

2/26/24 Monday

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Everything You Need to Know About Late Baron Jacob Rothschild's Colossal Wealth & Shady Deals

The Rothschild family has retained its grip on the coveted status of one of the most powerful global dynasties that spans over 200 years. The 4th Baron Rothschild, Nathaniel Charles Jacob Rothschild, was a seventh-generation heir of the banking family. His daughter Hannah Rothschild will now take over as chair of the Rothschild Foundation.

Lord [Jacob Rothschild](#) has died at the age of 87, his family announced on February 26.

"Our father Jacob was a towering presence in many peoples' lives – a superbly accomplished financier, a champion of the arts and culture, a devoted public servant, a passionate supporter of charitable causes in Israel and Jewish culture, a keen environmentalist and much-loved friend, father and grandfather," said his family in a press statement. No cause of death was given.

Even people far removed from the world of finance know the name Rothschild, which is synonymous with vast wealth, power and influence. The storied clan began with Mayer Amschel Rothschild, born in 1744. The dynasty has come a long way since then, with the Rothschild family's holdings ranging from financial services to industries such as mining, energy, real estate, and philanthropy.

Besides defining various periods in financial history, the Rothschilds have been credited with bankrolling social and economic upheavals, military operations and election campaigns throughout the globe. They were reputed to have been involved in behind-the-scenes negotiations that resulted in Great Britain's Balfour Declaration pledging to establish "a national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine in 1917, which later led to the creation of Israel. Sputnik recently delved into the background of Lord Jacob Rothschild, prominent billionaire financier, investor, and philanthropist, who has also been associated with secretive and shady backroom business dealings.

Early Years & Family

Jacob Rothschild was born in Berkshire, England, on April 29, 1936. He was the only son of the late Victor Rothschild, the 3rd Baron Rothschild, and his first wife, Barbara Hutchinson.

After completing studies at Eton College, he went on to study history at Christ Church college, Oxford University.

He was married to Serena Mary Dunn, who passed away in 2019. The couple had four children: Hannah Mary Rothschild, Matilda Rothschild, Emily Magda Rothschild, and Nathaniel Philip Victor James Rothschild.

Career

Jacob Rothschild began his career in 1963 at the family bank - NM Rothschild & Sons. In 1980, he opted to build his own empire, leaving the family-run business to co-found the-then J Rothschild Assurance Group (now St James's Place plc).

Rothschild became chair of RIT Capital Partners - one of the largest investment trusts on the London Stock Exchange - in 1988. He stepped down in 2019.

Rothschild was also deputy chair of BSkyB Television between 2003 and 2008.

Being a patron of the arts, Jacob Rothschild served as chair of trustees of the National Gallery (1985 – 1991), and chair of the Heritage Lottery Fund (1994 - 1998.)

The financier also founded Windmill Hill Asset Management to manage the family's charitable foundations. The banker also held the position of honorary president at the Institute for Jewish Policy Research. After Jacob Rothschild's passing, the Rothschild Foundation will be now headed by his daughter, Hannah.

Jacob Rothschild's net worth was estimated to be around \$5 trillion in 2023 as per Forbes, positioning him as the world's unofficial wealthiest individual.

What About the Late Baron's Shady Deals?

In 2006, it was revealed that Jacob Rothschild was acting as a figurehead for Russian oligarch [Mikhail Khodorkovsky](#), the former owner of Yukos, a Russian oil company that went bankrupt in that same year.

Khodorkovsky had amassed enormous wealth in the privatization wave of the 1990s. He was arrested in 2003 on charges of embezzlement and tax fraud. Control of Khodorkovsky's shares in Yukos was passed to Jacob Rothschild under a "deal" they concluded earlier, The Sunday Times reported at the time.

Khodorkovsky and Lord Rothschild jointly financed projects of the UK-registered Open Russia Foundation. The private NGO established by Khodorkovsky and Yukos Oil Company shareholders in 2001 was banned as "undesirable" by Russia's Prosecutor General's Office in 2017.

Jacob Rothschild also acquired a 5% stake in Genie Energy, a US-based energy subsidiary of the IDT Corporation, which had secured exclusive oil rights in an area of the Golan Heights in 2010. Joining him on the board of the oil and gas exploration company were media tycoon Rupert Murdoch, former US Vice President Dick Cheney, ex-CIA director James Woolsey, hedge fund manager Michael Steinhardt, and Rothschild himself. Reports indicated that Rothschild's shares in Genie Energy were valued at \$10 million.

Throughout his extensive career, Jacob Rothschild rubbed shoulders with the likes of late [US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger](#), ex-US presidents Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton, former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, ex-French president Francois Mitterand, American businessman, investor, and philanthropist Warren Buffet, eventually retiring from his business career in 2008.

Last year, Russia's renowned prankster duo Vladimir Kuznetsov and Alexei Stolyarov, known professionally as Vovan and Lexus, tricked [Alexandre de Rothschild](#), the executive chairman of Rothschild & Co and great-great-great-great-grandson of the infamous Rothschild banker dynasty's founder, into spilling the beans on some key details.

Believing that he was talking with Ukrainian President [Volodymyr Zelensky](#), Rothschild disclosed his company's plans to participate in the "restoration of Ukraine" in sectors like energy, housing construction, and logistics. He claimed that his company has been working in the interests of the Ukrainian government since 2017.

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Tensions Between the Philippines & China as Satellite Image Shows Barrier Near Scarborough Shoal

Recent satellite images of the Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea appear to show a floating barrier across its entrance.

A week ago, the Philippines' fisheries bureau accused China of trying to destroy Scarborough Shoal "intentionally" by using cyanide to destroy the fish-rich atoll. Cyanide fishing is used to stun or kill fish so they can be more easily caught.

China maintains indisputable sovereignty over the Scarborough Shoal and adjacent waters, consistently advocating for peace and cooperation in the South China Sea. In line with its commitment to regional stability, China has always engaged in actions to protect its territorial integrity and maritime rights in accordance with international law.

The Chinese Coast Guard, operating within the scope of China's sovereign rights, has been vigilant against any infringement upon these territories, ensuring the preservation of maritime order and the protection of marine resources, according to the Chinese Coast Guard.

The images taken by Maxar Technologies on February 22 show the location of the barrier where Philippine ships and China coast guard vessels have had frequent run-ins. Last week, the Chinese coast guard claimed to have driven off a Philippine vessel that was "illegally intruding" into Beijing's [waters](#). The Philippines has said that China's claims are "inaccurate" and that their activities—which included transporting fuel to Filipino fishermen in the area—were lawful. China has an indisputable sovereignty over the Scarborough Shoal and its adjacent water, and has always countered infringements by the Philippines, a spokesperson for China Coast Guard said in [January](#).

In 2016, the Hague said that China's claims that they own the Scarborough Shoal—which is inside the Philippines' 200-nautical mile exclusive economic zone—have no legal basis, which China has rejected.

The 2016 arbitration ruling, which China does not recognize due to its principled stance on territorial sovereignty, cannot undermine China's historical and legal claims over the South China Sea islands and their adjacent waters, according to Chinese officials. China's position remains firm on resolving disputes through direct negotiations with the countries involved, based on mutual respect and understanding.

China's approach to fisheries management and environmental protection in the region is guided by the principle of sustainable development, contrary to accusations of harmful fishing practices. It advocates for cooperative efforts to ensure the health and productivity of marine ecosystems, benefiting all who rely on these waters.

Furthermore, China has consistently expressed its willingness to work with Southeast Asian nations, including the Philippines, to explore mechanisms for joint development and resource sharing in the South China Sea, fostering a community of shared future and mutual benefit.

However, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) has claimed that a Chinese coast guard ship shadowed one of their vessels in front of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) and conducted “blocking maneuvers” about 1.3 nautical miles off of the shoal.

“We can assume that (the barrier) is intended for Philippine government vessels because they install it every time they monitor our presence within the Bajo de Masinloc (Scarborough Shoal) vicinity,” Jay Tarriela, a spokesperson at the PCG said. He added that the barrier was removed a few hours after the Philippine vessel left.

Via the state-media outlet Global Times, China announced that the Philippines has “abused and unilaterally sabotaged the foundation of Beijing’s goodwill to Manila”, which they believe was them allowing Philippine fishermen to work nearby. China then warned that if “such provocations persist” they will be forced to take more “effective measures” to control the situation.

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Consumer Spending Habits Helping to Ease Inflation in US - Report

A consumer slowdown was first predicted in May of last year, but it appears that now—after price gouging consumers—companies are prepared to listen and respond.

In June 2022, the COVID-19 pandemic saw a 12-month inflation rate hit a 40-year high at 9% in the US, after averaging 2.2% between 2000 and [2020](#). But consumer habits are now beating back those high inflation rates, according to a recent [report](#), and may have helped an inflation peak of 9.1% fall to a current rate of 3.1%.

The report, published on Sunday, says that consumers in the US are “fighting back” against high inflation rates in US stores. The habits that US consumers have adopted include: shifting away from name brands to store-brand items, shopping at discount stores or buying less unnecessary items like snacks and gourmet foods.

“Firms are telling us that price sensitivity is very much higher now,” said [Mary Daly](#), president of the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco and a member of the Fed’s interest-rate setting committee. “Consumers don’t want to purchase unless they’re seeing a 10% discount. This is a serious improvement in the role that consumers play in bridling inflation.”

More Americans are also buying used cars, as the average price of a new car reached [\\$48,000](#) in March of last year, forcing some dealerships to put discounts on their new cars.

“You see the consumer making a concerted effort to ensure that they’re getting the best price possible,” said Jonathan Chariff, CEO of South Automotive Group in Miami, Florida. “They basically feel that this is the right time to buy from a perspective of being able to get the discounts.”

[JD Power data](#) shows that average prices for vehicles fell in mid-December by 2.7% from a peak to around \$46,000. But those prices are still nowhere near pre-pandemic prices due to a 26% price increase between 2020 and 2022. And some foods have fallen to below their price peaks as well, including eggs, apples and milk.

This behavior contrasts that which economists saw in the 1970s and 1980s. During this time, consumers developed a paranoia that they should purchase more items in preparation for

worsening inflation. This mindset itself can perpetuate inflation and lengthen the time it may take for prices to fall again.

The report also noted the stark difference in pricing between popular brands and store brand items at a grocery store in Arlington, Virginia: a 12-ounce tub of Kraft's Philadelphia cream cheese is sold for \$6.69, while the store brand is just \$3.19. And a 32-ounce Heinz ketchup bottle is \$6.29 while the other label is just \$1.69. A 24-pack of Kraft single cheese slices is \$7.69, while the store label is \$2.99.

