

4/24/24 Wednesday

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US Continues to Struggle With Its Vast Plastic Waste Amid Export Cut-Offs

The US wastes 40 million tons of plastic per year. The refinement of plastic also emits up to 235 million tons of greenhouse gasses per year which then becomes microplastics, which has caused almost 95% of America's water supply to contain plastic.

The US is now struggling to find ways to dispose of their plastic following a ban from China, a recent [report](#) claims. In 2018, China cut off plastic under their "National Sword" policy which banned the import of most plastics and other materials after managing half of the world's recyclable waste for the past quarter century, with the US regularly exporting 7 million tons a year to China alone.

The US, the UK, and other EU countries then responded to China's ban by sending their waste to other countries including Thailand and Malaysia, who have since followed China's example in cutting off imports.

US companies like Chevron and ExxonMobil, are now suggesting that plastic could be turned into crude oil.

According to the report, because these companies are looking to make up for their loss in revenue as the world moves away from fossil fuels, they are lobbying to cover the US with 150 plants that specialize in pyrolysis, a form of chemical recycling that melts plastic into crude oil that can then be used for fuel and petrochemicals and other poor quality plastics.

However, this solution of reusing or reproducing overlooks the fact that plastic production continues to double every 15 to 20 years. Because while recycling is a legitimate process, the vast majority of plastics aren't actually recycled because it costs more to do so than is actually profitable.

"Reduction in the production of plastic is entirely possible," said Abou-Ghaloum of Buckeye Environmental Network. "It's talked about how we rely on plastic for so many things, and it just feels like a marketing ploy to make us reluctant to shift away from it. We had everything we ever needed before plastic."

According to a [report](#) by the Center for Climate Integrity (CCI) released in February, despite their knowledge that recycling plastics is not technically or economically practical, petrochemical companies have continued to push "fraudulent" marketing and public outreach campaigns to convince consumers otherwise.

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

More than 99% of plastics are produced from fossil fuels, the CCI report added. Though there are thousands of different types of plastic, the majority of these cannot be "recycled". And

despite efforts to convince consumers otherwise, the recycling rate in the US for plastics in 2021 was estimated to be only 5% to 6%.

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

As oil is being replaced by clean, renewable energy, oil companies are trying to focus on plastic to replace their fuel losses, despite the fact that plastic waste can no longer be exported. The International Energy Agency predicted that in 2018, petrochemical products like plastic would outpace trucks, aviation, and shipping in oil demand by 2050, according to Wednesday's [report](#). Meanwhile, ExxonMobil predicted that petrochemicals used for plastics and fertilizer would make up for nearly all of the oil industry's growth by 2050, replacing industrial fuel demand. However, to keep up plastic production, the companies have to show that what they are doing is somehow sustainable.

But the economic and environmental impact of turning pyrolysis oil back into plastic is actually worse than making brand-new plastic, a study published in 2023 by researchers at the National Renewable Energy Laboratory found.

The process can also emit cancerous pollutants including mercury, benzene, and arsenic. It also does nothing to hold accountable the fossil-fuel companies responsible for driving the on-going climate crisis.

"It has had, let's say, limited success," Tim Miller, a vice president at the plastic-recycling center Royal Paper Stock, said about pyrolysis, adding that a pyrolysis facility in Oregon shut down after tens of millions of dollars in losses. "No one yet in the United States that I know of is just cranking in plastic and pumping out oil."

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Former Neuralink President Launches Eye Implants For The Blind

According to the National Eye Institute (NIH), retinitis pigmentosa is a group of rare eye diseases that affect sight by making cells in the retina break down slowly over time, eventually leading to vision loss. It is something that people are born with, and symptoms usually start in childhood.

A start-up company in Alameda, California called [Science](#) has designed a visual prosthesis called the Science Eye that could restore vision in people with retinitis pigmentosa, according to a recent [report](#). Max Hodak is the company's CEO and co-founder who helped create the company after his time as the president of Elon Musk's controversial company Neuralink. "The Science Eye [is] a visual prosthesis targeted at retinitis pigmentosa (RP) and dry age-related macular degeneration (AMD), two forms of serious blindness presently without good options for patients," the company wrote on its website, adding that the device won't work for those with glaucoma or cataracts.

“In diseases like RP and dry AMD, the light-sensitive cells in the back of the eye – the photoreceptors – have died, but the cells of the optic nerve itself remain. By inserting a gene into the cells of the optic nerve, we can make it possible to stimulate them using a small display inserted into the eye.”

Hodak’s company is not the only one hoping to restore sight to those who suffer from the disease, though. The Paris-based biotech company GenSight Biologics and Bionic Sight in New York are also experimenting with optogenetics - a form of gene therapy that delivers proteins called opsins through an injection in to the eye to increase the sensitivity of the cells in the patient’s retina.

The Science Eye is made up of two parts: the first is an implant composed of a wireless power coil and an ultrathin, flexible micro-LED array that is applied directly over the retina. During this procedure an implant is slid over the eye and the display is inserted through an incision. The implant is then secured and the display is laid over the retina. This surgery is far more invasive than other procedures like repairing cataracts.

The second is a pair of frameless glasses that are similar in size and shape to typical prescription glasses which contain miniature infrared cameras and inductive power coils.

“The Science Eye is a combination device that uses an optogenetic gene therapy targeted at the cells of the optic nerve (the retinal ganglion cells) in conjunction with an implanted flexible thin-film, ultra dense micro LED display panel inserted directly over the retina,” the company writes.

The company explains that making the optic nerve sensitive to light won’t necessarily restore vision. The company explains: “the signal sent down the optic nerve is heavily compressed relative to the image that is formed onto the photoreceptors through the eye’s lens” and it is “this compressed data the Science Eye implant stimulates into the optic nerve”.

After the surgery, the eye isn’t receiving images, but is instead receiving digital information.

Hodak explains that a person should be able to walk across the street “without being hit by a car”. Hodak adds that clinical trials for Science Eye should start sometime in the next 18 months.

The blindness drug Luxturna has been available to patients for five years since it was approved by the Food and Drug Administration in 2017 and is used to treat those with a rare genetic mutation that impacts the retinal pigment epithelium. However, Hodak notes that “it may help slow the progression of the disease, but it does not regenerate any loss”.

In January US billionaire and business owner Elon Musk announced his tech start up Neuralink had successfully inserted a chip into the brain of its first human test subject.

Last year, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) gave Neuralink clearance to conduct its first trial to test its implants on humans after the company performed hundreds of tests on pigs, sheep and monkeys.

The company has killed about 1,500 animals as a result. Neuralink then fell under a federal investigation for potential animal-welfare violations amid complaints that animal testing was being rushed, and that animals were needlessly suffering and dying as a result, according to a report from December of 2022.

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'Terrifying': Israel May Have Used Iran Conflict as 'Red Herring' for Gaza Occupation - Report

On April 1, Israel attacked the Iranian consulate in Damascus, Syria, marking an act of war against Iran and Syria. Iran then responded to the attack two weeks later, which was intercepted by Israel's western allies including the US.

An [article](#) published on Tuesday, 'Did Israel Use Iran's Attack to Secure a US Green Light for Rafah Invasion', questions whether the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has used Iran's attacks as leverage for his war strategy in Gaza.

The conflict between Israel and Iran prompted the US to funnel billions of dollars into Israel's war chest, with the country now making preparations to invade Rafah. The journalist, Palestine activist and author Robert Fantina joined Sputnik's [The Critical Hour](#) on Wednesday to discuss these unfolding events.

"We have to remember that the welfare of the Palestinians in Gaza has never been a concern of Israel or the US. There has been an international outcry against the genocide, against the horrific suffering, the slaughter of innocent persons, men, women and children," said Fantina. "This has come to the attention of the world's population. But, Israel and the US government don't care."

"The Iranian reprisal attack on Israel, which, of course, was in compliance with international law following Israel's violation of international law by bombing the Iranian consulate in Damascus. This was something that the US was trying to demonize Iran for doing when it was simply a matter of reprisal for a crime that had been committed against it," the journalist added.

"The welfare of the people of Gaza has never been a concern of the US. Iran was just a red herring to distract it."

[Following](#) Iran's retaliatory attack against Israel on April 13, the US approved \$14 billion to Israel in the aftermath, with 90 congressional lawmakers urging House Speaker Mike Johnson to immediately advance the foreign funding bill. House Democrats also called for lawmakers to pass a \$95 billion foreign funding bill which includes aid to both Ukraine and Israel - with \$17 billion in defense for Israel. Meanwhile, analysts expect that just \$2 billion will go to humanitarian aid in Gaza.

The Palestinian presidency said that this funding will be a "dangerous escalation", and added that the money would "translate into thousands of Palestinian casualties in the Gaza Strip". But as the threat of a regional war faded following Israel's most recent attack, Israel launched strikes in the city of Rafah, killing 18 children and four others, health officials said on Sunday. About 1.5 million people currently shelter in Gaza as it is the last city that has been spared from the atrocity caused by Israel's ground forces.

"These are people that the US government and the US system considers expendable because they're not white," Fantina added. "The US is sending more weapons and money to Ukraine. When Gaza is being victimized in the same way, only far, far worse, and the US, rather than giving the Palestinians the means to defend themselves, it's giving the perpetrator more means

to commit the slaughter and the genocide. So, it comes down partly to racism, partly to profits and partly to power.”

An [article](#) published on Wednesday described the “unprecedented terror” that continues to haunt Palestinians in Nur Shams refugee camp in Tulkarem, just two days after the Israeli army completed its 52-hour-long invasion of the camp. According to the article, Israeli forces killed 14 Palestinians. A resident said that this is not the first time the Israeli occupation has raided Nur Shams, but it was different because this time they used “unprecedented violence” during the raid, one resident said.

“The IDF is an extremely brutal force, a terrorist force, that is government sanctioned and US sanctioned. And the fact that this was unprecedented terror is just horrifying to me. And reading about it, they killed several Palestinians,” Fantina said. “The raid lasted a couple of days. They bulldozed houses and whatever else, stores, businesses. Just terrifying people, killing the people and making it difficult for them to continue their life.”

'Terrifying': Israel may have used the conflict with Iran as a 'Red Herring' for Gaza occupation – report

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An article questions whether Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has used Iran’s attacks as leverage for his war strategy in Gaza. The conflict between Israel and Iran prompted the US to funnel billions of dollars into Israel’s war chest, with the country now making preparations to invade Rafah. Journalist, Palestine activist, and author Robert Fantina joined Sputnik’s The Critical Hour to discuss these unfolding events.

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US Congress Votes for Weapons, Free Healthcare for Ukraine

US lawmakers gathered over the weekend to pass funding for Ukraine, Israel and anti-China authorities in Taiwan.

After months of languishing in congressional purgatory, Washington lawmakers finally passed renewed spending for Ukraine's proxy war against Russia over the weekend.

The aid package, worth some \$61 billion, moved forward with the support of about half of congressional Republicans and the majority of Democrats. Its passage prompted a dramatic display of patriotic pride – but not for the United States. A sea of Ukrainian flags was [observed](#) as representatives waved miniature versions of the blue and yellow banner. The scene prompted criticism from some Republicans, who questioned the legality of the display of a foreign flag in the legislative chamber.

International relations expert Mark Sleboda joined [Sputnik's Fault Lines program Wednesday](#) to discuss the development and its implications for Kiev's struggling war effort.

