

5/2/24 Thursday

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US Relocates Military Air Assets to Qatar Following UAE Restrictions – Reports

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) – The US has been relocating military air assets from an Abu Dhabi air base to Qatar, after the UAE imposed restrictions on the US launching airstrikes from there on Iraq and Yemen, The Wall Street Journal reported on Friday

“Restrictions have been imposed on strike missions against targets in Iraq and Yemen,” a UAE official said, as quoted by The Wall Street Journal. “Those restrictions are coming from a place of self-protection.”

The official added that these restrictions were imposed because the Pentagon acted too slowly in defending the UAE after militias in Iraq and Yemen attacked it in early 2022.

In February, the UAE informed the US that it could no longer launch airstrikes on Iraq and Yemen from Al-Dhafra air base, leading the US to relocate warplanes, armed drones, and other aircraft to Al-Udeid air base in Qatar.

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Almost 60% of Canadians Think Freedom of Speech Under Threat in Country - Poll

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - Nearly three in five Canadians believe that freedom of speech is currently under threat in their country, with a bigger share of respondents thinking it has become harder for them to openly express their opinions, a Leger Poll revealed on Friday.

Fifty-seven percent of those polled feel that freedom of speech is threatened in Canada. The feeling is significantly more common among Conservative voters with 76% of them holding such belief.

In addition, 62% believe that it has become harder for them to publicly express their opinions in Canada. Such belief is more prevalent not just among Conservative voters but also with Canadians aged 55 or older, with 70% of both groups sharing this opinion.

Only 36% believe that freedom of speech is not threatened in Canada, and 27% think that it is easier for them to express their opinions publicly.

Most Canadians (61%) think their opinions are mostly socially acceptable, while 19% say they are mostly socially unacceptable. Another 19% found it difficult to answer.

The poll also showed that 76% of Canadians are comfortable expressing their personal views on government decisions.

The poll was conducted via web survey from April 26-28 among 1,610 Canadians aged 18 and older.

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Biden Awards Medal of Freedom to Pelosi, Gore, Bloomberg

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) – The White House announced 19 recipients of the Presidential Medal of Freedom on Friday, ranging from several long-time politicians such as former Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Oscar-winning Malaysian actress Michelle Yeoh, according to a release.

"Today, President Biden named nineteen recipients of the Presidential Medal of Freedom. The Presidential Medal of Freedom is the Nation's highest civilian honor, presented to individuals who have made exemplary contributions to the prosperity, values, or security of the United States, world peace, or other significant societal, public or private endeavors," the release stated.

The recipients include several current or former politicians, including former New York mayor Michael R. Bloomberg; Congressman James E. Clyburn; former Sen. Elizabeth Dole; former Vice President Al Gore; former Secretary of State John Forbes Kerry; former Sen. Frank R. Lautenberg; and former Speaker Nancy D'Alesandro Pelosi.

They also include various professionals who have made major contributions in their field, including Homeboy Industries founder Gregory J. Boyle; journalist Phil Donahue; anti-segregation activist Medgar Wiley Evers; civil rights lawyer Clarence B. Jones; Olympic swimmer Kathleen Genevieve Ledecy; Juneteenth activist Opal Lee; former Johnson Space Center director Ellen Ochoa; NASA astrophysicist Jane Rigby; United Farm Workers president Teresa Romero; Matthew Shephard Foundation co-founder Judy Shepard; Native American Olympian James Francis Thorpe; and Academy Best Actress award recipient Michelle Yeoh.

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Almost 40% of Americans Says US Doing Too Much to Support Israel – Poll

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) – Almost 40% of Americans think that the United States provides too much support for Israel in its war against Hamas, a new ABC News-Ipsos poll showed on Friday.

The poll found that almost four out of every 10 US citizens think the US is doing too much to support Israel in its war against Hamas, an increase from about three in 10 in January.

Approximately one-third of those polled said that Washington is doing too little to support Israel.

Only 29% of Republicans said that the US is doing too much in the conflict, while among Democrats this number grows up to 40%.

The poll also found that Americans believe former President Donald Trump is the best person to solve the Middle East conflict: 37% of Americans said they trust him, while 29% preferred Biden. However, one-third said they did not support either candidate on the issue.

The survey was conducted among 2,260 adults nationwide on April 25-30.

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US Adds 175,000 Jobs in April, Nearly Half From Month Ago, Boosting Rate Cut Hopes

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - The United States added 175,000 jobs in April, nearly half of what it did the prior month and more than a quarter below Wall Street's forecast, in what analysts said could expedite interest rate cuts by the Federal Reserve.

"Total nonfarm payroll employment increased by 175,000 in April, and the unemployment rate changed little at 3.9 percent," the US Bureau of Labor Statistics said.

Job gains occurred in health care, social assistance, and transportation and warehousing.

The Fed has said it will be encouraged to expedite rate cuts if US inflation, middling at 2.5% to 3.5%, came closer to its 2% target or jobs growth slowed significantly from monthly growth of some 200,000 to 300,000. The April jobs data showed the smallest expansion in employment since November.

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Senior US Diplomat to Visit China, Philippines from May 6-10 – State Department

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) – US Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources Richard Verma will travel to China and the Philippines between May 6-10, the US Department of State said on Friday.

"Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources Richard R. Verma will travel to the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Philippines May 6-10," the department said in a statement.

In China, Verma will pay visits to the US Embassy in Beijing as well as the Consulates in the cities of Shenyang, Shanghai and Guangzhou to thank personnel and ensure they have the necessary tools and facilities to better serve US interests in the country, the statement said.

Verma is also set to meet members the US business community in Shanghai, where he will advocate for a "level playing field" for US workers and firms operating in the country.

During his trip to the Philippines, Verma is scheduled to meet with senior government officials with whom he will build on the progress made during the 2024 US-Philippines Bilateral Strategic Dialogue, the meeting between US President Joe Biden and his counterpart Ferdinand R. Marcos, and several other recent major state-level events.

Verma will also participate in a wreath-laying ceremony at the Manila American Cemetery and Memorial and will host a dinner with the alumni of the US-Philippines exchange program.

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US Adds 175,000 Jobs in April, Unemployment Rate at 3.9% - Labor Department

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Biden Vows Sanctions in Coming Weeks Over 'Global Crackdown' on Press Freedom

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) – The United States will unveil sanctions and visa bans among other measures in the coming weeks in response to violations of press freedom around the world, President Joe Biden said Friday.