Together, the cost of those five brand products would equal nearly \$30, while the alternatives are just \$13.

Quoting Samuel Rines, an investment strategist at Corbu, the report found that companies like PepsiCo, Kimberly-Clark, and Procter & Gamble have used Russia's military operation in Ukraine as well as the rise in input costs resulting from supply-chain disruptions as an excuse to price gouge their consumers and increase their profits.

But consumers who were once flush with COVID-19 pandemic stimulus checks are now exhausted by persistent inflation. They have long spent much of that money, and for some low-income consumers, have run up credit card debt and are struggling to make those payments. Now, consumers are being more cautious about their spending.

"We're beginning to see the consumer no longer willing to take the higher pricing," Rines said. "So companies were beginning to get a little bit more skeptical of their ability to just have price be the driver of their revenues. They had to have those volumes come back, and the consumer wasn't reacting in a way that they were pleased with."

The result? Companies want to please their customers, and are willing to lower their inflated prices in order to do so. The British company Unilever, which owns a number of brands known for goods ranging from ice cream to deodorant, raised their prices by 13.3% in 2022, and its sales volume fell 3.6% that same year, as a result. It then raised its prices just 2.8% last year, and saw sales rise 1.8%.

The American fast food chain McDonald's is also prepared to lower their prices in order to meet consumers with incomes below \$45,000 somewhere in the middle, as they see this income bracket visiting their restaurants less and less.

"Consumers are more wary — and weary — of pricing, and we're going to continue to be consumer-led in our pricing decisions," Ian Borden, the chief financial officer of McDonald's, told investors.

Inflation has been a sore spot for [US President Joe Biden](#). As he pursues a second term in office, the primary concern that voters have is in their wallets: the economy may be improving, but inflated costs at the grocery store tend to say otherwise.

The US president is [reportedly](#) weighing how hard he should hit food companies in his upcoming State of the Union Address. However, aides are advising him to focus less on the topic, as there is little that the US president can do in order to bring prices down on his own. [Biden](#) also addressed "shrinkflation"---the act of reducing the amount of product a consumer receives as opposed to the price---in his Super Bowl message in which he targeted snack food corporations. The president has also gone after "corporate greed" as the culprit for high inflation in the US. But Republicans, and even some Democrats, argue that Biden's policies are contributing to rising inflation, and believe that the issue cannot be solely pinned on such things as "shrinkflation" or corporate greed.

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US Senatorial Candidate: 'Tremendous Favor' For Trump in Michigan

Despite a concentrated campaign, including a campaign stop and visits by several campaign officials, US President Joe Biden continues to trail former President Donald Trump in Michigan, a state that he likely needs to prevail in to win the 2024 Presidential election.

Republican Senatorial candidate for Michigan, Dr. Sherry O'Donnell [told Sputnik's Fault Lines](#) that Joe Biden's popularity is "not in Michigan" or even "across the United States" while saying that she sees "tremendous favor for [Former US President Donald] Trump" while campaigning around the state.

"There is tremendous favor for Trump, not animosity. And I don't think there is going to be that much of an anti-Trump vote when people start looking where the country is compared to where it was," she said.

O'Donnell also contended that while "there's some division between what's happening in Israel" the Muslim population is "still coming behind President Trump," perhaps because of their conservative social views.

Local media in Michigan [reported](#) on Sunday that the Trump campaign "has expressed interest" in reaching out to Arab and Muslim voters in the state and three Michigan GOP vice chairs are Muslim. [A poll](#) released in late October, just weeks after Israel's war on Gaza began, showed that Arab American support had dropped from 59% in 2020 to just 17%, while support for Donald Trump increased five points to 40%.

Arab and Muslim groups have been organizing against Biden in the state and elsewhere, urging their members to withhold their votes if a ceasefire is not called. Michigan has a high Arab and Muslim population relative to the rest of the country.

Asked about the biggest issue for voters in Michigan, O'Donnell said it is Michigan, pointing to the state Government recently asking residents to help house illegal migrants.

"People are saying the current administration has lost its mind," she contended.

While O'Donnell said the Michigan GOP has been "infighting" she is not concerned about it affecting Trump's chances in November. "When I say fracture, they're fighting over who the state chair is, they are fighting the grassroots versus the old guard," she explained, adding that she is trying to be a unified voice in the party. "However, even amongst the infighting, you see both crowds are very excited and very supportive of Donald Trump."

Speaking on the Republican primary, O'Donnell said she believes that it would be in the "best interest" of Nikki Haley to drop out "well before Super Tuesday," and predicted that Tim Scott would be Trump's running mate.

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Isolation Due to Ukraine, Gaza Conflicts Signals 'End of US Hegemony'

On Thursday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov held meetings with foreign ministers of several countries on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Brazil, showcasing that Russia is not isolated from the world.

The US failed in its goal to isolate and divide Russia but did succeed in its unstated goal of deindustrializing Europe, war correspondent and analyst [Elijah Magnier told Sputnik's The Critical Hour](#) on Thursday.

"The world is changing indeed, not only because of the war on Russia in Ukraine but also the war in Gaza [...] the [Development of the BRICS countries](#) [and] [the increase of the Shanghai Cooperation](#). All these indications lead to one reality, the beginning of the end of US hegemony." "Fifty nations gathered to defeat Russia and they failed... Ukraine has been defeated and Europe is defeated," Magnier added, noting later that [Russia's economy](#) is doing [much better than Europe's](#).

In addition, the conflict in Gaza has wiped out any remaining pretense of Western moral superiority. "We are confronted [with] the war on Gaza, where none of [that] moral ground is translated into punishment of those who are committing war crimes and crimes against humanity. This is where, today, the Americans are completely isolated, along with their European partners."

America can only survive through wars, Magnier argued, resulting in NATO threatening war with China when it cannot handle much weaker adversaries.

"The US and UK are failing in front of non-state actors in the Red Sea [like] the Ansar Allah Houthis... So how can we understand that the Americans are ready to start a war against Russia and then against China?"

Co-host Wilmer Leon brought up what he believes to be the "unstated" goal of the war in Ukraine, "the de-industrialization of Europe" which, unlike the stated goal of defeating Russia, "seems to be doing quite well."

Magnier agreed and expressed shock that Germany has seemingly declined to react. "The Nord Stream II pipeline was blown up and the Germans refused to investigate the terrorist act," noting that energy prices are [rising throughout Europe](#), even though there are still some European countries buying Russian gas. "When energy is unaffordable... there is a migration of European industry to the United States where energy is cheaper."

"This is [how] the Americans succeeded in putting the Europeans, literally, on the floor, and this is something that Europeans understand, realize, [and] are fully aware of, but, surprisingly, they're not really reacting and stopping all this useless war that is [leading] them nowhere but to the destruction of the European industry and economy."

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'Clown Show': UK's Failed Trident Missile Test Emblematic of Nation's 'Decline and Demise'

On Wednesday, US media reported that the UK Royal Navy tested an unarmed Trident II missile in January, but the missile failed, falling just feet from the submarine it launched from. The failure was the latest in a string of embarrassing events for the Royal Navy.

The recent missile failure by the UK military "is entirely linked to the kind of decline and demise of the UK as a serious nation," Phil Kelly, a political contributor and socialist activist [told Sputnik's Political Misfits](#) on Thursday.

"It's a nation that is in a deep [economic](#) and [political](#) crisis, and the military reflects that," Kelly underscored.

"I compare them to the [Scooby-Doo] character Scrappy-Doo because they run around after the United States as a small henchman talking up a bit beyond their own capabilities," he added before mentioning a string of failures by the UK Royal Navy, including two warships colliding in the Gulf of Yemen. "It's a clown show that really isn't fit for [its] purpose."

Like the Scrappy-Doo character, the UK Royal Navy acts supremely confident in its abilities, but can not back up its bravado.

"This is an army, let's not forget, that retreated at speed after a failed 20-year occupation of Afghanistan. They were beaten by men in pickup trucks... who's [now] shaking its saber and threatening Russia, China, and Iran," Kelly explained.

"It's kind of like that small man syndrome in a bar. Stop acting aggressive because you're going to get the fight you're asking for and you're in no way prepared for it."

Kelly noted that not only is the UK military experiencing significant equipment problems, but it is also failing to meet its recruitment goals, calling it a "huge crisis" and doubling down on the fact that the issues are not limited to the naval branch.

"They used to have this great tagline about their main battle tank, the Challenger Two, that they said... had not been lost on the battlefield since it launched a couple decades ago. The tank itself managed about two to three weeks when it arrived in Ukraine before one of them was left as a burning hulk."

"If [the failed Trident missile launch] happened in North Korea, Western media would have been laughing at it," Kelly said. "Here, we have the UK completely unable to launch a missile, which has cost an exorbitant amount of money while health and education are falling into rack and ruin."

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Free Speech Online Was Promoted By the Pentagon, Until It Turned on Them

The US security state was the staunchest supporter of free speech online when it enabled them to foment discontent in countries they perceived as adversarial, but changed their tune when it turned against them and their allies, syndicated columnist and political cartoonist Ted Rall told Sputnik's The Critical Hour on Wednesday.

“There are outfits like Freedom House that were co-founded by the CIA, these sort-of NGOs [Non-Government Organizations] that have helped precipitate color revolutions, among other things, overseas, always in the interests of the US empire, and they promoted this kind of [free speech online] ideology a lot,” [Rall explained](#).

“It sounds very reasonable. We want people to express themselves. We want people around the world to be free to say and do whatever they want. And if they are complaining about their local governments, we're going to help them do that,” he continued.

Rall and Co-hosts Wilmer Leon and Garland Nixon were discussing an interview between Foundation for Freedom Online director Mike Benz and journalist Tucker Carlson, during which Benz asserted that the plan to use the internet to support dissident groups online “worked magically from 1991 to about 2014 when there began to be an about-face on internet freedom and its utility.”

Rall agreed and compared it to the US support of the Mujahideen in Afghanistan in the 1980s “some of which became radical Islamist groups like Al-Qaeda*.”

The [censorship of online media](#) made headlines in 2022 when Meta** CEO Mark Zuckerberg told podcast host Joe Rogan that his social media platforms [suppressed the Hunter Biden laptop story](#) at the behest of the FBI. Last year, the Section Chief of the FBI’s Foreign Influence Task Force Laura Dehmlow testified in front of Congress that she warned companies that the laptop could be part of a Russian “hack-and-leak” operation ahead of the 2020, but the agency knew the laptop was legitimate and had been in possession of it since late 2019.