"So first of all, on the surface, \$61 billion – read into the details. That's the first thing," said the security analyst. "You'll see that of that, only \$14 billion is direct military aid to the Kiev regime in Ukraine. Actually, the largest chunk of that is \$20 billion worth that is supposedly going to restock US military inventories because the Biden administration cut too deep into the US military's own supplies already in order to provide the Kiev regime."

"Of course there's nothing stopping them from using that drawdown authority again if it becomes necessary," he noted. "Some \$8 billion is going towards training and the like."

But, perhaps most controversially, a significant portion of the aid will go towards simply maintaining the functioning of Ukrainian civil society – a contentious prospect as the country is [frequently ranked Europe's most corrupt](#).

"\$8 billion is going to support the Ukrainian budget, of course, because it is entirely dependent on Western aid," said Sleboda. "Some of that is also coming from the EU, by the way. So they'll be paying for peoples' salaries and health care for Ukrainians because actually Ukraine has a government health care system."

"Hey, American taxpayers, you can't get a health care system but the Kiev regime that you support in Ukraine thanks you for your hard-earned tax dollars for that, because that's part of the Ukrainian budget."

A majority of Americans polled have consistently [supported](#) some form of guaranteed health insurance for all citizens, although industry lobbying efforts have so far scuttled all attempts to implement such a system.

The sending of increasingly more powerful weapons to Kiev has led to concerns its military will continue to attack non-combatant civilians in territory controlled by Russia. Ukraine has frequently launched strikes on non-military targets in Crimea and the Bakhmut region.

Ukraine's attacks on civilians have gone largely unreported in Western media although the country has faced intense criticism for its massacres in the Donbass region going back to 2014.

In one particularly shocking incident [neo-Nazi paramilitaries attacked a peaceful rally](#) of trade unionists in Odessa, setting first to a union hall after civilians sought refuge there.

“The long range strategy that they're looking at is they need to bring the war home to the Russian people,” claimed Sleboda. “They need to challenge the political stability in Russia to make Russian people turn against the conflict, which they admit, essentially, that the Russian people are fully behind the government in this.”

“Which means long-range strikes, which means more acts... they don't say it outright, but making it clear, how do you bring the war home to the Russian people?” he asked. “You kill civilians. You do attacks that will affect the Russian people. Crocus City Hall, right? That sort of thing. The Crimean bridge, right? Big, symbolic, doesn't have any real military value as a target, as we've heard German generals attest to when they didn't think they were being listened to, as they plotted out how to attack it. But it's symbolic, right?”

“You have to shatter the psyche and the morale of the Russian people. This was always the goal, they just failed to do it with sanctions. Utterly failed to do it.”

Sleboda enumerated the armaments the Kiev regime would likely utilize to meet its goal: “These are NATO weapons, particularly US weapons. We're talking here with the ATACMS, more Storm Shadows have also been sent from the UK, and they are guided to target by NATO satellites and reconnaissance planes. That's how the targeting is done. So this is a NATO attack.”

Meanwhile Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's rule appears as uncertain as ever as a lack of morale and discipline within the military persists.

“There's political turmoil in Kiev as well because Zelensky's term ends on May 21st, right around the time the Russian offensive is supposed to start,” said Sleboda. “The far-right is furious at him because he just banned the 67th [division] after they refused his orders, which is the Right Sector. And also the third assault Azov has been refusing orders to go into places like Chasov Yar.”

“We've had multiple Ukrainian brigades just disobey orders at this point because they're not going into Ocheretino, right? No one wants to go. There's certain areas that are described as hell. And they don't want to go into conditions like that... We're starting to see people not willing to die.”

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More Than Half of Americans Support Mass Deportation of Undocumented Migrants - Poll

WASHINGTON, April 25 (Sputnik) - More than half of Americans say undocumented migrants in the United States should be deported from the country, a new Axios Vibes survey by the Harris Poll revealed on Thursday.

The report on the poll pointed out that 51% of Americans supported the idea of mass deportations of migrants who entered the United States illegally.

"And 30% of Democrats - as well as 46% of Republicans - now say they'd end birthright citizenship, something guaranteed under the 14th Amendment of the Constitution," the poll report said.

Only 46% of independent voters and 42% of Democrats shared this view, the poll report said. At the same time, the poll report said 65% of Americans are of the opinion that the US government should make it easier for immigrants to enter the United States legally, the poll report said.

More than half (58%) support expanding legal ways for orderly immigration, the poll report added.

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Deal Proposed to Hamas 'Meets Nearly All' of Group's Demands - Senior US Official

WASHINGTON, April 25 (Sputnik) - A senior US official said on Wednesday that there has been a deal proposed to Hamas that "meets nearly all of the demands" of the group.

"The core truth [is] there's a deal on the table. It meets nearly all of the demands that Hamas has had ... and what they need to do is release the vulnerable category of hostages to get things moving," the official said at a press briefing.

The official added that since Hamas' initial rejection of the deal, "we do see some indications that there might be an avenue here, but I'm not totally confident because a lot of times we hear things from leaders of Hamas outside that do not reflect the Hamas leadership inside."

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US, 17 Other Countries Urge Hamas to Release Hostages - Statement

WASHINGTON, April 25 (Sputnik) - The United States alongside 17 other countries on Thursday released a statement urging the Palestinian movement Hamas to immediately release the remaining hostages in Gaza.

The list of countries includes Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Spain, Thailand and the United Kingdom.

"We call for the immediate release of all hostages held by Hamas in Gaza for over 200 days. They include our own citizens. The fate of the hostages and the civilian population in Gaza, who are protected under international law, is of international concern," the statement said.

The current hostage deal on the table would bring an immediate and prolonged ceasefire in Gaza and facilitate a surge in additional necessary humanitarian aid deliveries throughout the Palestinian enclave, the statement said.

The countries tried to issue a joint statement earlier but only reached a unanimous consensus today, a senior US administration official told reporters.

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Biden to Announce Over \$6Bln in Funding for Micron Manufacturing Plants - White House

WASHINGTON, April 25 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will announce more than \$6.1 billion in funding for the semiconductor firm Micron to help build a cutting-edge series of memory chip manufacturing plants, the White House said in a release on Thursday.

"Today, President Biden will travel to Syracuse, New York, to announce that the Department of Commerce has reached a preliminary agreement with Micron to provide up to ~\$6.14 billion in direct funding under the CHIPS and Science Act," the release said. "This investment will support the construction of two fabs in Clay, New York, and one fab in Boise, Idaho, unleashing \$50 billion in private investment by 2030 as the first step towards Micron's investment of up to \$125 billion across both states over the next two decades to build a leading-edge memory

manufacturing ecosystem."

The project is expected to create more than 70,000 jobs, including 20,000 direct construction and manufacturing jobs and tens of thousands of indirect jobs.

The financial support includes at least \$40 million in dedicated CHIPS funding for training and workforce development.

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Canada Refuses to Repatriate Woman From IS Camp Over National Security Concerns - Reports

WASHINGTON, April 25 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government has refused to repatriate a woman from a camp in Syria that houses families of members of the Islamic State terror group (banned in Russia) over national security concerns, Global News reported on Thursday.

The woman, referred to as "F. J." - formerly a resident of Montreal - was the last person attempting to return to Canada from the detention camp in Syria.

However, the woman was unable to return because the Canadian authorities assessed she poses a national security risk in part due to law enforcement lacking evidence to charge her or limit her movements with a so-called peace bond, the report said, citing a memorandum it obtained from Public Safety Canada.

Allowing the woman to return to Canada in the absence of charges would grant her the freedom of movement throughout the country, the memorandum said.

The woman, a mother of six, has since departed from the camp on her own but her current whereabouts are unknown, her lawyer Lawrence Greenspon was quoted as saying. However, her children remained in the detention camp.

Between 2022-2023, the Canadian government facilitated the repatriation of several female nationals and their children who were detained in detention camp in northern Syria housing families of Islamic State members.

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Major Flare-Up in Middle-East Conflict Could Stoke Global Inflation - World Bank

WASHINGTON, April 25 (Sputnik) - A major flare-up in Middle East fighting could send global inflation soaring, the World Bank said in its Commodity Markets Outlook report on Thursday.

"Global inflation remains undefeated," World Bank Chief Economist Indermit Gill said in the report. "A key force for disinflation - falling commodity prices - has essentially hit a wall. That means interest rates could remain higher than currently expected this year and next. The world is at a vulnerable moment: a major energy shock could undermine much of the progress in reducing inflation over the past two years."

The report noted that between mid-2022 and mid-2023, global commodity prices plummeted by nearly 40%, helping drive most of the roughly 2-percentage-point reduction in global inflation.

"Since mid-2023, however, the World Bank's index of commodity prices has remained essentially unchanged," the report said. "Assuming [there's] no further flare-up in geopolitical tensions, the Bank's forecasts call for a decline of 3% in global commodity prices in 2024 and 4% in 2025."

That pace will do little to subdue inflation that remains above central bank targets in most countries, the report said, noting that commodity prices remain about 38% higher than they were on average in the five years before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Crude prices hit five-month highs on April 12, on the eve of Iran's retaliatory attack on Israel amid fears that it would trigger a new Middle East catastrophe and seriously disrupt crude shipments from the oil-rich Middle East. United Kingdom-origin Brent, the global benchmark for crude, reached a five-month high of \$92.18, while its US peer, the West Texas Intermediate (WTI), scaled \$87.67.

But the attack executed by Iran and Israel's muted response on April 19 did little to escalate the broader Middle East crisis. As a result, downward pressure had built since on crude prices, with Brent settling Wednesday at \$88.02 per barrel and WTI at \$82.75.

The World Bank report said the persistently high geopolitical tensions had propped up oil and other critical commodities even as global growth slowed. Brent's five-month high in mid-April, for instance, was around \$35 per barrel above the 2015-2019 average.

The World Bank forecast that Brent will average \$84 per barrel in 2024 before declining to an average of \$79 in 2025, assuming no conflict-related supply disruptions occur.

"If the conflict in the Middle East were to escalate further, however, oil-supply disruptions could push up global inflation," the report said. "A moderate conflict-related supply disruption could raise the average Brent price this year to \$92 per barrel. A more severe disruption could see oil prices surpass \$100 per barrel, raising global inflation in 2024 by nearly one percentage point."

World Bank Deputy Chief Economist and Director of its Prospects Group Ayhan Kose similarly predicted higher inflation down the road.

"A striking divergence is emerging between global growth and commodity prices: despite relatively weaker global growth, commodity prices will most likely remain higher in 2024-25 than in the half-decade before the COVID-19 pandemic," Kose said in the report. "One critical factor behind this divergence relates to heightened geopolitical tensions that are keeping upward pressure on prices of major commodities and stoking risks of sharp price movements. Central banks must remain alert about the inflationary implications of commodity-price spikes amid elevated geopolitical tensions."

An escalation of the conflict in the Middle East could also drive up prices of natural gas, fertilizers and food, the report noted.

The World Bank's baseline forecast, however, is for overall food prices to decline - by 6% in 2024 and 4% in 2025, while fertilizer prices are expected to fall by 22% in 2024 and 6% in 2025.

Accelerating investment in green technologies has also bolstered prices of key metals that are critical for the global clean-energy transition. Prices of copper surged to a two-year high this month and are expected to rise 5% in 2024 before stabilizing in 2025. Prices of aluminum are forecast to rise by 2% in 2024 and 4% in 2025.

