

4/1/24 Monday

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'Only a Matter of Time' Before NATO Enters Ukraine, Says Analyst

On Sunday, members of the Russian 9th Brigade raised a flag on a northwestern building in Pervomaiskoye, confirming Russian control over most of the village and marking further Russian advances west of Avdeyevka.

As the situation becomes more desperate for Ukraine, it is only a matter of time before NATO troops start operating "openly" in the country, security and international relations analyst Mark Sleboda told [Sputnik's Fault Lines on Monday](#). He also predicted that Ukraine will resort to more terror attacks as its troops are forced to step back.

"I think as their desperation grows and Russia's advances on the battlefield come faster, with more casualties on the Kiev regime side and far fewer casualties on the Russian side," Sleboda explained. "They will grow more desperate and more panicked and they will continue to do more, shall we say, unconventional, dirty things like terror attacks."

"Eventually, I'm positive we are going to see NATO member state troops openly—under flag—on Ukrainian soil. I think it's just a matter of time."

The comment came as Sleboda and co-hosts Jamarl Thomas and Melik Abdul were discussing the Crocus City Hall terrorist attack that Russia blames on the Ukrainian domestic intelligence organization the SBU.

Sleboda pointed out that while Ukraine has not accepted responsibility for the attack, they have recently admitted to nearly every recent terrorist attack against Russia that they previously denied.

"[Head of Security Service of Ukraine] Vasyl Malyuk, he admitted, he flat out spoke on Ukrainian TV that yes, we, we did this, we did this... basically everything except for Crocus, they're basically admitting now. The unwilling suicide bombing attack on the Kerch bridge to Crimea as well," Sleboda explained. "They admitted to all of these, and these are acts of terrorism, of state terrorism."

On Ukrainian television last week, Malyuk said during an hour-long interview with Ukrainian media that "Officially, we will not admit to this..." and then went on to describe details of numerous assassinations, including [military blogger Vladen Tatarsky](#), who was killed in a terrorist bombing of a crowded cafe in St Petersburg and former Ukrainian member of parliament Ilya Kyva.

Russian officials have demanded that [Malyuk be handed over](#) by authorities in Kiev for the Crocus terrorist attack.

Sleboda noted that Russia seems to be in the process of dismantling an international terrorist network.

"Within Russia, people continue to be detained," and then possibly charged, Sleboda described.

"Russia has evidently also contacted the Turkish government, which has detained several dozen people, I believe, outside Istanbul and it is believed that they have been detained."

Sleboda added that there are “unconfirmed reports” that there was “some kind of training center” outside of Istanbul.

However, even if the SBU is successful in launching more terrorist attacks, it won’t stop the Russian advance.

“Nothing will hold permanently. After Avdeyevka, they lost the first defensive line they were hastily trying to erect in the next series of three towns within a few days,” Sleboda said, explaining the situation in the Donetsk region. “A little further back, they managed to hold a defensive line for a month. But all those towns but one have been overrun, and the last town, I think they hold a few buildings in Berdychi, in the area west of Avdeyevka.”

After mentioning other Russian victories in the heavily fortified towns in the Donetsk region, including Novomikhailovka and Pervomaiskoye, Sleboda noted that Western media has been unable to ignore the reality. “I think the first time I’ve seen it in print by a British journalist, very anti-Russian, Iain Martin, ‘It’s time we talked about the fall of Kyiv.’”

Asked about French President Emmanuel Macron’s comments that he may send troops into Ukraine in the Odessa region. “This is being batted around in the Russian analyst and commentary circles on the conflict is that all these security guarantees, documents that were signed with Kiev by numerous countries,” Sleboda began, referring to the Kiev regime signing security guarantees with France, Canada, Italy, Germany, the UK, and Denmark. “[They] were mainly about supply of arms and training and intelligence and things like that. But, they also [it is rumored] held secret clauses, basically dividing up responsibility for physically maintaining the territory of the Kiev regime in different areas of the country. For instance, Odessa fell within the area of France’s purview.”

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Netanyahu’s ‘Personal Agenda’ is Not Hostages

Over the weekend, tens of thousands of Israelis took to the streets to demand that the government hold new elections and urgently negotiate for the release of the remaining Israeli hostages. Meanwhile, the Israeli government started conscripting ultra-orthodox Jews who were previously immune, causing further divisions in Israeli society.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has a “personal agenda” driving his actions in Gaza and the Israeli hostages are not a priority for him, Israeli-American anthropologist and anti-war activist Jeff Halper [told Sputnik’s Fault Lines](#) on Monday.

“[Netanyahu] has a personal agenda because the longer the war goes on, there won’t be elections. He’s very unpopular. He’s being tried, he has three different trials going on, and he can delay, delay, delay everything as long as the war goes on,” Halper explained, noting that the Israeli military has an agenda of defeating Hamas, but not necessarily recovering the hostages. In contrast, Halper argues, for the Israeli public also supports the destruction of Hamas but saving the hostages is a much higher priority. “The disconnect between these two agendas that’s really propelling a lot of the protests.”

Earlier in the conversation, Halper noted that the protests occurring in Israel, which have been calling for ultra-orthodox Jews to be included in the country's compulsory military service, is something Israel must do to maintain its state of "permanent warfare."

Halper said that the inequality that some Israelis get to skip military service has "always been an issue. But again, what's changed now in the Israeli perspective is the fact that this isn't simply an issue of fairness.... [It has become] really an issue of the sustainability of Israel in many ways, to the degree that it's committed to permanent warfare."

However, the ultimate goal of Israel is to "quietize" the "Palestinian issue" so that it can move on to normalizing relations with the Arab world.

"The Arab peoples do not want to normalize with Israel in any way," Halper explained. "But the governments... are very interested in normalizing with Israel," noting that [Saudi Arabia](#) had made progress towards that before the October 7 Hamas attack. Unfortunately, Halper does not believe there is a just solution for the Palestinians that Israel will accept.

"You can't really have a just solution to the Palestinian issue because that means the end of Israel," Halper began. "So how do we impose an apartheid regime, but sweeten it enough in terms of power for the Palestinian Authority collaborators?"

"The issue is not to resolve, certainly in a just way, the Palestinian issue, the issue is how do we quietize it?"

Halper predicted that Israel ultimately would lock Palestinians into Bantustans and then call that a state, completing the "two-state solution" on paper but not in reality.

"The point being then to present a map that looks okay, and then you have a collaborationist Palestinian leadership that says 'okay, you know what, we can live with this,'" Halper envisioned. "Then there's so many interests against this that the Palestinians can't resist anymore because they're not seen as having justification since more or less, the issue has been settled."

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unwilling suicide bombing attack on the Kerch bridge to Crimea as well,” Sleboda explained. “They admitted to all of these, and these are acts of terrorism, of state terrorism.”

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US State Department Appoints New Chief Diversity Officer – Blinken

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) – The US Department of State has appointed Zakiya Carr Johnson as its chief diversity and inclusion officer (CDIO), according to a release on Tuesday.

“I am appointing Zakiya Carr Johnson as the Department of State’s next Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer (CDIO),” US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in the release.