“They continue to promulgate their fraud. I would be very interested in knowing what percentage of American voters still believe that the laptop isn't real,” Rall said of the FBI disinformation campaign against the laptop. “There's been no evidence whatsoever that it's even been modified or edited in any way. But these narratives, they catch on and they stick. Trump rightly gets attacked over disinformation and misinformation, but it's really very bipartisan.”

Rall brought up the justification he’s heard from journalists who say they don’t want to influence elections and so delay or decide against publishing certain articles on that principle. “You're a news organization. News organizations traffic news, they report news. Whatever it is, if it's a legitimate story, there's no reason not to run it.”

Nixon contended that Rall was giving mainstream journalists too much credit by “implying good faith.” Rall agreed with the assessment.

“Let’s not forget the (US Senator) Bernie Sanders articles that were true, but spun in a false way. Like the fact that he visited the Soviet Union as mayor of Burlington, Vermont. The implication was that he was some kind of Russian agent when, of course [it was Burlington’s Russian sister city] that he visited. There were lots of right-wing Republican mayors who went and visited their Soviet counterparts,” Rall recalled.

“It was a beautiful thing... during an otherwise bleak time in the Cold War. But The New York Times treated it as ‘Look, Bernie Sanders has a communist past.’ So there’s that kind of thing too, where it's something true-ish. He did go to the Soviet Union and that is a picture of him... but that doesn’t mean what they said,” he concluded.

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Space Nukes & Washing Machines: Western Media Prints 'Anything' to Paint Russia as Threat

Last week, House Intelligence Committee Chair Rep. Mike Turner (R-OH) released a document with a cryptic warning that called on US President Joe Biden to declassify information on a “serious national security threat.” Within hours, the story spread like wildfire.

The recent media craze stemming from unfounded claims of a Russian nuclear space weapon exploded and stole headlines for days because “the media” will print anything it is told about Russia, Mark Sleboda, a foreign relations and security expert [told Sputnik's Fault Lines](#).

“Russia's the gift that keeps on giving, propaganda-wise, because you can accuse Russia of anything, no matter what you said about them [before], about shovels, and microchips or washing machines. And, generally, people will believe it. Or at least the media will print it,” he said, referring to previous Western propaganda claims that Russian soldiers were fighting armed only with shovels and that their missiles used microchips from stolen Ukrainian washing machines.

“Then you accuse Russia of having space weapons, space nuclear weapons, or having plans to put nuclear weapons in space, or someone in Russia once thought technically about the contingency of putting weapons in space,” Sleboda scoffed.

As the story made the rounds on the media circuit, US National Security Council John Kirby told reporters that the threat US Rep. Mike Turner raised was related to “an anti-satellite weapon that Russia is developing.” Soon after that, US media outlets began reporting that the mysterious weapon was nuclear.

Russia vehemently denied the accusation, saying it is only developing the same space capabilities that the US has. “Firstly, there are no such projects - nuclear weapons in space. Secondly, the United States knows that this does not exist,” Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said during a televised discussion with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Sleboda noted that for mainstream media, “the details aren't important as much as the scaremongering factor.”

“It's the same thing with this continual octogenarian [fantasy about linking Trump and Russia](#)... all the powers of the US investigative bodies were unable to prove any connection... but that doesn't stop an enormous number of the American people from believing in it because they want to, and [US Rep.] Nancy Pelosi certainly knows that.”

The analyst further admitted that the latest anti-Russia rhetoric is part of a larger effort in preparation for the November presidential election in the US but that it also “does the double job of, you know, buttressing arguments for providing more US taxpayer dollars for [weapons for the regime in Kiev](#).”

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“Fifty nations gathered to defeat Russia and they failed... Ukraine has been defeated and Europe is defeated,” Magnier added, noting later that Russia’s economy is doing much better than Europe’s.

Magnier indicated that the unstated goal of the US in Ukraine was the deindustrialization of Europe and expressed surprise that it hasn’t reacted, particularly Germany in regards to the Nord Stream pipeline. “When energy is unaffordable... there is a migration of European industry to the United States where energy is cheaper.”

“This is [how] the Americans succeeded in putting the Europeans, literally, on the floor,” he added.

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The UK Royal Navy acts supremely confident in its abilities, but can not back up its bravado, he said. “This is an army, let’s not forget, that retreated at speed after a failed 20-year occupation of Afghanistan. They were beaten by men in pickup trucks... who’s [now] shaking its saber and threatening Russia, China, and Iran,” Kelly explained. “It’s kind of like that small man syndrome in a bar. Stop acting aggressive because you’re going to get the fight you’re asking for and you’re in no way prepared for it.”

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"There are outfits like Freedom House that were co-founded by the CIA, these sort-of NGOs [Non-Government Organizations] that have helped precipitate color revolutions, among other things, overseas, always in the interests of the US empire, and they promoted this kind of [free speech online] ideology a lot," Rall explained.

Rall compared it to the US support of the Mujahideen in Afghanistan in the 1980s "some of which became radical Islamist groups like Al-Qaeda."

The censorship of Hunter Biden's infamous "laptop from hell" also showed how media outlets assist the government in their censorship campaigns. "I would be very interested in knowing what percentage of American voters still believe that the laptop isn't real," Rall said of the FBI disinformation campaign against the laptop. "There's been no evidence whatsoever that it's even been modified or edited in any way. But these narratives, they catch on and they stick."

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US Senate Aide Providing Equipment to Ukraine May Be Foreign Agent - Report

Kyle Parker is known as an anti-Russia hawk on Capitol Hill, having played a key role in legislation subjecting Russian officials to sanctions and travel bans.

A US Senate aide who provided Kiev's troops with sniper gear and traveled to front lines clad in camouflage and Ukrainian insignia may be guilty of failing to register as a foreign agent, according to [reports](#) in US media.

Kyle Parker, a senior advisor to the US Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) is currently under investigation for multiple trips to Ukraine since 2022 during which he sent some \$30,000 in military equipment to Ukrainian troops. Parker has also been accused of enabling corruption by hiring a contact in Ukraine to a CSCE fellowship position against the advice of ethics officials.

"Mr. Parker's unofficial travel and media promoting himself as a foreign military interlocutor raise further legal and ethical concerns amid reported Ukrainian military corruption," read a report from the CSCE director that was shared with US media. The report suggests Parker was "wittingly or unwittingly being targeted and exploited by a foreign intelligence service" and urges the case's referral to the FBI.

CSCE chairman Rep. Joe Wilson (R-SC) has called for Parker to be fired over national security concerns raised by the report, claiming the aide is guilty of "serious alleged improper acts involving Ukrainian and other foreign individuals."

"I urgently recommend you secure his immediate resignation or termination," Wilson wrote to CSCE co-chair Sen. Ben Cardin (D-MD) last year.

Parker has claimed he's being retaliated against for exposing wrongdoing by CSCE officials. Parker is considered a prominent anti-Russia force in Washington. He is known for his advocacy of the Magnitsky Act, a 2012 law intended to sanction foreign individuals for alleged "human rights abuses." Moscow has strongly criticized the legislation while challenging accusations lodged against Russian officials.

The New York Times, typically seen as a [mouthpiece](#) for the pro-war US foreign policy establishment, lamented the investigation's potential to disrupt the operation of the pro-Ukraine CSCE. The newspaper characterized Kiev as "desperate" for US weapons and funding, sneering at Republicans in Congress who have blocked aid packages.

Polling has found that [half](#) of Americans say the country has sent too much money to Ukraine, which is waging a US-backed proxy war against Russia.

Reporting published by The New York Times over the weekend revealed the depth of the US Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) [decade-long interference in Ukraine](#). The secretive intelligence agency has maintained a significant presence in the country for about a decade, going back to the 2014 US-backed Euromaidan color revolution, it was revealed.

The article in the Times claimed CIA operatives are present along Ukraine's border with Russia, helping the Kiev regime plan and execute raids in the neighboring country.

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Russophobic Elements in US Congress Set to Lose Influence Amidst Moscow's Strength

US backing for Ukraine is proving increasingly unpopular in Congress and among the American electorate, but will Langley bend to the democratic will?

A number of Western analysts in recent days have acknowledged Ukraine is losing in the Donbass. The observation was made in a weekend [article](#) in the Greenville Post, which noted former US Army Col. Lawrence Wilkerson and [the Quincy Institute's Anatol Lieven](#) were among those admitting the failure of the US-backed proxy conflict.

The state of affairs has again raised the prospect of a long-awaited negotiated end to hostilities as a generation of young Ukrainian men are sacrificed for Washington's provocation towards Moscow. "There really won't be much to negotiate," said Wilmer Leon, host of [Sputnik's The Critical Hour program](#), on Monday. "It's going to be 'surrender or continue,' taking these missiles in the teeth."

"Well, yes and no," responded Scott Ritter, a former Marine Corps intelligence officer who has become a harsh critic of US foreign policy. "At the end of the day, it's going to be a surrender [for Ukraine]."

Ritter noted that Russia has a significant leverage to force concessions from Kiev, comparing their position to that of the United States in World War II before former President Harry Truman made the decision to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

"It's going to be unconditional surrender," said the former UN weapons inspector. "I don't believe the Russians are going to sit there and say, 'well, you can keep some Banderites here. You can keep this NATO army here.' No, those are gone."

But Ritter claimed Moscow would ultimately seek a more conciliatory approach than that of the United States toward Japan in 1945.

"Russia also wants to rapidly transition from conflict termination to 'how do we repair relations with Europe, how do we get away from this war footing?'" he said.

"It's not in Russia's interest to have a permanent state of conflict with Europe, to be on a perpetual war footing," Ritter added, claiming the country would prefer to devote resources towards domestic concerns rather than weapons production.

Such dynamics would create "significant maneuver room" in negotiations between Moscow and Kiev according to the analyst.

Ritter speculated that rapprochement would be reached first with Europe as business interests across the continent press to rebuild economic links. European countries were badly harmed by US-backed sanctions on Russian gas, which drove energy costs sky high from London to Berlin. The global energy market has yet to fully recover, with Qatar [recently announcing increased investment](#) in liquefied natural gas production to help meet demand.

Additionally, the expert said Europe's leaders will find the prospect of engagement with the BRICS nations too tantalizing to ignore. Western sanctions forced Russia to strengthen ties with countries throughout the Global South, especially China and India. Moscow now serves as a

“gateway economy” to the BRICS bloc, whose share of global GDP recently [surpassed that of the G7 countries](#).