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Russia, China Remain on US Priority Watch List Over 'Serious' Trade Issues - Trade Office

WASHINGTON, April 25 (Sputnik) - Russia, China, and five other nations remain on the United States' priority watch list this year over trade issues it deems as serious, a senior US Trade Representative (USTR) official told reporters.

"USTR has placed seven countries on the priority watch list indicating that serious problems exist in that country with respect to IP protection, enforcement, or market access for US persons relying on IP," the official said during a conference call. "The seven countries are Argentina, Chile, China, India, Indonesia, Russia and Venezuela."

The office of the US Trade Representative issued this assessment as part of the release of this year's Special 301 Report, which details trade issues the United States has with countries.

With respect to China, the official said many serious concerns remain regarding intellectual property (IP) protection and enforcement.

The pace of reforms in China remains slow, but stakeholders acknowledge some positive developments, the official noted.

The United States continues to raise concerns about implementing the amended criminal law, copyright law, and patent law, the official said, adding that stakeholders also raised long-standing issues like technology transfer, trade secrets, bad faith trademarks, counterfeiting, online piracy, and geographical indications.

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US, Russia Must Involve Young Generations in Elbe Day Remembrance - Veteran

WASHINGTON, April 25 (Sputnik) - The United States and Russia must involve younger generations in commemorations of the historic meeting between the US and Soviet troops at the Elbe River in Germany in April 1945 in order to remind people that the two countries were allies, US World War II veteran Frank Cohn told Sputnik on Monday.

"We should have drawn in representatives from the next generations into those ceremonies. Not doing that was a big mistake," Cohn said.

The 98-year-old veteran, who was among American troops who met Soviet soldiers at the Elbe River bank, expressed regret that now there are almost no veterans left who represent the bridge of friendship between the two countries and who can explain to young people that maintaining this cooperation is important.

"I was advised recently that the Russian veteran who was introduced to me and teamed up with me in 2015 and who participated in a movie with me commemorating the spirit of the Elbe has died. I was so sorry to hear this, but it is no longer a surprise - we are fading away," Cohn said. However, Cohn expressed hope that politicians from both countries will find a common

language and commemorate in 2025 the 80th anniversary of the meeting at the Elbe River. Cohn also said his advanced age does not give him much time to wait for this.

"I'll be 99 in August, and I can't be sure that I will still be here to participate. The politics of the day always govern," Cohn added.

On April 25, 1945, Soviet and US troops met at the Elbe River near the town of Torgau. The meeting was a key milestone in the process of ending World War II and came about as US troops advanced from the west while Soviet troops advanced from the east, thus splitting Nazi German territory into two.

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Студенты в тexasском Остине требуют отпустить задержанных на пропалестинских протестах

ОСТИН (Техас), 25 апр – РИА Новости. Студенты в городе Остин в американском Техасе собрались перед зданием местной тюрьмы с требованием отпустить более 50 человек, задержанных в ходе университетских протестов в поддержку Палестины, передает корреспондент РИА Новости.

Ранее протесты студентов активизировались на фоне одобрения США нового пакета помощи Израилю. Они вспыхнули в том числе и в Техасском университете в Остине. По информации СМИ, на месте находились усиленные наряды силовиков.

"Это настоящее издевательство. Мы здесь поддерживаем друзей и семьи задержанных", - сказала корреспонденту Британни, одна из собравшихся перед зданием городской тюрьмы.

По словам адвоката Джорджа Лобба, помогающего задержанным, всего в тюрьму доставили 54 человека. Их должны отпустить в 3-4 часа утра (11-12 часов по мск.). Помимо студентов, к тюрьме пришли родственники задержанных.

Несмотря на задержания, студенты городского университета намерены продолжить акцию протеста в четверг после полудня по местному времени. Ожидается, что к ним присоединятся и преподаватели. Участники выступают против военной, финансовой и политической помощи от США для проведения израильской операции в секторе Газа.

Кампусы престижных американских вузов в последние дни стали эпицентром возмущения израильской операцией в секторе Газа из-за большого числа жертв среди мирного населения и помощи, которую оказывают США своему главному ближневосточному союзнику.

Ранее премьер Израиля Биньямин Нетаньяху раскритиковал реакцию руководства нескольких университетов США, в которых прошли пропалестинские акции протеста, и заявил об экспоненциальном росте антисемитизма в США и на Западе в целом.

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

Students in Austin Call for Release of 54 Arrested During Protests at University of Texas

AUSTIN, the United States, April 25 (Sputnik), Lenka White - Students and families are waiting outside a prison in the US city of Austin, Texas, and calling for the release of approximately 54 people arrested during mass protests at the University of Texas at Austin campus, a Sputnik correspondent has reported.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott said in a statement on Wednesday that law enforcement officers have arrested several protesters participating in a large pro-Palestine demonstration at the University of Texas at Austin campus. A spokesperson for the Texas Department of Public Safety later told Sputnik that more than 20 arrests have been made at the University of Texas campus in connection with the demonstration.

"Drop the charges, let them out," the students shouted outside the prison on Wednesday.

One of the protesters told the correspondent that "it's total bullying," adding that "we are supporting the friends and families here of the arrested ones."

"There are approximately 54 arrested protesters. They should be released at approximately 3-4 a.m.," an attorney told the correspondent.

Nevertheless, the protests at the University of Austin are planned to continue on Thursday at noon local time. Teachers are expected to accompany students in the demonstrations.

The correspondent reported that the protesters had large quantities of food and water worth several thousand dollars throughout the day, and it is unknown who paid for all the supplies.

The protesters are demonstrating against the United States military, financial and diplomatic support for Israel's operation in Gaza, which has resulted in the death of some 34,000 Palestinians and the wounding of more than 77,000 Palestinians.

Pro-Palestine protests have swept across college campuses and on town squares in the United States - and around the world - calling for an end to the war in Gaza.

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Trump Allies Charged in Election Case, Ex-President 'Unindicted Coconspirator' - Filing

(Adds background information after para 4, corrects last name in lede to read Giuliani)

WASHINGTON, April 25 (Sputnik) - Trump allies Mark Meadows, Rudy Giuliani, and Jenna Ellis are among 18 people charged in an election interference case in the state of Arizona, court documents revealed.

"Defendants' attempts to declare Unindicted Coconspirator 1 and Pence the winners of the 2020 Presidential Election contrary to voter intent and the law, involved numerous other charged and uncharged coconspirators," the filing said on Wednesday.

Former President Donald Trump is listed as an unindicted co-conspirator in the filing.

The defendants are accused of trying to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election in the state of Arizona, the court documents stated.

In February, a US federal appeals court ruled that Trump is not immune from prosecution in his 2020 election interference case, which Trump appealed to the US Supreme Court. The US Supreme Court is scheduled to decide whether Trump is immune from being prosecuted as a former US president on Thursday.

In August 2023, a Fulton County grand jury indicted Trump on 13 felony counts related to his alleged attempts to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election. Trump has pleaded not guilty to the charges in Georgia over the 2020 presidential election.

Trump faces a total of 91 charges in four criminal cases that Republicans say are an attempt by the Democratic establishment to prevent him from returning to the White House. The most serious charges carry penalties of up to 20 years in prison. If the punishment were to be determined by adding up the terms, he could be behind bars for more than 700 years.

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US Navy Orders \$701Mln in Maintenance Contracts For Mayport-Based Ships - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, April 25 (Sputnik) - Eight US shipbuilding and engineering companies have been awarded a combined more than \$700 million contract to repair all US surface ships visiting or homeported in the Mayport region of Florida, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"[The eight companies] are awarded a combined \$701,167,248 ...contract for repair, maintenance and modernization requirements of non-nuclear Navy Surface ships homeported in, or visiting the Mayport, Florida, region," the release stated on Wednesday.

The scope of work will include maintenance and short-term availabilities for naval operations, the Defense Department explained.

The Defense Department identified the first four companies as Colonna's Shipyard in Norfolk,

Virginia; East Coast Repair & Fabrication in Portsmouth, Virginia; General Dynamics NASSCO-Mayport in Jacksonville, Florida and BAE Systems Jacksonville Ship Repair in Jacksonville, Florida, the release said.

The other four companies were identified as Fincantieri Marine Repair in Jacksonville, Florida; Standard Inspection Services/Standard Welding & Fabrication in Jacksonville, Florida; Epsilon Systems in Portsmouth, Virginia and Tecnico Corporation in Atlantic Beach, Florida, the Defense Department said.

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US Navy Orders 14 More Training Aircraft From Textron Aviation - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, April 25 (Sputnik) - The US Navy has extended its existing contract with Textron Aviation by more than \$121 million to continue producing planes to train Navy personnel to operate multi-engine aircraft, the Defense Department announced.

"Textron Aviation [of] Wichita, Kansas is awarded a \$121,280,428 modification ...contract ...for the production and delivery of 14 Multi-Engine Training System aircraft," the Defense Department said in a press release on Wednesday.

The new aircraft will be used to provide intermediate and advanced training platforms for future crews of P-8, EP-3, KC-130, E-6, E-2, CMV-22 and MV-22 multi-engine aircraft for the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard, the release said.

Most of the work in building the aircraft will be carried out in Wichita, Kansas (99%) over the next year and a half and is expected to be completed in September 2025, the release added.

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US Defense Industry 'Not Where It Needs to Be' - Senior Pentagon Official

WASHINGTON, April 25 (Sputnik) - The US military industrial base has not yet rebounded from the enormous cutbacks it experienced since the end of the Cold War and is expanding at only half the annual rate of Russia's, Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment William LaPlante said.

"It is not where it needs to be, but Russia is on a wartime footing," LaPlante told a conference at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) on Wednesday. "It is going to take years to do this. Everybody around the world, I think, is recognizing this."

LaPlante said the US defense industrial base was only expanding at a rate of 3.2%, whereas Russia was already on a war footing and its defense industries working round the clock, expanding their production base at a rate of 7% per year.

To offset its own production limitations and slower rates of expansion, the United States was turning to "more and more coproduction and sustainment agreements around the world with

other countries. That's where this is all heading," LaPlante added.

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US Destroys Houthi Drones Over Yemen, Coalition Ship Engages Missile - Central Command

WASHINGTON, April 25 (Sputnik) - The United States destroyed four drones over Houthi-controlled territory in Yemen and a coalition vessel engaged an anti-ship missile, US Central Command said in a statement via social media platform X.

"At 11:51 a.m. (Sanaa time) on April 24, a coalition vessel successfully engaged one anti-ship ballistic missile (ASBM) launched from Iranian-backed Houthi terrorist-controlled areas in Yemen over the Gulf of Aden," the statement said on Tuesday. "Separately... US Central Command successfully engaged and destroyed four airborne unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) over Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen."

The ASBM was likely targeting a US-flagged, owned and operated vessel with 18 US and four Greek crew members, the statement said. The incident did not result in any damage or injuries, the statement said.

The ASBM and UAV presented an "imminent threat" to the US coalition and merchant vessels in the region, the statement said.

Houthis have been launching attacks on commercial and military vessels in the region for months, in response to Israel's military operation in the Gaza Strip. The attacks prompted the US to form a multinational coalition to protect shipping in the area, as well as to strike Houthi targets on the ground.