Blinken noted that the State Department would continue to pursue diversity “aggressively,” saying that it was critical to US national security.

The State Department’s Office of Diversity and Inclusion was established in June 2021, with Conny Mayer as acting CDIO.

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US Issues Final Rule to Create Requirements for Size of Train Crews – Transportation Dept.

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) – US authorities issued a final rule establishing minimum safety requirements for the size of train crews, the US Department of Transportation said on Tuesday.

“Today, as part of the Biden-Harris Administration’s ongoing efforts to strengthen rail safety and hold railroads accountable, Secretary Pete Buttigieg announced that the US Department of Transportation’s Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has issued a final rule establishing minimum safety requirements for the size of train crews,” the statement said.

The new rule comes amid heightened focus on railway safety after a Norfolk Southern train carrying toxic chemicals derailed near East Palestine, Ohio on February 3, 2023.

According to the Transportation Department, the new rule will enhance safety in the rail industry by emphasizing the importance and need for a second crewmember on all trains.

“Common sense tells us that large freight trains, some of which can be over three miles long, should have at least two crew members on board — and now there’s a federal regulation in place to ensure trains are safely staffed,” Buttigieg said in the statement, adding that this rule is long overdue.

A second crewmember performs important safety functions that could be lost when reducing crew size to a single person, according to the statement.

The new rule establishes minimum standards and closes a loophole that companies used to reduce crew size without performing a rigorous risk assessment, it added.

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Trump Says Posted \$175Mln Bond in Civil Fraud Case

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) – Former US President Donald Trump said that he has posted a \$175 million bond as he appeals the judgment against him in the New York civil fraud case.

"I've just posted a 175 Million Dollar Bond with the sadly failing and very troubled State of New York, based on a Corrupt Judge and Attorney General who used a Statute that was never used for this before, where no Jury was allowed, my financial statements were conservative and had a 100% perfect caution/non-reliance clause, there were no victims (except me!), there was no crime or damage, there was only success and HAPPY BANKS," Trump wrote on Truth Social on Monday.

The former president reiterated that the case against him was fabricated.

"The Crooked Judge, to suit his narrative, valued Mar-a-Lago, in Palm Beach, Florida, at \$18,000,000, when it is worth 50 to 100 times that amount. He ruled I was guilty before he ever saw the case," Trump said.

The civil fraud case was brought by New York Attorney General Letitia James against the former president for allegedly lying about the value of his properties.

Trump stated in the Truth post that the judge should be disbarred while James should be impeached.

He added that he had also posted a \$91 million bond in another case in the New York court, which he also called "fake."

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Blinken Says West Must Bolster Defense Industry, See Ukraine Aid as Investment In Itself

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - The West must ensure that its defense industrial base is as strong as possible as the challenges it is facing in Ukraine will not go away any time soon, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday.

Blinken made the remarks at a meeting with French Defense Minister Sebastien Lecornu during a visit to the headquarters of weapons manufacturer Nexter Systems in Versailles.

"But it [Ukraine aid] is also an investment in ourselves. And what we've been talking about today, besides the immediate challenges for Ukraine, is the work that both our countries are doing ... in building back and strengthening our defense industrial base, because unfortunately, the challenges that we are seeing in Ukraine are not going to go away tomorrow. And we have to make sure that we have means not only to continue to help Ukraine but to make sure our own defenses are as strong as possible," Blinken said.

That is why the supplementary budget request that President Joe Biden made to Congress "must be fulfilled as quickly as possible," he stressed.

Virtually all the money requested for defense articles for Ukraine will be invested in the United States to produce "what's needed," the secretary said.

The Biden administration looks to Congress to act "swiftly and quickly and effectively" to approve the supplemental request with multi-billion-dollar aid for Kiev, Blinken said.

Western countries have provided hundreds of billions of dollars worth of aid to Ukraine since the start of Russia's special military operation in February 2022. Aid shipments began in 2022 with artillery munitions and training and have escalated to include tanks, advanced air-defense systems, missiles and cluster munitions. The Kremlin has consistently warned against the West's continued arms deliveries to Ukraine, saying that they only prolong the conflict.

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UNSC to Consider Iran's Meeting Request on Israeli Attacks on Consulate -President

UNITED NATIONS, April 2 (Sputnik) - The United Nations Security Council will consider Iranian requests to schedule a meeting regarding Israeli attacks against its consulate in Damascus, the

Maltese Ambassador to the UN Ambassador and President of the Council Vanessa Frazier said on Monday.

"Of course, we will consider that. I have to read the letter first," Frazier replied with regard to a question whether she has seen an Iranian letter to the Council Presidency and whether she plans on scheduling a meeting.

Earlier in the day, the Iranian Mission to the UN sent a letter to the Security Council President calling for a meeting on the Israeli attacks against its consulate in Damascus.

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F-35 Joint Strike Fighter Approved to Fly Again in Lightning Conditions - Reports

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - The Lockheed Martin F-35 J Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter, at a projected \$1.7 trillion, the most expensive aircraft and military weapons program in history, has after an almost four-year ban been cleared to fly again in lightning weather conditions, US media reports said.

The Department of Defense has finally removed its restriction imposed in June 2020 that no F-35A should fly in thunderstorm conditions, the Breaking Defense military affairs website reported on Monday.

The Defense Department formally lifted the restrictions on March 19 after approving hardware and software upgrades to the aircraft's lightning protection system, Breaking Defense cited F-35 Pentagon-Lockheed Martin Joint Program Office (JPO) spokesman Russ Goemaere as saying.

The F-35A had been prohibited from flying within 25 miles of lightning since June 2020, when damaged tubes were found installed on the On-Board Inert Gas Generation System (OBIGGS) in several of the aircraft, Breaking Defense said.

The OBIGGS prevents a jet from exploding when being struck by lightning by pumping nitrogen-enriched air into the fuel tanks to make its contents inert, and damage to the tubes carrying the inert gas raised the specter that the system would not function properly in an emergency, the report said.

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Attack on Iranian Consulate in Damascus Should Be Concerning to US - Nuland

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - The United States should be concerned about the possible consequences of the Israeli attack on the Iranian consulate general building in Syria's Damascus, former Under Secretary for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland said on Monday.

When asked whether the incident may lead to further escalation, including a direct confrontation between Israel and Iran, Nuland stated, "Obviously, that's something to be concerned about from a US perspective."

"The administration has been trying since October 7 to keep this conflict from escalating beyond Hamas-Israel and beyond Gaza and particularly, has been trying to ensure that it does not spread much beyond the low-grade conflict in the north of Israel, between Hezbollah and Israeli forces," Nuland said in an interview with CNN. "Iran had been constraining Hezbollah in the north and maybe it'll take those chains off or as you say, we could see a direct strike." Earlier in the day, Iran said that Israel struck the consular section of Iran's embassy complex in Damascus in a clear violation of the rules on the inviolability of diplomatic premises. Iranian Ambassador to Syria Hossein Akbari said that five to seven people were killed. The IRGC has confirmed the death of two of its generals in the attack.