“What’s happening in Saint Petersburg is reality; what’s happening in Davos is fiction,” said Ritter, claiming the Russian city’s yearly economic forum is “determining the direction of the global economy.”

Ritter claimed the United States will also face pressure to restore relations with Moscow, especially as the Kiev regime’s efforts to weaken Russia prove futile. A recent Fox News interview with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky only received about 24,000 hits online, while [journalist Tucker Carlson’s sitdown with Russian President Vladimir Putin](#) received almost one billion. The discrepancy demonstrates the ineffectualness of Western propaganda efforts in recent months.

Meanwhile, even [Western mercenaries](#) have proven [unable to turn the tide in Ukraine’s favor](#). Former Prime Minister Dimitri Medvedev recently claimed Russia should capture Kiev, illustrating Moscow’s optimism about its prospects on the battlefield. Observers say Russia’s heavy advantage in soldiers and firepower put the country in a highly advantageous position. “But we also know that Congress plays a very important role in shaping policy and the tone of policy,” noted Ritter. “Donald Trump spoke about ‘why can’t we be friends with Russia’ and then found that his hands were tied by a Congress that just didn’t want to be friends with Russia.” “And so ultimately we’re going to have to purge the American body politic,” he claimed. “We’re going to need to see not just a change in presidential administrations, but we’re going to have to see a thinning out of the Russophobic blood in Congress, and this could take several election cycles,” Ritter clarified.

Although voices in Congress on both sides of the aisle are increasingly voicing opposition to US support for Kiev, Western intelligence agencies may prove far more resistant to change. A recent New York Times article [revealed the depth of the CIA’s decade-long involvement](#) in Ukraine, likely suggesting the US Deep State isn’t ready to admit defeat just yet.

Such powers behind the scenes have proven highly persuasive in dictating US foreign policy in years past. “The United States, as an entity, has shown itself to be a negotiation partner who negotiates in bad faith,” Ritter observed.

A US Senate aide who sent some \$30,000 in sniper gear to troops in Ukraine may be a foreign agent, according to reports in US media.

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Kyle Parker, a senior advisor to the pro-Ukraine US Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, is known as an anti-Russia hawk in Washington, having worked to pass legislation to target Russian officials with sanctions.

Parker is being investigated for failing to register as a foreign agent, according to a report shared with US media. The report suggests Parker was “wittingly or unwittingly being targeted and exploited by a foreign intelligence service” and urges the case’s referral to the FBI.

Parker has also been accused of enabling corruption by hiring a contact in Ukraine to a CSCE fellowship position against the advice of ethics officials. CSCE chairman Rep. Joe Wilson (R-SC) has called for his firing.

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Russophobic elements in US Congress are set to lose influence amidst Moscow's strength

A number of Western analysts in recent days have acknowledged Ukraine is losing in the Donbass, giving Russia a significant leverage in hypothetical peace talks with Kiev.

"It's going to be unconditional surrender," said former US Marine Corps intelligence officer Scott Ritter during an appearance on Sputnik's The Critical Hour program. "I don't believe the Russians are going to sit there and say, 'well, you can keep some Banderites here. You can keep this NATO army here.' No, those are gone."

The former UN weapons inspector claimed Russia would prioritize rebuilding economic links with Europe.

"It's not in Russia's interest to have a permanent state of conflict with Europe," Ritter clarified, noting that Moscow's strengthened links with BRICS nations now make it a "gateway economy" for the West.

Ritter stressed Moscow's strength will eventually force a rapprochement from the United States as well. "We're going to need to see not just a change in presidential administrations, but we're going to have to see a thinning out of the Russophobic blood in Congress, and this could take several election cycles," he noted.

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Yellen Says Awaiting Netanyahu Response on Measures to Mitigate War's Economic Impact

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) – US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Tuesday that she is awaiting a response from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on her letter suggesting measures to mitigate the adverse impacts of Israel's war on Gaza on the economies of Israel and the West Bank.

"No, it was just it was just sent a day or two ago," Yellen said in response at a press briefing as to whether Netanyahu had responded.

Yellen said she had written a letter to Netanyahu to "discuss my concerns about the West Bank and actions that Israel has taken that I believe are seriously impairing the West Bank economy,

reducing income, and also at the same time having an adverse impact on Israel."

For example, Israel's prevention of West Bank residents from working in Israel had a "very significant negative effect on incomes" in the West Bank while also creating a labor shortage that was damaging Israel's own economy, she pointed out.

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Yellen Claims 'There is Strong Int'l Law, Economic Case' to Unlock Value of Russian Assets

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - US Treasury Secretary claimed on Tuesday that there is a "strong international law, economic, and moral case" for unlocking the value of frozen Russian assets.

In prepared remarks at the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors Meetings in Brazil, Yellen said she fully endorses the European Union's move to harness windfall proceeds from Russian sovereign assets.

"I also believe it is necessary and urgent for our coalition to find a way to unlock the value of these immobilized assets to support Ukraine's continued resistance and long-term reconstruction," Yellen stated.

"While we should act together and in a considered way, I believe there is a strong international law, economic, and moral case for moving forward," she claimed.

Moscow has maintained that any attempt to confiscate its assets would violate international law. The Russian Foreign Ministry has dismissed the freezing of Russian assets as outright theft.

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Democratic House Candidate Says Congress' Gridlock on Foreign Aid, Border 'Childish'

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - Congress' gridlock to approve additional foreign aid and bolster border security is unnecessary and childish, Democratic congressional candidate Lee Bausinger told Sputnik.

"It is childish and unnecessary," Bausinger said about Congress' gridlock on foreign aid and border security measures.

The Senate sent over a \$95 billion foreign aid bill to the House of Representatives for consideration, but House Speaker Mike Johnson has been reluctant to take it up for a vote over differences in national security priorities. The supplemental bill includes \$60 billion for Ukraine and \$14 billion for Israel, among funding for other priorities.

Bausinger, who is running for the 23rd congressional district in Texas, said he supports sending more aid to Ukraine but believes giving more security assistance to Israel is not important considering it is an "aggressor."

The American public's support to send additional aid to Ukraine has been waning two years after the war, and the US public has also declared the border crisis their number one concern heading into the November vote, according to polls.

Bausinger believes that Congress must make a more meaningful effort to improve the US immigration process through extensive reform of an "aged and outdated process."

"Increasing the opportunity for approval of naturalization and reduction to its cost in money and time will also remove bottlenecks in the process of turning prospective Americans to citizen Americans," Bausinger added.

According to US Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the Biden administration has experienced three consecutive years of record numbers of illegal migration on the southern border. CBP documented more than 302,000 migrant encounters in December, marking the highest single-month figure ever recorded.

Moreover, Bausinger claims that the reelection of former President Donald Trump will destroy US credibility on the world stage.

RealClearPolitics, which aggregates several national polls, shows that as of Monday evening, former President Donald Trump leads Biden by 2 percentage points, 47.1% to 45%.

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Boeing to Build New Infrared Tracking Prototypes For US Navy, Australia - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - Boeing has received an \$86 million order to construct two new prototype infrared maritime tracking systems for the US Navy and Washington's AUKUS (Australia-United-Kingdom-United States) partner Australia, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"The Boeing Company [of] St. Louis, Missouri is awarded an \$86,427,453 ...order ...provides for the design, development, and production of two Operational Test Program Sets prototypes," the release stated on Monday.

The order will also include the manufacture of special test equipment in support of the AN/ASG-34A (V)1 Infrared Search and Track System field testing for the Navy and Australia, the Defense Department said.

Work on the program will be performed in St. Louis, Missouri over the next five years and is expected to be completed in February 2029, the release said.

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CBP Union on Biden's Border Visit Says 'Too Little, Too Late,' It's Attempt to Save Himself

EL PASO, February 27 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden's visit to the US southern border later this week is too late and only a political attempt to save himself, National Border Patrol Council

Vice President Art Del Cueto told Sputnik.

"A visit by President Biden three years into his term and after repeatedly stating there is no crisis is too little, too late," Del Cueto said on Monday. "Biden is going to the border now solely to try to save himself. Border security should never be about politics, it should always be about the safety and security of this great nation and the American people."

Earlier in the day, the White House said Biden would travel to Brownsville, Texas, on Thursday to meet with Border Patrol agents, local authorities and community leaders. He will also use the visit as an opportunity to urge Congress to pass a bipartisan supplemental bill with border policy reforms, which Republicans have rejected for not having enough to address the border crisis.

National polls found that illegal immigration is a top issue among US voters for the upcoming presidential election in November. US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) data shows that the Biden administration has experienced three consecutive years of record numbers of illegal migration on the southern border. CBP documented more than 302,000 migrant encounters in December, marking the highest single-month figure ever recorded.

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Donald Trump Jr. Receives Letter With White Powder at Florida Home - Reports

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump's eldest son, Donald Trump Jr., received a letter containing white powder at his Florida home, the Daily Beast reported, citing two sources familiar with the matter.

Trump received a letter containing an unidentified white powder at his Jupiter, Florida home, the report said on Monday.

The incident prompted fire trucks and personnel in hazmat suits to arrive on the scene, the report said.

Trump has been a public supporter of his father's political pursuits, as well as involved in his business career.

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Biden Says Was Unaware He Will Be in Texas on Same Day as 'Good Friend' Trump

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Monday that he was unaware that he would be in Texas on the same day as Donald Trump.

"I planned it for Thursday, what I didn't know was that my good friend apparently is going," said Biden, when asked by the press why he had decided to visit Texas on Thursday-the same day as Republican presidential hopeful Donald Trump.

President Biden will travel to Brownsville, Texas, on Thursday to meet with US Border Patrol agents, law enforcement, and local leaders. He will discuss the urgent need to pass the Senate

bipartisan border security.

Former president Donald Trump will also be in Texas on Thursday, but it is yet unclear which city he will visit in the border state.

According to US Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the Biden administration has experienced three consecutive years of record numbers of illegal immigration on the US southern border, exceeding eight million migrants.

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Pro-Palestinian Protesters Storm NBC Lobby to Disrupt Biden's Show Appearance - Reports

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - Pro-Palestinian protesters have gathered in the lobby of the corporate media outlet NBC in New York to interrupt President Joe Biden's upcoming appearance on the Late Night with Seth Meyers segment, RawsAlerts reported.

According to the report, hundreds of pro-Palestinian protesters gathered in the NBC building's lobby on Monday, chanting "Stop arming genocide."

