#) during the Nakba, the violent campaign that marked the creation of the Israeli state.

Tlaib’s colleague Ilhan Omar, who is also Muslim, has likewise faced opposition from party elites for her pro-Palestine advocacy. The congresswoman reported receiving death threats after a highly unusual round of criticism from within her own party after she noted the influence of Zionist advocacy groups in US politics, with her statements also disingenuously cast as “antisemitic.”

Tlaib and Omar are among the more independent-minded members of the “squad,” a group of allegedly progressive and “socialist” members of the Democratic Party. Members of the informal group have typically backed Democratic Party leadership on most major issues, despite occasionally offering symbolic opposition.

The “squad” refused calls from activists to use the reelection of Nancy Pelosi as House Speaker as leverage to force concessions in 2019, with New York Representative Alexandria Ocasio Cortez claiming those championing the tactic were not “real” organizers. Poor and elderly terminal cancer patients were among the activists urging Ocasio Cortez to adopt the strategy, which was intended to promote increased healthcare spending.

The Democratic Party lost control of the House of Representatives during the [2022 midterm elections](#) after US President Joe Biden failed to enact a minimum wage increase or act on numerous other campaign promises. Nevertheless the United States’ rigid two-party system frustrates activists’ attempts to challenge the party, with third-party candidates lacking the massive sums of money required to successfully compete in US politics.

[Studies](#) have found that candidates who spend more money in their electoral campaigns are overwhelmingly favored to be reelected in the United States. Still, the US continuously [lectures other countries](#) about “freedom” and “democracy” despite massive levels of corruption within its own political system.

As establishment figures in Washington stoke Russophobia with hysterical claims of Russian space nukes, security analyst David Oualaalou noted the timing of the “revelations” is likely intended to damage Donald Trump after the former president made statements questioning the relevance of NATO.

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“The timing of the release of this story seems interesting and I would say is – no pun intended – targeted like a laser to damaging Donald Trump,” Oualaalou told Sputnik’s The Critical Hour program.

Trump has angered establishment figures by challenging Ukraine funding and other Washington foreign policy shibboleths. However, host Garland Nixon said establishment outrage against Trump likely helps instead of harms him.

“They don’t understand that in a way, they’re helping Donald Trump because the American people, the average working-class people, don’t see NATO as something that we got to spend hundreds of billions of dollars on,” Nixon emphasized.

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A new survey of US Navy servicemembers reveals significant culture and morale problems within the institution.

37% of sailors reported being “severely” or “extremely” stressed in the 2023 survey, an increase of more than 10% over the last four years. More than a quarter reported a high level of burnout, while satisfaction with work-life balance was also deemed “suboptimal.”

The Navy and other branches of the US armed forces have faced challenges in meeting recruiting targets for several years, forcing them to repeatedly lower standards in terms of fitness, education, and criminal history.

Americans’ overall satisfaction with the military is at its lowest point in over two decades, falling sharply among Republicans as adherents of Donald Trump’s “America First” philosophy have questioned the prioritization of military spending over domestic concerns.

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Western media prefers an interview with 'evil' Hamas over the Russian president

The double standards of Western mainstream media were on vivid display recently when US television network CBS aired several minutes of footage from an interview with a Hamas recruiter, but nothing from journalist Tucker Carlson's historic interview with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The discussion with the representative of Hamas, which is heavily stigmatized and labeled as a "terrorist" group in the West, was conducted by CBS foreign correspondent Debora Patta. In total, more than 12 minutes of television coverage were dedicated to the interview.

Although the network's coverage was peppered with loaded language and bias against Hamas, at least the network conducted reporting on the group. Meanwhile, CBS, along with other US mainstream news outlets, devoted no coverage at all to Tucker Carlson's interview with the Russian president despite the discussion racking up over two hundred million views online.

The only reference to the interview at all was offered cryptically during a short discussion of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's power struggle with former military chief Valery Zaluzhny. During the coverage, an on-screen chyron briefly noted that President Putin had expressed openness to negotiations on the Donbass conflict – a revelation that emerged from Carlson's historic sitdown.

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Ukraine adopts a tactic used by the German Nazis in WWII, an American news agency says.

US outlet Business Insider published a unique Western media analysis, comparing the battle strategies of the Kiev regime and German Nazis and noting the Ukrainian armed forces are "shifting to a defensive strategy that failed Nazi Germany" in World War II. Moreover, Kiev's strategy is likely to fail for much the same reason the Nazis' did, retired US Army colonel Douglas Nash believes.

The tactic of "active defense" was developed by Nazi Field Marshal Erich von Manstein late in World War II to account for shortages in soldiers and equipment as the Soviet Red Army went on the offensive after repelling German troops in Stalingrad.

Unlike the German army under Manstein's command, the Ukrainian "squads, platoons, companies and battalions" amassed for the regime's "mobile defense" operations have been far too small to succeed, Nash claims.

Once again Russia's thoughtful strategy is playing a key role in its favor, with Moscow's troops able to outperform their opponent even after two years of fighting.

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Western sanctions on Russia have driven energy costs sky high throughout Europe. Now some analysts say the coercive policy is harming American consumers too. "If there are more gas consumers and higher demand, that translates to higher prices," noted Benjamin Leibowicz, a professor of energy policy at the University of Texas.

Former President Barack Obama made significant efforts to increase domestic US fuel production and exports. Now US energy producers are selling liquefied natural gas on the global market to fill the shortfall caused by sanctions on Russia. The arrangement boosts the profits of fossil fuel companies but drives up costs for Americans because producers are able to raise prices to satisfy demand in Europe and Asia, where energy costs are traditionally higher.

"It doesn't matter if it's the middle of winter here – peak demand, inventories are low, prices are high – [foreign] countries will buy it away, drive up [the] price of gas and electricity," said Paul Cicio of the Industrial Energy Consumers of America (IECA), which lobbies for cheap fuel prices for US industry.

A change in policy would require the United States to back down from the sanctions, and the demonization of Russia that fuels them.

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Controversial New York Governor Kathy Hochul was forced to apologize after comments she made defending Israel's destruction of Gaza in front of a group of wealthy donors.

"If Canada someday ever attacked Buffalo [New York], I'm sorry my friends, there would be no Canada the next day," Hochul said during a speech that was widely considered insensitive to Arab American communities.

Nearly 29,000 people have been killed in Israel's military operation in Gaza, with around 70% of the dead estimated to be women and children. Relief organizations warn the besieged enclave faces mass famine as Israel prevents aid from entering the territory.

"While I have been clear in my support of Israel's right to self-defense [sic], I have also repeatedly said and continue to believe that Palestinian civilian casualties should be avoided

and that more humanitarian aid must go to the people of Gaza,” read Hochul’s statement on Friday.

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US detects first Houthi underwater drone while conducting new round of air-strikes

The US conducted five strikes in total and detected the first deployment of an unmanned underwater vessel by the Houthis, according to a statement from US Central Command (CENTCOM), the division of the US military tasked with ensuring American dominance over the Middle East, Central Asia and parts of South Asia.

“These actions will protect freedom of navigation and make international waters safer and more secure for US Navy and merchant vessels,” CENTCOM’s statement read, without clarifying the justification for US Navy ships’ presence in the Red Sea, which lies between the continents of Asia and Africa in the Indian Ocean, thousands of miles away from the United States.

The Ansar Allah movement, known in the West as the “Houthis,” cites as justification for its blockade governments’ obligation under international law to prevent genocide, a term that numerous organizations have claimed applies to Israel’s actions.

Click through for analysis of the US presence in the Middle East and how Western backing of Israel fits into the US’ broader military ambitions.

Spy Versus Spy: Chinese Intelligence Agency Slams CIA

The US Central Intelligence Agency, known for its long history of morally dubious activity, was criticized by Chinese officials in a post on the WeChat platform Sunday.

In a rare bilingual article China’s Ministry of State Security strongly criticized the CIA’s recent focus on China, responding to a missive from CIA director William Burns published in US media last month.

China’s Ministry of State Security said the CIA’s anti-China crusade represents “another typical case of hegemonic, domineering and bullying practices of the US.” Previously the agency has accused the CIA of promoting a “Cold War mindset” against the country.

Anti-China narratives have pervaded Western media in recent years as the country solidifies its status as the world’s largest economy by purchasing power parity.

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US President Joe Biden suffers blow as member of his party urges Democrats to vote against him in an upcoming state primary election

Michigan Rep. Rashida Tlaib urged voters to mark “uncommitted” on their ballots in next Tuesday’s primary to register opposition to Biden’s support for Israel’s deadly campaign in the Gaza Strip, which has killed some 29,000, according to enclave’s health ministry.

“It is... important to create a voting bloc – something that is a bullhorn to say ‘enough is enough,’” said Tlaib, the first Palestinian American member of US Congress. “Right now we feel completely neglected and just unseen by our government.”

Biden has strongly backed Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu, even bypassing Congress to rush an “emergency” shipment of lethal aid to Israel in December. Activists warn Biden he risks losing reelection in November amidst opposition from Arab Americans in Michigan and other states.

Follow the link for analysis of the incident and the precarious state of pro-Palestine advocacy within the Democratic Party

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US House Establishes Artificial Intelligence Task Force – Speaker

WASHINGTON, February 20 (Sputnik) – US House Speaker Mike Johnson and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries announced on Tuesday the establishment of a bipartisan task force on artificial intelligence, according to a release.

“Because advancements in artificial intelligence have the potential to rapidly transform our economy and our society, it is important for Congress to work in a bipartisan manner to understand and plan for both the promises and the complexities of this transformative technology,” Johnson said in the release.