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Florida Supreme Court Upholds Restrictions on Abortion - Ruling

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - The Florida Supreme Court said in a ruling that the state can move forward with restricting access to abortions, overturning more than three decades of legal precedent in the state.

"After considering each of these sources and consistent with longstanding principles of judicial deference to legislative enactments, we conclude there is no basis under the Privacy Clause to invalidate the statute," the ruling, issued Monday, said.

The court receded from prior decisions in which it held that the Privacy Clause guaranteed the right to receive an abortion through the end of the second trimester of pregnancy, the ruling said.

The court upheld a 15-week abortion ban in the state and allowed a six-week ban to take effect 30 days after the ruling.

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Iran Reserves Right to Take Action in Response to Israeli Attack on Consulate - UN Mission

UNITED NATIONS, April 2 (Sputnik) - Iran has the right to take action as a response to today's Israeli attack on the Iranian consulate in Damascus, the Iranian Mission to the UN said.

"The aggressor Zionist regime bears full responsibility for its consequences and the Islamic Republic of Iran reserves its legitimate and inherent right under international law and the United Nations Charter to take a decisive response to such reprehensible acts," the statement said on Monday.

In addition, the statement asked to convene a UN Security Council meeting, calling the attack on its consulate "a huge violation of international law."

Earlier in the day, Iranian ambassador to Syria Hossein Akbari said that several military advisers from the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) were killed on Monday in an

Israeli air force attack on the Iranian consulate general in Damascus.

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Wall Street On Wobbly Footing For Q2 Start As Fed Again Smothers Rate Cut Hopes

NEW YORK, April 2 (Sputnik) - US stocks made their second quarter debut on a wobbly footing on Monday as the Federal Reserve's unwavering caution on rate cuts doused sentiment on Wall Street where investors were increasingly getting impatient for a policy pivot from tight post-pandemic credit conditions.

The New York Stock Exchange's S&P 500 index, which tracks stocks of the top 500 US companies, finished the first trading day of April down 11 points, or 0.2%, at 5,243.77. Last week, the blue-chip indicator ended the first quarter up almost 10%. It had also its best week since mid-December, rising 2.4%.

The technology-laden Nasdaq Composite Index, which comprises marquee "FAANG" names — i.e. Facebook(META-banned in Russia), Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google — settled at 16,340, up 17 points, or 0.1%. The Nasdaq rose 2.9% last week and 9% for the first quarter.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average, Wall Street's broadest equities indicator that tracks the stocks of 30 large US corporations, finished at 39,567, down 241 points, or 0.6%. Last week, the Dow rose 2.1% — its most since a 2.9% rally during the week ended December 15. It finished the first quarter up around 5%.

There is no real threat of a recession in the United States and inflation isn't far from the Fed's call but the central bank still needs to see more price moderation before embarking on interest rate cuts, Chairman Jerome Powell said Friday.

"We don't need to be in a hurry to cut," Powell told a banking forum. "Reducing rates too soon would be very disruptive. We want to be more confident before we take that step."

Runaway inflation triggered by supply chain breakdowns and business slowdowns in the aftermath of the COVID-19 prompted the Fed to hike rates by as much as 11 times between March 2022 and July 2023. That brought rates to a range of between 5.25% and 5.5% — versus the zero to 0.25% range introduced soon after the start of the pandemic.

The 5.25% to 5.5% range has been in place since July last year.

The central bank has said that it wants to see inflation drop to around 2% per annum before embarking on rate cuts.

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Israel Agreed to Take US Concerns Over Military Action in Rafah Into Account – White House

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) – During a virtual meeting between the two countries' senior officials, Israel agreed to take into account US concerns regarding a potential military action in

Rafah after Washington voiced concerns about the consequences of an operation in the refugee-flooded Palestinian city, according to a joint statement of the meeting published by the White House.

“Assistant to the President and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan together with Secretary of State Antony Blinken convened the Strategic Consultative Group (SCG) with Israeli counterparts today by secure video conference,” the statement said on Monday. “The U.S. side expressed its concerns with various courses of action in Rafah. The Israeli side agreed to take these concerns into account and to have follow-up discussions between experts, overseen by the SCG.”

The meeting lasted for about two hours and the Israeli side was chaired by National Security Advisor Tzachi Hanegbi and Minister for Strategic Affairs Ron Dermer, the statement added.

The group has agreed to hold an in-person follow-up meeting next week, the statement said.

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US Citizen Tested Positive for 'Bird Flu' - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - A US citizen tested positive for the highly pathogenic avian influenza virus, known as "bird flu," the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said in a statement on Monday.

"A person in the United States has tested positive for highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) A(H5N1) virus ('H5N1 bird flu')," the statement said.

According to the statement, the patient, who had direct contact with dairy cattle in Texas and was suspected to be infected with bird flu, experienced only eye redness. The individual is currently in recovery, self-isolating, and undergoing antiviral treatment.

"This infection does not change the H5N1 bird flu human health risk assessment for the US general public, which CDC considers to be low. However, people with close or prolonged, unprotected exposures to infected birds or other animals (including livestock), or to environments contaminated by infected birds or other animals, are at greater risk of infection," the statement said.

The statement indicated that the CDC is monitoring and testing individuals who may have been exposed to infected or potentially infected birds/animals and are exhibiting symptoms.

Furthermore, the statement added that this is the second case of a person testing positive for influenza A(H5N1) in the US, following a 2022 case in Colorado.

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US Lets Pacific Island State Choose Between US, China - Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, April 2 (Sputnik) - The US Envoy to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield said that the US does not force Pacific islands to choose between Washington and Beijing.

"It's a huge problem that that we've encountered specifically in New York, but I think it's a global problem as well, where the Chinese made a very concerted, forceful effort to kind of rewrite the rules..." Thomas-Greenfield said during the conference of the Center for Strategic and International Studies on Monday.

"But ... we're not trying to force countries to choose between the US and China. What we're doing is giving them a choice to make..." she said.

The moderator said that one of the concerns the US and its allies have is Chinese efforts in the Pacific Island region which go against their equity because of global competition as well as their attempts to rewrite the international rules.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) –

ISRAELI ATTACK ON IRANIAN CONSULATE IN SYRIA

* An Israeli airstrike fully destroyed the building of the Iranian consulate in Damascus on Monday, and the attack killed or injured everyone who was inside, the Syrian Defense Ministry said.

* The Israeli airstrike on the Iranian consulate general building in Syria's Damascus on Monday killed a commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), Mohammad Reza Zahedi, Iran's Fars state-run news agency reported.

* The Israeli attack on the Iranian consulate general building in Syria's Damascus killed five people and injured 12 more, the Tasnim news agency reported.

* The United Nations is concerned over reported Israeli attacks on the Iranian consulate in Syria's capital city, Damascus, the UN Spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

* The IRGC confirmed that the Israeli attack on the Iranian consulate general building in Syria's Damascus on Monday killed two IRGC generals and five officers.