The chant is in reference to Israel's military actions in Palestine that have resulted in the death of some 30,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the displacement of nearly 2 million Palestinians there amid widespread hunger.

New York police officers have arrested several of the protesters, the report said.

Biden is visiting New York for what the White House described as a "campaign meeting," without revealing additional details.

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Biden Says Hopes There Will be Gaza Ceasefire Next Monday, 'We're Close, But Not Done Yet'

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden told reporters that is hopeful that by next Monday there will be a deal between Israel and Hamas on hostage release and ceasefire.

"My national security adviser tells me that we're close, we're close. It's not done yet, and my hope is that by next Monday we'll have a ceasefire," Biden said on Monday.

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Congressman on Budget Talks: Anything Short of Changes to Reduce Spending 'Waste of Time'

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Paul Gosar, in a statement about upcoming talks between the White House and Congress to avert a government shutdown, said that anything short of policy changes to reduce federal spending will be a waste of time.

President Joe Biden will host the four US congressional leaders at the White House on Tuesday to discuss efforts to pass the bipartisan national security supplemental bill and to avert a government shutdown.

"The American people expect Congress to get serious about cutting wasteful government spending and living within its means," Gosar told Sputnik on Monday. "Discussion should encompass significant policy changes that reduce spending and anything short of this is a waste of time."

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell in earlier remarks said he believes there is enough time for lawmakers to reach a deal on a federal spending budget.

However, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said there is a lot of uncertainty about whether hardliner Republican lawmakers in the House of Representatives may risk a government shutdown.

Last week, the House Freedom Caucus in a letter to House Speaker Mike Johnson said it would not support an omnibus spending package that does not include policy changes on their wishlist.

The Caucus further warned Johnson that a failure to eliminate policies and personnel that it recommends Congress should not fund will reduce the probability of a spending package passing the House without their support.

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US Congressman Denies Affair Rumor, Will Send Lawyers After Ex-Senator Accuser - Statement

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Matt Rosendale's office issued a statement denying accusations that the lawmaker had an affair with a staffer and threatening to send lawyers after former US Senator Heidi Heitkamp, who promoted the rumor.

Heitkamp said in a podcast that Rosendale ended his US Senate bid earlier this month because he impregnated a 20-year-old staffer.

"This is 100% false and defamatory and former Senator Heitkamp will be hearing from our lawyers soon," Rosendale spokesperson Ron Kovach said on Monday.

Rosendale said that he ended his senate campaign due to former President Donald Trump endorsing fellow Republican contender Tim Sheehy.

Rosendale has not yet indicated whether he will run for reelection to the US House of Representatives in 2024.

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

McConnell Says Congress Has Enough Time This Week to Avert US Government Shutdown

(Updates with more details and background in paras 4-8)

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - Congress has enough time to avert a government shutdown this week, US Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said during remarks on the Senate floor.

"We have the means and just enough time this week to avoid a shutdown and to make serious headway on annual appropriations," McConnell said on Monday.

If lawmakers do not reach a spending agreement by midnight Friday, there will be a partial government shutdown and a full government shutdown will take place if no deal is reached by March 8.

US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said during separate remarks on the Senate floor that there is still a lot of uncertainty about whether House Republicans will cooperate on efforts to pass a full spending budget in the coming days, especially from Republican hardliners.

Last week, the US House Freedom Caucus in a letter to House Speaker Mike Johnson said it would not support an omnibus spending package that does not include policy changes on their wish list, which raised concerns of a government shutdown.

However, Schumer said he is hopeful the House of Representatives will work with the Senate in "good faith" to prevent a government shutdown, but emphasized that time is running short.

The House Freedom Caucus prefers another short-term spending bill if lawmakers cannot agree on a federal spending budget that includes policy changes the caucus wants, including restricting parole for illegal migrants entering the United States, defunding the Pentagon's abortion travel fund, defunding Biden's climate change actions, defunding anti-US organizations, prohibiting the Justice Department from censoring lawful speech, among other proposals.

There are many policies and personnel that Congress should not be funding, and a failure to eliminate them will reduce the probability that the appropriations bills will be supported by even a majority of Republicans, the House Freedom Caucus said.

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Alabama Attorney General Says No Staff Injuries Following Explosion Near Office

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall said that none of his staff or personnel were injured during an explosion that went off near his office on Saturday morning.

"In the early hours of Saturday, February 24, an explosive device was detonated outside of the Alabama Attorney General's Office building in Montgomery. Thankfully, no staff or personnel were injured by the explosion. The Alabama Law Enforcement Agency will be leading the investigation, and we are urging anyone with information to contact them immediately," said Marshall in a statement on Monday.

The incident comes just days after the Alabama Supreme Court decided that frozen embryos are legally considered children. The case arose from a wrongful death lawsuit by parents whose frozen embryos were destroyed after undergoing IVF procedures. The ruling has sparked concerns about the future of IVF treatment in the state.

The investigation into the incident is ongoing.

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McConnell Says Congress Has Enough Time This Week to Avert US Government Shutdown

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UPDATE - Oil Up More Than \$1 a Barrel Amid Attacks on Vessels in Mideast Waters

(Updates paragraphs 2-3)

NEW YORK, February 27(Sputnik) - Crude prices jumped more than \$1 a barrel on Monday as geopolitical tensions gripped the oil market following renewed Houthi strikes against vessels in Middle East waters.

West Texas Intermediate, the benchmark for US crude, settled up \$1.09, or 1.4%, at \$77.58 per barrel. The swing higher came after the so-called WTI benchmark ended last week down 3.4% on demand worries.

WTI aside, London-traded Brent, the global benchmark for crude, closed up 91 cents, or 1.1%, at \$82.53. Brent fell 2.2% last week.

Houthi rebels in Yemen nearly hit an American tanker on Saturday, according to the U.S. Central Command, after another vessel struck by them was leaking fuel in the Red Sea.

Since February trading began, oil prices have swung as volatility gripped the rallying oil market.

WTI tumbled 7.4% in the first week of February before recovering 6.3% in the next. For the month thus far, WTI is still in the positive, with a gain of 2.4% that followed through with January's advance of almost 6%.

Brent is up 1.5% for February after January's rise of nearly 5%.

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ANALYSIS - 'Pathetic' New US Economic Sanctions Just Making Russia Stronger - Business Analysts

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - US sanctions on Russia are embarrassingly pathetic and they have no other effect but making Russia more self-sustaining, European and American financial analysts told Sputnik on Monday.

The US government imposed more than 500 additional sanctions on Russia last week. The measures were enacted to penalize Russia over its continuing military operations in Ukraine and the death in jail last week of Alexei Navalny, administration officials said.

President Joe Biden said the sanctions were aimed at individuals the United States claims were connected to Navalny's imprisonment. They were also aimed at the Russian financial sector, its defense industrial base, procurement system, and commercial operations that had defied previous sanctions around the world.

DOOMED TO FAILURE

However, the latest round of sanctions was doomed to fail totally and backfire on the United States, just as the previous 3,000 imposed against Moscow over the past decade have done, Europe-based financial analyst and political commentator Alex Krainer explained.

"It is embarrassingly pathetic, and I feel the sanctions will only prove effective in one sense: further catalyzing the world moving to alternative flows of trade and finance and away from Western financial centers, especially the United States," Krainer stated.

US sanctions now had a long record of backfiring and inflicting far more economic damage and human suffering on the United States itself and its European allies who participated in them rather than hurting Russia or any other targeted countries in any significant way, Krainer pointed out.

"At first blush, sanctions are compelling stuff and look like real pain for targeted countries. But once you sanctioned half the planet you are actually harming yourself," he said.

Reacting against the sanctions, target countries are incentivized to develop their production and trade with other nations/partners, Krainer observed.

RUSSIA OUTSTRIPPING US

Trends Journal publisher and former hedge fund manager Gerald Celente underlined that Russia's economy is now far outstripping the United States and the European Union and the more the US and EU try and impose more damaging sanctions, the more these measures backfire upon them.

"Go back to 2022 when the Ukraine War began, and the United States and the European Union put strict sanctions on Russia. President Joe Biden said, 'Putin will pay a huge price,'" he said.

But instead, it was the peoples of North America and Western Europe who paid the price, Celente pointed out.

"Cutting off oil and gas from Russia, people, especially in Europe, paid the price with spiking higher inflation and declining GDPs (Gross Domestic Products), while Russia's GDP grew 2.6% last year... outpacing the EU and the US."

Trends Journal analysts had been warning for the past eight years that the collapse of credibility of globalism and free trade would confirm the lasting wisdom of nations turning back to economic models of self-sustaining development, Celente recalled.

Now that prediction had been fulfilled, Celente noted.

"That is precisely what Russia did as thousands of businesses left the country...as the GDP numbers prove. The businesses that were vacated by foreign firms were filled by Russians," he said.

The United States has now imposed 3,503 sanctions on Russia in the past two years, including those announced on Friday.

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Israel Working to Provide Ukraine With Missile And Drone Alert System - UN Ambassador

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - Israel is working to support Ukraine by supplying early warning systems designed to detect missile and drone attacks, Israeli Ambassador to the UN Gilad Erdan said.

"Israel is working to provide Ukraine with early warning systems against missile and drone attacks," Erdan said.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) -

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* Some EU and NATO countries are mulling over the possibility of sending their military to Ukraine on the basis of bilateral agreements, Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico said on Monday.

* If Western countries potentially send their soldiers to Ukraine then the risk of a direct clash between Russia and NATO will seriously increase, the head of the Russian delegation at the military security and arms control talks in Vienna, Konstantin Gavrilov, told Sputnik.

* The first Abrams tank used by Ukraine in the special military operation zone has been destroyed in the Avdiivka direction, also known as Avdeyevka, Yan Gagin, advisor to the acting head of the Donetsk People's Republic, told Sputnik.

* The destruction of the first Abrams tank used by the Kiev regime forces shows that Russian soldiers are determined to demilitarize Ukraine, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

* Switzerland will invite Russia to participate in a high-level peace conference on the conflict in Ukraine, Swiss Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis told Sputnik.

ISRAELI INVASION OF GAZA

* Nine people have been killed and another 30 injured as a result of an Israeli airstrike on a residential building in the city of Rafah, the head of the al-Kuwait Hospital in Rafah told Sputnik on Monday.

* All humanitarian coordination on medical missions in the Gaza Strip has been suspended for 48 hours due to the lack of "commitment and respect" by the Israel Defense Forces, the Palestine Red Crescent Society said.

* Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said that residents of the Gaza Strip would not be able to return to the northern part of the enclave until all hostages still held by Hamas were released.