"In the coming weeks, I will be taking executive action in response to the global crackdown on press freedom, as exemplified by the wrongful detention of journalists around the world. I will declare this crackdown on press freedom a grave threat to national security and will authorize measures, including sanctions and visa bans, against those who take abusive actions to silence the press," Biden said in a statement on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day.

The president noted that media workers are essential to every democracy due to their role in creating "well-informed dissent," which he said was critical to the construction of stronger and more successful societies.

Biden stressed that 2023 marked one of the deadliest years for journalists in recent memory, including due to the war in Gaza. He said that over 300 journalists were imprisoned around the world last year, which is the highest number in decades.

Biden also mentioned the cases of American journalists Evan Gershkovich and Alsu Kurmasheva who have been imprisoned in Russia. He also mentioned the case of Austin Tice, believed to have been kidnapped while reporting in Syria in August 2012.

Biden urged the immediate and unconditional release of all journalists who ended up being imprisoned for "simply doing their jobs."

The president also said that the US has brought together a coalition of states that will counter the proliferation and misuse of commercial spyware, which is often used to monitor journalists worldwide.

WSJ reporter Gershkovich was arrested in the Russian city of Yekaterinburg in March 2023 on suspicion of trying to collect classified defense information for the United States.

Kurmasheva, a correspondent of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (designated as a foreign agent in Russia) who holds Russian and US passports, was detained in October and charged with failure to register as a foreign agent in Russia. The offense carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison.

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ANALYSIS - US Cutoff of Russian Uranium Imports Viable But Costly to Replace

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - The United States' move toward banning imports of Russian uranium will be viable but replacing that supply will be costly to fund the necessary investment needed to meet the growing demand, a leading US uranium firm and expert told Sputnik.

The US Senate on Tuesday passed the Prohibiting Russian Uranium Imports Act, sending it to President Joe Biden's desk to be signed into law. The legislation bans US imports of unirradiated low-enriched uranium that is produced in Russia or by a Russian entity, and it includes measures to close loopholes. However, the legislation allows waivers should the United States determine that no alternative viable source of low-enriched uranium is available to sustain the continued operation of a US nuclear reactor or nuclear energy company, or if it also determines the importation of uranium is in the national interest. Any waiver issued by the US Energy Department must terminate by January 1, 2028, while the ban itself expires on December 31, 2040.

Scott Melbye, executive vice president of Uranium Energy Corporation and president of Uranium Producers of America, told Sputnik that the ban will absolutely mean the United States will boost uranium production in the coming years, but also noted that significant new investment will be needed for that to happen.

"The United States and its close allies have sufficient mineral resources, technologies and companies to regain this level of leadership, however, significant capital needs to be deployed to make that a reality," Melbye said.

The combination of the Prohibiting Russian Uranium Imports Act and the US Nuclear Fuel Security Act can provide the support and market certainty needed to encourage new investment to expand Western uranium production to include conversion and enrichment, he said.

"We are already beginning to see the revitalization of the American uranium industry with 5 members of the Uranium Producers of America having restarted operations, or are in the process of commencing production," Melbye said.

US uranium production has dropped significantly since 2000, reaching a high of nearly 5 million pounds of uranium concentrate produced in 2014, but dropping to about 27,000 pounds in 2023, according to the US Energy Information Agency (EIA). Uranium production in the United States was nearly non-existent in 2020 and 2021, data shows. By the end of 2023, there were only five plants in the United States producing uranium concentrate.

Melbye pointed out that while the United States works on ramping up its uranium production, Western allied nuclear energy programs will rely on each other to meet the current and growing demand for nuclear fuel.

The industry executive noted that the United States, Canada, Japan and the United States have plans to mobilize \$4.2 billion to promote a reliable global nuclear energy supply chain, which presents strong export opportunities for American uranium.

The EIA notes that during 2022, 3% of the uranium loaded into US civilian nuclear power reactors was US-origin uranium and 97% was foreign-origin uranium. The United States purchased a total of 32.1 million pounds of uranium concentrate from abroad in 2022.

In 2022, Russia supplied almost a quarter of the enriched uranium used to fuel America's fleet

of more than 90 commercial reactors.

Princeton University Professor Frank Von Hippel, who has served as the US Assistant Director for National Security in the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, also believes the plan is possible, but will require Western nuclear utilities to spend more.

"It would require the Western nuclear utilities to buy more uranium and to pay more for enrichment work," Von Hippel told Sputnik. "The US utilities, at least, are notoriously sensitive to even small cost increases. That is why it has taken two years for Congress to get to this point. And... they are allowing escape clauses if any utility really gets desperate."

The legislation is meant to cut off a source of revenue to Russia amid its special military operation in Ukraine, but Von Hippel said he does not expect it to make much of a difference considering Russia gets most of its foreign exchange from selling oil and gas.

Russian nuclear company Rosatom could be expected to lose some reactor sales and some fuel sales in some other countries because of the ban, but other countries that have already signed contracts for new reactors, and have them under construction, are locked in, Von Hippel added.

OPPOSITION FROM ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS

Sarah Fields, program director for environmental group Uranium Watch, said that although her group supports cutting off revenue to Russia, they also urge the United States to end its reliance on nuclear power.

"The United States should end its reliance on nuclear power, which is not a viable solution to climate change," Fields told Sputnik. "Uranium Watch does not support the expansion of uranium fuel production in the United States. With no national repository for long-term care and disposal of spent nuclear fuel, it is irresponsible and foolish to continue to extend the lives of existing nuclear reactors and support the development of new reactors."

Fields further said that uranium mining is the least regulated part of the nuclear fuel chain and continues to pollute land, air, and water as well as expose rural and Indigenous communities to radiological emissions and contamination.

Melbye argues that much of the environmental opposition towards uranium mining is mistakenly based on observations of the deficient health, safety and environment practices of the 1950's to the 1970's, but that today's American uranium mining industry has no resemblance to that historical period.

"The green energy transition runs on mined minerals like nickel, cobalt, lithium, copper and uranium," Melbye said, adding that he's confident the United States will ensure it uses safe and responsible mining practices.

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Russia's Exit From IMF Would Weaken Nations That Need Moscow's Support - Envoy

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - Russia's withdrawal from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) would weaken member nations that need Moscow's support, IMF Executive Director for Russia Aleksei Mozhin told Sputnik.