Johnson and Jeffries have each appointed 12 members to the task force who represent key committee of jurisdiction. It will be jointly chaired by Representatives Jay Obernolte and Ted Lieu.

The task force will aim to produce a report with guiding principles, recommendations, and policy proposals.

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

X Briefly Suspends Yulia Navalnaya's Account

WASHINGTON, February 20 (Sputnik) - The social media platform X on Tuesday briefly suspended the account of Alexei Navalny's widow, Yulia.

Her X page said: "Account suspended. X suspends accounts which violate the X Rules."

In less than a hour, the page was restored.

Navalnaya reportedly created the account on Monday.

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UN Food Agency Halts Deliveries to North Gaza Citing Safety Concerns

WASHINGTON, February 20 (Sputnik) – The UN’s World Food Programme (WFP) announced on Tuesday that it has paused deliveries of critical food aid to northern Gaza, citing safety concerns posed by desperately starving Gazans, according to a release.

“The UN World Food Programme is pausing deliveries of life-saving food aid to northern Gaza until conditions are in place that allow for safe distributions,” the release stated.

The WFP said that the decision had not be made lightly, acknowledging that Gaza is “hanging by a thread” and the halt in deliveries meant that the situation in the north would “deteriorate further and more people risk dying of hunger.”

Deliveries had resumed on Sunday after a three-week suspension following an Israeli strike on an UNRWA truck and the lack of a functioning humanitarian notification system.

The WFP said it had planned to send 10 trucks of food for seven consecutive days, but on Sunday, its convoy was surrounded by crowds of hungry people close to the Wadi Gaza checkpoint while en route toward Gaza City. It said it had to fend off people trying to climb aboard its truck and face gunfire in Gaza City.

Its convoy on Monday faced “complete chaos and violence due to the collapse of civil order. Several trucks were looted between Khan Younes and Deir al Balah and a truck driver was beaten. The remaining flour was spontaneously distributed off the trucks in Gaza city, amidst high tension and explosive anger.”

The WFP admitted that it had “witnessed unprecedented levels of desperation” over the past two days and noted that a report it had co-authored in December warned of the risk of famine in northern Gaza by May unless conditions there improved decisively.

A report issued on Monday by UNICEF and WFP found the situation in northern Gaza “particularly extreme” with 15.6% of children under two years of age acutely malnourished.

The WFP said it would seek to “resume deliveries in a responsible manner as soon as possible,” calling for the entry of “significantly higher volumes of food” into Gaza, the opening of additional crossing points to north Gaza, a functioning humanitarian notification system, a stable communication network, and security for its staff and partners.

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US Charges 2 Russian Nationals Over Lockbit Ransomware Attacks - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 20 (Sputnik) – The US Justice Department unsealed an indictment on Tuesday that charged two Russian nationals with allegedly attacking numerous individuals and businesses in the US with Lockbit ransomware, according to a release.

"The Justice Department also unsealed an indictment obtained in the District of New Jersey charging Russian nationals Artur Sungatov and Ivan Kondratyev, also known as Bassterlord, with deploying LockBit against numerous victims throughout the United States, including businesses nationwide in the manufacturing and other industries, as well as victims around the world in the semiconductor and other industries," the release stated.

It added that three additional criminal counts against Kondratyev were unsealed in the Northern District of California related to his alleged Sodinokibi/Revil ransomware attack on a corporation located in California in 2020.

According to the New Jersey indictment, from at least as early as January 2021, Sungatov allegedly deployed LockBit ransomware against corporations and funded additional LockBit attacks against other victims. He allegedly deployed LockBit ransomware against manufacturing, logistics, insurance, and other companies located in Minnesota, Indiana, Puerto Rico, Wisconsin, Florida, and New Mexico.

As early as August 2021, Kondratyev similarly began to allegedly deploy LockBit against multiple victims. Operating under the online alias "Bassterlord," he allegedly deployed LockBit against municipal and private targets in Oregon, Puerto Rico, and New York, as well as targets located in Singapore, Taiwan, and Lebanon.

LockBit is one of the most active ransomware groups in the world. It has targeted over 2,000 victims, received more than \$120 million in ransom payments, and made ransom demands totaling hundreds of millions of dollars.

The Justice Department also announced that in cooperation with the FBI, the UK's National Crime Agency's cyber division, and other international law enforcement agencies, it had disrupted Lockbit's operations by seizing numerous public websites that connect to the organization's infrastructure and seizing control of servers used by LockBit administrators. The agencies have also developed decryption capabilities that may enable victims to restore systems encrypted by the LockBit ransomware.

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Algeria's Draft UN Resolution on Gaza Urges Prevention of Civilians' Displacement in Rafah

UNITED NATIONS, February 19 (Sputnik) - The Algeria-proposed draft resolution on Gaza, which is to be voted in the UN Security Council on February 20, urges prevention of civilians'

displacement in the enclave's city of Rafah, which is the target of a planned Israeli ground offensive, the document seen by Sputnik read.

The resolution asks for "a viable plan to ensure the protection of and prevent the displacement of civilians in the event of a major ground military offensive into Rafah."

The document also calls on the "parties to refrain from depriving the civilian population in the Gaza Strip of basic services and humanitarian assistance indispensable to their survival."

Earlier on Monday, US Deputy Ambassador to the UN Robert Wood said that Washington did not find the Algeria-proposed resolution effective enough. Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia, for his part, expressed his belief that if the United States had agreed to a resolution on a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip back in October 2023, many lives would have been saved.

The US has regularly impeded any resolution on Gaza that may hinder Israeli military operations. Washington, in particular, blocked a Brazil-drafted resolution in October 2023, and a resolution drafted by the United Arab Emirates, which called for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, in December.

On October 7, 2023, the Palestinian movement Hamas launched a large-scale attack on Israel, killing 1,200 and abducting more than 200 others. The attack prompted a retaliatory military operation by Israel, leading to the deaths of more than 29,000 people in the Gaza Strip, according to local authorities.

In November 2023, Qatar mediated a deal between Israel and Hamas on a temporary truce and the exchange of some of the prisoners and hostages, as well as the delivery of humanitarian aid into Gaza. The ceasefire expired on December 1, 2023, after several extensions. More than 100 hostages are still believed to be held by Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

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US Considers New Algerian UNSC Resolution on Gaza Not Effective - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, February 19 (Sputnik) - The United States is not satisfied with the latest draft proposal on Gaza, which Algeria put forward, as Washington finds it ineffective towards its goals, US Deputy Ambassador to the UN Robert Wood said on Monday.

"This resolution that the Algerians have put forward, we don't think is an effective mechanism. We are trying to do the three things that we want to see happen: trying to get the Hostages out, more aid in, and a pause," Woods told reporters, adding that the US is "looking at a range of options."

The US will be discussing this issue with allies in the future, the diplomat added.

The UN Security Council is supposed to vote on the draft on Tuesday.

"We are talking to people about various options... including a possibility of a resolution. But I don't think you can expect anything to happen tomorrow," Wood explained.

The United States has been blocking resolutions on Gaza ever since the war started, as it feels its obligations towards one of the biggest allies, Israel.

Earlier in the day, Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said that if the Security

Council had supported its resolution in the ceasefire back in October, many lives would have been saved.

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Russia May Request UNSC Meeting on West Arms Deliveries to Kiev in February, March - Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, February 19 (Sputnik) - Russia may request another UN Security Council meeting on deliveries of Western weapons into Ukraine sometime in February or March, Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said on Monday.

"Yes, sometime into February or March. Of course, it will go something in that way [for Russia to request a meeting on Western deliveries of weapons in Ukraine]," Nebenzia told journalists in front of the UN Security Council chamber.

But at the moment and this week, Nebenzia said, adding that we are still having two meetings on Ukraine — one is in the General Assembly. Russia's former Western partners called for the second one and it will be in the Council on February 23, the diplomat added.

The topic of Western weapon supplies to Kiev is one of the main aspects that Russia focuses on in the UN Security Council. On the other hand, the Western states prefer to discuss humanitarian issues. Nevertheless, the situation in Ukraine now is getting less attention within the UN system due to the escalated tensions in the Red Sea and the war in Gaza.

Western countries have been providing military and financial aid to Kiev since the start of Russia's military operation in Ukraine in February 2022. The Kremlin has consistently warned against continued arms deliveries to Kiev, saying it would lead to further escalation of the conflict. In April 2022, Russia sent a diplomatic note to all NATO countries on the issue of arms supplies to Ukraine. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has warned that any cargo containing weapons for Ukraine will become a legitimate target for Russian strikes.

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RPT: ANALYSIS - Fall of Avdiivka 'Turning Point' in Ukraine Conflict, May Discourage US's Funding to Kiev

WASHINGTON, February 19 (Sputnik) - The Russian takeover of Avdiivka, a Ukrainian stronghold north of Donetsk, is an important move forward on the battlefield and a "major strategic loss" for Ukraine that may discourage the West from continuing funding and providing military assistance to Kiev, experts and former US military officers told Sputnik.

On Saturday, Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Oleksandr Syrskyi announced the decision to withdraw troops from Avdiivka. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that the decision to pull out the troops had been made to "save people's lives." Later, the Russian Defense

Ministry said that the Russian military had taken full control of Avdiivka.

"The fall of Avdiivka is an important move forward for Russia and a major strategic loss for Ukraine ... Its fall has resulted in a loss of western military equipment and ammunition, will help secure Donetsk, while, at the same time, providing a key logistical forward hub for the Russian forces," former US Army Lt. Col. Earl Rasmussen told Sputnik.

The retired military officer has described Avdiivka as a major logistical hub with transportation intersections of roads and rail lines that was reinforced over the years, "creating a key defensive location for the Ukrainian forces" and served as a military center "used to launch attacks into Donetsk for the past nine years."