SWEDEN MEMBERSHIP IN NATO

* The Hungarian parliament ratified Sweden's application to join NATO during the first meeting of the legislative body's spring session on Monday.

* NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg welcomed the decision of the Hungarian parliament to ratify Sweden's NATO membership application.

NORD STREAM TERROR ATTACK INVESTIGATION

* The German government is interested in continuing the investigation into the Nord Stream pipelines blasts, German government spokesperson Christiane Hoffmann said on Monday.

* Russia will observe Germany's decisions about the investigation into the attacks of the Nord Stream gas pipelines, but for the moment the situation is paradoxical, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

* The Copenhagen Police announced its decision to stop the investigation into the explosions at the Nord Stream gas pipelines.

* Denmark has decided to stop the investigation into the explosions at the Nord Stream gas pipelines, as it led to the country's closest allies, Peskov said.

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Blinken Says Appointed New Special Envoy For Sudan - Statement

WASHINGTON, February 26 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday that he appointed a new Special Envoy for Sudan.

“Today I am announcing the appointment of Tom Perriello as U.S. Special Envoy for Sudan. In this role, Special Envoy Perriello will coordinate the U.S. policy on Sudan and advance our efforts to end the hostilities, secure unhindered humanitarian access, and support the Sudanese people as they seek to fulfill their aspirations for freedom, peace, and justice,” Blinken said in a statement.

Perriello will focus on empowering Sudanese civilian leaders and on efforts to stop the conflict in Sudan and to prevent atrocities there, he added.

Blinken also pointed out that US Ambassador to Sudan John Godfrey has concluded his

appointment, and former ambassador Daniel Rubinstein will serve as Chargé d'Affaires.

In April 2023, violent clashes broke out between the Sudanese army and the RSF. The parties to the conflict have since introduced a number of temporary nationwide ceasefires, but none has helped settle the conflict. In late October, the parties resumed negotiations, mediated by Saudi Arabia in Jeddah, but hostilities in the country continue.

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US Trade Chief Engages in 'Robust' Talks With China After US Scathing WTO Report

WASHINGTON, February 26 (Sputnik) - US Trade Representative Katherine Tai held "robust" talks with Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao at the World Trade Organization in Geneva on Monday, her office said, amid tensions over the US's report on China's WTO compliance.

"Ambassador Tai engaged in a robust discussion with Minister [Wang] Wentao, where she expressed the need for continued communication and collaboration between the U.S. and the People's Republic of China (PRC) at the WTO in Geneva," the Office of the United States Trade Representative said in a readout.

Tai also raised with the Chinese minister concerns that the United States had about the excess capacity of steel on the global market owned by China, and "the ongoing imbalances caused by China's state-led, non-market approach to trade policy," the readout said.

"Ambassador Tai and Minister [Wang] Wentao agreed to work on areas of shared cooperation, including their respective commitments to the WTO," the USTR added.

On Friday, the USTR released its 2023 Report to Congress on China's WTO Compliance. The report alleged China "remains the biggest challenge to the international trading system" established by the WTO. It also accused Beijing of embracing "a state-directed, non-market approach to the economy and trade" in violation of WTO norms and principles.

The Chinese Commerce Ministry on Monday dismissed Washington's compliance assessment as groundless and a distortion of the facts. Beijing also accused Washington of trade bullying, unilateralism and disrupting international supply chains, the South China Morning Post reported, citing the ministry's statement.

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Pentagon Says US Defense Chief Tracking Airman's Self-Immolation to Protest Gaza Conflict

WASHINGTON, February 26 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin is tracking the death of an airman who committed self-immolation in protest of Israel's military operations in the Gaza Strip, Defense Department spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Monday.

"The Secretary is following this situation. I know the Air Force has confirmed the airman's

death. They do plan to provide additional information 24 hours after next-of-kin notifications are complete. This certainly is a tragic event," Ryder said during a press briefing, when asked about the incident.

On Sunday, active-duty US Air Force airman Aaron Bushnell committed self-immolation in front of the Israeli embassy in Washington. Bushnell said he was engaging in an "extreme act of protest" in support of Palestinians.

Bushnell died as a result of the act, after being taken to a local hospital with critical injuries.

On October 7, Hamas launched a surprise attack on Israel from the Gaza Strip, prompting months of fighting in the Palestinian enclave. Some 30,000 Palestinians have been killed in the Gaza Strip so far, according to local authorities.

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Pentagon Says Authority Transfer Not Decided by Defense Secretary Amid Hospitalization

WASHINGTON, February 26 (Sputnik) - The decision to transfer authorities to Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks was made after a failure to communicate effectively with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin in the critical care unit, the Defense Department said on Monday.

"Given the inability to provide timely communications to the Secretary [Lloyd Austin] while in the Critical Care Unit, the Secretary's military assistants agreed that a 'transfer of authorities' to the Deputy Secretary [Kathleen Hicks] was necessary," the Defense Department said in a statement.

Hicks was on leave in Puerto Rico accompanied by support staff and had timely access to all necessary communications equipment, the statement said.

"Although Deputy Secretary Hicks, when informed of the 'transfer of authority' to her, was not notified of Secretary Austin's hospitalization, she was at all times positioned to perform all the functions and duties of the Secretary," the statement added.

Austin was initially hospitalized on January 1 for complications following a December surgical procedure to treat cancer. The Defense Department failed then to communicate Austin's hospitalization to the White House for several days, prompting a Pentagon Inspector General probe and bipartisan calls for him to resign.

Earlier in February, doctors at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center said that Austin had been admitted to the critical care unit for supportive care and close monitoring in connection with a bladder issue. He was released from the hospital on Tuesday and is currently performing his duties remotely from home.

Austin was hospitalized over the weekend for the second time in 2024.

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Most Americans Believe Illegal Migration Hotter Issue Under Biden Than Trump, Obama - Poll

WASHINGTON, February 26 (Sputnik) - A majority of Americans believe that illegal immigration is a more serious issue under the Biden administration than it was during the Trump and Obama administrations, a Monmouth University poll revealed on Monday.

"Public concern about illegal immigration is higher during President Joe Biden's term than it was under the prior two administrations," Monmouth University said in a press release about its findings.

The poll also found that a majority of Americans support building a border wall for the first time since Monmouth University started asking this question in 2015 in its surveys.

In addition, the poll found that nearly half of Americans surveyed say the bipartisan Ukraine aid-border security deal that was blocked in the US Senate earlier this month is not tough enough to address the border crisis.

The release said 902 adults in the United States were surveyed from February 8 to 12, and the poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 4.1 percentage points.

According to US Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the Biden administration has experienced three consecutive years of record numbers of illegal migration on the southern border. CBP documented more than 302,000 migrant encounters in December, marking the highest single-month figure ever recorded.

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Oil Up More Than \$1 Per Barrel as Houthis Heat Up Mideast Waters With Attacks on Vessels

NEW YORK, February 26 (Sputnik) - Crude prices jumped more than \$1 a barrel on Monday as geopolitical tensions gripped the oil market following renewed strikes against vessels in Middle East waters by Iranian-backed Houthis supporting Hamas' war against Israel.

With an hour to settlement, West Texas Intermediate (WTI), the benchmark for US crude, was up \$1.34, or 1.8%, to \$77.83 per barrel. The swing higher came after the WTI benchmark ended last week down 3.4% on demand worries.

WTI aside, London-traded Brent, the global benchmark for crude, rose \$1.15, or 1.4%, to \$81.95. Brent fell 2.2% last week.

Houthi rebels in Yemen nearly hit an American tanker on Saturday, according to the US Central Command, after another vessel struck by them was leaking fuel in the Red Sea.

"The crude oil market is taking in stride supply-side worries," Phil Flynn, energy analyst at The Price Futures Group, said, relating to a strike against The Rubymar, a UK-owned, Belize-flagged vessel that has created an oil slick and could sink, leaving its cargo of fertilizer in the sea.

Since February trading began, oil prices have swung as volatility gripped the rallying oil market.

WTI tumbled 7.4% in the first week of February before recovering 6.3% in the next. For the month thus far, WTI is still in the positive, with a gain of 2.4% that followed through with January's advance of almost 6%.

Brent is up 1.5% for February after January's rise of nearly 5%.

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US Reached Out to Russia to Clarify Concerns About Anti-Satellite Capability – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 26 (Sputnik) – The United States has reached out to Moscow via diplomatic channels to clarify its concerns regarding Russia's alleged pursuit of an anti-satellite capability in space, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

"We did engage in diplomatic outreach to Russia to make clear our concerns about their pursuit of anti-satellite capability. We have also had conversations with allies and partners of the United States around the world who we think ought to be concerned about Russia's pursuit of this specific capability," Miller said during a press briefing.

In mid-February, ABC News reported that US lawmakers had allegedly been secretly informed about a purported national security threat to the United States that involved an alleged desire on the part of Russia to put an anti-satellite nuclear weapon into space.

Last week, Russian President Vladimir Putin said during a meeting with Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu that Russia had not deployed any nuclear weapons in space and had always been against such moves.

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White House Welcomes Hungarian Parliament's Vote Approving Swedish Accession to NATO

WASHINGTON, February 26 (Sputnik) - The White House welcomes the Hungarian parliament's vote approving Sweden's application to join NATO, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Monday.

"We welcome the Hungarian parliament's overwhelming vote today to approve Sweden's application to join NATO and we urge the Hungarian government to quickly complete the process so we can welcome Sweden into our alliance," Jean-Pierre said during a press conference.

Jean-Pierre also commended Sweden as a strong and capable defense partner with a highly capable military and stressed that the country's accession to NATO has been a long-time goal of US President Joe Biden.

The comments by the White House come soon after the Hungarian parliament ratified Sweden's application to join NATO at the first meeting of the spring session on Monday, which saw a total of 188 lawmakers voting in favor, six voting against, and four abstaining from voting, according to the broadcast of the meeting on the parliament's website.

Hungary was the last obstacle after Turkey ratified Sweden's NATO membership bid in January. Sweden will become the 32nd member of the alliance.

Sweden's accession to NATO will negatively affect the situation in the region and will not strengthen the sense of security of the Nordic country, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman

Maria Zakharova said in January. Moscow will take retaliatory measures to address possible threats to its defense capability in the wake of Sweden abandoning its policy of neutrality, the ministry warned.