* Russia strongly condemns Israeli airstrike targeting the Iranian consulate general building in Damascus, and considers attacks on diplomatic facilities unacceptable, the Foreign Ministry said.

MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

* The United States is mulling selling F-15 fighter jets, air-to-air missiles, and precision bombs to Israel as the US ally continues bombing Gaza and is preparing a ground operation in refugee-flooded Rafah, Politico reported on Monday, citing a congressional aide and a person familiar with the discussions.

* Secretary of State Antony Blinken during a virtual meeting with Israeli officials on Monday will reiterate the United States' concerns about Israel's possible ground operation in Rafah, spokesperson Matthew Miller said.

* White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre said that US and Israeli officials are holding a

virtual meeting to discuss a potential military operation in Rafah.

CROCUS CITY TERRORIST ATTACK IN RUSSIA

* The Moscow Basmany Court on Monday ruled to arrest Yakubjoni Yusufzoda, the 10th defendant in the case of the March 22 Crocus City Hall terrorist attack, a Sputnik correspondent reported from the court.

* Media reports about the alleged training and radicalization of the Crocus terrorists in Turkey are not true, a Turkish diplomatic source told Sputnik.

* The United States is covering those responsible for the Crocus concert venue terrorist attack, and the office of US President Joe Biden is intensifying work to create a distorted picture of what happened, the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) said.

* One of the foreigners detained in Russia's Dagestan Republic has admitted that he took weapons to the city of Mytishchi near Moscow to terrorists who attacked the Crocus City Hall concert venue, according to a video published by the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB).

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* Kiev has decided to celebrate April Fools' Day with "idiotic news," Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said when commenting on the Ukrainian Security Service's accusations against Margarita Simonyan, the editor-in-chief of RT and the Rossiya Segodnya media group.

* The Ukrainian armed forces have lost up to 510 soldiers in the Donetsk direction in the past day, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

* Moscow will analyze the situation related to the expiration of the term of office of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in May in order to declare its position, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

* Russia intends to appeal to international courts after sending a note on the fight against terrorism to Kiev, and the relevant documents are being prepared, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

FIDAN-LAVROV TALKS

* Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan discussed by phone with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov the safety of navigation in the Black Sea, as well as other regional issues, a Turkish diplomatic source told Sputnik on Monday.

* Lavrov discussed with Fidan the situation in the Black Sea region and the South Caucasus, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

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NATO Treaty Fails to Cover Hawaii, Other US States Should Leave Alliance - US Congressman

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Thomas Massie said on Monday that the entire United States should exit the NATO alliance, under the terms of which the state of Hawaii is not provided clear protections.

"Hawaii is not covered by the NATO treaty. Some experts say that needs to change. I say, let's get the other 49 states out," Massie said in a statement via social media platform X.

Although Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty provides for a collective response to an armed attack on an alliance member, Article 6 of the treaty limits territories covered under Article 5 to Europe, North America and islands in the Mediterranean Sea and Atlantic Ocean north of the Tropic of Cancer.

A US State Department spokesperson reportedly confirmed to CNN last week that Hawaii is not covered by Articles 5 or 6 of the treaty. However, Hawaii could be covered under Article 4, which allows alliance members to consult about situations in which the territorial integrity, independence or security of a member are threatened, the spokesperson said.

NATO would likely fail to reach a consensus on a treaty amendment to cover Hawaii because other alliance members also maintain territories outside the scope of Articles 5 and 6, the spokesperson said.

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US Authorities Arrest Man Who Rammed Car Into Gate at FBI Office in Atlanta – FBI

(Updates with statement from FBI's Atlanta office)

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) – US law enforcement forces have arrested a man who drove his car in the gates of the FBI office in Atlanta, the FBI said in a statement on Monday.

“Today, a person rammed into FBI Atlanta’s front gate shortly after noon. He was not associated with this facility,” the statement said.

Several special agents apprehended the man after he left the car, it added.

The FBI did not provide the suspect’s name and stated that his motives remain clear.

“The suspect was taken to a local hospital for evaluation. Currently we are looking into both state and federal charges,” the statement said, adding that no one was injured during the incident.

The FBI has opened an investigation into the case, according to the statement.

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Blinken Tell Abbas US Committed to Creation of Independent Palestine State - State Dept

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas that Washington is committed to creating independent Palestinian state with security guarantees for Israel, State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a readout of a phone call between the two officials on Monday.

"The Secretary stressed that the United States continues its urgent work of advancing a ceasefire as part of a hostage deal, which would also facilitate a surge of crucial humanitarian assistance into Gaza and create a pathway to a more enduring peace," Miller said. "The

Secretary also underscored the US commitment to the realization of the creation of an independent Palestinian state with security guarantees for Israel."

Members of the new Palestinian cabinet were sworn in on Sunday by President Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian Authority-run WAFA news agency reported.

On Thursday, newly appointed Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa presented the new cabinet and its work program to Abbas, who then signed a decree on the approval of the new government.

"Secretary Blinken reiterated that the United States looks forward to working with the new PA cabinet to promote peace, security, and prosperity and urged the implementation of necessary reforms," Miller said. "Secretary Blinken emphasized that a revitalized PA is essential to delivering results for the Palestinian people in both the West Bank and Gaza."

Meanwhile, White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre said on Monday that US and Israeli officials are holding a virtual meeting to discuss a potential military operation in Rafah.

The virtual meeting will be led by US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, Jean-Pierre added.

On Sunday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that the government had approved operational plans for a ground military operation in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, adding that the military was preparing to evacuate civilians from the city.

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France to Unveil Draft UNSC Resolution Calling for Permanent Ceasefire in Gaza – Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, April 1 (Sputnik) – France will unveil a draft UN Security Council resolution for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza later on Monday, French Envoy to the UN Nicolas de Rivièrè told reporters.

Earlier in March, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. The motion was sponsored by the 10 non-permanent members of the UNSC. Fourteen countries voted in favor, while the United States abstained. US envoy Linda Thomas-Greenfield opined that the resolution was "non-binding," which prompted Russia's envoy, Vassily Nebenzia, to remind his US counterpart that all UNSC resolutions were binding under international law and that he regretted that she has not "read the UN Charter."

China's envoy, Geng Shuang, pointed out that the US, as a permanent member of the Security Council, should lead by example in demonstrating commitment to implementing the UN Charter.

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US Arrest Man Who Rammed Car Into Gate at FBI Office in Atlanta - Reports

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) – US law enforcement forces have arrested a man who drove his car in the gates of the FBI office in Atlanta, CNN reported on Monday.

The incident happened in the early afternoon. The red SUV was crushed by the security barrier when the driver tried to enter the gates behind an authorized vehicle, according to the report.

The name of the suspect has not been released. He was detained by FBI agents who witnessed the incident and sent to a hospital for evaluation, the reports added.

No one from the FBI was hurt during the incident, CNN said, citing FBI spokesperson Tony Thomas. The FBI is opening an investigation, but there is currently no clear motive, it added.