"The loss of Avdiivka will undoubtedly bring more visibility to the critical position facing Ukraine and likely support voices on both sides of the aisle in Western countries. Realists will clearly see that Project Ukraine is a failure and a lost cause, and put greater pressure avoiding further funding into the Ukrainian black hole," Rasmussen said.

UKRAINE FUNDING CUTS

Former CIA analyst and US Army intelligence officer Philip Giraldi told Sputnik that the fall of Avdiivka would encourage some Congressmen to oppose "throwing away" \$61 billion more for the military aid to Ukraine and called the Ukrainian troops' retreat an "enough of a swing" for US Congress to disapprove further funding in two weeks when the legislative body will review the issue.

"Some Congressmen will certainly shift over into the position that throwing away \$61 billion more is truly to waste the money on a lost cause. It should be enough of a swing to guarantee that the money will not be appropriated when Congress resumes in two weeks time. That is good news!" Giraldi said.

The expert also said that the Ukrainians have been pointing to their defense of Avdiivka as "evidence" that they can "hold out or even prevail" with sufficient assistance from the United States and NATO.

"That has proven to be an illusion with Russia holding back on the casualties that would have been produced by an all-out push to take the town rather than let it fall into their hands due more to developing Ukrainian weakness," he added.

UKRAINE CONFLICT TURNING POINT

Covert Action Magazine Managing Editor and military analyst Jeremy Kuzmarov told Sputnik that the capture of Avdiivka is a "turning point" in the Ukraine conflict that shows that Kiev's counteroffensive has failed and the US's aid has been useless.

"Yes, I think it is a turning point in the war. It underscores the failure of the Ukrainian counteroffensive and that the Russians are winning the war and gaining territory, more slowly than was anticipated, but gaining territory nevertheless. It also underscores the futility of US aid," Kuzmarov told Sputnik.

The US society does not like to support "a losing cause" and has been "tired of this war," the military analyst said.

"They were sold a package of lies like with Iraq and Afghanistan and others, and have belatedly woken up to this," Kuzmarov also said.

Western countries have been providing military and financial aid to Kiev since the start of Russia's military operation in Ukraine in February 2022. The Kremlin has consistently warned against continued arms deliveries to Kiev, saying it would lead to further escalation of the

conflict.

On February 13, the US Senate passed a \$95 billion foreign aid bill that included \$60 billion for Ukraine aid and \$14 billion in security assistance for Israel. House Speaker Mike Johnson said that he had no plans to bring the bill to the House floor for a vote. Johnson was highly critical of the bill, saying that it was silent on border security, which he called "the most pressing issue" in the United States at the moment.

On February 16, US Congressmen Brian Fitzpatrick, Jared Golden, Don Bacon and others released a statement on the legislation — dubbed the Defending Borders, Defending Democracies Act — after Johnson said that House lawmakers would not hold a vote on a \$95 billion spending bill passed by the US Senate. The bill provides \$47.69 billion to support Ukraine, including \$13.77 billion for the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative.

The US House of Representatives is not set to return to legislative business until February 28.

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ANALYSIS - Fall of Avdiivka 'Turning Point' in Ukraine Conflict, May Discourage US's Funding to Kiev

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US Presidential Candidate Haley Blames Both Biden, Republican Party for Poor US Economy

IRMO, SOUTH CAROLINA, February 18 (Sputnik), Lenka White - Number two Republican candidate for the US president, Nikki Haley, criticized her Republican Party for the bad shape of the US economy, saying it is not only President Joe Biden's fault.

"Right, for the first time, we are paying more in interest payments than we are in defense budget. Nobody is noticing Russia, China, and Iran," Haley said on Saturday to the attendees of her rally in Irmo, a small town in South Carolina. "And as much as I would love to tell you that Biden did that to us ... Our Republicans did that to us too."

They passed a COVID stimulus bill with no accountability, she added.

"And Instead of Republicans trying to make it right, they double down and open up pet project in earmarks for the first time in ten years," Haley continued.

She also believes that the Democrat's leading runner won't be Joe Biden, but Vice President Kamala Harris.

Nikki Haley, a 52-year-old daughter of two Indian immigrants, served as South Carolina Governor until 2017, when she became the American Ambassador to the United Nations until 2018.

The politician believes she will be chosen as the leading runner for the Republican Party; however, so far, Haley has lost in Iowa and New Hampshire, and the polls show that former US President Donald Trump is leading by 26 points in South Carolina before the state's 24 February primary elections.

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US Presidential Candidate Haley Scolds Trump Once per 2 Minutes in Rally Speech

IRMO, SOUTH CAROLINA, February 18 (Sputnik), Lenka White - The number two republican candidate for the US president, Nikki Haley, devoted her speech to her primary rival, former US President Donald Trump, mentioning him approximately once in two minutes.

Haley spoke on Saturday for about 25 minutes, and upon counting, the former president's name was mentioned ten times in connection to many topics.

Trump, on the other hand, mentioned Haley in his one hour and half-long speech on Wednesday only a handful of times, despite that he called her the "bird brain."

Trump, according to polls, is leading to become the Republican nominee for the general elections in November. Haley, nevertheless, believes she will be the chosen runner competing against the current Vice President.

"We will have a female president of the United States. The hard truth is it's either going to be me or Kamala Harris," Haley told the attendees.

The Ambassador held a rally to gather support before February's primaries in South Carolina in a park in a small area called Irmo, a suburb of Columbia, the central city of South Carolina.

Nikki Haley, a 52-year-old daughter of two Indian immigrants, is a former South Carolina governor, and she also served as the American Ambassador to the United Nations in

2017-2018.

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US Presidential Candidate Haley Trying to Gather Support in Home State - Correspondent

IRMO, SOUTH CAROLINA, February 18 (Sputnik), Lenka White - Number two republican candidate for the US president and ambassador, Nikki Haley, organized a rally in a town of her home state, South Carolina, on Saturday evening.

The event was held in a park in a small area called Irmo, a suburb of Columbia, the central city of South Carolina. Despite a few policemen and her security guards walking around, the event seemed relatively relaxed as no security check was done to the attendees. Haley's team, however, has requested US Secret Service protection for the ambassador beginning in February.

Around 100 people of all ages attended the event, with a few teenagers specifically put in the front rows.

Haley's team was giving out free stickers on clothing and bump stickers, including t-shirts, which were for purchase. The staff was also giving out anti-Trump stickers with "[former US President Donald] Trump is too chicken to debate."

Her event seemed organized, and Haley arrived on time for the start at 6 p.m. (23:00 GMT). The ambassador's speech lasted about 25 minutes, and she spoke about the main topics: US President Joe Biden is too old, Trump is "unhinged," and she would like to deport all immigrants. Haley also called Russian President Vladimir Putin a "thug" and called out Trump for encouraging Putin in his, according to her, malicious endeavors. Nevertheless, the ambassador also wants to apply a stricter policy on immigration of "catch and deport."

Nikki Haley, a 52-year-old daughter of two Indian immigrants, is a former American Ambassador to the United Nations from 2017 until 2018, and she was a South California Governor from 2010 until the UN role.

Haley believes she will be chosen as the leading runner for the Republican Party; however, so far, she has lost in Iowa and New Hampshire, and a Washington Post-Monmouth University poll show that Trump is leading by 26 points in South Carolina before the state's 24 February primary elections.

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Biden Drank Tap Water in East Palestine One Year After Toxic Train Wreck - Press Pool

WASHINGTON, February 17 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden is alleged to have drunk tap water during a visit to East Palestine, Ohio, where a year ago a train derailment resulted in the spill of toxic chemicals that it was transporting, according to a White House press pool report.

There have been concerns about the safety of the quality of the air, water, and soil after it was exposed to toxic chemicals following the accident.

The White House press pool on Friday said it can confirm that Biden drank from a glass of tap water from the community's water source.

This is Biden's first visit to East Palestine since the incident occurred on February 3, 2023.

Biden's motorcade passed by protesters in East Palestine holding up signs that said "Go home, sleepy Joe!" while others gave the middle finger or thumbs down gesture to the US president. Other signs along the route also stated "Trump won" and "Biden is not my president."

Last February, a train hauling 20 cars from Norfolk Southern with hazardous materials derailed in East Palestine, Ohio. A big fire erupted due to the derailment, leading to officials burning vinyl chloride inside five of the tanker cars to avoid a catastrophic explosion. The accident released toxic chemicals, including hydrogen chloride, phosgene, butyl acrylate, and ethylene, into the environment.

Despite repeated assurances that the air and water are safe, residents in the area told Sputnik of recent health impacts, including headaches, burning skin, and irritated eyes as well as anxiety about long-term health risks such as cancer.

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources told Sputnik last February that approximately 3,500 fish had died in waterways near the train derailment site.

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Salient CRGT Wins \$865Mln Tech Support Contract From US Air Force - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, February 17 (Sputnik) - Salient CRGT has received a \$865 million US Air Force contract to provide communications technical support services throughout the US Central Command (CENTCOM) area of responsibility (AOR), which covers the Middle East, the Defense Department announced.

"Salient CRGT, a wholly owned subsidiary of GovCIO [in] Fairfax, Virginia, has been awarded a \$865 million [contract] for communications technical support services, the Defense Department said in a release on Friday.

The contract provides services at multiple locations throughout the US Central Command AOR over the next five years until March 4, 2029, the release said.

The contract also offers incentive options which, if earned, could extend it for another two years until March 4, 2031, the release added.

GovCIO is a private company that provides cloud services, Agile software development, mobility services, cyber security, data analytics and infrastructure optimization to civilian, defense, homeland and intelligence agencies.