"If we leave, we would weaken the positions of those member states that need our support," Mozhin said.

The composition of the IMF Board of Directors is divided equally: 12 seats each from Western and non-Western countries, Mozhin noted.

However, the distribution of votes is approximately 60% to 40% in favor of Western countries, he said.

The popularity of the Russian Directorate at the IMF among non-Western states has never been as high as after the beginning of the special military operation in Ukraine in 2022, Mozhin said.

"Our exit would very much weaken their positions. Russia is a strong ally. We have challenged the West, both militarily and an economically, and we are coping, including showing the strength of our economy," Mozhin added.

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Russia's Exit From IMF Would Make Other Countries Follow Suit - Envoy

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - Russia's withdrawal from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) would make other countries follow its lead and deprive the organization of its global status, IMF Executive Director for Russia Aleksei Mozhin told Sputnik.

"The main shareholders of the IMF are our worst enemies today. However, they understand that if we leave, the IMF will cease to be a global institution and other countries will follow Russia and exit it," Mozhin said.

Russia does not need anything from the IMF, but benefits from having access to information and documents, Mozhin added.

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IMF Has Always Been Biased in Its Analyses, But Has Gone Off Scale Now - Russian Envoy

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) – The International Monetary Fund has always been politically biased in its analyses, but it has gone off the scale now, IMF Executive Director for Russia Aleksei Mozhin told Sputnik.

"Bias has always existed in the fund's analytics, but the degree which it has reached now is already off the scale," Mozhin said.

He stressed that there are many examples of the IMF highlighting specific negative events in relation to some countries while keeping silent in relation to others.

"Positive moments are kept silent for some and put forward for others. There are plenty of such examples in the fund's documents," he added.

For example, the IMF discusses problems related to high public debt in low- and middle-income

countries, but remains silent about high-income countries where debts are off the charts, Mozhin said.

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IMF Falls Victim to Geopolitical Tensions, Losing Impartiality - Russia's IMF Envoy

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has fallen victim to geopolitical tensions and become an increasingly unfair organization, IMF Executive Director for Russia Aleksei Mozhin told Sputnik.

"We have no reason to be happy about what is happening at the IMF. Unfortunately, we see that geopolitical differences have affected the fund's activities. The IMF has become a victim, perhaps the main victim, of the geopolitical situation," Mozhin said.

The IMF is becoming an increasingly politicized and unfair institution, the Russian representative said.

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US, Other Rich Countries in Deadlock Over Debt Issue - Russia's IMF Director

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - The United States and other high-income countries are in a deadlock due to their huge public debt, International Monetary Fund (IMF) Executive Director for Russia Aleksei Mozhin told Sputnik.

"The main question is what rich countries, for example, the US, are going to do with this public debt. In my understanding, they are in a deadlock," Mozhin said.

Low-income countries should get their debt written off or restructured, the Russian envoy said. As for rich nations, they have several options to resolve their own debt crises, according to Mozhin.

Advanced economies can do this the direct way by reaching a primary budget surplus, maintaining it for a number of years, and slowly reducing public debt coupled with facing an inevitable recession, he said.

Mozhin pointed out that it is also possible to address the issue either through economic growth or by depreciating public debt through inflation. However, the IMF in its assessments has ruled out either of those possibilities for the United States, he noted.

As a result, the United States is left to "do nothing and watch this debt grow endlessly" or choose "the worst option," which is a unilateral debt restructuring, Mozhin said.

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Rich countries, including us, are in deadlock over debt issue – Russia's IMF director to Sputnik

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US Official Says Russian Forces in Separate Compound on Niger Base, No Access to US Forces

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - Russian forces are being housed on the same base in Niger but in a separate compound with no access to US forces until the withdrawal of the contingent of the United States from the country, a US official has told Sputnik.

"The Russians are housed in a separate compound and do not have access to US forces, spaces, or equipment," the official said on Thursday. "We continue to monitor the situation and to take all necessary and prudent measures to ensure the security of US forces, facilities, and equipment."

The official noted that Russian forces arrived a few weeks ago at Air Base 101, a Nigerien Air Force base that is co-located with the international airport in Niger's capital, Niamey.

On April 12, a Sputnik correspondent reported that Russian specialists have arrived in Niger to train local forces on combating terrorism.

Washington and Niamey recently began discussions for the "orderly withdrawal" of US servicepeople based in Niger. The military pullout was initiated in March after a Nigerien military spokesperson said the country's transitional government, which took power in a coup last July, had terminated the military agreement with the US with immediate effect, citing the interests of the Nigerien people.

The Pentagon later announced that some of the US contingent will also be withdrawn from Chad. On Wednesday, a US defense official told Sputnik that the US has relocated 60 of its military personnel to Germany, where they will continue their work, as part of their withdrawal from Chad.

There are around 1,100 US personnel in Niger. Veteran Defense Department analyst Lt. Col. Karen Kwiatkowski told Sputnik that the expulsion of US forces from Niger and Chad, along with similar trends across Africa, show that the post-World War II era of US-led neocolonialism to exploit the continent's peoples and riches is finally ending.

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BRICS Could Offer Alternative If Dollar Collapses - Russia's IMF Director

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - BRICS countries could provide an alternative to the US dollar if the international monetary system collapses, International Monetary Fund (IMF) Executive Director for Russia Aleksei Mozhin told Sputnik.

"A lot is being written about the shortcomings of the current system. Moreover, many

publications mention BRICS in the context that this association can offer an alternative," Mozhin said.

BRICS countries could create a unit of account that would be built on a basket of currencies of the five member countries of the group, including the Brazilian real, the Russian ruble, the Indian rupee, the Chinese yuan, and the South African rand, according to Mozhin.

"This proposal is being discussed. In case the US dollar and international monetary system collapse, there will be a need to turn this unit of account into a real currency backed by commodities," the Russian representative said.

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Risk Exists International Monetary System Could Collapse - IMF Director for Russia

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - A possibility exists that the international monetary system could collapse, International Monetary Fund (IMF) Executive Director for Russia Aleksei Mozhin told Sputnik.

"I think there is such a possibility," Mozhin said regarding the potential risk for the international monetary system to collapse.

Mozhin noted that the existing system relies on trust that dollar assets are safe.