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Oil At 5-Month High As Q2 Trading Begins Amid Supportive Data, Supply Squeeze

NEW YORK, April 1 (Sputnik) - Crude prices hit five-month highs on Monday as trading for the second quarter began amid supportive US and Chinese economic data and a supply squeeze by producers in OPEC+ that accelerated this year's rally.

Brent crude, the global benchmark for oil, settled at \$87.42 per barrel, up 42 cents, or 0.5% on the day. It earlier peaked at \$87.98, reaching a level not seen since its October 30 high of \$90.15. At the close of last week's trading, Brent finished the first quarter up 13%.

West Texas Intermediate, the benchmark for US crude, settled at \$83.71 per barrel — up 54 cents, or 0.7%, after a session high at \$84.49 — which marked a peak since the \$85.30 it scaled on October 30. Last week, the so-called WTI finished the first quarter up 16%.

In Monday's trading, both Brent and WTI rallied as US manufacturing activity grew for the first time in 1-1/2 years in March as production rebounded sharply and new orders increased. This was despite employment at factories being subdued by "sizable layoff activity" and manufacturers facing higher price pressures too.

Chinese manufacturing activity also expanded after a notable stretch — growing for the first time in six months — according to an official factory survey. China is the world's largest oil buyer and any increased economic activity in the country has direction correlation with crude demand and prices.

"Chinese oil demand is arguably the one missing factor outside of geopolitical headlines capable of taking oil prices to the next level," Bob Yawger, director of energy futures at Mizuho, wrote in a note. "Strong summer gasoline demand and a rebound in China oil demand could be the one-two punch that support(s) \$100 a barrel."

Aside from supportive US and Chinese data, European oil demand firmed, rising 100,000 barrels per day during the year to February versus a forecast contraction of 200,000 barrels, according to analysis by Wall Street bank Goldman Sachs.

Oil producers in both the United States and OPEC+ seem determined to keep the market in a supply deficit this year versus the highs of 2022 and 2023, said analysts.

OPEC+ intends to maintain supply cuts of 2.2 million barrels per day until the end of June.

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Moscow's Request for Extradition of Kiev's Security Chief 'Bilateral Issue' - UN Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, April 1 (Sputnik) - The United Nations sees Russia's request for Ukraine to extradite its security chief and others over suspected involvement in terrorism as a "bilateral issue," UN Spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Monday.

"Extradition is a bilateral issue between two member states and we have no particular comment," Dujarric told journalists.

On Sunday, Russia's Foreign Ministry said that it had conveyed to Ukraine its demand that those involved in terrorist attacks on Russian territory, including Ukrainian Security Service head Vasyl Malyuk, be arrested and extradited to Moscow. Russia is seeking Malyuk's arrest after he admitted involvement in the bombing of the Crimean Bridge in October 2022.

A diplomat at the Russian Foreign Ministry told Sputnik on Sunday that Moscow recently handed over a note on the fight against terrorism to Kiev through an established channel in Minsk.

The note demands the extradition of those involved in organizing terrorist attacks but does not refer to the attack on Crocus City Hall, as the investigation into that attack must be completed first, the diplomat said, adding that an additional request will be drawn up, based on the results of the probe.

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US Weighs Selling Israel F-15s, JDAM Bombs, Air-to-Air Missiles – Reports

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) – The United States is mulling selling F-15 fighter jets, air-to-air missiles, and precision bombs to Israel as the US ally continues bombing Gaza and is preparing a ground operation in refugee-flooded Rafah, Politico reported on Monday, citing a congressional aide and a person familiar with the discussions.

The two countries are discussing a sale of up to 50 new F-15 fighter jets, 30 AIM-120 Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missiles, and a number of Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM) kits also known as 500lbs (230 kg) precision bombs, the report said.

The Biden administration has already notified some relevant congressional committees about its intention to sell the weapons to Israel, but the sale has not been yet formally approved and it could take years to deliver them, the report added.

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No Request Yet for UNSC Meeting After Attack on Iranian Consulate in Damascus - President

UNITED NATIONS, April 1 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council has not yet received any request for a meeting after Tehran accused Israel of conducting a deadly airstrike on the Iranian consulate in Damascus, Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations Vanessa Frazier said on Monday.

Malta holds the presidency of the Security Council for the month of April.

"We have not had any request so far," Frazier said in a briefing.

But if a request comes in, the meeting will be scheduled, she added.

Earlier in the day, Iran said that Israel struck the consular section of Iran's embassy complex in Damascus in a clear violation of the rules on the inviolability of diplomatic premises.

Iranian Ambassador to Syria Hossein Akbari said that five to seven people were killed. The IRGC has confirmed the death of two of its generals in the attack.

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US Special Envoy Traveling to Saudi Arabia, Oman For Peace Talks On Yemen - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) - US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking is traveling to Saudi Arabia and Oman this week to engage in talks aimed at ending Houthi attacks that hinder Yemen's peace and aid delivery, the State Department said in a statement on Monday.

"US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking is traveling to Saudi Arabia and Oman this week to meet with partners to discuss the need for an immediate cessation of Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and [the] Gulf of Aden, which are undermining progress on the Yemen peace process and the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Yemen and other countries in need," the statement said.

Furthermore, the statement said that US Special Envoy Lenderking plans to discuss de-escalation steps and focus on lasting peace in Yemen with regional partners.

"The United States remains firmly committed to supporting a durable peace in Yemen and alleviating the complex humanitarian and economic crises harming the Yemeni people. The United States supports a return to UN-led peace efforts once the Houthis halt their indiscriminate attacks," the statement added.

The Houthis vowed in November 2023 to attack any ships associated with Israel until it halts military actions in the Gaza Strip. This led the US and the European Union to announce a multinational operation to secure navigation in the Red Sea. US and UK forces have launched numerous strikes against Houthi positions in a bid to degrade their ability to target commercial vessels.

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Guests Boycott Biden's Iftar Dinner Over Support for Israel Amid Gaza Conflict - Reports

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) - Several people who were invited to a White House dinner to commemorate Ramadan have declined to attend due to frustration with the administration's stance on Israel amid the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, CNN reported on Monday.

According to the report, President Joe Biden plans to hold the iftar dinner at the White House on Tuesday.

Vice President Kamala Harris, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and senior White House aides are expected to attend, along with fewer than a dozen other invitees, the report said.

The report noted that last year, instead of holding an iftar dinner, the White House celebrated Eid al-Fitr with a reception for nearly 350 guests, marking the conclusion of Ramadan.

On October 7, 2023, Palestinian movement Hamas launched a large-scale rocket attack against Israel and breached the border, attacking both civilian neighborhoods and military bases. Nearly 1,200 people in Israel were killed, and some 240 others abducted during the attack. Israel launched retaliatory strikes, ordered a complete blockade of Gaza, and started a ground incursion into the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages. Over 32,700 people have been killed so far in the Gaza Strip, local authorities say.

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Canada Expands Scope of Assisted Departures From Haiti to Include All Citizens – Ministry

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) – The Canadian government will be expanding in the coming days the scope of its assisted departures from Haiti to include all Canadian nationals and permanent residents who wish to leave, the Canadian foreign ministry said on Monday.