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China Concerned Over Israeli Bombardment of Gaza, Calls to Abandon Rafah Operation - Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, April 25 (Sputnik) - China is concerned about the Israeli strikes in Gaza and urges Israel to abandon its Rafah operation, Chinese Deputy Ambassador Geng Shuang said on Wednesday.

"We are gravely concerned about Israel's frequent bombardment of Gaza in recent days. We urge Israel to immediately cease all military operations against Gaza and abandon its planned offensive on Rafah," Shuang told the UN Security Council members during a meeting in Palestine.

In addition, he said that countries with significant influence on Israel should act impartially. The U.S. Mission has been a big supporter of Israel within the Council, blocking any resolutions that could complicate Israel's operations.

Israel launched a ground incursion into the Gaza Strip after Hamas attacked the Jewish state

on October 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people and abducting some 240 others. Over 34,000 people have been killed so far by Israeli strikes in the Gaza Strip, according to local authorities.

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Nebenzia Says UNSC Can Deploy Peacekeeping Contingents If Gaza Ceasefire Not Upheld

UNITED NATIONS, April 25 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council has other means to enforce peace if a ceasefire is not implemented in Gaza, such as the deployment of peacekeeping contingents, Russian Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said on Wednesday.

"If the ceasefire is not complied with, let's discuss concrete measures how we can ensure that it is upheld. The Security Council does have some well-honed algorithms, it has a toolkit, including the deployment of peacekeeping contingents," Nebenzia told the UN Security Council members during a meeting on Palestine.

Nebenzia added that the Security Council could revert to the idea of more active involvement by the UN truce supervision organization.

The U.S. Mission has been a big supporter of Israel within the Council, blocking any resolutions which could complicate Israel's operations.

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UPDATE 2 - Several Arrested at Mass Pro-Palestine Protest on University of Texas Campus - Governor

(Updates with comment from Texas State police in paras 4, 5)

WASHINGTON, April 25 (Sputnik) - Law enforcement officers have arrested several protesters participating in a large pro-Palestine demonstration on University of Texas at Austin campus, Texas Governor Greg Abbott said in a statement.

"Arrests being made right now and will continue until the crowd disperses," Abbott said on Wednesday. "These protesters belong in jail. Antisemitism will not be tolerated in Texas."

Abbott said students joining in "hate-filled, anti-Semitic protests" at any public college or university in Texas should be expelled.

A Texas Department of Public Safety spokesperson told Sputnik that more than 20 arrests have been made on the University of Texas campus in connection to the demonstration.

"The Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) responded to the University of Texas (UT) campus in Austin today at the request of the University and at the direction of Texas Governor Greg Abbott, in order to prevent any unlawful assembly and to support UT Police in maintaining

the peace by arresting anyone engaging in any sort of criminal activity, including criminal trespass," the spokesperson said.

Media footage shows Texas state police officers in full riot gear shoving several protesters and arresting others.

The protesters are demonstrating against the United States military, financial and diplomatic support for Israel's operation in Gaza, which has resulted in the death of some 34,000 Palestinians and the wounding of more than 77,000 Palestinians.

Pro-Palestine protests have swept across college campuses and on town squares in the United States - and throughout the world - calling for an end to the war in Gaza.

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US Navy Testing Direct Energy Weapons on Frigates This June - Senior Pentagon Official

WASHINGTON, April 25 (Sputnik) - The US Navy is going to carry out a series of direct energy tests on its frigates at sea this June, Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment William LaPlante told a conference at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

"The Navy is doing a series of direct energy tests on frigates in June," LaPlante told the conference on Wednesday.

The Navy was also looking at developing and employing "a whole system of anti-UAS (Unmanned Aerial System vehicles) systems" that extends as far in range as current anti-missile defenses and that would be operationally integrated with them, LaPlante added.

He also said that the Pentagon and the Navy were looking at ways that could reduce the costs of UAS defense capabilities to only \$100,000 per round, only one-tenth of the current cost of using such weapons.

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US Industry Tripling Artillery Shell Production to 100,000 Per Month - Pentagon Official

WASHINGTON, April 25 (Sputnik) - US industry is in the process of more than tripling its production of 155mm artillery shells to 100,000 per month by the end of this year, Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment William LaPlante said.

"We are currently at 30,000 to 40,000 (155mm artillery shells) a month," La Plante told a conference at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) on Wednesday. "We are ramping up to 100,000 a month."

LaPlante said that US industrial producers were expected to reach this targeted level of production by the end of this year.

"The 155mm [shell production] situation is pretty good right now," LaPlante said.

The expanded production levels were intended to replenish the huge previous stocks of 155mm ammunition that had been sent to supply Ukraine, LaPlante added.

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Disastrous 2024 Quarterly Earnings Statement Rocks US Airplane Maker Boeing

WASHINGTON, April 25 (Sputnik) - Boeing announced a drop in its deliveries of 737 airplanes and losses of up to more than a dollar per share in the first three months of this year, the US airliner builder and defense contractor announced.

"Financial results reflect lower 737 deliveries and 737-9 grounding customer considerations," Boeing said in a press release on Wednesday. "Revenue of \$16.6 billion, GAAP [Generally Accepted Accounting Principles] loss per share of (\$0.56) and core (non-GAAP) loss per share of (\$1.13)."

Boeing still enjoyed an operating cash flow of \$3.4 billion and a free cash flow of \$3.9 billion, the release said.

"Total company backlog grew to \$529 billion, including over 5,600 commercial airplanes," the release added.

US media described the first quarterly figures as staggering losses and said Boeing was having to pay out 22 cents for every dollar it collected in revenue.

By mid-afternoon on Wednesday, Boeing's shares had dropped \$3 on the day to \$164 - totaling a 35% drop in value for the year so far.

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Australia Orders \$325Mln New US Air Battle Management System From US - Lockheed Martin

WASHINGTON, April 25 (Sputnik) -The Australian government has signed an almost \$325 million contract with Lockheed Martin to build a new integrated air battle management system for its air force, the giant US defense contractor announced in a press release.

"Lockheed Martin Australia signed a landmark 500 million Australian dollar (\$almost \$325 million) contract with the Department of Defence to build Australia's future Joint Air Battle Management System under project - AIR6500 Phase 1 (AIR6500-1)," the release stated on Wednesday.

The new system will provide Australia with an advanced integrated air and missile defense capability, using next-generation technologies, to combat high-speed threats, Lockheed Martin said.

"AIR6500-1 will be built in Australia by Australians. A significant majority of the AIR6500-1 program workshare will be allocated across Australian industry to develop and deliver this strategic, national endeavor," the release said.

Previously, Lockheed Martin Australia developed an Operator Evaluation System for the Joint Air Battle Management System that was delivered ahead of schedule and on budget, the release added.

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UPDATE - Several Arrested at Mass Pro-Palestine Protest on University of Texas Campus - Governor

(Updates with change in attribution, governor's comments in paras 1-3)

WASHINGTON, April 25 (Sputnik) - Law enforcement officers have arrested several protesters participating in a large pro-Palestine demonstration on University of Texas at Austin campus, Texas Governor Greg Abbott said in a statement.

"Arrests being made right now and will continue until the crowd disperses," Abbott said on Wednesday. "These protesters belong in jail. Antisemitism will not be tolerated in Texas."

Abbott said students joining in "hate-filled, anti-Semitic protests" at any public college or university in Texas should be expelled.

Media footage shows Texas state police officers in full riot gear shoving several protesters and arresting others.

The Texas State Police and University of Texas campus police did not immediately respond to Sputnik's request for comment on the matter.

The protesters are demonstrating against the United States military, financial and diplomatic support for Israel's operation in Gaza, which has resulted in the death of some 34,000 Palestinians and the wounding of more than 77,000 Palestinians.

Pro-Palestine protests have swept across college campuses and on town squares in the United States - and throughout the world - calling for an end to the war in Gaza.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, April 25 (Sputnik) -

US-SPONSORED UN DRAFT RESOLUTION ON WMD IN SPACE

* Russia blocked the US- and Japan-sponsored UN Security Council draft resolution to prohibit nuclear weapons or other types of WMD in outer space after its amendment was rejected, a Sputnik correspondent reported on Wednesday.

* The draft resolution represents a cover-up for a cunning plan by the West, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said.

* The draft resolution needed an amendment to include all weapons, Nebenzia said.

FOREIGN MILITARY AID TO UKRAINE

* The United States is confident that Ukraine will use the long-range ATACMS missiles only within its own territory as it allegedly did with the HIMARS weapon system, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Wednesday.

* The United States will send more ATACMS to Ukraine now that the national security supplemental package was passed in Congress, Sullivan said.

* Supplying ATACMS to Ukraine will not change the situation on the ground as Russia has experience in destroying almost all NATO missiles, Yan Gagin, advisor to the head of the Donetsk People's Republic, told Sputnik.

* US President Joe Biden directed the State Department to provide up to \$145 million in additional assistance to Ukraine, a memorandum released by the White House said.

RUSSIA'S FROZEN ASSETS

* Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said on Wednesday in commenting the US authorization to seize Russian frozen assets that it is a case of Russophobes trying to cover up their theft with pseudo-legal arguments.

* The United States is still in talks with its European partners about how to utilize the immobilized Russian assets to aid recovery efforts in Ukraine, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said.

* Russia will use all mechanisms and tools at its disposal to respond to the seizing of its assets if the collective West takes such a step, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Pankin said.

ENERGY MARKETS

* The production of liquefied natural gas in Russia increased by 5.5% in the first quarter of 2024 to 9 million tonnes year-on-year, Russia's Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat) said.

MIDDLE EAST

* The US foreign aid supplemental package will help Israel replenish its air defenses, President Joe Biden said on Wednesday, after signing the \$95 billion national security supplemental bill.

* Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev and his Iranian counterpart, Ali Akbar Ahmadian, confirmed that the two countries are interested in preventing further escalation in the Middle East during a meeting on Wednesday, the Russian Security Council said.

DETENTION OF RUSSIAN DEPUTY DEFENSE MINISTER IVANOV

* Russian Deputy Defense Minister Timur Ivanov has been accused of helping ministerial contractor who allegedly did repair works at Ivanov's personal facilities, his lawyer told Sputnik on Wednesday.

* The defense team of Ivanov will appeal his arrest in a bribery case, the official's lawyer, Denis Baluyev, told Sputnik.

* Ivanov has been placed in the Lefortovo pre-trial detention center, and has no complaints about the conditions of the detention, a representative of the Public Monitoring Commission in Moscow told Sputnik.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* Russia and Ukraine held first face-to-face talks on the return of children with the mediation of Qatar, as a result of which 29 children will travel to Ukraine and 19 children will come to Russia, Russian Children's Rights Commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova said.

* The Ukrainian armed forces have suffered up to 470 military casualties near several settlements of the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) in the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

* The situation on the battlefield is very clear and all new shipments of weapons to Ukraine will not change the dynamics at the frontline, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

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US World War II Veteran Calls Elbe Day 'Mess' as US Cancels Arlington Cemetery Ceremony

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) - The planned commemoration of the momentous encounter between US and Soviet troops at the Elbe River in April 1945 is facing disruption with Washington's decision to cancel the remembrance ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery, US World War II veteran Frank Cohn told Sputnik.

"I am afraid that Elbe Day is in a mess," Cohn said.

The 98-year-old veteran, who was among American troops who met Soviet soldiers at the Elbe River bank, stressed that he always welcomed such ceremonies.