However, central banks and households are already buying gold - and other precious metals - as a result of the growing mistrust about the safety of dollar assets, Mozhin said.

"Once trust is lost, chaos will ensue in the global economy," Mozhin added.

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US Liberal Elites Want Central Europe to Be 'Spear' Against Russia - Hungarian Official

UNITED NATIONS, May 3 (Sputnik) - Liberal elites of the United States want Central Europe to be "the edge of the spear" against Russia in a new Cold War, Balazs Orban, the political director of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, has said in an interview with US journalist Tucker Carlson.

"I think the offer which comes from the Washington liberal elites is that you, Central European countries, could be the edge of the spear against the Russians ... like the last frontier, like a new Iron curtain," Balazs Orban said on Thursday. "And you, Central Europeans, should pay to play a role in that. Like you are fighting against the Russians. And for this we support you. We give you some weapons, we give you some military support, we give you some investments to survive, but not much. But get used to the idea that there is a new Cold War."

The official said this is not good for Hungary and that this is not the destiny the Hungarians want, adding that Hungary wants "to be sovereign," "to be strong," and "to be a keystone state in the region."

Balazs Orban added that the European liberal elites and the US leadership "are so much interconnected" and they "have the same mindset." The official further said he hopes former US President Donald Trump would again be elected as US president because he would change the US foreign policy, which in turn would "destroy the connection between the European liberal elites and the American leadership."

"So the best thing that can happen with Europe is that President Trump is reelected," the official said.

In March, Trump hosted Viktor Orban at his Mar-a-Lago residence in Florida to discuss a wide range of issues of common interest for Hungary and the US and praised the Hungarian as "a great leader."

Trump and Viktor Orban are longtime allies who share conservative political views and have publicly expressed mutual respect and support for each other. Orban has thrown his support behind Trump both in the US presidential race and the legal challenges he is facing.

The US presidential election is slated for November 2024. The main contenders expected on the ballot are incumbent President Joe Biden and Trump, who have both won enough delegates' votes to be their respective Democratic and Republican parties' presumptive nominees.

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US Set for 'Very Lackluster' Economic Growth in Near, Mid-Term - IMF Director for Russia

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - The US economy is set for "very lackluster" economic growth in the near- and medium term, International Monetary Fund (IMF) Executive Director for Russia Aleksei Mozhin told Sputnik.

"All IMF outlooks expect very lackluster growth in the near and medium term," Mozhin said.

The United States is facing a very high level of debt, and interest payments on the public debt in 2023 alone amounted to 10% of total budget revenues, Mozhin noted.

The country's gross financing needs, an indicator which reflects how much needs to be borrowed to finance the budget deficit and principal payments, were estimated at almost 37% of GDP for 2023, Mozhin said.

On Monday, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva warned that US economic growth is "unlikely to last."

The global economy is converging back to a rather weak rate of growth, she pointed out.

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Peace Campaigner Warns Anti-Israel Protests Could Spread Globally

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - The wave of protests against Israeli atrocities in Gaza sweeping US college campuses and other Western countries will set off a global rebellion of

young people against the irresponsibility of global warming policies and possibly against the Western military-industrial complex heading towards nuclear war as well, legendary peace campaigner Dr. Helen Caldicott, founder and former leader of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Physicians for Social Responsibility told Sputnik.

"This movement almost certainly will transform into a global rebellion against the powers that be who invest and indulge in global warming, damning their lives, their futures, and their survival," Caldicott said.

The expanding wave of protests marked the move into activism of an entire generation of politically active, motivated young people and potential leaders across the world, Caldicott explained.

"At last the young people are rising up to protest the genocidal mania of Israel and [US President Joe] Biden," she said.

This activism could well spread to confronting and exposing the inordinate power, wealth, and irresponsibility of the military-industrial complex with its legions of self-styled nuclear "strategists" plotting annihilating wars, Caldicott proposed.

"Hopefully they will also take on the wicked and evil military-industrial nuclear complex which threatens their lives with instant annihilation within the very near future," she said.

Biden by his own actions and failures was now the focus of much of this anger and that energy and activism could sway the outcome of the US presidential election in November, Caldicott advised.

"Their impact upon the US election will be difficult to gauge as Biden has placed himself clearly within their crosshairs," she said.

Caldicott is the author of many books including "War in Heavens: The Arms Race in Outer Space" and "The New Nuclear Danger." The Smithsonian Institution has named her as one of the most influential women of the 20th century.

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US Congressman Says Holding Current Territory Best Outcome for Ukraine, Urges Peace Talks

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - US House Armed Services Committee Ranking Member Adam Smith said that holding on to the territory currently under the control of the regime in Kiev is the best outcome for Ukraine, given the realities of its conflict with Russia.

Ukraine must hold on to approximately 82% of its territory, including access to the Black Sea, in order to consider the outcome of the conflict a success, Smith said, according to a Foreign Policy report released on Thursday.

The Biden administration has avoided making such a statement because it does not want to admit that Ukraine might have to relinquish territory to Russia, Smith said.

Countries propping up Ukraine need to help it develop a strong enough military to retain the territory under its control, Smith said.

The United States also needs to get "more aggressive" about finding ways to negotiate directly with Russia to end the conflict, Smith added.

In April, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Ukraine has not yet demonstrated readiness for dialogue with Russia. Russian President Vladimir Putin is prepared for negotiations based on a draft agreement created in Istanbul, Peskov said.

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US Senate in Call With ICC Conveys Concern About Potential Action Against Israel - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - A bipartisan group of US senators during a call with International Criminal Court (ICC) senior officials discussed their concerns about the court's potential decision to issue arrest warrants against senior Israeli officials, Axios reported, citing people familiar with the matter.

The report on Thursday said the meeting was held on Wednesday and considered confidential, meaning it is unknown which senators took part in the meeting.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is reportedly nervous that an arrest warrant will be issued against him and has pressed US lawmakers to try to convince the ICC not to move forward with their potential plans.

Congressional Republicans are drafting legislation to retaliate against any ICC officials involved in the issuing of arrest warrants against Israeli leaders, which may include sanctions, media reported.

The White House said the ICC has no jurisdiction and does not support its investigation.

On Monday, US media reported, citing an Israeli official familiar with the matter, that the ICC may issue arrest warrants for Netanyahu, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, and other senior officials as early as this week.