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US Army Orders New \$249Mln Automated Accounting System From Leidos - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, February 17 (Sputnik) - Leidos has won an almost \$250 million US Army contract to provide an Automated Installation Entry system, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"Leidos [of] Reston, Virginia, was awarded a \$249 million ...contract for the Automated Installation Entry system," the release stated on Friday.

Work on the contract is projected to take almost six years with an estimated completion date of February 8, 2030, the Defense Department said.

The US. Army Contracting Command located at the Army Proving Grounds in Aberdeen in the US state of Maryland will oversee work on the project as its contracting activity, the defense Department said.

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Biden One Year After East Palestine Trainwreck Says Accident Was Preventable, Act of Greed

WASHINGTON, February 17 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden during a visit to East Palestine, Ohio, a year after a toxic train derailment, said the accident was preventable, but an act of greed.

"This was an act of greed that was 100% preventable," Biden said during a press conference on Friday. "Let me say it again. An act of greed that was 100% preventable. We were pushing railroads to take more precautions, to deal with braking, to deal with a whole range of things that were not dealt with."

Biden also said that multimillion dollar railroad companies transporting toxic chemicals have a responsibility to do it safely, but Norfolk Southern failed.

Biden also announced six grants to study the short- and long-term impacts of the toxic spill. This is Biden's first visit to East Palestine since the incident occurred on February 3, 2023.

Biden's motorcade passed by protesters in East Palestine holding up signs that said "Go home, sleepy Joe!" and "F..k Biden," while others gave the middle finger or thumbs down gesture to the president. Other signs along the route also stated "Trump won" and "Biden is not my president."

Last February, a train hauling 20 cars from Norfolk Southern with hazardous materials derailed in East Palestine. A big fire erupted due to the derailment, leading to officials burning vinyl chloride inside five of the tanker cars to avoid a catastrophic explosion. The accident released toxic chemicals, including hydrogen chloride, phosgene, butyl acrylate, and ethylene, into the environment.

Despite repeated assurances that the air and water are safe, residents in the area told Sputnik of recent health impacts, including headaches, burning skin and irritated eyes as well as anxiety about long-term health risks such as cancer.

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources told Sputnik last February that approximately 3,500 fish had died in waterways near the train derailment site.

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Trump After Verdict Says Aided NYC in Bad Times, Justice System There Under Assault

WASHINGTON, February 17 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump said in a social media post that after supporting New York City in tough times, he is now being unfairly targeted by what he describes as a biased justice system and radical opponents amid rising crime.

"The Justice System in New York State, and America as a whole, is under assault by partisan, deluded, biased Judges and Prosecutors...I helped New York City during its worst of times, and now, while it is overrun with Violent Biden Migrant Crime, the Radicals are doing all they can to kick me out," Trump said on Friday.

Earlier in the day, judge Arthur Engoron ruled that Trump is liable more than \$354 million and barred him from the New York State real estate industry. Trump's attorney Alina Habba called the court ruling a "manifest injustice" adding that she plans to appeal it.

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Trump's Attorney Says Court Ruling Signals 'New York No Longer Open for Business'

WASHINGTON, February 17 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump's attorney Alina Habba said in a statement that the New York court's ruling in the fraud case against her client will serve as a signal to all Americans that New York is no longer open for business.

"Let me make one thing perfectly clear: this is not just about Donald Trump - if this decision stands, it will serve as a signal to every single American that New York is no longer open for business," the statement said on Friday.

Earlier in the day, judge Arthur Engoron ruled that Trump is liable more than \$354 million and barred him from the New York State real estate industry.

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Biden Met by Angry Protesters in East Palestine 1 Year Since Toxic Disaster

WASHINGTON, February 17 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden was met by groups of angry residents of East Palestine, Ohio, the site of a train derailment that spilled toxic chemicals into the town more than a year ago, according to the White House press pool.

This is Biden's first visit to East Palestine since the incident occurred on February 3, 2023.

The press pool said Biden's motorcade passed by protesters holding up signs that said "Go home, sleepy Joe!" and "F.k Biden," while others gave the middle finger or thumbs down

gesture to the president.

Other signs along the route of Biden's motorcade also stated "Trump won" and "Biden is not my president."

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, February 17 (Sputnik) -

UKRAINE CONFLICT

* The city of Avdiivka in the Donetsk People's Republic may become the "second Bakhmut" if the Ukrainian military does not have enough funding and personnel to defend it, Dmytro Lykhoviy, a spokesman of Ukraine's Tavria operational group, said on Friday.

* Germany and Ukraine signed a new security agreement that stipulates Berlin's military support for Kiev will be used only in compliance with international norms and the UN Charter.

* German soldiers will not participate in the current conflict in Ukraine as stipulated in the agreement, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said.

* Germany will do everything possible to help Ukraine strengthen its defense potential in order to prevent a new conflict after the possible end of the current one, Scholz said.

* Providing wide support to Ukraine is important, despite the fact that Germany is "experiencing financial consequences" from this decision, Scholz said.

* France and Ukraine signed a bilateral agreement on security guarantees as part of Paris' determination to support Kiev long-term, the Office of the French President said.

* The agreement was signed for ten years and it includes the allocation of \$3.2 billion of military aid for Ukraine in 2024, French President Emmanuel Macron said.

TRUMP COURT CASE

* New York judge Arthyr Ergonon ruled that former President Donald Trump is liable more than \$354 million in the civil fraud trial against him, court documents revealed on Friday.

* Engoron also banned Trump and the Trump Organization from applying for loans from any New York-chartered financial institution for three years, the documents said.

ISRAEL INVASION OF GAZA

- * The Al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Palestinian movement Hamas, said on Friday that there were heavy losses among the Israeli hostages still being held in the Gaza Strip.
- * The International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled on Friday that the situation around Rafah does not require the introduction of any additional measures against Israel that are being demanded by South Africa.
- * Israel has no intention of expelling Palestinians from the Gaza Strip, but the demilitarization of the enclave is necessary, Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz said on Friday.

DEATH OF ALEXEI NAVALNY

- * The Russian prison service announced on Friday that Alexei Navalny died while being incarcerated and an investigation into the cause of death is underway.
- * US President Joe Biden said his administration is contemplating new sanctions on Russia after accusing Russian President Vladimir Putin of bearing responsibility for Navalny's death.
- * Biden also said Navalny's death serves as motivation for Congress to pass additional aid for Ukraine.
- * The United States needs to show restraint in connection with Navalny's death and await the results of the medical examination, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.
- * The statements of Western politicians about Navalny's death are outrageous and unacceptable, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

AZERBAIJAN-ARMENIA TENSIONS

- * The Azerbaijan Defense Ministry on Friday accused Armenia of shelling its combat positions along the common border, an accusation promptly denied by the Armenian Defense Ministry.

US BORDER CRISIS

- * Governor Greg Abbott said on Friday that Texas will establish a base camp for military personnel at the United States' border with Mexico near Eagle Pass, in an effort to secure the border from illegal immigration.

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State Dept. Slaps Visa Restrictions on Over 100 Nicaraguan Municipal Officials

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) – The US Department of State is imposing visa restrictions on more than a hundred Nicaraguan municipal officials over their involvement in an alleged "repression campaign" by President Daniel Ortega, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Friday.

"We are taking steps to impose visa restrictions on more than 100 Nicaraguan municipal officials for their role in the Ortega-Murillo government which continues to engage in a repressive campaign that silences civil society and unjustly detains courageous individuals for

exercising their fundamental freedoms," Miller said in a statement.

The US continues to work with the international community in order to seek accountability for those "threatening" Nicaragua's democracy, according to the statement. Washington remains committed to supporting the Nicaraguan people and ensuring the protection of their human rights, the statement added.

The measure has been taken pursuant to the Presidential Proclamation 10309, the statement said.

In November 2021, US President Joe Biden signed Proclamation 10309, banning members of the Nicaraguan government from entering the United States. The move was in response to the November 7 elections in the Central American nation that the US called "rigged."

In response, Ortega accused the US of seeking to undermine Nicaragua's electoral process. Managua said that US financial and diplomatic coercion against the country is abusive, authoritarian and non-compliant with the UN Charter.

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Trump's Attorney Says Ruling in New York Fraud Trial 'Manifest Injustice,' Plans to Appeal

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) – Former US President Donald Trump's attorney Alina Habba on Friday called a New York court ruling in a fraud trial a "manifest injustice" and added that she plans to appeal it.

Earlier in the day, US judge Arthur Engoron ruled that former President Donald Trump is liable for more than \$354 million and barred from the New York State real estate industry in his civil fraud trial.

"It is the culmination of a multi-year, politically fueled witch hunt that was designed to 'take down Donald Trump,' before Letitia James ever stepped foot into the [New York State] Attorney General's office," Habba said in a statement to CNN.

Habba added that "given the grave stakes" of the case, Trump's legal team plans to appeal the ruling, according to the statement.

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US Court Finds Trump Liable for More Than \$354Mln in Civil Fraud Trial - Judge

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - A US judge ruled that former President Donald Trump is liable for more than \$354 million in his civil fraud trial in the state of New York, court documents revealed on Friday.

The civil fraud case against Trump was brought by New York Attorney General Letitia James for allegedly lying about the value of Trump properties, for which James sought \$370 million in fines and to ban Trump from the New York State real estate industry. Trump has repeatedly denied

any wrongdoing in the case.

Moreover, US Judge Arthur Engoron ordered that defendants Donald Trump, Allen Weisselberg, and Jeffrey McConney are prohibited from serving as an officer or director of any New York corporation or other legal entity in New York for three years. Engoron also banned Trump and the Trump organization from applying for loans from any New York-chartered financial institution for three years.