Last week, Canada announced that it would begin conducting small-scale assisted departures from Port-au-Prince toward the neighboring Dominican Republic in an operation that only allowed for the evacuation of the most vulnerable Canadians.

"Starting as early as Wednesday of this week, if security and weather conditions allow, Canada is expanding assisted departure operations from Port-au-Prince to Canada to include Canadian citizens, permanent residents of Canada and their immediate eligible family members who wish to leave Haiti," Global Affairs Canada (GAC) said in a statement.

Canada's assisted departure operation from Port-au-Prince to the Dominican Republic is now complete and successfully assisted 153 Canadians to exit Haiti, GAC said.

The new stage of evacuations will take individuals from the Haitian capital toward a "secondary safe location" prior to their departure for Quebec's city of Montreal in charter flights, the ministry added. All flights are at the traveler's own expense, it added.

On February 29, gang violence erupted in the downtown area of Port-au-Prince while Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry was visiting Kenya to seek an agreement for the deployment of foreign forces in Haiti to fight organized crime. The gangs said their goal was to prevent the prime minister from returning to Haiti. They took control over many parts of the city and stormed

Haiti's largest prison, freeing an unconfirmed number of inmates. The Haitian government declared a state of emergency in the capital region. On March 11, Henry announced that he would resign once a transitional presidential council was created.

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Malta's Envoy to UN Says UNSC Meeting On Ukraine Not Scheduled, But 'Inevitable'

UNITED NATIONS, April 1 (Sputnik) – Malta's permanent representative to the United Nations, Vanessa Frazier, who became President of the UN Security Council in April, said on Monday that a meeting on Ukraine is not scheduled but is "inevitable."

"It is inevitable that there will be meetings on Ukraine," Frazier told reporters, explaining that there is an ongoing conflict in the country.

However, Ukraine was not included in the initial work program of Malta's presidency, she added.

Frazier also did not rule out the topic of Ukraine being discussed during other events in the UN.

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US Cannot Trust Taliban to 'Keep a Lid' on Islamic State in Afghanistan - Congressman

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) - The United States cannot trust the Taliban (under UN sanctions for terrorism) to address the activities of the Islamic State – Khorasan Province (ISKP, also known as ISIS-K, banned in Russia) terrorist group in Afghanistan, US Congressman Michael Waltz said on Monday.

"We cannot trust the Taliban to keep a lid on the rise of ISIS-K in Afghanistan," Waltz said in an op-ed for Fox News. "Unlike Iraq where we could deploy assets from nearby bases in the Middle East to take on ISIS, there is very little we can do to address the growing threat in Afghanistan."

The Biden administration's withdrawal from Afghanistan left a power vacuum for ISKP to fill, Waltz said.

Moreover, the Biden administration's failure to secure the US' borders from illegal immigration makes the country increasingly vulnerable to terrorist attacks, Waltz said.

What happens in Afghanistan does not stay in Afghanistan, Waltz said. The US should have learned such a lesson after the September 11 terrorist attacks, Waltz added.

The US could support Afghan allies that fight against both ISKP and the Taliban through "sophisticated channels," Waltz said. Further US military assets in Asia, rather than Europe, could help counterterrorism efforts, Waltz said.

ISKP claimed responsibility for the March 22 terrorist attack on Crocus City Hall in Russia, which resulted in at least 695 casualties, including 144 deaths, according to the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations.

Last week, the head of the Taliban's political office, Suhail Shaheen, told Sputnik that ISKP terrorists are mainly hiding outside of Afghanistan in other Asian countries.

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White House Says Israeli Law Allowing Ban of Foreign Media Outlets 'Concerning'

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) – White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre called reports about a new Israeli law that makes it possible to ban any international media outlet from working in the country "concerning."

Earlier in the day, Israel's parliament, the Knesset, passed a law that enables the prime minister to close any foreign media outlet in the country if its broadcasting "harms in a real way" the nation's security.

"We believe in the freedom of the press. It is critically important, and the United States supports the critically important work of journalists around the world and that includes those who are reporting in the conflict in Gaza," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing when asked to comment on the law. "If those reports are true, it is concerning to us."

The Qatari state-funded news outlet Al Jazeera is expected to be the first victim of the new law, as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated earlier that he would act immediately to shut down the outlet once the law passes.

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United Airlines Asking Pilots to Take Time Off Over Boeing Plane Shortage - Reports

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) -Airline company United Airlines is asking its pilots to take time off this May due to a shortage of new Boeing planes, ABC News reported on Monday.

"Due to the recent delays in Boeing deliveries, our forecasted (flight hours) have been reduced and we are offering our pilots voluntary programs for the month of May to reduce staffing," United Airlines spokesperson Leslie Scott is quoted as saying in the report.

The airline does not expect to get all of the Boeing planes it ordered for 2024 and 2025, according to the report. American Airlines ordered 191 planes this year and 127 planes next year, but will only receive 88 and 64 planes, respectively.

According to the report, the airline is offering short-term leaves and unpaid time off but they are not mandatory for pilots.

In January, the US Federal Aviation Administration temporarily grounded all Boeing 737 Max 9 planes in the United States after a door panel blew out on an Alaska Airlines flight.

Boeing has also experienced issues with other aircraft. In particular, an oxygen leak was discovered on board a Boeing 737 that was to transport US Secretary of State Antony Blinken from the Davos World Economic Forum in January. The leak proved impossible to mend,

making the plane unsafe to fly.

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Blinken to Reiterate Rafah Invasion Concerns at Talks With Israeli Officials - State Dept

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) - Secretary of State Antony Blinken during a virtual meeting with Israeli officials on Monday will reiterate the United States' concerns about Israel's possible ground operation in Rafah, spokesperson Matthew Miller said.

"The Secretary is at the White House right now participating in the meeting with the representatives of the Israeli government to lay out an alternative approach to dealing with the remaining Hamas battalions in Rafah," Miller told a briefing. "The Secretary, I expect, will reiterate the concerns that he expressed when he was in Israel some 10 days ago now about the dramatic humanitarian impact of a full-scale ground invasion in Rafah."

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US Court Sentences Murderer Alex Murdaugh to 40 Years for Financial Crimes - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) - A US court sentenced convicted murderer Alex Murdaugh to 40 more years in federal prison for a variety of financial crimes, the US Justice Department confirmed to Sputnik.

On Monday, a federal court sentenced Murdaugh to a total of 40 years in prison for 22 criminal counts, US Attorney's Office spokesperson Veronica Hill said.

Murdaugh is already serving two life sentences for killing his wife and son.

The court sentenced Murdaugh to 360 months on four of the counts, to be served concurrently, Hill said. The court also sentenced him to 240 months on four other counts, to be served concurrently to each other and the concurrent to the aforementioned four counts, Hill said.

The court further sentenced Murdaugh to 120 months on 14 counts, to be served concurrent to each other but consecutive to the first eight counts, Hill said.

In September, Murdaugh pleaded guilty to crimes including wire fraud, bank fraud and money laundering for having engaged in three different schemes as a personal injury attorney to obtain money and property from clients.