He was the first American to lay a wreath at the Spirit of Elbe monument at the Arlington cemetery during a ceremony that the Russian embassy was organizing annually until the US decision to stop this tradition several years ago.

"Now, the United States has canceled the ceremony at Arlington Cemetery, and I am afraid that the remembrances are being wiped out," Cohn said.

Cohn said the ceremonies commemorating the historic meeting at the Elbe River were the last remnant of a time when the United States and Russia were allies.

"With the Cold War, we were no longer allies but competitors, yet we still retained the spirit of the Elbe, the remembrance that we used to be allies, which meant that we once had identical goals. It was always good to remember that," Cohn added.

On April 25, 1945, Soviet and US troops met at the Elbe River near the town of Torgau. The meeting was a key milestone in the process of ending World War II and came about as US troops advanced from the west and Soviet troops advanced from the east, splitting the territory of Nazi Germany in two.

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Biden's Re-Election Campaign to Use TikTok Amid Ban Threat - Reports

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) — US President Joe Biden's re-election campaign intends to maintain its presence on TikTok despite his signing of a law that could lead to a nationwide ban if the platform's parent company fails to sell it, NBC News reported on Wednesday.

According to the report, a Biden campaign official said that they intend to use TikTok to engage with voters online, emphasizing the importance of reaching young demographics and ensuring enhanced security measures.

The report added that the Biden re-election campaign initially didn't use TikTok, however, in February, it launched its own account.

Earlier in the day, US President Joe Biden signed a bill that could force Tiktok's parent company, ByteDance, to sell the app in the US or face a nationwide ban.

Later, on the same day, the TikTok social media platform said it would challenge the new "unconstitutional" law in court.

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Police Clash With Pro-Palestine Protesters at University of Southern California - Videos

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) — Police clashed with pro-Palestine protesters at the University of California (USC) on Wednesday after demonstrators tried to set up an encampment, videos posted to social media showed.

"There is significant activity at the center of the UPC campus due to a demonstration. There may be difficulty accessing that area," USC said in an alert.

Videos posted to social media showed police engaged in tense confrontations with students. One video showed a large group protesters encircling a police car holding one of the protesters, chanting, "let him go."

The Palestinian Youth Movement said in a statement via X that the group had managed to "de-arrest a student."

According to the USC Divest from Death Coalition, the Gaza encampment was started to urge USC to suspend its exchanges with Hebrew University's Rothenberg International School and Reichman University and to avoid starting new exchanges or programs with Israeli universities.

"One material way we can support Palestinian liberation on our campuses is by cutting ties with academic institutions that contribute to apartheid, scholasticide, and genocide," the USC Divest from Death Coalition said in a statement.

This protest at USC comes as various private and public universities across the United States have seen pro-Palestinian demonstrations and encampments in solidarity with their Columbia University counterparts, who first erected tents last Wednesday to form a "Gaza Solidarity Encampment."

In general, students are calling for their universities to condemn Israel's US-backed military campaign in Gaza, to divest from companies linked to Israel, including defense manufacturers, and to discontinue study abroad programs at Israeli universities, among various demands.

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US Provided Kiev ATACMS Earlier in April After Biden Quietly Directed Delivery - Spokesman

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden quietly directed his national security team to provide the long-range Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS) to Ukraine as part of the security aid package announced in March and those munitions arrived in April, a Pentagon spokesperson told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"Yes, I can confirm the United States provided Ukraine with long-range ATACMS at the president's direction," the spokesperson said. "He [Biden] quietly directed his national security team to send ATACMS to Ukraine for use inside Ukrainian sovereign territory in February. They started moving as part of the military aid package we announced on March 12th and those missiles arrived in Ukraine this month."

The United States was discreet about supplying the ATACMS at that time in order to maintain operational security for Ukraine, the spokesperson said.

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Russia Stands Ready to Sign Agreement on Banning All Weapons in Outer Space - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, April 24 (Sputnik) - Russia stands ready to sign an agreement that would prohibit any weapons in outer space but does not agree with the US- and Japan-sponsored draft resolution that solely focuses on weapons of mass destruction (WMD), Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Wednesday.

"For the record, I'd like to state again we're prepared to sign an international quarterly binding agreement. We can even do it tomorrow. An agreement which would contain a comprehensive ban on the placement of weapons of any kind, not just WMDs in outer space ... These WMDs are already prohibited by the Outer Space Treaty," Nebenzia said during a meeting of the UN Security Council.

Earlier on Wednesday, Russia vetoed the US- and Japan-sponsored UN Security Council draft resolution prohibiting the use of weapons of mass destruction in outer space.

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White House on Pro-Palestine University Rallies: 'Incredibly Painful Time for Communities'

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) - Many communities in the United States are going through an incredibly painful time, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said on Wednesday.

Jean-Pierre made the comment in response to the ongoing pro-Palestine rallies and protests against Israel's military operation in Gaza at universities across the United States.

"We know it's an incredibly painful time for many communities," Jean-Pierre said in a press briefing. "You've heard us talk about the White House staff officials having regular ongoing meetings with these different groups."

Students at various private and public universities across the United States have organized pro-Palestine rallies and encampments in solidarity with their Columbia University counterparts.

The latter first erected tents last week to form a "Gaza solidarity encampment" as Columbia President Minouche Shafik testified at a congressional hearing on anti-Semitism.

The following day, Shafik authorized the New York Police Department (NYPD) to clear out the encampment, which also involved the arrest of more than 100 people and the suspension of at least 15 students.

The Columbia University students have since resurrected the encampment and are currently facing off with the university administration.

Other universities have followed suit by resorting to using police to shut down the student-led protests. On Monday night, NYPD arrested 133 people involved with protests at New York University, including students and faculty.

Yale University police arrested 47 students at an outdoor protest, and three students at California Polytechnic Humboldt were also arrested.

Students are calling for their universities to condemn Israel's US-backed military campaign in Gaza, to divest from companies linked to Israel and discontinue study abroad programs at Israeli universities, among other demands.

More than 34,000 Palestinians have so far been killed during Israel's military operations in Gaza and more than 77,000 have been wounded, according to the Gaza authorities.

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Russia Blocks US Draft Resolution on Nukes in Space After Its Amendment Rejected

UNITED NATIONS, April 24 (Sputnik) - Russia on Wednesday blocked a US- and Japan-sponsored draft resolution that would have urged against developing nuclear weapons or other types of WMDs specifically designed to be placed in orbit after its amendment was rejected, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

Thirteen UNSC members voted in favor, while China abstained.

Prior to the vote, Russia and China proposed an amendment that would have extended the ban to include the placement of any type of weapons in space rather than just nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction.

The amendment failed in a 7-7 vote with one member abstaining.

Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said earlier this month that the UN Security Council is not the right body to adopt resolutions on outer space activities that affect all UN members.

He said that the US and Japan were seeking to politicize the matter and use the draft resolution

to promote "groundless" allegations about Russia aiming to deploy nuclear weapons in space. At the same time, the US is refusing to take any obligations not to develop other types of weapons specifically designed to be placed in outer space, Nebenzia stressed.

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US Will Continue to Comply With Arms Control Obligations After UNSC Vote - Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, April 24 (Sputnik) - The United States will continue to adhere to its arms control obligations and constructively engage to seek new ones, US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield said on Wednesday after the UN Security Council rejected a resolution on prohibiting use of weapons of mass destruction in outer space.

"We will continue to comply with existing arms control obligations and engage constructively in new ones," Thomas-Greenfield told the Security Council members. "But let me be clear in no way does this vote undermine the obligations Russia or any other state party continues to have under the Outer Space Treaty."

Russia earlier on Wednesday blocked the draft resolution, sponsored by the US and Japan, after the Council rejected a Russian-Chinese amendment to extend the ban on the placement of any type of weapons in space, rather than just the weapons of mass destruction.

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US House Speaker Calls on Columbia President to Resign Amid Pro-Palestine Protests

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Wednesday that Columbia University President Minouche Shafik should resign from her leadership position, amid a controversial pro-Palestine protest on the campus.

"I'm here today joining my colleagues in calling on President Shafik to resign if she cannot immediately bring order to this chaos," Johnson said during a speech at the university.

A number of protesters attended Johnson's speech, booing and chanting over his remarks.

The Biden administration and some US lawmakers have characterized pro-Palestine protests on college campuses across the United States as anti-Semitic. Americans have the right to peacefully protest but calls for violence and physical intimidation of Jewish students are unconscionable and dangerous, US President Biden said.

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Several Arrested at Mass Pro-Palestine Protest on University of Texas Campus - Reports

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) - A large pro-Palestine protest is taking place on the campus of the University of Texas in Austin on Wednesday as law enforcement officers in riot gear clash with the demonstrators, according to media footage.

Media footage shows Texas state police officers in full riot gear shoving several protesters and arresting others.

The Texas state police and University of Texas campus police did not immediately respond to Sputnik's request for comment on the matter.

The protesters are demonstrating against US military support in Israel's military operation in Gaza, which has resulted in the death of some 34,000 and the wounding of more than 77,000 Palestinians.

Pro-Palestine protests have swept across college campuses in the United States – and throughout the world - calling for an end to the war in Gaza.

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Unstable Global Situation Increasing Nuclear Conflict Risk for All Countries - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) - The unstable geopolitical situation increases for all countries the risk of a nuclear conflict, US Assistant Secretary of State Mallory Stewart said on Wednesday.

"Everyone has a heightened risk of nuclear conflict while we have an unstable international arena, especially as we have challenges with our ability to communicate and clearly prevent misunderstanding, miscalculation, or even escalation with Russia specifically in this context," Stewart said.

Stewart pointed out that the United States raised this issue earlier this week during the nuclear risk reduction meeting with officials from Latin American countries.

"We do not want to have a situation where misunderstanding and miscalculation lead to increasing participation, increasingly escalatory weapons involvement, and then other countries bringing in whatever weapon systems they have to address the conflict," Stewart said.

Stewart emphasized the importance of preventing a broader conflict and the proliferation of dangerous weapons, which could lead to a confrontation.

Behaving transparently and having the necessary communication channels in place would greatly help avoiding miscalculations and unintentional escalation.

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Nebenzia Says US Draft Resolution on Nukes in Space 'Fig Leaf,' Part of Cunning Plan

UNITED NATIONS, April 24 (Sputnik) - A US- and Japan-sponsored draft resolution that would have called against developing nuclear weapons and other types of WMDs specifically designed to be placed in orbit represents a cover-up for a cunning plan by the West, Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said on Wednesday.

"Yet, behind this fig leaf, there was a cunning plan that was concocted by our Western colleagues," Nebenzia told the UN Security Council before a vote on the draft resolution.

Russia blocked the draft resolution after a Russian-Chinese amendment to extend the ban on the placement of any type of weapons in space rather than just the weapons of mass destruction was rejected in a 7-7 vote with one abstention.

Nebenzia said earlier this month that the UN Security Council is not the right body to adopt resolutions on outer space activities that affect all UN members.

He said that the US and Japan were seeking to politicize the matter and use the draft resolution to promote "groundless" allegations about Russia aiming to deploy nuclear weapons in space. At the same time, the US is refusing to take any obligations not to develop other types of weapons specifically designed to be placed in outer space, Nebenzia stressed.