Aside from the punishments, Engoron removed the order that Trump's companies must be dissolved.

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Ned Price to Serve as Deputy Ambassador to UN - Reports

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - Former State Department spokesperson Ned Price is set to become the next deputy to US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield, Politico reported on Friday, citing Greenfield.

"His judgment and expertise will be a tremendous asset to me and the entire USUN team," Greenfield said in a statement to Politico.

Price assumes his new role amid international scrutiny over the US's support for Israel during the ongoing war in Gaza, including an International Court of Justice investigation into allegations of genocide in Gaza, the report said.

His appointment also comes as the Biden administration is seeking to use UN mechanisms to maintain diplomatic pressure on Russia over the Ukraine conflict, the report added.

Price served as State Department spokesperson from January 2021 to March 2023, before taking up his current role as senior advisor to Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

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US Think Tank Says Ukraine-Russia Peace Deal Possible, Desirable

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - A negotiated settlement to end the conflict between Ukraine and Russia is both possible and desirable, the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft said on Friday.

"Conventional wisdom holds that a negotiated end to the Ukraine war is neither possible nor desirable. This belief is false. It is also extremely dangerous for Ukraine's future," the US think tank said in a report.

The conflict is trending toward the collapse of Ukraine, the report said. The United States and its allies cannot fix Ukraine's "acute manpower problems" without direct involvement in the conflict, the report said.

Russia has withstood sanctions and improved its military, whereas Ukraine has gradually exhausted its forces, the report said. There is "little realistic prospect" of future Ukrainian territorial gains, the report said.

Ukraine's best hope lies in a negotiated settlement that prevents future escalation and bolsters regional and global security, the report said.

The US should publicly support calls from China, Brazil and other countries to hold peace talks, the report said. US officials should engage with Russian counterparts through both formal and informal channels to help build trust and bolster dialogue, the report said.

A negotiated settlement must address key concerns of Russia, Ukraine and western countries alike, the report said. Ukraine must obtain security guarantees and a path to economic reconstruction, Russia must secure assurances that Ukraine will not host NATO weapons or forces, and the US and Europe must receive promises from Moscow not to leverage success in Ukraine into broader threats, the report said.

US public rhetoric should demonstrate openness to peace talks instead of a belief that the conflict ought to continue indefinitely, the report said.

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Texas Governor Says Establishing Military Camp Near US-Mexico Border

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - Texas Governor Greg Abbott said on Friday that the state will establish a base camp for military personnel at the United States' border with Mexico

near Eagle Pass, in an effort to secure the border from illegal immigration.

"To expand our border security capabilities, we are building a new Texas Military Department base camp that allows the Texas National Guard to increase and to improve operations in this area," Abbott said during a press conference.

Construction of the base camp has already started on an 80-acre area designated for the base camp, Abbott said.

The base camp will allow more personnel in Eagle Pass to operate more effectively and efficiently, Abbott also said.

The base camp will be able house up to 2,300 soldiers, if needed, Abbott added.

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Brazil Did Not Request Joint G20 Statement on Ukraine Conflict - US State Department

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - Brazil did not request Group of Twenty (G20) foreign ministers to develop a joint statement on the Ukraine conflict, Assistant US Secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs Ramin Toloui said on Friday.

"Brazil did not ask for an attempt to mobilize a joint statement for the foreign ministers," Toloui said during a preview of Blinken's trip, when asked about the potential for a joint statement on the Ukraine conflict.

The foreign ministers meeting is not typically a venue to negotiate or issue joint statements, Toloui said.

Brazil will host a meeting of G20 foreign affairs ministers in Rio de Janeiro on February 21-22. There are no bilateral meetings to preview between US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Toloui said.

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ANALYSIS - US Seeks to Panic Public, Congress Into More Arms Spending With Russia Threat Scare

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration's alarmist calls about Russian plans to deploy space-based nuclear weapons are a cynical ploy to instill fear in the American people about the "big bad Russians" to justify massive military budgets, more billions in military aid to the increasingly discredited Zelenskyy regime in Ukraine and distract the public from the government's neglect of their economic and social crises at home, eminent US nuclear experts told Sputnik on Friday.

President Joe Biden has instructed his team to initiate direct diplomatic contacts with Russia in connection with a "national security threat" related to Russia's ongoing development of anti-satellite capabilities, Strategic Communications Advisor John Kirby told reporters on

Thursday.

The US government is in the process of contacting Russia and consulting with its allies regarding the alleged threat to national security, Kirby said during a press briefing.

Meanwhile, according to Biden, Russian anti-satellite technology does not pose any nuclear threat to Americans or anyone else in the world and there is no evidence that Russia has decided to move forward with the capability.

OLD SCARE TACTICS

Covert Action Magazine Managing Editor and intelligence expert Jeremy Kuzmarov observed that the Biden administration was using old scare tactics from the Cold War to justify enormous additional spending on lucrative weapons contracts.

"This is all very reminiscent of the original Cold War. The United States warns about Russian military advances or attempts to control outer space as a basis for ratcheting up conflict and the arms and nuclear arms race," he said.

The Biden administration was trying to instill fear in the American people about the 'big bad Russians' to justify massive military budgets and the neglect of their population, Kuzmarov explained.

"In this particular case, the claims seem ridiculous because the United States has been in the process of militarizing and in effect colonizing outer space for the last generation and has even developed a space force as a branch of the US armed forces," he said.

NONEXISTENT THREAT

Global peace activist Dr. Helen Caldicott, founder of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Physicians for Social Responsibility and author of "War in Heaven: The Arms Race in Outer Space," said she had been able to find no evidence to substantiate the Biden administration's claims whatsoever.

"I have perused the many articles concerning this and cannot for the life of me find out what the Russian threat really is," she said.

Not a single administration official had yet made public even what the specific new threat was alleged to be, Caldicott pointed out.

"Is it a nuclear-powered satellite capable of shooting other satellites? No one is saying so!" she said.

Because of the administration's continuing vagueness, there was simply no data available to assess if the alleged threat even existed, let alone how serious it was, Caldicott stressed.

ALARMIST CLAIMS

Los Alamos Study Group Co-Founder and Executive Director Greg Mello agreed that the US government had yet to produce any evidence whatsoever to substantiate its new alarmist claims.

"We can find nothing that corresponds to any new threat," he said.

Nuclear weapons were always a threat, whether Russian or American and any notion of absolute safety as regards nuclear weapons would always be mistaken, Mello advised.

On Wednesday, House Intelligence Committee Chairman Mike Turner issued a statement saying that he had alerted all members of Congress to what he described as "a serious national security threat."

However, Mello said Turner was just trying to panic Congress into approving the administration's latest extravagant demands for increased military spending.

"Representative Turner is trying to gaslight fellow House members to pass \$60 billion in aid to Ukraine [and] defense contractors. That's all this is. It's a crude piece of political propaganda," he said.

ALL FICTION AND LIES

Co-founder and coordinator of the Global Network Against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space Bruce Gagnon dismissed the administration's claims as entirely false and said they had been cooked up to justify the political agenda of more defense spending increases.

"It is all fiction and lies. It is clear the Biden White House is in a state of desperation. They are frantically looking for some huge talking point to panic and distract the public to demonize Russia yet again to panic Congress into voting more billions of dollars to keep the Ukraine war going," he said.

The new scare echoed the events of more than 20 years ago when the New York Times reported that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, Gagnon recalled.

"The US intelligence agencies claimed it was all true. But it was not," he said.

Back in 2003, that false and fabricated intelligence was used to justify the US invasion and occupation of Iraq, Gagnon noted.

"Now we see and hear the same old story from the same corporate media outfits that should have been discredited in 2003," he said.

The new alarmist rhetoric was also meant to distract the US public from the impact of Russian president Vladimir Putin's easily accessible interview with veteran news anchor and journalist Tucker Carlson, Gagnon stressed.

"Suddenly, this new narrative is all over the news just days after the President of Russia gave an interview with Tucker Carlson that has now been seen by hundreds of millions - by now possibly billions of people," he said.

NOTHING NEW IN CLAIMS

Russia was certainly working to advance its space technology just as the United States and China also were, former Soviet nuclear physicist Edward Lozansky, president of the American University in Moscow observed.

"The United States, Russia, and China are definitely working on new space technology that can be used in potential future conflicts: There is nothing new about that," he said.

However, as knowledgeable US government officials have admitted, Russia does not appear close to deploying these weapons and these US security officials do not consider them to be an urgent threat, Lozansky reminded.

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US State Department Says No Meeting to Preview Between Blinken, Lavrov at G20 Summit

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - There is no meeting between US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to preview ahead of the Group of Twenty (G20) Foreign Ministers Meeting in Brazil, Assistant US Secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs Ramin Toloui said on Friday .

"We don't have any meetings to preview at this time, any bilateral meetings," Toloui said during a preview of Blinken's trip, when asked about the potential for a meeting between Blinken and Lavrov.

The United States will continue to discuss the situation in Ukraine and encourage G20 partners to call for an end to the conflict as a general matter, Toloui said.

Blinken is set to travel to Rio de Janeiro to participate in the G20 summit, as part of a broader trip to South America from February 20-23. Blinken is also scheduled to meet with Brazilian President Luiz Lula da Silva and Argentine President Javier Milei.

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US Citizen Charged With Seeking IS Terror Group Military Training - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - Federal authorities have charged a US citizen residing in the state of Minnesota with conspiring to receive military training from the Islamic State terror group (IS, banned in Russia) and provide support to it, the Department of Justice announced on Friday.

"The United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York ... announced today the unsealing of a Complaint charging Harada Hussein Abdi with providing and conspiring to provide material support to a designated foreign terrorist organization, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), and receiving and conspiring to receive military-type training from ISIS," the press release said.