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US Has No Confirmation of Target, Responsible Party in Damascus Strike – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) – The United States so far has no confirmation of the target or the responsible party in the attack on Damascus earlier in the day and is in conversations with regional partners regarding the incident, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

Earlier in the day, Iranian ambassador to Syria Hossein Akbari said that several military advisers from the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) were killed on Monday in an Israeli air force attack on the Iranian consulate general in Damascus.

"We are in conversations with partners in the region gathering more information but at this point don't have confirmation either of the target or the responsible party," Miller said during a press briefing.

When asked to confirm if the strike on Damascus would have any impact on the hostage talks between Hamas and Israel, Miller responded that "there is no reason why this incident should have any impact on the hostage talks."

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Blinken to Reiterate Rafah Invasion Concerns at Talks With Israeli Officials - State Dept

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) - Secretary of State Antony Blinken will reiterate the United States' concerns about Israel's possible ground operation in Rafah during a virtual meeting with Israeli officials on Monday, spokesperson Matthew Miller told reporters on Monday.

"The Secretary is at the White House right now participating in the meeting with the representatives of the Israeli government to lay out an alternative approach to dealing with the remaining Hamas battalions in Rafah," Miller said. "The Secretary, I expect, will reiterate the concerns that he expressed when he was in Israel some 10 days ago now about the dramatic humanitarian impact of a full-scale ground invasion in Rafah."

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White House on Claim Tying Havana Syndrome to Russia: Intel Community Has Not Concluded It

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) - The US intelligence community has not concluded that Russia has been involved in "Havana syndrome" cases, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Monday.

When asked about a CBS report alleging "Russian nexus," Jean-Pierre said: "I am going to be really careful here."

"The intelligence community has not concluded that," the spokesperson said during a press briefing. "That particular piece about Russia I know that they had not concluded that."

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White House Says 'Looking Into' Reports of Israeli Strike on Iranian Consulate in Syria

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) – The White House said Monday that it was “looking into” reports of an Israeli strike on the Iranian consulate in Damascus that killed a senior IRGC commander and several Iranian diplomats.

“I’m aware of the reports. Our team is looking into it,” White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said at a press briefing.

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UN Trying to Get All Security Guarantees Before Going to Al-Shifa Hospital - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, April 1 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is trying to get all security guarantees before entering Al-Shifa hospital, UN Spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Monday.

"We are trying to ensure that we have all the security guarantees that we need [including the permission from the Israeli government]," Dujarric said in a briefing.

The UN is sending its mission to Al-Shifa as a response to the Israeli government ending its seige of the hospital, he said.

Dujarric added that the mission is trying to move as quickly as possible while not compromising their safety.

Earlier today, the Iranian Foreign Ministry demanded an immediate international investigation into the Israeli raid on Gaza's Shifa Hospital after two weeks of hostilities left the place in rubble.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) announced the end of a "precise operational activity" in the Gaza Strip's largest hospital earlier in the day. The military said it killed "terrorists" inside the hospital, while "preventing harm to civilians, patients, and medical teams."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday that IDF troops killed more than 200 fighters hiding inside the complex. He accused Palestinian armed group Hamas of turning the facility into their main headquarters in northern Gaza.

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White House Confirms US, Israeli Officials Holding Virtual Meeting on Rafah on Monday

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) – White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre said on Monday that US and Israeli officials are holding a virtual meeting to discuss a potential military operation in Rafah.

"I can confirm that there is a virtual meeting happening today with both, US officials and Israeli officials, to discuss Rafah, the situation in Rafah, and obviously the next steps that we have been hearing that the Israeli government wants to take," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing.

The virtual meeting will be led by US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, Jean-Pierre added.

On Sunday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that the government had approved operational plans for a ground military operation in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, adding that the military was preparing to evacuate civilians from the city.

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Ultraviolet Spectrometer Integrated in Geocorona Mission Satellite 'Bus' - BAE Systems

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) - BAE Systems has integrated a spectrometer to measure ultraviolet light onto the satellite vehicle that is scheduled to carry NASA's earth-monitoring satellite into orbit next year, the company announced in a press release on Monday.

"BAE Systems has successfully completed the integration of the Carruthers Geocorona Observatory's ultraviolet (UV) spectrometer onto the satellite bus, the next major step in completing the NASA Earth-monitoring satellite," the release said.

The Carruthers is a small satellite or SmallSat, that is designed around BAE Systems' configurable spacecraft platform., the company said.

"Once on orbit at Lagrange Point 1 (L1), the observatory will use an advanced UV imager to observe the exosphere - the outermost part of the atmosphere - to determine how it changes in response to space weather caused by the Sun," the release said.

Carruthers is expected to be the first SmallSat to operate at L1, a gravitationally stable orbit point between the Earth and the Sun about 1 million miles away, and it will be the first satellite to provide continuous observations of the Earth's exosphere. The satellite is currently scheduled to launch in 2025, BAE Systems said.

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Biden Denies Declaring Transgender Visibility Day on Same Date as Easter - White House

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Monday that he never declared Transgender Visibility Day on the same date as the Easter holiday, following criticism of the decision.

Biden for the fourth year in a row issued a presidential proclamation to celebrate Transgender Day of Visibility on March 31, 2024, but this year, the date coincided with the US Easter holiday. Former US President Donald Trump called the move appalling and urged the White House to

issue an apology to Christians. US House Speaker Mike Johnson also criticized the action. Biden said that Johnson is “thoroughly uninformed,” when asked about the lawmaker’s criticism.

“I didn’t do that,” Biden said, when asked to clarify how Johnson is allegedly uninformed. On Monday, Biden attended the White House’s annual Easter Egg Roll, which is a tradition dating back to 1878. The White House said that 40,000 people were expected to attend the event this year.

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Biden to Visit Collapsed Baltimore Bridge on Friday – White House

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) – US President Biden will visit the site of the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore on Friday, according to the White House press secretary.

“President Biden will travel to Baltimore on Friday to visit the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge, meet with state and local officials, and get [an] on-the-ground look at federal response efforts,” White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said at a press briefing.

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UN Concerned by Reports of Israeli Attack on Iranian Consulate in Damascus - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, April 1 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is concerned over reported Israeli attacks on the Iranian consulate in Syria’s capital city, Damascus, the UN Spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Monday.

“We are obviously very concerned by these reports, but we will wait to get a bit more information to opine,” Dujarric said in a briefing.

Earlier today, it was reported by Iranian media that there was an Israeli attack on the Iranian consulate general building in Syria’s Damascus on Monday, killing five people and injuring 12 more.

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US Army Orders \$483Mln Additional Hellfire, Air-to-Ground Missiles - Lockheed Martin

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) - The US Army has ordered almost half a billion dollars worth of additional air-to-ground and Hellfire missiles from Lockheed Martin, the company announced in a press release on Monday.

"The US Army awarded Lockheed Martin a follow-on production contract for Joint-Air-to-Ground Missiles (JAGM) and Hellfire missiles with a total value of \$483 million," the release said.