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US-Sponsored UN Draft Resolution Needed Amendment to Ban All Weapons in Space - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, April 24 (Sputnik) – The US- and Japan-proposed UN Security Council draft resolution on prohibiting the use of nuclear weapons in outer space needed an amendment to include all weapons, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Wednesday.

"For that reason, we believe that it's necessary to introduce a balanced amendment which would allow the council to send a strong unequivocal signal to the international community, a signal about our ironclad intention to ensure that an arms race does not occur in outer space," Nebenzia told the UN Security Council. "And I'm referring to all kinds of weapons, not just WMDs [weapons of mass destruction] and nuclear weapons."

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Police Clash With Pro-Palestine Protesters at University of Southern California - Videos

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) — Police clashed with pro-Palestine protesters at the University of California (USC) on Wednesday after demonstrators tried to set up an encampment, videos posted to social media showed.

"There is significant activity at the center of the UPC campus due to a demonstration. There

may be difficulty accessing that area," USC said in an alert.

Videos posted to social media showed police engaged in tense confrontations with students. One video showed a large group of protesters encircling a police car holding one of the protesters, chanting, "let him go."

The Palestinian Youth Movement said in a statement via X that the group had managed to "de-arrest a student."

According to the USC Divest from Death Coalition, the Gaza encampment was started to urge USC to suspend its exchanges with Hebrew University's Rothenberg International School and Reichman University and to avoid starting new exchanges or programs with Israeli universities.

"One material way we can support Palestinian liberation on our campuses is by cutting ties with academic institutions that contribute to apartheid, scholasticide, and genocide," the USC Divest from Death Coalition said in a statement.

This protest at USC comes as various private and public universities across the United States have seen pro-Palestinian demonstrations and encampments in solidarity with their Columbia University counterparts, who first erected tents last Wednesday to form a "Gaza Solidarity Encampment."

In general, students are calling for their universities to condemn Israel's US-backed military campaign in Gaza, to divest from companies linked to Israel, including defense manufacturers, and to discontinue study abroad programs at Israeli universities, among various demands.

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Russia Blocks US Draft Resolution on Nukes in Space After Its Amendment Rejected

UNITED NATIONS, April 24 (Sputnik) - Russia on Wednesday blocked a US- and Japan-sponsored draft resolution that would have urged against developing nuclear weapons or other types of WMDs specifically designed to be placed in orbit after its amendment was rejected, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

Thirteen UNSC members voted in favor, while China abstained.

Prior to the vote, Russia and China proposed an amendment that would have extended the ban to include the placement of any type of weapons in space rather than just nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction.

The amendment failed in a 7-7 vote with one member abstaining.

Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said earlier this month that the UN Security Council is not the right body to adopt resolutions on outer space activities that affect all UN members.

He said that the US and Japan were seeking to politicize the matter and use the draft resolution to promote "groundless" allegations about Russia aiming to deploy nuclear weapons in space. At the same time, the US is refusing to take any obligations not to develop other types of weapons specifically designed to be placed in outer space, Nebenzia stressed.

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US OKs Sale of Guided Missiles to Poland, Netherlands for Nearly \$2Bln – DSCA

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) – The US State Department on Wednesday approved potential sales of anti-radiation guided missiles to Poland and the Netherlands for \$1.275 billion and \$700 million respectively, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) announced on Wednesday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Poland of Advanced Anti-Radiation Guided Missiles - Extended Range and related elements of logistics and program support for an estimated cost of \$1.275 billion," the agency said in a press release.

Separately, the agency said the State Department approved a potential \$700 million sale of Advanced Anti-Radiation Guided Missiles - Extended range and related equipment to the Netherlands.

The Polish government intends to buy 360 Advanced Anti-Radiation Guided Missile-Extended Range (AARGM-ER), eight AGM-88G AARGM-ER Guidance Sections, and eight AGM-88G AARGM-ER Control Sections, among other equipment and related services, according to the release.

The Government of the Netherlands has requested to buy 265 AGM-88G Advanced Anti-Radiation Guided Missiles - Extended Range (AARGM-ER), eight AGM-88G AARGM-ER Guidance Sections, and eight AGM-88G AARGM-ER Control Sections, according to the release.

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National Security Advisor Sullivan Says Expects to Travel to Saudi Arabia in Coming Weeks

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Wednesday that he expects to travel to Saudi Arabia in the coming weeks, after canceling a trip to the country earlier this month due to a rib injury.

"I do expect to get to Saudi Arabia in the next few weeks," Sullivan said during a press briefing. However, the trip has not been formally scheduled yet, he said.

Sullivan pointed out that he is 80% recovered from his rib injury but joked that he is "physically deteriorating" in every other way.

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US Discussing With European Partners How to Use Russian Assets to Aid Ukraine- White House

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) - The United States is still in conversation with its European partners about how to utilize immobilized Russian assets to aid recovery in Ukraine, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Wednesday.

"Russian assets are going to remain immobilized until they are put to use for recovery in Ukraine. The precise way in which that happens. . .is still a matter of consultation with our European partners," said Sullivan during a press briefing.

Sullivan added that the subject will be a prominent topic at the G7 summit in June.

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UNSC Fails to Adopt Russia-China Amendment to Resolution Against Nukes in Space

UNITED NATIONS, April 24 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council on Wednesday failed to adopt an amendment sponsored by Russia and China that would extend a ban on the placement of any type of weapons in space rather than just the weapons of mass destruction sought by the United States and Japan, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

The amendment failed in a 7-7 vote with one member abstaining.

If adopted, the amendment would have required states to "take urgent measures to prevent for all time the placement of weapons in outer space and the threat or use of force in outer space, from space against Earth and from Earth against objects in outer space."

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US Says Confident Kiev Will Use ATACMS on Its Own Soil as It Allegedly Did With HIMARS

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) - The United States is confident that Ukraine will use ATACMS only within its own territory as it allegedly did with HIMARS, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Wednesday.

"We now have an extended period of time where we have tested these commitments from the Ukrainian government which they have made with respect to other systems as well, including HIMARS where they have said we will only use these on Ukrainian sovereign territory, we won't use them beyond the borders," Sullivan said when asked about how the US will ensure that ATACMS will only be used within Ukrainian territory.

"They have followed through on that commitment time and time again with respect to the systems that we have provided them, so we have confidence they will follow through on this

commitment as well," he stated.

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US Justice Dept. Probing McKinsey Over Its Advice to Opium Producers – Reports

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) – The consulting firm McKinsey is being investigated by the United States Department of Justice over its involvement in advising some of the country's largest opioids manufacturers on how to increase sales, the Wall Street Journal reported on Wednesday.

Moreover, US federal prosecutors are also probing whether the consulting firm or any of its employees may have obstructed justice with regard to records on services provided to opioid producers, the report said, citing individuals familiar with the investigation.

The report further added that a grand jury has been selected in the State of Virginia as part of the ongoing investigation into McKinsey's alleged opioid-related consulting.

The investigation is being jointly conducted by the US attorney's offices in the Western District of Virginia and the District of Massachusetts, the cited individuals said.

The consulting firm declined to comment on the ongoing probe, the report said.

Created in 1926, McKinsey & company is a US multinational strategy and management consulting firm that offers its services to a variety of clients ranging from corporations, governments and several organizations.

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us approves possible \$700 million sale of anti-radiation guided missiles to the netherlands - pentagon

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US Will Send More ATACMS to Ukraine - White House

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) - The United States will send more ATACMS long-range missiles to Ukraine now that the national security supplemental package has been passed, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Wednesday.

"We've already sent some; we will send more now that we have additional authority and money," Sullivan said during a press briefing.

Sullivan added that there is now a significant number of ATACMS coming off the production line and entering US stocks. As a result, the US can move forward with supplying the artillery

systems to Ukraine while sustaining the readiness of the US armed forces, he stated.

President Joe Biden quietly directed his national security team to provide the long-range Army Tactical Missile System to Ukraine as part of the security aid package announced in March and those munitions arrived in April, a Pentagon spokesperson told Sputnik earlier in the day.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that the US's new military aid package for Kiev would not change the situation on the battlefield and would only increase Ukraine's military losses.

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us still in consultations with european allies about precise way of using russian assets for ukraine - white house

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White House Says 'Possible' Russia Can Make Territorial Gains in Ukraine Over Coming Weeks

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) - The United States admits the possibility that Russia could make additional territorial gains in Ukraine over the coming weeks, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Wednesday.

"And it is certainly possible that Russia could make additional tactical gains in the coming weeks. Russia has tried to grind out very slow, costly progress on multiple fronts over weeks," said Sullivan during a press briefing.

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US Working With IAEA to Get More Transparency on Iranian Nuclear Activity - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) - The United States is working closely with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to get more transparency from Iran on its nuclear activity amid concerns it is close to developing nuclear weapons, US Assistant Secretary of State for Bureau of Arms Control, Deterrence, and Stability Mallory Stewart said on Wednesday.

"We're working very closely with the IAEA and with the Board of Governors in that context to try to encourage greater transparency, greater willingness to work together with the international organization set up really to confirm no diversion of nuclear capabilities for weaponized program," Stewart said when asked about concerns Iran is close to developing nuclear weapons.

Stewart emphasized that the State Department supports all of the efforts of the IAEA to gain greater insight from Iran to address the insecurity and any misunderstandings that result from a

lack of transparency.

Earlier this week, the State Department said the United States is not taking part in direct talks with Tehran on the return to Iran's nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

In 2015, Iran signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, with the involvement of the European Union. The deal committed Iran to scaling back its nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief. The US withdrew from the deal in 2018 under then-President Donald Trump but resumed talks with Iran in a bid to revive the deal under incumbent President Joe Biden. The talks have since hit a deadlock.

Tehran maintains that its nuclear program is solely intended for peaceful purposes.

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Majority of Likely US Voters Think Government Overspending on Foreign Aid - Poll

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) - A majority of likely voters in the United States believe that the US government spends too much money on foreign aid, according to a Rasmussen Reports poll published Wednesday.

Fifty-seven percent (57%) of respondents believe that the US government is spending too much on foreign aid, the poll report said.

One-in-ten respondents believe that the US does not spend enough on foreign aid and 23% believe the amount is just about right, the poll report said.

The poll report comes following the passage of a \$95 billion foreign aid package with funding for Ukraine, Israel and Indo-Pacific security initiatives.

The poll surveyed 1,126 likely US voters from April 16-18. The poll maintains a margin of error of plus-or-minus three percentage points with a 95% confidence level.

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UN Will Need Access to Conduct Meaningful Investigation in Gaza - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, April 24 (Sputnik) - In order to conduct an effective investigation in Gaza, the UN will need access to the area, UN Spokesman Farhan Haq said on Wednesday.

"This is something that's been true across the board with our investigations. There's always difficulties in terms of places where conflict has occurred, to get the access we need. But ultimately, for any investigation to be meaningful, you need that access," Haq said in a briefing.

In addition, he said that any party that controls access to the area, therefore, needs to agree to the investigation.

Israel launched a ground incursion into the Gaza Strip after Hamas attacked the Jewish state

on October 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people and abducting some 240 others. Over 34,000 people have been killed so far by Israeli strikes in the Gaza Strip, according to local authorities.

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US Recognizes UNRWA Performing Indispensable Functions, No Substitute - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) - The United States sees the work of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) as indispensable and admits there is no substitute for it, US Assistant Secretary Barbara Leaf said on Wednesday.