Abdi, 41, of Minneapolis, Minnesota, is charged with conspiring to provide material support to a designated foreign terrorist organization, which carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison, and conspiring to receive military-type training from a designated foreign terrorist organization, which carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison, the Justice Department said.

"Abdi, a US citizen, was recently taken into custody overseas and was transported to the United States [on] February 15, 2024," the release said.

Abdi is a US citizen who moved from Minnesota to Somalia in 2015 and then joined a group of Islamic State fighters at a training camp in the Puntland region of Somalia, the Justice Department said.

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Blinken, China's Wang Discuss Situation in Mideast, Ukraine at Munich Forum - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met at the Munich Security Conference and discussed the situation in

the Middle East and in Ukraine, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a readout of the conversation on Friday.

"The Secretary raised concerns over the PRC's [People's Republic of China] support for Russia's war against Ukraine, including support to the Russian defense industrial base," Miller said. "The two sides also exchanged views on the situation in the Middle East and on the Korean Peninsula and affirmed that their respective senior officials should meet to follow up on these discussions."

Blinken spoke during the meeting about his trip to the Middle East and the United States' diplomatic efforts in the region, Miller said.

In addition, Blinken emphasized the importance of continuing to implement the progress made by the two countries on counternarcotics cooperation and military-to-military communications, Miller said.

"The Secretary reiterated that the United States will stand up for our interests and values and those of our allies and partners," Miller said.

Miller characterized the conversation between Blinken and Wang as "candid and constructive." The Munich Security Conference this year takes place from February 16-18.

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UN Calls to Reserve Judgment' on Russian Investigation Into Navalny's Death- Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, February 16 (Sputnik) - The United Nations calls to reserve judgment on Russia's investigation into the death of Alexey Navalny, UN Spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Friday.

"People have often raised issues with our investigations and audits before they happen. And I say people should reserve judgment so that would be my answer as well," Dujarric said in a briefing when asked whether the UN would accept Russia's investigation concerning Navalny's death.

And for the UN to conduct an international investigation, we would need to receive a mandate, he followed.

President Joe Biden said also on Friday that the United States is unaware of how exactly Alexey Navalny died but he nevertheless blamed Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Earlier in the day, the Russian prison service said that Alexey Navalny died in prison, adding that the causes of death are being established.

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Russian Embassy Urges Canada to Stop Meddling in Russia's Affairs Following Navalny Death

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - The Russian Embassy in Ottawa on Friday urged Canada to stop interfering in Russia's internal affairs following the death of Alexey Navalny. "Every death is a tragedy. But the death of a Russian citizen is strictly Russia's matter. Thus, we urge Canada to stop interfering into our internal affairs," the Russian Embassy said via the social media platform X.

Earlier on Friday, the Russian prison service said Navalny died in prison and the causes of death are currently being established.

US Vice President Kamala Harris and Secretary of State Antony Blinken claimed right away that Russia is responsible for the death of Navalny, adding that the United States would consult with its allies about a possible response.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said the statements made by Western politicians were outrageous and unacceptable, The Foreign Ministry also said it was interesting that the US government considered Navalny's death more important than the death of journalist Gonzalo Lira, a US citizen who was imprisoned and tortured in Ukraine for criticizing the Volodymyr Zelenskyy's regime and subsequently died in prison there.

Several other foreign leaders and media have prepared "carbon-copy" accusations in advance of Navalny's death, the Foreign Ministry said, characterizing their actions as moral opportunism.

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Biden Says US Contemplating New Sanctions on Russia After Navalny's Death

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden said on Friday that his administration is contemplating new sanctions on Russia following the death of Alexei Navalny. "It was three years ago, in the meantime they faced a hell of a lot of consequences, ... they have been subjected to great sanctions across the board, and we are contemplating what else can be done," Biden told reporters when asked if he is going to keep his word to Russian President Vladimir Putin about devastating consequences in case Navalny dies.

Biden added that he is looking at a whole range of options to "hold Russia accountable" for Navalny's death.

Earlier on Friday, the Russian prison service said that Navalny died while incarcerated, adding that an investigation into the cause of death is underway.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said that US officials should "show restraint" and wait for the results of the medical examination before commenting on Navalny's death.

The Foreign Ministry said it is interesting that the US government considers Navalny's death more important than the death of journalist Gonzalo Lira, a US citizen who was imprisoned and tortured in Ukraine for criticizing Volodymyr Zelenskyy's regime and subsequently died in a Ukrainian prison.

Several other foreign leaders and media have prepared "carbon-copy" accusations in advance of Navalny's death, the Russian Foreign Ministry said, characterizing their actions as moral opportunism.

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CBP Medical Chief's Bid for Fentanyl Lollipops Sparks Misconduct Allegations - GAO

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Chief Medical Officer Alexander Eastman has engaged in misconduct, including medical cover-ups, contractor misuse and financial waste in order to provide fentanyl lollipops, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) said in a statement on Friday.

"Inappropriate and unlawful actions taken by Acting CBP CMO Dr. Alexander Eastman, including attempts to change CBP narcotics policy to procure fentanyl lollipops, a medical cover-up, inappropriate use of contractors, and gross waste of funds," the statement said.

Eastman dedicated significant effort and staff resources last year, leading up to the UN General Assembly, to procure fentanyl lollipops, the statement said.

Eastman claimed they were needed for potential medical emergencies during his travel to New York City on a CBP helicopter, the statement said.

"Over half a dozen CBP employees were involved in handling the urgent purchase request and navigating the hurdles of purchasing and handling highly regulated narcotics," the statement added.

On September 5, 2023, the Office of the Chief Medical Officer senior leadership expressed concern regarding the procurement efforts in an email to Operations Support leadership, according to the statement.

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Biden Urges Ukraine Funding Off Back of Navalny's Death

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Friday that the death of Russian opposition figure Alexei Navalny serves as motivation for the US Congress to pass further aid for Ukraine.

"This tragedy reminds us of the stakes of this moment. Let's provide the funding so that Ukraine can keep defending itself," Biden said during remarks on Navalny's death. "I hope to God it helps."

Earlier on Friday, the Russian prison service said that Navalny died while incarcerated, adding that an investigation into his cause of death is underway. Nevertheless, Biden and other US officials accused President Vladimir Putin of responsibility for Navalny's death.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said that US officials should "show restraint" and wait for the results of a medical examination before commenting on Navalny's death. It is interesting that the US government considers Navalny's death more important than the death of journalist Gonzalo Lira, a US citizen, in a Ukrainian prison, the ministry said.

Foreign leaders and media prepared "carbon-copy" accusations in advance of Navalny's death,

the ministry said, characterizing their actions as moral opportunism.

Navalny's death comes amid efforts in the US Congress to pass aid for Ukraine as part of broader legislative deals. The US Senate passed a \$95 billion spending bill with aid for Ukraine and Israel, but US House Speaker Mike Johnson said that he has no plans of holding a vote on the legislation in the House of Representatives.

A bipartisan group of House lawmakers also released a \$66 billion spending bill with Ukraine and Israel aid, as well as border security measures. However, House lawmakers are not set to resume legislative business until February 28.

House lawmakers should pass Ukraine aid instead of going on a "two-week vacation," Biden said.

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Biden Says US Unaware of What Caused Russian Opposition Figure Alexey Navalny's Death

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden said on Friday that the United States is unaware of how exactly Russian opposition figure Alexey Navalny died but he nevertheless blamed Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"We don't know exactly what happened," Biden said during remarks on Navalny's death, when asked if he believes Navalny was assassinated.

However, Biden accused Putin and his allies of having responsibility for Navalny's death.

Earlier on Friday, the Russian prison service said that Navalny died while incarcerated, adding that an investigation into the cause of death is underway.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said that US officials should "show restraint" and wait for the results of the medical examination before commenting on Navalny's death.

The Foreign Ministry said it is interesting that the US government considers Navalny's death more important than the death of journalist Gonzalo Lira, a US citizen who was imprisoned and tortured in Ukraine for criticizing the regime of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and subsequently died in prison there.

Several other foreign leaders and media have prepared "carbon-copy" accusations in advance of Navalny's death, the Foreign Ministry said, characterizing their actions as moral opportunism.

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Biden Says No Nuclear Threat to Americans From Russia's Anti-Satellite Capability

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) – Russian anti-satellite technology does not pose any nuclear threat to Americans or anyone else in the world, US President Joe Biden said on Friday.

"There is no nuclear threat to the people of America or anywhere else in the world with what

Russia is doing at the moment," Biden told reporters. "Anything that they [Russians] are doing and or they will do relates to satellites in space and damaging those satellites, potentially."

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Biden Says Urged Israeli Government to Establish Ceasefire With Hamas to Free Hostages

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Friday that he urged the Israeli government to establish a temporary ceasefire with Hamas to facilitate the release of hostages from the Gaza Strip.

"I've had extensive conversations with the Prime Minister of Israel over the last several days, almost an hour each, and I made the case — and I feel very strongly about it — that there has to be a temporary ceasefire to get the hostages out," Biden said during remarks to reporters.

Biden said he is hopeful Israel and Hamas can reach such an agreement.

Biden said that he is not anticipating a massive land operation by Israel in the meantime.

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Biden Says No Evidence Russia Decided to Go Forward on Anti-Satellite Capability in Space

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden said Friday that he has seen no evidence that Russia has decided to move forward with doing anything in space amid reports Russia is considering placing some anti-satellite capability into orbit.

"There is no evidence that they [Russians] have made a decision to go forward with doing anything in space," Biden said.