"Under the contract, Lockheed Martin will supply JAGM and Hellfire missiles as well as production support to the US Army, US Navy, and international customers," the company said.

"This contract is the third follow-on award that is a part of a multiple-year award that was initially awarded in March 2023. The total contract award value is for up to \$4.5 billion through 2025," the release said.

The JAGM and Hellfire systems are designed and developed in Orlando, Florida, and are manufactured at Lockheed Martin plants in Dallas; Orlando, and Ocala, Florida.; Archbald, Pennsylvania.; and Troy, Alabama. So far, more than 140,000 of them have been made, the company said.

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'Say Hello to Oyster Bunnies': Biden Blunders at White House Easter Event

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden made a gaffe at the White House's annual Easter Egg Roll on Monday, inviting guests to greet the "oyster bunnies" in attendance at his side.

"Thanks everybody, and by the way, say hello to oyster bunnies," Biden said during remarks at the event.

The White House Easter Egg Roll is a tradition dating back to 1878, in which children visit the presidential residence to participate in Easter-themed activities. The White House said that 40,000 people were expected to attend this year's event.

Biden said that he considers Easter a "time for forgiveness" and a chance for people to gather together, according to a White House pool report.

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US State Dept. Says 'Deeply Concerned' by Convictions of Human Rights Advocates in Vietnam

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) – The United States is "deeply concerned" by convictions of ethnic minority and religious freedom advocates in Vietnam and calls on Hanoi to respect human rights and release all detained individuals, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

"The United States is deeply concerned by ongoing convictions of Vietnamese ethnic minority and religious freedom advocates, including five convictions since January 2024," Miller said in a statement. "We call upon Vietnam to respect the rights of individuals to exercise freedoms of expression, association, and religion or belief. We reiterate our call on Vietnam to release all

those unjustly detained.”

The United States is “particularly troubled” by the 13-year sentence of religious freedom activist Y Krec Bya as well as by the multi-year prison terms of other human rights advocates Nay Y Blang, Danh Minh Quang, Thach Cuong, and To Hoang Chuong, the statement added.

Earlier in March, Human Rights Watch said that there were at least 163 people detained in Vietnam for their political views or beliefs.

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Blinken Congratulates Senegalese President-Elect Bassirou Diomaye Faye

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with Senegalese President-elect Bassirou Diomaye Faye on Monday to congratulate him on his electoral victory last week, according to a release.

“Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke today with Senegal’s President-elect, Bassirou Diomaye Faye. The Secretary congratulated President-elect Faye on his election and commended the people and institutions of Senegal for a peaceful and inclusive electoral process,” the release stated.

Blinken also emphasized America’s “strong interest” in deepening the US partnership with Senegal.

Faye, 44, is expected to be inaugurated as Senegal’s fifth president on Tuesday.

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Trump Says He Has ‘No Choice’ But to Conduct Mass Deportations of Illegal Migrants

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) – Former US President Donald Trump said on Monday that he would have “no choice” but to conduct mass deportations of illegal migrants from the United States once he is back in the White House.

“I have no choice, I have no choice,” Trump said on the Dan O’Donnell show. “No country can sustain what this man [US President Joe Biden] has done. He is the worst president in our history.”

According to Trump, his administration will start mass deportations with “the bad ones” whose names the local police know, facilitating their ejection from the United States.

Since 2021, there have been 9 million encounters nationwide and over 7.4 million encounters at the southwest border.

Democrat President Biden and his Republican predecessor Trump are facing a rematch in the November presidential election after Biden’s 2020 win.

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US Congressman Says 'Deep State' Writing Ukraine Aid Bill, Planning to Expedite Passage

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Thomas Massie said on Monday that so-called "deep state" lawmakers are drafting Ukraine aid legislation, which they intend to fast track through the US Congress under suspension of the rules.

"Unfortunately, this is not April fools. [US House Speaker Mike Johnson and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer] and the deep state are writing the Ukraine bill. Then Johnson will suspend rules to pass it," Massie said in a statement via social media platform X.

On Sunday, Johnson said that he intends to advance Ukraine aid when the US House of Representatives returns to Washington from a district work period. The legislation could include innovations, such as aiding Ukraine with a loan or using seized Russian assets, Johnson said.

The push in the US Congress to pass Ukraine aid comes amid warnings from the Biden administration and the Kiev regime that Ukrainian forces could be forced to retreat without further foreign assistance.

Last week, US Senator Mike Lee said that European countries must "step up" if Ukraine requires more aid, noting that the United States has already provided some \$113 billion to Ukraine.

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IMF Says Will Complete Next Review of Egypt's Loan Program by Late June

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) will complete the third review of its loan program for Egypt by the end of June, IMF mission chief Ivanna Vladkova Hollar said on Monday.

"The next review will take place by the end of June," Vladkova Hollar told reporters.

There is a routine process that usually takes about three months, she added.

Vladkova Hollar pointed out that the recent completion of the first and second reviews of the extended arrangement under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) enabled the Egyptian government to immediately draw about \$820 million.

She stressed that the strong performance of the private sector allowed the IMF to improve key economic results for Egypt in the foreseeable future. However, inflation expectations remain very high, she warned.

The IMF said last week that the Egyptian government is implementing a strong economic stabilization plan to correct policy slippages. The plan is centered on a liberalized foreign exchange system in the context of a flexible exchange rate regime, a significant tightening of the policy mix, reducing public investment, and leveling the playing field to allow the private sector

to become the engine of growth, the fund added.

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US House to Work on Ukraine Aid 'Right After' Recess, Include Some 'Innovations' - Speaker

WASHINGTON, April 1 (Sputnik) – The US House of Representatives will work on the national security supplemental package "right after" recess and the bill that includes multi-billion-dollar aid for Ukraine will have "some important innovations," Speaker Mike Johnson said.

In February, the Senate passed a \$95 billion foreign aid bill that includes some \$60 billion for Ukraine, but it is currently stuck in the House as Republicans look into other options for providing aid to Ukraine while also addressing the crisis on the US southern border. House Speaker Johnson so far has rejected calls from Democrats and President Joe Biden to put the supplemental bill to a vote.

"But when it comes to the supplemental, we've been working to build that consensus. We've been talking to all the members especially now over the district work period. When we return after this work period, we'll be moving a product, but it's going to, I think, have some important innovations," Johnson told Fox News on Sunday. "We're putting that product together and we'll be moving it right after the district work period."

Among the potential innovations, Johnson mentioned the Rebuilding Economic Prosperity and Opportunity for Ukrainians Act, also known as REPO.

"The REPO Act, you know, if we can use the seized assets of Russian oligarchs to allow the Ukrainians to fight them, that's just pure poetry. Even President Trump has talked about the loan concept, where ... we're not just giving foreign aid. We're setting it up in a relationship where they can provide it back to us when the time is right," Johnson said.

In January, the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee advanced REPO, a bill that would authorize the president to seize frozen Russian assets and give them to Kiev. Sen. Rand Paul was the only one who opposed the bill in the committee, saying that it would be an "act of economic war" against Russia.

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