"We do recognize that the functions that UNRWA carries out are indispensable and that there is no ready replacement for UNRWA in carrying out those responsibilities, or for the staff who put their lives at risk in Gaza every day to carry out these functions," Leaf told reporters.

She added that while Congress ruled out the US providing direct assistance to UNRWA, a number of countries have resumed their support for the agency.

"We are certainly encouraging all of our partners to look to these needs in a coordinated way," she said.

Leaf emphasized that the US is using other channels to provide assistance to Palestinians.

In January, Israel shared data with UNRWA's leadership on the alleged involvement of some of its staff members in the October 7 Hamas attack and vowed to hold accountable anyone involved in "acts of terror." A number of countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Canada, Japan and others, responded by suspending funding to the agency. By March, however, many of these nations had decided to resume their funding.

In early February, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appointed an independent review panel led by former French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna to check UNRWA's activities for alleged links with Hamas. Their final report was published on Monday, saying that Israel had provided no evidence of the agency's workers allegedly being members of "terrorist organizations."

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US Unsuccessful in Countering Russia's Disinformation in Africa, South American - Haines

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) - The United States has been unsuccessful in countering alleged Russia's disinformation campaigns in Africa and South America, National Intelligence Director Avril Haines said on Wednesday.

"What we saw in Europe was that we were actually pretty successful in countering Russian disinformation. We were not successful in Africa, in the continent of Africa, or really in South America," Haines said during a discussion hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington.

According to Haines, Russia was attempting to compel the public in Africa and South America that NATO actions provoked and escalated the conflict in Ukraine.

In March, US Africa Command (AFRICOM) chief Gen. Michael Langley said that Russia has over the past several years been successful in its attempts to "drown out" the US narrative in Africa through alleged misinformation campaigns.

Russia has repeatedly rejected accusations put forth by Washington about its alleged disinformation campaign aimed at the United States.

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US Losing Ground in Arctic to Russia Due to Lack of Icebreaking Capability – Coast Guard

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) – The United States is losing ground in the Arctic to its near-peer competitors, including Russia and China, because of a lack of icebreaking capability, but this situation will improve in the future, U.S. Coast Guard Vice Commandant Admiral Steven D. Poulin said on Wednesday.

“We are losing ground [in the Arctic] because we don't have the kind of icebreaking capability of some of our near-peer competitors. Russia has 40-plus icebreakers and wants to increase its fleet. China is building icebreaking capability for both the high latitudes of the north and the south. We have one heavy icebreaker and one medium icebreaker,” Poulin said during a discussion hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

Poulin noted that he is nevertheless optimistic that this gap will narrow in the future after Washington has sped up the construction of new heavy icebreakers.

According to the admiral, the United States must be present in the Arctic to allegedly ensure the ocean space has “good maritime governance” and that sovereignty and the rule of law are protected.

Earlier in April, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko said that NATO seeks to strengthen its presence in the Arctic and establish new headquarters command chains there and Russia will adequately respond to that.

In recent years, Russia has on many occasions expressed its concerns about increased NATO military activities in the Arctic, saying that there was a risk of unintended clashes in the region. Moscow has also allowed for the possibility of withdrawing from the Arctic Council if its activities do not meet Russia's interests.

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US Warned Hezbollah Against Entering Into Conflict With Israel - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) - The United States warned the Lebanese armed group Hezbollah against entering into a conflict with Israel, US Assistant Secretary of State for Near

Eastern Affairs Barbara Leaf said on Wednesday.

"We have certainly used a number of channels and we've been aided by other partners in using their channels - direct or indirect - to Hezbollah to warn against entering into the fray and widening the conflict," Leaf said during a press briefing.

The United States has also cautioned Israel to be careful in its response to Hezbollah actions, Leaf said.

There has been a concerning degree of volatility along the Israel-Lebanon border, Leaf added, noting that the potential for escalation is acute.

Israel and Hezbollah have been exchanging strikes since October 2023, following Palestinian organization Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel and the subsequent Israeli military operation in the Gaza Strip.

On Sunday, Hezbollah said that it shot down a multi-role Israeli combat drone over southern Lebanon. The Israeli Defense Forces confirmed that their drone was downed over Lebanon by a surface-to-air missile and said that the Israeli air force struck the missile launch sight.

Earlier this month, Lebanese Culture Minister Mohammad Wissam Al-Mortada told Sputnik that Israel may eventually invade Lebanon if their actions in Gaza are not addressed.

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Biden Directs State Dept. to Provide Up to \$145Mln in Aid to Ukraine - White House

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden has directed the State Department to provide up to \$145 million in additional assistance to Ukraine, a memorandum released by the White House said on Wednesday.

"I hereby delegate to the Secretary of State the authority under section 614(a)(1) of the FAA to determine whether it is important to the security interests of the United States to furnish up to \$145 million in assistance to Ukraine without regard to any provision of law within the purview of section 614(a)(1) of the FAA," Biden said the memorandum to the secretary of state.

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US Provided Kiev ATACMS Earlier in April After Biden Quietly Directed Delivery - Spokesman

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden quietly directed his national security team to provide the long-range Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS) to Ukraine as part of the security aid package announced in March and those munitions arrived in April, a Pentagon spokesperson told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"Yes, I can confirm the United States provided Ukraine with long-range ATACMS at the president's direction," the spokesperson said. "He [Biden] quietly directed his national security

team to send ATACMS to Ukraine for use inside Ukrainian sovereign territory in February. They started moving as part of the military aid package we announced on March 12th and those missiles arrived in Ukraine this month."

The United States was discreet about supplying the ATACMS at that time in order to maintain operational security for Ukraine, the spokesperson said.

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US Already Sent Long-Range Missiles to Ukraine, Kiev Used Them Twice - Reports

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration last month covertly sent to Ukraine the long-range Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS) and Kiev twice used the weapon to hit Russian territory, Politico reported on Wednesday.

Earlier in the day, the US Defense Department unveiled a \$1 billion military aid package for Ukraine, including cluster munitions and air defense supplies.

The package includes 155mm dual purpose improved conventional munitions rounds, Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, RIM-7 and AIM-9M air defense missiles and additional ammunition for the High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), the report said.

The security aid package was prepared after Congress passed legislation to provide nearly \$61 billion in Ukraine-related funding.

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pentagon tells sputnik will defer questions about previous and or potential use of atacms to ukraine, since they should speak for own military ops

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pentagon tells sputnik us started moving atacms as part of military aid package announced on march 12, missiles arrived in ukraine this month

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US to Produce 100, 000 155mm Artillery Rounds by Summer 2025 - General

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) - The United States will be able to produce 100,000 155mm artillery shells by the summer of 2025 thanks to Congress approving the new Ukraine aid package, US Army Vice Chief of Staff Gen. James Mingus said on Wednesday.

"Prior to February 2022, we were producing about 14,000 rounds a month. We quickly moved that to 18[000], then to 24[000], then to 28[000]. This month we will produce 30[000]. By the end of this year, we'll be at 50[000] and 72[000]. And then, with the supplemental that just was thankfully passed last night, we'll be at 100,000 rounds by next summer," Mingus said.

The general made the comment during a discussion hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington.

In March, US media cited NATO intelligence estimates that Russia was producing about 3 million artillery shells per year, while the United States and its European allies can collectively produce only 1.2 million.

According to Defense Department data, the United States has supplied Ukraine with more than 2 million 155 mm artillery rounds and with more than 200 155mm howitzers.

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

In April 2022, Russia sent a diplomatic note to all NATO countries on the issue of arms supplies to Ukraine. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov warned that any cargo containing weapons for Ukraine will become a legitimate target for Russian strikes.

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us has already sent long-range atacms to ukraine, kiev has used weapon twice - politico

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UNRWA Chief in Moscow From April 24-25, Will Brief BRICS on Gaza - Source

UNITED NATIONS, April 24 (Sputnik) - The head of the UN Palestinian relief agency UNRWA Philippe Lazzarini is due to arrive to Moscow today to participate in a BRICS meeting by briefing member countries on the latest developments in Gaza, a UN source told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"Mr. Lazzarini is visiting Moscow on April 24-25. He will address the BRICS meeting (at the deputy Foreign Ministers' level) and will give latest about Gaza and could meet BRICS deputy foreign ministers, including Russian," a UN source told Sputnik.

Lazzarini's visit to Russia comes after several countries paused funding for UNRWA amid Israeli allegations that a "significant" number of the agency's staff are members of Hamas and other "terrorist" organizations.

In early February, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appointed an independent review panel led by former French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna to probe UNRWA's activities for alleged links with Hamas. Colonna's final report, published on Monday, concluded that Israel had provided no evidence to support its claims that UNRWA staff are members of "terrorist organizations."

In January, Israel shared data with UNRWA's leadership on the alleged involvement of some of its staff members in the October 7 Hamas attack and vowed to hold accountable anyone involved in "acts of terror."

A number of countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Canada and Japan, responded to Israel's allegations by suspending funding to the agency. By March, however, many of these nations had decided to resume their funding, though the United States, the agency's largest donor, has not done so.

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Blinken Expresses Hope to Have 'Productive Meetings' During Visit to China

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday upon his arrival to China that he was looking forward to having productive meetings with officials in Shanghai and Beijing, including on the issue of fentanyl.

"I just arrived here in Shanghai in the People's Republic of China to work on issues that matter to the American people. One of those is fentanyl, synthetic opioids - the leading killer of Americans between the ages of 18 and 49," Blinken said in a short video posted on social media.

Blinken added that he looked forward to having productive meetings with officials in Shanghai and in Beijing.

Blinken's visit to China is scheduled to last three days. During his visit, Blinken is expected to meet with his counterpart Wang Yi and also possibly with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

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US Space Command Says Chinese Moon Ambitions 'Lack Transparency'

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) – The US Space Command said Wednesday that China lacked transparency in its moon exploration project, raising uncertainty over whether there was a "military component."

"Obviously, we've seen the announcements of China's ambitions to go to the moon. And those appear to be exploratory and scientific on the surface, but the Chinese aren't very transparent with what they do in space, and so we hope there's not a military component to that, but we would certainly welcome more transparency," General Stephen Whiting, commander of the US

Space Commander, said at a press briefing.

China and Russia jointly initiated the International Lunar Research Station (ILRS) program in 2021 in competition with the US-led Artemis moon exploration project.

A preliminary version of the ILRS is projected to be established on the moon this decade, with the station fully operational for lunar research by 2050.

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Antonov on US Authority to Seize Frozen Russian Assets: Russophobes Try to Cover Up Theft

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) - Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said on Wednesday in commenting the authorization allowing US President Joe Biden to seize Russian frozen assets that it is a case of Russophobes trying to cover up their theft with pseudo-legal arguments.

"Russophobes are trying to cover up their robbery, which essentially serves as a financial weapon against Russia, with pseudo-legal arguments," Antonov told reporters. "At the same time, they are not at all embarrassed that by their actions, they are trampling on the very sacred principles of the inviolability of property that the United States so boasts of."

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Trudeau Says 'Trusts' Canadians to be 'Reasonable' When it Comes to 2025 Federal Elections

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) – Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Wednesday said that he “trusts Canadians to be reasonable” when it comes to the choices they will make during the 2025 federal elections.

The Premier made the remarks when questioned on what he would tell Canadians who are angry at him and unhappy with his rule, and who would rather support Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre.

“I trust Canadians to be reasonable,” Trudeau said as he compared what his Liberal government had to offer in contrast with their Conservative counterparts.