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US Navy Issues Operating, Missions Planning Contract for Hypersonic Testing - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - Corvid Atea is awarded a \$78,421,905 US Navy contract to provide range instrumentation, operations and maintenance, mission planning for hypersonic system-under-test events, the Defense Department said.

"Corvid Atea [of] Mooresville, North Carolina is awarded a \$78,421,905 ... contract to provide range instrumentation, operations ... for the hypersonic system-under-test events," the Defense Department said in a release on Thursday.

The contract will also include maintenance mission planning and test support, analysis, engineering, environmental test, cyber security, data management and the design and development of range instrumentation systems for the tests, the release said.

The company will also carry out technology demonstrations in support of the Global Hawk RQ-4 drones for the Navy, the release added.

Work on the contract will be carried out in Point Mugu, California (55%); Westlake Village, California (20%) and various locations within the continental United States over the next five years and is expected to be completed in April 2029, according to the release.

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Second Boeing Whistleblower Joshua Dean Dies Amid Safety Scrutiny - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) — The second Boeing whistleblower and quality inspector for the Boeing supplier Spirit AeroSystems Joshua Dean died due to a sudden infection after reporting safety failures on passenger jets, Fox News reported on Thursday.

According to the report, Dean died from Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA), a staph infection spread by contact with contaminated items or infected wounds.

The report added that Dean was terminated in 2023 and filed a retaliation complaint, alleging his dismissal was due to reporting dangerous faults in Boeing's 737 MAX plane components, and was represented by the law firm also handling John Barnett's case, another whistleblower found dead earlier this year.

In March, Boeing whistleblower John Barnett was found dead from a self-inflicted gunshot wound in the state of South Carolina over the weekend. However, lawyers representing the deceased Barnett said that they saw no indication that Barnett was suicidal.

Barnett, who worked at Boeing for over three decades before retiring in 2017, accused the company of cutting corners to get its 787 Dreamliner jets out of production quickly at the North Charleston plant, compromising the safety of the aircraft.

According to Barnett, the emergency oxygen systems on 787 Dreamliners had a failure rate of 25%, meaning that a quarter of 787 Dreamliners were at risk of rapidly losing oxygen and suffocating the passengers if the cabins were suddenly decompressed. A federal investigation confirmed some of Barnett's allegations.

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More Than 50 US Lawmakers Urge Biden to Dissuade Israeli Offensive in Rafah - Letter

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - A group of more than 50 US House lawmakers sent a letter to President Joe Biden this week, urging his administration to use all available means to dissuade the Israeli government from launching offensive operations in Rafah.

“We write with urgency to say: an offensive invasion into Rafah by Israel in the upcoming days is wholly unacceptable,” the letter, released Thursday, said. “We urge you to invoke existing law and policy to immediately withhold certain offensive military aid to the Israeli government, including aid sourced from legislation already signed into law, in order to preempt a full-scale assault on Rafah.”

On Tuesday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that Israel will enter Rafah to combat the Palestinian organization Hamas, with or without an agreement on hostages. Israel has no other choice but to enter Rafah, Netanyahu said.

The Israeli government has not provided a credible and executable plan to protect civilians during potential operations in Rafah, as requested by the Biden administration, the letter said.

An Israeli offensive in Rafah risks starting an "escalatory spiral" and putting the region back on the brink of a broader conflict, the letter said.

Earlier this week, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that an Israeli operation in Rafah would be an "unbearable escalation" that would kill thousands of civilians and force hundreds of thousands of others to flee. European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell also urged Israel not to launch an offensive in Rafah.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken signaled to Israel that launching an offensive in Rafah could hinder efforts to normalize relations with Saudi Arabia, Israeli media reported on Thursday.

On October 7, Hamas launched a large-scale attack on Israel, in which nearly 1,200 Israeli civilians and military personnel were killed and some 240 others abducted. In response, Israel began military operations in the Gaza Strip, which have killed more than 34,000 people so far, according to local authorities.

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Pentagon Awards Northrop Grumman \$7Bln to Upgrade Its B-2 Bomber Fleet

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - The Pentagon said in a press release that it has awarded US defense firm Northrop Grumman a \$7 billion contract to upgrade the US fleet of B-2 bombers.

"Northrop Grumman Systems Corp. Aerospace Systems, Palmdale, California, was awarded a indefinite-delivery/indefinite-quantity contract with a ceiling of \$7,000,000,000 for B-2 modernization and sustainment," the release said on Thursday. "This contract provides for B-2 enhancements, sustainment, logistics elements including sustaining engineering, software maintenance, and support equipment."

The modernization of the B-2 fleet is expected to be completed by May 3, 2029, the release noted.

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ANALYSIS - Gaza Protests Sweeping US Colleges Expose Power Abuse, Corrupt Politics in Washington

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - The wave of student protests sweeping universities and

colleges across the United States is not just about the continued Israeli killing of thousands of civilians in the Gaza Strip, it is also about the decades-long chronic abuse of power in Washington and the wider crimes of the US empire, analysts told Sputnik.

Pro-Palestine protests erupted on dozens of university and college campuses throughout the United States beginning last month. Students and faculty have called on their schools to condemn Israel's military campaign in Gaza, divest from companies linked to Israel and discontinue study abroad programs at Israeli universities. The protests intensified after Congress passed a \$95 billion package, which includes significant aid to Israel. More than 1000 students and faculty have so far been arrested.

President Joe Biden said in a special address on Thursday that there was no place for anti-Semitism or hate speech in the United States or on its college campuses and emphasized that the protests would not compel his administration to change its Middle East policies.

"This is not just about Gaza - horrific that that is," Irish political commentator Finian Cunningham said. "It is about the decades-long chronic abuse of power in Washington, the Congressional corruption, the unconscionable social injustice across the United States, the appalling wasting of resources and graft for the military-industrial complex, the evident dominance of war-making as a 'normal function' of American capitalism and foreign policy, as well as the increasing deployment of fascist police state repression."

The depth and extent of US complicity in Israeli war crimes in Gaza - and in other activities around the world - have come as a galvanizing shock to a new generation of young Americans, he said.

"This is a truly shocking revelation. It exposes the criminality of Washington's foreign policies not only regarding Gaza but also in Ukraine and towards China over Taiwan. The American empire is being exposed as an insatiable psychopathic power that feeds on violence and bloodshed," Cunningham said.