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UPDATE - Skate Canada to Appeal ISU Demotion of Russia to Bronze in 2022 Olympic Figure Skating

(Updates with more details in para 6)

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - Skate Canada, the country's figure skating governing body, said on Friday that it would appeal the International Skating Union's (ISU) decision to demote Russia to the third place in the 2022 Olympics following the disqualification of Russian teenage athlete Kamila Valieva.

In late January, the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) found Valieva guilty of violating

anti-doping rules and sanctioned her with a four-year period of ineligibility, commencing on December 25, 2021. Valieva's results at the Beijing Olympics were annulled, which led to a change in the results of the team tournament. The US team now ranks first, the Japanese came second, and the Russian team dropped to third place.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov has stated that Russia sees CAS's decision as politicized, highlighting that Russia would always protect the interests of its athletes.

"Skate Canada, together with the Canadian athletes from the team figure skating event at the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games and the Canadian Olympic Committee, have made the decision to formally appeal the International Skating Union's (ISU) decision in respect of the bronze figure skating team medal," the governing body said in a statement.

To preserve competitive integrity, it is crucial that rules and regulations are upheld consistently and an independent review will provide clarity to the relevant parties, the statement said.

The governing body further expressed its full support for the US and Japanese teams and hopes they receive their medals in a timely manner, the statement added.

Skate Canada had previously said that it would review its options to appeal the ISU decision as the Union did not apply Rule 353. The rule guides which competitors who initially placed lower than disqualified competitors will move up.

On December 25, 2021, then-15-year-old Valieva tested positive for doping during the national competitions. This information, however, was made public by the International Testing Agency only on February 8, 2022, the day after the end of the team competition at the 2022 Beijing Olympics, where the Russian national team with Valieva in its ranks, won. The awarding of gold medals to her team was suspended pending the doping inquiry.

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Skate Canada in turn stated that it would review its options to appeal the ISU decision, noting that the Union had not applied Rule 353. The rule guides which competitors who initially placed

lower than disqualified competitors will move up.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov has stated that Russia sees CAS's decision as politicized, highlighting that Russia would always protect the interests of its athletes.

To preserve competitive integrity, it is crucial that rules and regulations are upheld consistently, the statement said, adding that an independent review will provide "clarity" to the relevant parties.

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US Senator Joe Manchin Says Won't Pursue Third-Party Presidential Run in 2024

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - US Senator Joe Manchin said on Friday that he will not pursue a third-party run in the 2024 US presidential election, following speculation that the lawmaker might launch a campaign.

"I will not be seeking a third-party run. I will not be involved in a presidential run," Manchin said during a speech in his home state of West Virginia, as quoted by CNN.

Last year, Manchin declined to rule out a 2024 presidential bid and participated in events with centrist political group No Labels, which was considering launching a third-party campaign.

In November, Manchin announced that he will not run for reelection to the US Senate in 2024. Manchin said that he will remain in public life and would explore the possibility of setting up a national political movement to draw support from both major parties.

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US January Wholesale Prices Increase Most in 5 Months, Adding to Hot Inflation Picture

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - US producer prices, also known as wholesale prices, rose the most in five months in January, the Labor Department said on Friday.

The so-called Producer Price Index (PPI), a measure of prices received by producers of domestic goods and services, gained 0.3% last month, the most since August. Wall Street economists polled by US media had expected an increase of just 0.1%. By contrast, the PPI fell 0.2% in December.

There is "an upside surprise in this report" by the Labor Department, economist Adam Button said on the ForexLive forum.

The wholesale prices further complicate the inflation picture in the United States after the

Consumer Price Index, or CPI, reading released earlier this week.

The CPI grew 3.1% in the year to January, above the 3% annual rate that would have facilitated a Fed interest rate cut, the Labor Department data showed on Tuesday.

Consumer prices have stubbornly remained above 3% in the aftermath of the inflation triggered by the trillions of dollars of pandemic relief spending in the United States. The Fed is counting on annual inflation to go below its long-held target of 2% in order to roll back nearly two years of interest rate hikes forced by the COVID-19 pandemic measures.

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Federal Reserve Must See Beyond Day-to-Day Risk to Prevent US Banking Crisis - Barr

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - Federal Reserve supervisors need to look beyond day-to-day risks in order to prevent another banking crisis in the United States, the central bank's Vice Chair of Supervision Michael Barr said on Friday.

Barr made the comment as banks in the United States brace for the Fed's annual stress test aimed at keeping them in check financially.

"Supervisors should be encouraged to consider a range of potential shocks and vulnerabilities, so that they think through the implications of unlikely 'tail' events with severe consequences," Barr said during a Columbia University-sponsored event on banking.

While most supervisors at the Fed were skilled at pattern detection, they often had trouble contemplating the consequences of events outside of their historical experience, Barr said.

"It is important to find ways to break these strictures and think more critically about scenarios that could lead to acute distress at firms," Barr said.

Barr spoke one day after the central bank released hypothetical scenarios in its annual stress test for 32 large US banks that included a severe recession with a 10% jobless rate and a collapse in real estate prices.

The Fed stress on large US banks began after the 2007-2009 financial crisis. The annual exercise is to determine how much capital a bank needs to stay solvent without compromising on shareholder dividends and activities like share buybacks.

Barr said the Fed's supervision must change and adapt as the banking system changes in order to avert another banking crisis,

"We need to continuously explore new models of financial risk," Barr said. "We must appropriately adjust supervision when we see changes at a firm or in the financial sector, especially in these times of great innovation and technological change."

But the Fed also needs to be humble and own up to mistakes such as the 2023 banking crisis, which showed the central bank's inability to move quickly enough to mitigate risks, Barr said.

"It showed that in some cases, such as when banks grow rapidly or take on new risks, that supervision can lack the speed, force and agility required to keep up with those changes," Barr said. "Since that time, we have been hard at work to address those issues. And while this work will take time, I am committed to getting the job done properly."

The 2023 banking crisis was the result of a series of failures and bankruptcies among midsize

US lenders. In response, the Fed established an emergency lending facility called the Bank Term Fund Program to offer impacted banks loans of up to one year based on qualifying assets. That program is due to expire on March 11.

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UPDATE - US Watching Avdiivka Very Closely, Ukrainians Running Short of Key Supplies – Pentagon

(Updates with latest developments on ground in paras 3-5, background in para 6)

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) – Ukrainian troops in Avdiivka are experiencing a critical lack of ammunition that could be a harbinger of the collapse of this defensive line to advancing Russian forces, a senior US defense official said on Friday.

“We are watching Avdiivka very closely, and we do see that Ukrainians are running short on critical supplies, particularly ammunition, and we see this as something that could be the harbinger of what is to come,” the official said during a press briefing.

Earlier on Friday, commander of the Tavia Joint Forces Operation Brig. Gen. Oleksandr Tarnavskiy said that Ukrainian troops retreated from their positions in the southern part of Avdiivka with losses.

“Ukrainian units have withdrawn from the position on the southern outskirts of Avdiivka with minor losses. In other threatening directions, a maneuver will be carried out to move to new prepared positions, if necessary,” Ukrainian information agency Ukrinform quoted Tarnavskiy as saying.

Tarnavskiy also announced withdrawal of Ukrainian troops from the Zenit position on the southeastern outskirts of Avdiivka “after many months of confrontation,” according to a report by Strana.ua.

On Thursday, National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said that the current situation in Avdiivka is critical and the city may come under Russia’s control because the Ukrainian forces lack ammunition.

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Harris Says Too Many Palestinians Killed, Israel 'Must do Better' to Protect Civilians

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Kamala Harris said on Friday that way too many Palestinians have been killed in the Gaza conflict and Israel must take more steps to protect civilians.

"Israel then had a right to defend itself ... but how it does so matters," Harris said at the Munich Security Conference. "We have also been clear that far too many innocent Palestinians have been killed, that Israel must do better to protect innocent civilians."

On October 7, the Hamas movement launched an attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip. Some 1,200 Israelis — military and civilians — were killed in the attack and some 240 others were abducted. Israel launched massive retaliatory strikes and imposed a complete blockade of Gaza. Israel then initiated a ground invasion of the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas and rescuing the hostages.

Almost 29,000 Palestinians have been killed and over 68,000 others injured in Israel's attacks, according to the local authorities.

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New Biden Campaign Ad Attacks Trump for Purportedly Wanting to Abandon NATO Alliance

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden's 2024 reelection campaign released a new advertisement on Friday, which criticizes Republican front-runner Donald Trump for purportedly wanting to abandon the NATO alliance.

"Every president since [Harry] Truman has been a rock-solid supporter of NATO, except for Donald Trump. Trump wants to walk away from NATO," the advertisement said.

Trump gave Russia a "green light" to attack NATO allies, the advertisement said.

Trump's stance is shameful, weak, dangerous and un-American, the advertisement also said.

Biden understands that the United States' commitment to NATO benefits both, the United States and the rest of the world, the advertisement said.

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US Lawmakers Unveil \$66Bln Foreign Aid, Border Security Bill - Statement

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - A bipartisan group of US House lawmakers on Friday unveiled a \$66.32 billion spending bill with aid for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan, as well as border security measures.

US Congressmen Brian Fitzpatrick, Jared Golden, Don Bacon and others released a statement on the legislation — dubbed the Defending Borders, Defending Democracies Act — after US House Speaker Mike Johnson said that House lawmakers would not hold a vote on a \$95 billion spending bill passed by the US Senate.

"This legislation would require the suspension of entry of inadmissible aliens to achieve operational control over US borders, require immigration officers to detain and immediately expel inadmissible aliens, and provide \$66.32 billion in defense-only funding for Ukraine, Israel, and Taiwan," the statement said.

The border security and national security appropriations would only be active for one year after enactment, the statement added.