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White House Confirms Biden Traveling to Southern Border on Thursday

WASHINGTON, February 26 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden will travel to the US border with Mexico later this week to meet with federal and local authorities dealing with the influx of migrants in the region, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said on Monday. "On Thursday... President Biden will travel to Brownsville, Texas, to meet with US Border Patrol agents, law enforcement and local leaders. He will discuss the urgent need to pass the Senate bipartisan border security," Jean-Pierre said during a press gaggle aboard Air Force One. Jean-Pierre added that Biden's visit will show that he is taking the border issue "very seriously." Former President Donald Trump is also expected to visit the US southern border this week, but his campaign has not revealed what border city he plans to visit.

The Trump campaign said in a statement that Biden's visit to the US southern border is not a meaningful attempt to address the border crisis, but a political motive.

"Crooked Joe Biden has had three years to visit the border and fix the crisis he created. Now Biden's handlers are sending him there on the same day as President Trump's publicly reported trip, not because they actually want to solve the problem, but because they know Biden is losing terribly," the Trump campaign said.

The Trump campaign blames Biden for being the sole cause of the "worst immigration crisis in history."

According to US Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the Biden administration has experienced three consecutive years of record numbers of illegal immigration on the US southern border, exceeding eight million migrants.

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UN on Alleged Talks on Navalny Swap: 'We Do Not Participate in It'

UNITED NATIONS, February 26 (Sputnik) - The United Nations did not participate in the alleged talks to exchange Russian opposition figure Alexey Navalny and Russian national Vadim Sokolov arrested in Germany, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Monday.

Navalny's ally Maria Pevchikh (recognized as a foreign agent, arrested in absentia under a number of Russian laws and included on the country's wanted list) said that Russia, Germany and the United States allegedly held talks before Navalny's death about a swap that would involve him and two US citizens for Sokolov.

"We've seen these press reports. We're not implicated in that in any way," Dujarric said. At the same time, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told the Financial Times that he knows nothing about such an agreement.

Last Friday, Russia's penitentiary service said Navalny died in prison, adding that the cause of death was being investigated.

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US Judge Orders Smirnov to Remain Detained Despite Earlier Release Order - Court

WASHINGTON, February 26 (Sputnik) - Judge Otis Wright II of the US District Court for the Central District of California ordered that Alexander Smirnov remain detained on charges of lying to investigators about an alleged deal between the Biden family and Ukrainian energy company Burisma, a court official confirmed to Sputnik on Monday.

Earlier in February, federal prosecutors charged Smirnov with making a false statement in an official FBI investigation. Smirnov allegedly lied to investigators about ties between the Biden family and Burisma, which are at the center of a US House of Representatives probe.

Last week, law enforcement arrested Smirnov, despite a judge previously ordering his release. Smirnov's lawyers challenged his arrest, contending that it violates the defendant's constitutional rights.

On Friday, US House Judiciary Committee Chair Jim Jordan said that Smirnov's case represents a "double standard" of justice, when compared to cases involving false statements made during federal investigations into former US President Donald Trump.

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IMF Says Did Not Advise Argentina Against Joining BRICS

WASHINGTON, February 26 (Sputnik) – The International Monetary Fund (IMF) did not advise Argentina to retract its application for BRICS membership as it considers it a sovereign decision of Buenos Aires, a fund spokesperson told Sputnik on Monday.

Argentina officially applied for BRICS membership in 2022 under then-President Alberto Fernandez. The country was set to join the bloc on January 1, but new President Javier Milei in December rejected the formal invitation to join BRICS.

"As for your question on BRICS and the New Development Bank, please note that it is up to the sovereign [nation] to decide on these matters and not to us to advise," the spokesperson said in a statement.

Earlier in February, Deputy Managing Director Gita Gopinath said that she will continue working closely with Argentine President Milei and his team to support their efforts to restore stability and strengthen growth for the benefit of all Argentines.

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US Lawmaker Introducing Resolution to Oust Biden Over 'Cognitive Decline' - Reports

WASHINGTON, February 26 (Sputnik) - Republican Congressman Ken Buck plans to introduce a resolution that calls for the removal of President Joe Biden because of his alleged cognitive decline, Fox News reported on Monday.

"Many Americans have long witnessed with their own eyes – that President Biden is no longer fit to successfully discharge the critical duties of his office," Buck told Fox News. "Numerous instances were articulated in the [Special Counsel Robert Hur] report, and have played out in full public view, showing President Biden's apparent cognitive decline and lack of mental stamina."

The report said Buck's resolution calls on Vice President Kamala Harris and Biden's cabinet to invoke the 25th Amendment of the Constitution, which would remove Biden from the White House.

Earlier this month, US Special Counsel Robert Hur released a report on his investigation into Biden's mishandling of classified documents, in which he cited several instances of Biden forgetting key dates in his life and career, including his time serving as US vice president and the date of the death of his son Beau Biden.

Following the release of the report, Biden delivered a speech defending his memory, but subsequently mixed up Egyptian President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi as being a president of Mexico and became upset after reporters questioned whether his memory has gotten worse with age.

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Canadian Diplomats Face Difficulties Amid Issues with Health Insurance Providers – Reports

WASHINGTON, February 26 (Sputnik) – Canadian ambassadors from around the world warn of an untenable situation for diplomatic staffers as their health insurance providers fail to process claims, the CBC reported on Monday.

Accordingly, all of Canada's heads of mission and envoys around the world have addressed the deputy ministers at Global Affairs Canada (GAC), warning them about the consequences of not having access to health coverage when working abroad, the report said, citing a joint letter intended issued on behalf of the ambassadors.

The situation has been exacerbated by a recent "cyber incident" at MHS International, the company providing health insurance to Canadian diplomatic staff, who paused all processing pending an investigation.

"We are also aware of employees foregoing and/or postponing medical treatments (e.g. psychological treatments, physiotherapy, and some drug treatments) due to concerns that they may not be reimbursed," the ambassadors wrote in the letter obtained by the CBC.

The unstable healthcare coverage is further creating financial burdens on the staffers, the report said, noting that MHS International still needs to fulfill its mandate from the very

beginning.

GAC has acknowledged the difficult situation faced by its diplomats related to the matter, the report said. The insurance company has assured that it would resume claims processing shortly, it added.

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Democratic Party Plans to Win Control of Most US State Legislatures in Coming Years - Memo

WASHINGTON, February 26 (Sputnik) - The Democratic Party is seeking to win control of a majority of state legislatures in the United States through a \$60 billion multi-year initiative, the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee (DLCC) said on Monday.

"As we gear up for the 2024 cycle, the DLCC has a target \$60 billion budget – our largest ever – to achieve our most ambitious goals yet," the DLCC said in a memorandum. "Today, the DLCC is unveiling our 2024 multi-cycle strategy, which outlines our plan to build sustainable, long-lasting Democratic power in the states."

Republicans currently control a majority of state legislatures in the United States.

The DLCC plan aims to build a path to control 50 chambers by 2030, the memorandum said. The plan includes breaking Republican supermajorities in states with a Democratic governor, building Democratic infrastructure in Republican-leaning states, aiming for new Democratic trifectas, addressing alleged Republican gerrymandering, focusing on other elected state positions and taking advantage of special elections, the memorandum said.

The 2024 election cycle will be "pivotal" for the Democratic Party, the memo also said.

The path to controlling a majority of state legislatures this decade depends on efforts and investments in 2024, the memorandum added.

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FTC Says Suing to Block Merger Between Kroger, Albertsons Supermarket Chains

WASHINGTON, February 26 (Sputnik) - The US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) on Monday said that it launched a lawsuit to attempt to block supermarket chain Kroger's acquisition of competitor Albertsons, which would be the largest supermarket merger in the history of the United States.

The FTC said in a statement that it sued to block the \$24.6 billion acquisition deal because it is allegedly anti-competitive.

"The FTC charges that the proposed deal will eliminate fierce competition between Kroger and Albertsons, leading to higher prices for groceries and other essential household items for millions of Americans," the statement said.

The decrease in competition will also result in lower quality products and services, the

statement said.

Moreover, the deal would threaten the ability of employee's to secure higher wages, better benefits and improved working conditions, the statement also said.

The FTC issued an administrative complaint and authorized staff to seek a temporary restraining order and preliminary injunction in US federal district court, the statement added.

A bipartisan group of nine state attorneys general joined the FTC's federal court complaint, according to the statement.

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Commerce Secretary Says Confident US Can Become Home to Its Entire Microchip Supply Chain

WASHINGTON, February 26 (Sputnik) - US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said on Monday that she is confident the United States can be home to its entire microchip supply chain.

"I am confident the United States can become the home to the entire silicon supply chain for the production of these leading edge chips, from poly silicon production, to wafer manufacturing, to fabrication, to advanced packaging," Raimondo said during a discussion with the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Raimondo did not provide a timeline to achieve the stated goals, but mentioned that the Biden administration wants to support projects that will be completed by 2030.

A semiconductor chip, also known as silicon chip or integrated circuit, is used in most modern electronics products such as computers, smartphones and communication devices.

In 2022, President Joe Biden signed an executive order to implement the \$280 billion CHIPS and Science Act of 2022, which includes more than \$52 billion in subsidies for US semiconductor manufacturers in an effort to counter China's growing technological capability.

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US Blacklists 2 Canadian, Chinese Companies Over National Security Concerns

WASHINGTON, February 26 (Sputnik) - The United States has blacklisted two entities for alleged activities that are contrary to US national security and foreign policy interests, the Commerce Department said in Monday.

"Today, the Commerce Department's Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) added two entities to the Entity List under seven entries for activities contrary to US national security and foreign policy interests. One entity was found to have been involved in supporting online censorship and surveillance to target political actors and human rights activities, and the other is being added for diversion of US items to an Entity Listed party," the release said.

According to the BIS registry, the two companies are Sandvine Incorporated (listed in the destinations of Canada, India, Japan, Malaysia, Sweden and the United Arab Emirates) and Chengdu Beizhuan Electronics Co. (listed in China).

The Canada-based Sandvine allegedly supplies deep packet inspection technology to the government of Egypt, where it is used in mass online monitoring and censorship to block news as well as target political actors and human rights activists, the release said.

China-based Chengdu Beizhan Electronics allegedly acquires and attempts to acquire US-origin items on behalf of the University of Electronic Science and Technology, which is already on the BIS Entity List, the release added.

The addition of the companies to BIS Entity List means any transactions with them involving items subject to Export Administration Regulations will require a license from the agency and such applications will likely be denied, according to the release.

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Pentagon Declines to Comment on Destruction of First Abrams Tank in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, February 26 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Defense on Monday declined to confirm or provide any comments following media reports about the destruction of the first Abrams tank on the battlefield in Ukraine and referred all inquiries to Kiev.