A WATERSHED MOMENT IN US HISTORY

Cunningham emphasized that the protests are a watershed moment in history similar to the way Americans rebelled against the Vietnam War to end the genocide in Southeast Asia and could prove to be a pivotal change in consciousness that could reverberate for generations.

"Hopefully, this time around the rebellion will go further, leading to an appropriate transformation of the corrupt American system under capitalist imperialism - a system that has prevailed for decades but which is now unsustainable and untenable," Cunningham said.

He stressed that while the United States government is "fully complicit in the Gaza genocide" by enabling the Israeli regime with inordinate weapons supplies, financial aid and crucial political cover and shows no conscience about their complicity in these events, at least the youth are standing up.

"The American youth are redeeming the diabolical conduct of older generations of politicians who are a shame on America," Cunningham said.

HOPE AMID HEAVY HANDED REPRESSION

University of Illinois Professor of Law Francis Boyle said that the protests showed there was still hope for a brighter future for the United States and for the Palestinians.

"These college students protesting Israeli genocide against the Palestinians have passed that test with flying colors: A+," Boyle said.

According to California State University Emeritus Professor of Politics Beau Grosscup, the

protests are an attempt "to break the stranglehold that conservative/right wing Zionists have had on the American consciousness and political process for decades" and might also have a significant impact on the US presidential election in November.

"[They] could cut into [President Joe] Biden's support in key upper Midwest states in the November national election, which was why he is attempting belatedly to rein in [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu now," he said.

Still, Grosscup advised the protests would have to spread far more widely and prove more long-lasting and intense before they could truly be seen as transformative.

"We are not [yet] seeing a seismic shift in consciousness: The protests are being curtailed/demonized," Grosscup added.

PROTESTS GO TO THE HEART OF US FOREIGN POLICY

The importance of the current protests cannot not be minimized, US constitutional historian and political commentator Dan Lazare said.

"I think the protests are hugely important because they go to the heart of Middle East policy, the focus of US foreign policy in general since at least the promulgation of the Carter Doctrine in January 1980," he said.

Lazare agreed that the Biden administration and other establishment forces were trying to demonize and discredit the protesters.

"Now that students are protesting the horrors that US policy has wrought, Democrats from the president on down are accusing them of anti-Semitism and calling in the police. But it won't make the dreadful situation in the Middle East any better. Biden has contributed to this disaster at every step of the way and is now paying the price," he said.

Biden's reelection prospects were certainly being directly threatened by the scale and intensity of the protests, Lazare advised.

"Does it harm his re-election prospects? Certainly. Biden is a decrepit old man whose sole asset on the campaign trail is that he's not Donald Trump. ... Young people are appalled by what a corrupt cesspool the Democratic Party has become and are deserting it in droves. Americans in general are appalled by the hot mess in Washington and are checking out as well," Lazare said.

It was already clear that a far-reaching political realignment was now beginning in American politics, Lazare added.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) –
CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* Russia has put Valentyn Nalyvaichenko, (included in Russia's list of terrorists and extremists), a former head of the Security Service of Ukraine, on its wanted list, the Interior Ministry's database said on Thursday.

* Russia calls on its partner countries to refrain from participating in the Ukraine peace summit

hosted by Switzerland in June to avoid being dragged into provocations, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

* The Russian air force has targeted a launcher of the German IRIS-T surface-to-air missile system near the Ostroverkhivka settlement in Ukraine's Kharkiv Region, the Defense Ministry said.

MIDDLE EAST

* The United States and Saudi Arabia are very close to reaching an agreement on the bilateral parts of a potential Saudi-Israeli normalization deal, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Thursday.

* Turkey has suspended all trade relations with Israel, with all imports and exports halted as of Thursday, Bloomberg reported, citing two Turkish officials familiar with the matter.

* The Biden administration still wants to see Israel and Saudi Arabia normalize their relations and believes this could facilitate a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said.

* At least 5% of Gaza's population has been either killed or injured as of April 12 amid the ongoing Israeli military campaign, according to a United Nations report on the socioeconomic situation in Gaza.

STUDENT PROTESTS IN US

* US President Joe Biden said on Thursday that there is no place for anti-Semitism or so-called hate speech in the United States or on its college campuses, amid pro-Palestine protests across the country.

* The US intelligence community has no information suggesting that Russia is making efforts to instigate pro-Palestine protests in the United States, US Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines said.

US INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS ON UKRAINE

* The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine will unlikely end any time soon, US Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines said on Thursday.

* Russia is making progress on the battlefield in Ukraine and could soon make tactical breakthroughs in Donetsk and Kharkiv, Haines said.

UNREST IN GEORGIA

* US Ambassador to Tbilisi Robin Dunnigan on Thursday expressed his concern over Georgia's controversial bill on foreign agents and the mass protests it had sparked, saying that the recent decisions by the Georgian authorities had allegedly moved the nation "away from its Euro-Atlantic future."

* The White House said that it was "deeply concerned" over Georgia's "foreign agent" bill.

* Another protest rally against the controversial bill on foreign agents is taking place in front of the Georgian parliament building in central Tbilisi, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

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US Says Very Close to Bilateral Pact With Saudis to Pave Way for Normalization With Israel

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - The United States and Saudi Arabia are very close to reaching an agreement on the bilateral parts of a potential Saudi-Israeli normalization deal, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Thursday.

"I'm not gonna speak to a US-Saudi defense pact in specific terms. What I will say is that the Secretary did meet with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia this week when he was in Riyadh," Miller said during a press briefing. "We are very close to reaching an agreement on the bilateral pieces of a normalization agreement."

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US Working on Long-Term Security Arrangement With Ukraine – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) – US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller confirmed on Thursday that the United States is working on long-term security arrangements with Ukraine.

"I'm not going to speak to it in specifics other than to say that we have made clear that we are working on ways to provide long-term support for Ukraine's security," Miller said during a press briefing. "We have been working on long-term security arrangements, that is something that the President [Joe Biden] made public around the time of the last NATO Summit."

Volodymyr Zelenskyy said last week in an interview that the United States and Ukraine are discussing a bilateral security agreement similar to the one Kiev has inked with eight countries to date, including Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and Finland.

According to Zelenskyy, Kiev plans to sign with the United States a security assistance agreement that would be "the strongest" of all agreements Ukraine has signed so far and will include financial, political, and armed support, and joint arms production.