The bill provides \$47.69 billion to support Ukraine, including \$13.77 billion for the Ukraine

Security Assistance Initiative, the statement said. The bill also provides \$10.4 billion to support Israel, including \$4 billion for Iron Dome and David's Sling procurement, as well as \$1.2 billion for Iron Beam procurement, the statement said.

Moreover, the legislation provides \$4.91 billion to support US and allied deterrence operations in the Indo-Pacific region, \$2.44 billion for US Central Command operations and \$542 million for US Indo-Pacific Command operations, the statement said.

The bill's border security provisions include requiring the US Secretary of Homeland Security to suspend the entry of inadmissible migrants if the secretary determines it necessary to achieve operational control of the border, the statement said. The bill also requires immigration officers to detain inadmissible migrants and expel them to Mexico or their home country without a hearing or review, the statement said.

The legislation includes a so-called "remain in Mexico" policy as well, which requires migrants seeking admission to the United States to stay in the country from which they attempted to enter the US until a court adjudicates their status, the statement said.

"As the world's oldest and strongest democracy, the United States' primary responsibility must be to secure its own borders. But we also have an obligation to assist our allies in securing their borders, especially when they come under assault by dictators, terrorists, and totalitarians," Fitzpatrick said in the statement.

The US House of Representatives is not set to return to legislative business until February 28.

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US Sanctions Against Yemen's Houthis Take Effect - Treasury Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - US sanctions against Yemen's Ansarallah or Houthis took effect on Friday after the Treasury Department returned the group to the "Specially Designated Global Terrorist" list over its attacks on Red Sea shipping, the department's Office of Foreign Assets Control said in a notice on its website.

The Treasury Department also issued a general license allowing third-country diplomatic or consular missions to avoid sanctions when engaging in transactions with Ansarallah.

"Except as provided in paragraph (b) of this general license, all transactions prohibited by the Global Terrorism Sanctions Regulations, 31 CFR part 594 (GTSR), involving Ansarallah, or any entity in which Ansarallah owns, directly or indirectly, a 50 percent or greater interest, that are ordinarily incident and necessary to the official business of third-country diplomatic or consular missions to Yemen are authorized," the license said.

The Houthis, also known as the Ansar Allah movement, vowed in November to attack any ships associated with Israel until it halts its military actions in the Gaza Strip. This led US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin to announce the creation of a multinational operation in December to secure navigation in the Red Sea. US and UK forces have since launched a series of strikes against Houthi positions in a bid to degrade the rebels' ability to target commercial vessels.

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US Estimates Russia Spent \$211Bln to Maintain Operations in Ukraine - Senior Official

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - Russia spent up to \$211 billion to equip, maintain and sustain its military operations in Ukraine since the beginning of the conflict in February 2022, a senior US Defense Department official said on Friday.

"Russia has probably spent up to \$211 billion in direct financial outlays to equip, deploy, maintain, and sustain Russian operations in Ukraine," the official said during a press briefing.

In addition to military costs, Russia has also allegedly lost about \$10 billion in canceled or postponed arms sales, the official added.

Since the beginning of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, the United States has provided to Ukraine well over \$110 billion in different kinds of assistance, including about \$50 billion in security aid.

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Canadians Say Poilievre Best Placed to Handle Potential Trump Return to White House - Poll

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - Nearly two in five Canadians believe that Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre is better positioned than Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to handle the possible return of Donald Trump to the White House, a new Bloomberg poll revealed on Friday.

Thirty-nine percent of Canadians said Poilievre, due to his "combative" personality, could better negotiate with Trump were he to return in office following the 2024 elections, the poll results show.

This gives the Conservative leader a 11% lead over Trudeau, with only 28% of the surveyed saying the latter has the ability to manage and negotiate with a second Trump administration, the poll results show.

A quarter of the respondents said there's no difference between either when it comes to dealing with Trump, whereas eight percent expressed uncertainty over the matter, the poll results show.

In late January, Trudeau said Trump's reelection could bring unpredictability to US-Canadian relations and Ottawa needed to be prepared for such eventuality. Trudeau said he revived the "Team Canada" strategy ahead of the upcoming US elections in November, to ensure a mutually beneficial relationship regardless of the outcome.

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East Palestine Resident Says Locals Want Biden Blocked From Visiting Town

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - A resident of East Palestine, Ohio, said on Friday that other residents asked him to use his trucking company to block President Joe Biden from visiting the town, more than a year after a toxic train derailment rocked the community.

"I've had several people call me and ask me if I could block the entrance of the town so that he can't come," Garry Allison said in an interview with a local ABC affiliate.

On February 3, 2023, a Norfolk Southern train carrying toxic chemicals derailed near East Palestine. Authorities subsequently decided to burn some of the chemicals, sparking concerns about further releasing toxicity in the environment.

Allison, who also works as a landlord, said that he lost tens of thousands of dollars since the train derailment, due to tenants leaving his properties.

Biden only wants to visit East Palestine because it is an election year in the United States, Allison said.

Biden is scheduled to visit East Palestine later on Friday, where he will receive a briefing on recovery efforts and deliver remarks on how the administration is working to hold Norfolk Southern accountable for the derailment.

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US, UK, Canada Endorse Framework to Counter 'Foreign Information Manipulation' - Statement

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - The United States, Canada and the United Kingdom on Friday issued a joint statement that they have endorsed the Framework to Counter Foreign State Information Manipulation amid concerns about potential actions that may undermine democracy.

The three countries emphasized in the statement that foreign information manipulation is a national security threat because it undermines democratic values, human rights, governmental processes and political stability.

"That is why today, the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada jointly endorse the Framework to Counter Foreign State Information Manipulation, which affirms our shared understanding of the threat and offers a holistic view of how to address the foreign information manipulation challenge," the statement said.

The three countries also called on all like-minded states to jointly work on identifying and countering the threat and help preserve trust in institutions of governance and processes, as well as in elected leaders and democracy as a whole.

The United States, Canada and the United Kingdom expressed their intent to jointly work with partner countries on building resilience to foreign information manipulation by advancing national strategies and policies, governance structures and institutions, capacity, civil society, independent media and academia as well as multilateral engagement, the statement said.

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US to Face Resource Gaps for Forces in Europe Without Supplemental Funding - Official

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - A US senior defense official told reporters on Friday that Washington will face resource a shortage of resources to support its own troops in Europe unless Congress approves supplemental funds for the Pentagon.

"Without the supplemental funding, we will face resource gaps to support our own forces that are deployed in Europe that are there defending our allies and defending our strategic interests," the official said. "We also will lack the resources to replenish our own military capabilities."

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UPDATE - Harris Claims Russia Responsible for Navalny's Death as Moscow Urges Restraint

(Adds Russia's reaction in paras 5-7)

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Kamala Harris claimed on Friday that Russia is responsible for the death of opposition politician Alexei Navalny, prompting Moscow to call for restraint and suggest waiting for forensic results.

"This is of course terrible news which we are working to confirm," Harris said at the Munich Security Conference, offering condolences to Navalny's family and noting that his wife Yulia is at the conference today.

"If confirmed, this would be a further sign of Putin's brutality, whatever story they tell, let us be clear, Russia is responsible. And we will have more to say on this later," Harris said.

Her accusations echoed the ones made earlier by Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said in response that "the death of a human is always a tragedy." It, however, dismissed the US claims as "infinite cynicism."

The ministry wondered why the death of a Russian citizen in a Russian penal colony appeared to the US much more important and more terrible than the death of its own US citizen, journalist Gonzalo Lira, tortured in a Ukrainian prison.

Instead of making unsubstantiated accusations, the US should show restraint and wait for forensic results on Navalny's death, the ministry said.

Navalny died earlier on Friday at an Arctic prison colony where he was serving a 19-year-term on fraud and extremism charges.

He felt unwell after a walk and almost immediately lost consciousness, the prison authorities said. All necessary resuscitation measures were carried out, but to no avail, with medics pronouncing him dead, the authorities said. The causes of the death are being established.

The Russian Federal Penitentiary Service (FSIN) is inspecting everything related to the death of Navalny and there is no need for additional instructions, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. The causes of the death should be established by doctors, he said.

FSIN has dispatched a commission to the prison in connection with Navalny's sudden death. The Russian Investigative Committee's office in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Area has

launched a procedural investigation.

The immediate reaction of Western leaders to Navalny's death is "self-exposing," as they have made their conclusions before a forensic examination is completed, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

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Ukrainians Can't Sustain Fight Against Russia Without US Support – Senior US Official

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) – A senior US defense official admitted on Friday that without the support of the United States and its allies, Ukrainians are not able to sustain their fight against Russia.

"The needs in Ukraine are so great that without the US, in addition to the allies and partners, Ukrainians cannot sustain their fight against Russia and everyone recognizes this," the official said during a press briefing.

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US Watching Avdiivka Very Closely, Ukrainians Running Short of Key Supplies – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) – Ukrainian troops in Avdiivka are experiencing a critical lack of ammunition that could be a harbinger of the collapse of this defensive line to advancing Russian forces, a senior US defense official said on Friday.

"We are watching Avdiivka very closely, and we do see that Ukrainians are running short on critical supplies, particularly ammunition, and we see this as something that could be the harbinger of what is to come," the official said during a press briefing.

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Pentagon Doing Contingency Planning if Supplemental Funding Not Approved - Official

WASHINGTON, February 16 (Sputnik) - The Pentagon is making contingency plans in case Congress fails to approve national security supplemental funding with aid for Ukraine and Israel, a senior US defense official said on Friday.

"We are always planing in DOD," the official told reporters, when asked whether there is any planning in terms of what the Pentagon would do if the funding was not approved. "We are always doing contingency planning for a variety of circumstances."

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