The Prime Minister further added that “he knows” Canadians will be very thoughtful when the time comes to choose what sort of country they want to live in, what choices for the future they seek, and whether the challenges facing them are being solved or amplified.

Canada being a democracy, voters will be called to cast their votes in favor of one of several candidates, Trudeau said, as he also expressed confidence that Canadians would both look at who is building on the people’s frustrations for political gain versus and who is providing solutions for the population.

The next Canadian federal elections are scheduled to take place on or before October 20,

2025. Trudeau has expressed his intention to run for another term for the Liberal Party in what would be his fourth general election.

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US Breaches Its Duty Under UN Charter by Supplying Weapons to Ukraine - Antonov

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) - The United States by supplying weapons to Ukraine has violated its responsibilities under the UN Charter, which gives Security Council members a key role in maintaining international peace and security, Russian Ambassador in Washington Anatoly Antonov said on Wednesday.

Earlier in the day, President Joe Biden signed a national security supplemental bill that includes \$61 billion in Ukraine aid.

"The cynicism of the US authorities amazes. Here they talk about the need to pump up the Nazi regime in Kiev. They are ready to kill as many Ukrainians and Russians as possible with US weapons," Antonov told reporters. "As a result, they want to save the world based on US rules, strengthen the system of domination of Western countries over the world majority. In essence, the administration violated its responsibility under the UN Charter - to bear on an equal basis with other permanent members of the Security Council special responsibility for international peace and security."

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Russia 'Very Concerned' Conflict in DRC May Escalate Due to Armed Group M23 - Deputy Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, April 24 (Sputnik) - Russia is very concerned that the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) may escalate with the participation of the illegal armed group M23, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Anna Evstigneeva said on Wednesday.

"We are very much concerned by the conflict escalating, with the participation of the M23 illegal armed group," Evstigneeva said during a meeting of the the UN Security Council.

Evstigneeva pointed out that Russia is also concerned about the tense relations between DRC and Rwanda amid the deteriorating situation in the former.

The M23 group, which fights for the interests of the Tutsi ethnic minority in the DRC, rebelled against the government in 2012 but suffered a major military defeat the following year and was disbanded.

In 2021, the M23 accused the DRC authorities of violating agreements to integrate their disarmed fighter into the country's army and took up arms again.

In March of the following year, M23 launched a major offensive in the North Kivu province to gain ground against the DRC military and has kept expanding into additional territories.

The DRC has repeatedly accused Rwanda of supporting the M23 rebels, but Rwanda has denied having any connections with them.

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Russian Ambassador on Ukraine Aid Package: US Chooses War, Sides With Evil

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) - The United States has made its choice in favor of the continuing conflict in Ukraine and sided with evil, Russian Ambassador in Washington Anatoly Antonov said on Wednesday, commenting on President Joe Biden signing the national security supplemental bill that includes \$61 billion in Ukraine aid.

"The United States has made a choice in favor of war," Antonov told reporters. "It has sided with evil and supported fascism. For the sake of its greedy and insatiable defense industry complex, the administration sacrifices the lives of ordinary people. With their decision, American politicians are actually writing off the fate of an entire state, which is being used as a 'battering ram' against Russia."

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Biden Says 'Determined' to Address Border Security Funding Excluded in Supplemental Bills

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden said Wednesday that he was “determined to get it done” when it came to border security funding that was not included in the long-awaited approval of foreign aid supplemental bills.

“There’s one thing this bill does not do: border security...It should have been included in this bill. And I’m determined to get it done for the American people. But I’ll come back to that in another moment, another time,” Biden said at a press briefing.

On Saturday, the House passed a set of supplemental foreign aid bills that totaled \$95.3 billion in funding for Ukraine, Israel, and the Indo-Pacific region, ending a months-long stalemate on a singular foreign aid supplemental bill.

In February, the Senate passed a version of this bill that included border security funding in an attempt to secure bipartisan approval across both chambers. However, Speaker Mike Johnson refused to bring that bill to the House floor. Ultimately, he opted to steer through three separate bills for Ukraine, Israel, and the Indo-Pacific region, setting aside the matter of border security for the meantime.

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

Trudeau Says on Potential US TikTok Ban That Canada Will Act in Ways 'Right for Canadians'

WASHINGTON, April 23 (Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Wednesday that Canada would act in ways that are "right for Canadians" amid a potential ban of the the social media platform TikTok in the United States.

On Saturday, the US House of Representatives passed legislation that would require the Chinese company ByteDance to divest its ownership stake in TikTok or else the platform would be banned in the United States.

The bill is expected to be promptly passed by the US Senate and signed into law by President Joe Biden. TikTok has denied that its application poses a security threat to US users as the lawmakers had alleged.

"We know that the security, the privacy and the data protection of Canadians needs to be a first priority for us. We've already taken significant measures on that. We will continue to do that, but we will act in ways that are right for Canadians," Trudeau said in response to a question whether he considered a similar move in Canada.

Trudeau, however, refused to comment on the US legislation but did say that Ottawa would continue to closely look into ways to ensure that Canadians remain safe all the while Canada takes advantage of technological advances allowing for innovation and nationwide opportunities.

In February 2023, the Canadian government announced that it was banning the use of TikTok from all devices issued by the federal government, including laptops and cellphones, arguing that the application represented an unacceptable level of risk to privacy and security.

In mid-March, media reported that the Trudeau government had launched a previously undisclosed national security review of TikTok in September 2023.

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Pentagon Unveils \$1Bln Ukraine Aid Package With Cluster Munitions, Air Defense Supplies

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department on Wednesday unveiled a \$1 billion military aid package for Ukraine, including cluster munitions and air defense supplies.

"This Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA) package has an estimated value of \$1 billion and includes capabilities to support Ukraine's most urgent requirements, including air defense interceptors, artillery rounds, armored vehicles, and anti-tank weapons," the Pentagon said in a statement.

The package includes 155mm Dual Purpose Improved Conventional Munitions rounds, Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, RIM-7 and AIM-9M air defense missiles and additional ammunition for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, the statement said.

The package comes following the passage of legislation with nearly \$61 billion in

Ukraine-related funding by the US Congress.

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Oil Price Drifts Below \$90 Per Barrel as Demand Doubts Add to Mideast Standoff

NEW YORK, April 24 (Sputnik) - The price of oil drifted beneath the key bullish mark of \$90 per barrel on Wednesday after US inventory data suggested mixed demand for fuels despite a huge drawdown in crude, while uncertainty lingered over the next phase of the conflict in the Middle East.

The UK-based Brent crude and its US peer, the West Texas Intermediate (WTI) traded at least half a percent down on the day, attempting to recover from last week's selloff triggered by the notion that Middle East tensions had been overplayed in pushing oil prices higher.

At the time of writing, Brent, which is the global benchmark for crude, was at \$87.97 per barrel, down 45 cents, or 0.5%.

WTI was at \$82.75 per barrel, down 61 cents, or 0.7%.

Brent reached a five-month high of \$92.18 while WTI scaled \$87.67 on April 12, on the eve of Iran's retaliatory attack on Israel, which many had feared would trigger a new Middle East catastrophe and seriously disrupt crude shipments from the oil-rich Middle East.

But the attack executed by Iran and Israel's subsequent muted response on April 19 did little to escalate the broader Middle East crisis. As a result, downward pressure had built on crude prices.

Oil markets also came under pressure after the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) said in its Weekly Petroleum Status Report that domestic crude balances fell by 6.368 million barrels during the week that ended on April 19 after four prior weekly builds of nearly 15 million barrels.

A consensus of forecasts by energy analysts on Wall Street showed crude stockpiles were expected to rise by 1.6 million barrels in the latest week.

Meanwhile, fuel inventories fell, muting some of the pressure arising from the build in crude balances. Gasoline stockpiles slid by 0.634 million barrels during the week to April 19, after a drop of 1.15 million barrels the prior week, the EIA said.

Gasoline is the primary motor fuel in the United States and makes up the largest component of the country's energy mix.

Distillate stockpiles were up by 1.614 million barrels last week versus the prior weekly drop of 2.76 million.

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Biden Says US Bows to No One, 'Certainly Not to Putin'

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) - The United States bows to no one and "certainly not to Vladimir Putin," President Joe Biden said on Wednesday after signing a bill with multi-billion-dollar aid for Ukraine.

"We bow to no one, to no one. Certainly not [Russian President] Vladimir Putin," Biden said.

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Biden Says US Aid Will Help Israel Replenish Air Defenses

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) - The US foreign aid supplemental package will help Israel replenish its air defenses, President Joe Biden said on Wednesday, after signing the \$95 billion national security supplemental bill.

"My commitment to Israel, I want to make clear again is ironclad. The security of Israel is critical. I will always make sure that Israel has what it needs to defend itself against Iran and terrorists it supports," Biden said in a speech. "With this aid, the United States can help replenish Israel's air defense and provide other critical needs so Iran can never carry out the destruction it intended with its attack 10 days ago."

Biden also said that the bill significantly increases humanitarian assistance to Gaza.

"This bill includes \$1 billion for additional humanitarian aid in Gaza," Biden said.

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Biden Says US to Begin Military Deliveries to Ukraine in 'Next Few Hours'

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) – President Joe Biden said Wednesday that the United States would start sending military equipment to Ukraine in the "next few hours," in a speech on the foreign aid supplemental bill.

"In the next few hours, literally a few hours. We're going to begin sending equipment to Ukraine for air defense munitions, for artillery, for rocket systems, and armored vehicles," Biden said.

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BIDEN SIGNS U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY LEGISLATION PROVIDING \$95Bln in Aid for Ukraine, Israel, Initiatives in Indo-Pacific

Sputnik

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US Senator Says \$61Bln Ukraine Aid Bill Will Prolong 'Bloody' Conflict

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) - A bill with nearly \$61 billion in Ukraine-related funding passed by the US Congress will prolong the conflict in the country and result in more Ukrainians dying, US Sen. Mike Lee said in a statement via social media platform X.

"Mr. President, I believe that this bill will prolong a bloody conflict and cost more Ukrainians their lives, even as their cause is righteous," Lee said on Tuesday night, following passage of the legislation by the Senate.

Lee said that he believes US President Joe Biden wants to end the bloodshed and asked whether the administration can work to establish a negotiated peace in Ukraine.

Foreign aid often involves taking money from poor people in rich countries to give to rich people in poor countries, Lee said in a separate statement, paraphrasing former US Congressman Ron Paul.

Lee sarcastically said that Americans will sleep better knowing that a few rich people in Ukraine are set to get even richer.

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Biden Pardons 16 People Committed Non-Violent Drug Crimes – White House

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden said on Wednesday that he is pardoning 16 individuals who were convicted of non-violent drug crimes.

"I am using my clemency power to pardon 11 individuals and commute the sentences of 5 individuals who were convicted of non-violent drug offenses," Biden said in a statement released by the White House.

Many of these people received disproportionately longer sentences than they would have under current laws, he added.

Biden expressed confidence the individuals have demonstrated their commitment to improving their lives and positively transforming their communities.

"The commutation recipients have shown that they are deserving of forgiveness and the chance at building a brighter future for themselves beyond prison walls," he said.

The White House said in a separate statement that Biden pardoned people from more than a dozen of US states. All of them were sentenced to a long terms for non-violent drug-related

crimes they had committed many years ago.