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

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US Navy Opening Info Warfare Training Centers in California, Japan - Senior Admiral

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - The US Navy is opening a new information warfare center in California and planning a second one located in Japan as part of its efforts to train its forces, especially in the submarine service to expand their capabilities deploying new generation battle management aids, Navy Information Forces Commander Vice Admiral Kelly Aeschbach told a

Defense One podcast on Thursday.

"We are going to start with a training facility in San Diego: Eventually the objective is to have a training facility in Japan," Aeschbach said. "The undersea environment has become much more complex."

Therefore the fleet in general and its undersea force in particular had to advance its capabilities in developing expanded battlefield awareness, she explained.

The Navy was already deploying Triton unmanned autonomous vehicles (UAVs) in its fleet and had them operating in the European Command (USEUCOM) area of responsibility and expected also to have them operating in the Central Command (USCENTCOM) in the Middle East by this summer, Aeschbach said.

"We are deploying autonomous UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) that are programmed and then sent off on their own without manned operators [utilizing AI]," Aeschbach said.

Two more pilot programs on information warfare on submarines are already operating on the US East Coast, she said.

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Artemis Spaceship Heat Shield Eroded 100 Times, Power, Maintenance Failed - Report

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - The heat shield on the unmanned Artemis 1 moon ship in 2022 eroded in 100 places during reentry into Earth's atmosphere and the Orion spacecraft also experienced 24 power failures and other engineering and poor maintenance problems, NASA's Inspector-General revealed in a new report on Thursday.

"NASA identified more than 100 locations where ablative thermal protective material from Orion's heat shield wore away differently than expected during reentry into Earth's atmosphere," the report said. "Engineers are concurrently investigating ways to mitigate the char loss by modifying the heat shield's design or altering Orion's reentry trajectory."

The Artemis 1 test flight from November 16, 2022 to December 11, 2022 revealed critical issues that needed to be addressed before placing crew on the Artemis 2 mission, the report said.

"In particular, the test flight revealed anomalies with the Orion heat shield, separation bolts, and power distribution that pose significant risks to the safety of the crew. Resolution of these anomalies is among the most significant factors impacting NASA's readiness for Artemis 2," the report said.

Post-flight inspections of the Crew Module/Service Module separation bolts revealed unexpected melting and erosion that created a gap leading to increased heating inside the bolt. NASA also recorded 24 instances of power distribution anomalies in Orion's Electrical Power, the report added.

A loss of in-flight communications revealed hardware and process issues with the Deep Space Network, largely due to maintenance deferrals and deterioration of hardware, according to the report.

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US Space Force Monitors Russia, China Satellite Maneuvers From 600 Locations - General

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - The US Space Force is continuously monitoring 1,000 maneuvering satellites around the earth, more than 10% of the total number currently in orbit, from 600 terrestrial locations, Deputy Chief of Space Operations for Intelligence Maj. Gen. Gregory Gagnon said on Thursday.

"Today we are [monitoring] 1,000 satellites from 600 sites around the world. These are the priorities," Gagnon told a Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies podcast.

There are 9,500 satellites in orbit from different countries and the monitoring is carried out from 600 US-operating tracking locations around the world that overlap with each other and ensure there are no gaps in the surveillance of space satellites, especially by China and Russia, Gagnon said.

"Space is no longer only strategic. Space is tactical and our adversaries have made it so....[However] We are moving fast and moving in the right direction. ...They [the People's Liberation Army] have direct ascent missiles in western China that can go straight up and destroy satellites."

China has dramatically expanded its space capabilities by 550% since 2015 and has at least 100 satellites in orbit devoted to tracking US aircraft and sea power including logistics fleets, Gagnon said.

Recently, China launched a major radar imaging satellite in geosynchronous orbit (GEO) 22,000 miles above the earth allowing it to continuously monitor ship movements and other activities in the Western Pacific, Gagnon added.

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Trump Narrows List of Vice President Picks, Expected to Announce in July - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump is narrowing his list of potential picks to be his running mate in the 2024 presidential election and is expected to unveil his choice in July, Bloomberg reported on Thursday, citing people familiar with the matter.

The report said, citing sources, that Trump's list of potential running mates includes US Senators JD Vance, Marco Rubio, Tim Scott, and North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum.

The report notes that Trump has previously said he will announce his decision close to the Republican National Convention, which begins July 15.

The campaign continues to vet many candidates, and Trump has yet to hold any official one-on-one meetings with any of the contenders, according to the report.

Last month, independent presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. claimed that Trump

"emissaries" had reached out to him about possibly being Trump's running mate.

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US Central Command Says Killed Syrian Civilian, Not Al-Qaeda Leader in May 2023 Air Strike

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - The United States killed a civilian during a May 2023 air strike in northwestern Syria after misidentifying him as a senior leader of Al-Qaeda (banned in Russia), US Central Command said on Thursday.

"On May 3, 2023, the United States conducted a unilateral counterterrorism air strike in Northwest Syria targeting a senior Al Qaeda leader. Soon after the air strike, reports surfaced the strike may have resulted in a civilian casualty," Central Command said in a statement. "The investigation determined US forces misidentified the intended Al Qaeda target and that a civilian, Mr. Lufti Hasan Masto, was struck and killed instead."

The investigation into the civilian casualty incident concluded in November 2023, the statement said. Investigators interviewed more than 40 witnesses and reviewed both classified and unclassified materials, the statement said.

The investigation concluded that the strike was conducted in compliance with the law of armed conflict and Pentagon policies, the statement said. However, the probe revealed several issues that could be improved, the statement added.

US Central Command acknowledges and regrets the civilian harm from the strike, the statement said.

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State Dept. Declines to Comment on Plans to Deploy US Nuclear Weapons to Poland

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller on Thursday declined to provide any comments regarding Poland's request to deploy US nuclear weapons in the country.

"No comment," Miller said during a press briefing.

Earlier this week, Polish Deputy Defense Minister Pawel Zalewski said that Warsaw has submitted an application for participation in NATO's nuclear sharing scheme and has not withdrawn it, adding that the issue should be discussed with Poland's Western partners.

The nuclear sharing program allows the US to deploy its nuclear weapons in NATO countries that do not possess them. After making the statement about Poland's readiness to host nuclear weapons, Duda made a follow-up statement specifying that no formal decision has been made yet.

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said he would seek a meeting with the president to understand what had prompted him to suggest the possibility of nuclear sharing.