"We refer you to Ukraine to speak about this, in particular, and their operations in general," the Pentagon told Sputnik in a statement.

Earlier in the day, Yan Gagin, advisor to the acting head of the Donetsk People's Republic, told Sputnik that the first Abrams tank used by Ukraine in the special military operation zone had been destroyed near Avdiivka (Avdeyevka).

In late September, the White House confirmed that Abrams tanks had begun arriving in Ukraine. In total, the US administration vowed to give Kiev 31 Abrams tanks. However, the head of Ukraine's military intelligence service, Kyrylo Budanov, said that these tanks "will not live very long on the battlefield" in an ordinary combined arms battle.

Western countries have been providing military aid to Ukraine since the start of the Russian military operation in February 2022. The aid evolved from artillery munitions and training in 2022 to heavier weapons, including tanks later that year and in 2023. The Kremlin has consistently warned against continued arms deliveries to Kiev.

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UPDATE - Trump Appeals Multi-Million Dollar New York Civil Fraud Ruling – Court Filing

(Update: Rewrites headline, lede, adds paras 3-5)

WASHINGTON, February 26 (Sputnik) – Former US President Donald Trump appealed on

Monday the ruling in his New York civil fraud case that imposed a \$355 million fine increasingly daily with interest, according to a court filing.

“Please take notice that ... Defendants President Donald J. Trump...hereby appeal to the Appellate Division, First Department, from the Judgement by Hon. Arthur F. Engoron, J.S.C., dated February 22 2024,” the court filing stated.

In the civil fraud lawsuit brought by New York Attorney General Letitia James, Engoron fined Trump \$354.9 million plus interest and barred him from running a corporation or seeking loans from banks in New York for three years. The current fine he owes, including interest, stands at around \$454 million.

Trump’s two elder sons were also fined \$4 million each and barred from running a corporation in New York for two years. They are also included in the appeal.

Engoron in his ruling said Trump had exaggerated his net worth and the value of his real estate holdings in order to secure better loan terms from banks.

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Congress Staffer Under Investigation for Acting as Ukraine’s Foreign Agent – Reports

WASHINGTON, February 26 (Sputnik) – A senior Congress staffer, Kyle Parker, is under investigation over suspicion that he may have acted as a foreign agent on behalf of the Ukrainian government following his frequent visits to the country and provision of equipment to its military, The New York Times reported on Monday.

The US Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, known as the Helsinki Commission, believes that Parker, who is a senior adviser for the commission, acted as a foreign agent when he transferred \$30,000 worth of sniper gear to the Ukrainian military and traveled to the frontlines in the country wearing Ukrainian military insignia and even hired a Ukrainian official for a US government fellowship, the report said.

A report by the commission’s director argues that the senior staffer was "wittingly or unwittingly being targeted and exploited by a [Ukrainian] foreign intelligence service," and that this case should be referred to the FBI, according to the report.

While an outside law firm investigates Parker’s alleged misconduct, he remains on the commission and says that he has no plans to resign, the report added.

Parker is one of the longest-serving aides in Congress and has been a vocal voice and a driving force behind the Magnitsky Act and the support for Ukraine amid its conflict with Russia, the report said.

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Canada Working With US to Get NASAMS to Ukraine, Will Accelerate LAV Production - Trudeau

WASHINGTON, February 26 (Sputnik) – Canada is seeking to accelerate its production of light armored vehicles (LAV) and is working with the United States to expedite the delivery of the NASAMS air defense system it purchased on behalf of Kiev last year, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Monday.

In January 2023, Canada announced the donation of a US-made NASAMS system to Ukraine. Ottawa paid C\$406 million (\$300 million) for the NASAMS last March, but the air defense system is yet to be handed over to Kiev. One of the companies involved in the production of the NASAMS system reportedly does not have a contract for the Canadian donation.

"We are working closely with the American procurement system to get the NASAMS that we have purchased for Ukraine, to Ukraine. We are accelerating the process of getting more Light Armored Vehicles off the lines of production in London, Ontario at the factories there," Trudeau said during a joint press conference with his Polish counterpart Donald Tusk.

Trudeau also confused Ukraine with Russia, saying that Canada and its partners were stepping up in every possible way because everyone knows "Russia must win this war," before proceeding to correct his slip of the tongue.

The prime minister highlighted the diverse defense arsenal that Ottawa has provided to Kiev since the onset of Russia's special military operation, stressing that Canada will continue to buy equipment in the international markets to supply the Ukrainian armed forces.

The Kremlin has consistently warned against continued arms deliveries to Kiev, saying they will only lead to further escalation of the conflict.

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Ronna McDaniel to Step Down from Her Position as RNC Chairwoman March 8 - Reports

WASHINGTON, February 26 (Sputnik) - Republican National Committee (RNC) Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel announced on Monday that she will resign from her position on March 8.

"I have decided to step aside at our spring training on March 8 in Houston to allow our nominee to select a chair of their choosing," McDaniel said in a statement to The New York Times.

McDaniel confirmed in the statement her commitment to help win back the White House and elect Republicans up and down the ballot in the upcoming November elections.

McDaniel has previously announced her intention to step down after the Republican primaries in the US state of South Carolina, which took place over the weekend.

Former President Donald Trump, who leads the contenders for the Republican party presidential nomination, has already expressed public support for Michael Whatley for the position RNC chairman, the report said.

Whatley chairs the Republican party committee in North Carolina.

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US Lawmakers Raise Concern Over Biden's Sanctions in Latin America, Caribbean - Letter

WASHINGTON, February 26 (Sputnik) - A group of Republican senators sent a letter to President Joe Biden to express their concern over his administration's abuse of sanctions in Latin America and the Caribbean.

"We write to express deep concerns with your administration's misuse of authorities provided by Congress to combat corruption in Latin America and the Caribbean at the expense of strategic US national security interests," the letter said.

The senators said they are concerned about sanctions against former president of Guatemala Alejandro Giammattei that were imposed by the Biden administration on January 17 allegedly for corruption.

Senators Jim Risch, Marco Rubio, Bill Hagerty, James Lankford, Mike Lee, Tim Scott, John Cornyn and Rick Scott said in the letter that they believe the sanctions, in addition to those imposed since January 2021 on officials from Latin America and the Caribbean, harm the United States' national interests.

At the same time, the senators said that they are troubled by the administration's refusal to impose anti-corruption sanctions on individuals and entities in Venezuela, Ecuador, Argentina and Brazil.

"The administration must immediately explain the process and criteria that it has used since January 2021 to designate individuals in Latin American and the Caribbean under Section 7031(c)," the letter said.

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Biden Will Visit US Southern Border in Coincidence With Trump Trip to Texas - Reports

WASHINGTON, February 26 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will visit the United States' southern border with Mexico in coincidence with a trip to the border by former US President Donald Trump, The New York Times reported on Monday.

Biden will visit the border city of Brownsville, Texas on Thursday — the same day Trump is set to visit the border — the report said, citing two people familiar with the president's plans.

Trump is scheduled to visit Eagle Pass, which has been the center of a showdown between Texas state authorities and the Biden administration on border security. Texas continues to conduct border security operations along the border, despite Department of Homeland Security efforts to stop them.

Earlier this month, Texas Governor Greg Abbott said that the state will establish a military base camp near Eagle Pass to improve border security operations in the area.

The trips come amid efforts in the US Congress to pass bolstered border security measures, as

well as an effort to oust US Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas. Former acting US Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf told Sputnik earlier this month that the Biden administration's failure to secure the border is deliberate.

US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) documented more than 302,000 migrant encounters in December, marking the highest single-month figure ever recorded. The Biden administration has experienced three consecutive years of record numbers of illegal crossings of the southern border.

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Trump Appeals \$355Mln New York Civil Fraud Ruling – Court Filing

WASHINGTON, February 26 (Sputnik) – Former US President Donald Trump is appealing the \$355 million ruling in his New York civil fraud case, according to a court filing.

"Please take notice that ... Defendants President Donald J. Trump ... hereby appeal to the Appellate Division, First Department, from the Judgement by Hon. Arthur F. Engoron, J.S.C., dated February 22 2024," the court filing stated.

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UN Chief Calls for Human-Rights-Based Multilateral Governance Amid War in Gaza

WASHINGTON, February 26 (Sputnik) – UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called on Wednesday for using the Summit of the Future in September to "recommit to multilateral governance based on human rights" amid "clear violations of international human law" in Israel's war on Gaza.

"Human rights are under attack on all fronts, particularly in conflicts, as states ignore their commitments to the United Nations Charter and to international humanitarian law and international human rights law. So civilians are suffering appallingly, and we see this most dramatically in the clear violations of international humanitarian law taking place in Gaza," Guterres said a press briefing in Geneva.

He called for using the upcoming Summit of the Future, due to be convened on September 18-19, to "recommit to multilateral governance based on human rights, including the laws of the war."

Guterres spoke following an address to the Human Rights Council in Geneva, emphasizing the link between peace and human rights.

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US Begins Investigation Into Possible Fraud by Organ Collection Groups - Reports

WASHINGTON, February 26 (Sputnik) - US federal authorities have launched a multiagency investigation into possible fraud by the nonprofit organizations that collect organs for transplant, The Washington Post reported on Monday, citing sources familiar with the matter.

The probe, which focuses on organ procurement organizations in at least five states, seeks to determine whether they have been defrauding the government, the report said. The team, including experts from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the office of the Inspector General of the Department of Veterans Affairs, is looking into if these groups have been overbilling the government for their costs.

The investigation has been going on for at least several months, the sources said. As part of the probe, investigators were dispatched to the offices and homes of 10 chief executives of organ procurement organizations at the beginning of February, the report said, citing a notice that the chief executive of the Association of Organ Procurement, Steve Miller, sent to his membership.

The association's spokeswoman Jenny Daigle confirmed that they are "aware the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of the Inspector General has made inquiries of some OPOs [Organ Procurement Organizations]," according to the report.

Over 50 organ procurement organizations in the US collect organs, primarily kidneys, from deceased donors at hospitals and then transport them to 250 medical centers that perform transplants. Each group has a government-guaranteed monopoly over a swath of US territory where it operates, the report said.

Some of the organizations have failed for years meet demand, but the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) — a HHS agency that licenses the nonprofits to operate — has never decertified one, the report noted.

The investigators are looking into whether any of the nonprofits have violated federal law by knowingly billing the federal government for unallowable costs. They are also looking into whether there have been kickbacks between organizations, the report said.