Last week, Duda invited Tusk for a meeting on May 1 to discuss the deployment of foreign nuclear arms in Poland, but the head of government turned down the offer, citing illness.

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White House Convenes Anti-Semitism Task Force Amid Pro-Palestine Protests - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden convened the administration's multi-agency anti-Semitism task force amid pro-Palestine protests on college campuses across the United States, Axios reported on Thursday.

Biden convened the task force on Wednesday to discuss ways to address alleged instances of anti-Semitism at the protests, the report said, citing administration officials.

The meeting was headed by Domestic Policy Council chief Neera Tanden and homeland security adviser Liz Sherwood-Randall, the report said.

Participants discussed campus safety, online anti-Semitism and protections for Jewish communities, the report said.

The task force also discussed Biden's upcoming Holocaust memorial speech at the US Capitol on May 7, the report said.

Earlier on Thursday, Biden said that anti-Semitism and hate speech have no place on US college campuses, but defended the right to peacefully protest.

Independent US Sen. Bernie Sanders has said that protests criticizing Israeli government policy and actions in the Gaza Strip do not constitute anti-Semitism. Nevertheless, the protests have been characterized as anti-Semitic by some lawmakers and commentators.

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US, UK, Australia Propose Defense Trade Control Changes - State Department

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) — The US, alongside Australia and the UK, unveiled proposed updates to defense trade controls for public and industry consultation, the State Department said in a statement on Thursday.

"The United States, together with Australia and the United Kingdom, published proposed changes to our systems of defense trade controls for public and industry input," the statement said.

According to the statement, the proposed changes aim to harness and maximize the innovative power of the defense industrial bases by facilitating secure, license-free defense trade among the countries.

"The proposed changes to the International Traffic in Arms Regulations – or ITAR – would create a license exemption supporting billions of dollars in license-free defense trade between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States and allow for deeper security cooperation

and innovation among AUKUS partners," the statement read.

The statement added that all three nations are committed to collaborating with their private sectors and research communities to ensure that the exemptions collectively uphold the objectives of the AUKUS enhanced security partnership.

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China to Send Military Attaché to El Salvador, Initiate Military Ties - Ambassador

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - The Salvadoran government has given China its approval to appoint the first ever military attaché to the Central American country, Chinese Ambassador to El Salvador Zhang Yanhui said on Thursday.

Zhang made the remarks during a lengthy interview with the hosts of La Tribu FM radio station during which he discussed topics related to the growing cooperation between El Salvador and China.

"For now, no. But soon it could have great beginnings," Zhang said when asked whether there were any current bilateral military ties. "Soon our military attaché will arrive. We didn't have any before."

The Chinese envoy said the embassy had just recently received the approval from the Salvadoran government for the appointment of a military attaché to the country. The official is set to arrive sometime in the next two months, he added.

In mid-August 2018, the administration of former Salvadorean President Salvador Sanchez Ceren broke ties with Taiwan and recognized China.

Ties between both countries have steadily improved ever since current President Nayib Bukele rose to power in 2019. During a state visit to China, several memoranda of understanding were signed between Bukele and his counterpart Xi Jinping. Under the agreements, China promised more than \$500 million in development projects, some of which have already been completed.

In mid-April, the Salvadoran Ministry of Finance announced in the latest major development that San Salvador and Beijing had initiated talks on a free trade agreement in an effort to boost trade and investment between the two nations.

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UN Spokesman on 2014 Odessa Fire: Unfortunately Not All Investigations Find Perpetrators

UNITED NATIONS, May 2 (Sputnik) - Not all investigations called for by the United Nations have been thorough and brought the perpetrators to justice, including the 2014 incident in Odessa in which some 50 people burned alive in a public building set on fire by Ukrainian nationalists, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric told reporters on Thursday.

Dujarric made the comment in response to a question whether the United Nations in still

advocating for a proper investigation into the deadly Odessa incident.

"Back then, UN Secretary-General [Antonio Guterres] issued a statement in which he called for a swift, conclusive investigation. Since then, our colleagues in the human rights monitoring mission in Ukraine have also issued several statements," Dujarric said.

The UN spokesperson pointed out that there are many cases around the world where the United Nations has called for an investigation but there has been no accountability.

Dujarric characterized that outcome as very sad.

On May 2, 2014, Ukrainian nationalists locked protesters who opposed the Euromaidan coup in Ukraine in the Odessa Trade Unions House and set the building on fire. Almost 50 people died and many others were injured in clashes with the Ukrainian radicals, the United Nations said.

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US With Allies to Announce New Sanctions Against Russia, DPRK This Month - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - The United States together with allies will introduce new sanctions this week related to alleged arms and petroleum transfers between Russia and North Korea, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Thursday.

"The United States will continue to impose sanctions against those working to facilitate arms and refined petroleum transfers between Russia and the DPRK, we are currently working with our partners, including Australia, the European Union, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, and the United Kingdom to announce new coordinate sanctions designations this month," Miller said during a press briefing.

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Elon Musk Proposes Mandatory Trips Abroad for People Who Remove, Replace US Flag

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - Billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk said on Thursday that people who remove the United States' flag and replace it with the flag of a foreign country ought to be forced to travel to that country.

"Proposed law: if someone tears down the American flag and puts up another flag in its place, that person should get a free (but mandatory) one-way trip to that flag's country," Musk said in a statement via social media platform X.

Musk added that people who would get sent abroad could return to the US after experiencing life in the foreign country.

Musk's post comes following an incident at the University of North Carolina on Tuesday, where a group of fraternity members protected a US flag during a pro-Palestine protest on the campus, during which demonstrators attempted to replace the US flag with a Palestinian one.

Footage of the incident went viral on social media and prompted the creation of a public

fundraiser to throw the fraternity members a party; the effort has since raised hundreds of thousands of dollars.

One user replied to Musk's post with recent footage of US lawmakers waving Ukrainian flags in the chamber of the US House of Representatives after approving billions of dollars in Ukraine-related aid. The user suggested that politicians who wave a foreign flag in the US Congress should also be sent abroad.

"That was weird. At least wave the American flag too," Musk said in response to the user.

The incident drew criticism from some lawmakers and led Congresswoman Kat Cammack to begin work on legislation to prohibit the display of foreign flags in the House chamber in the future.

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US Says Very Close to Bilateral Pact With Saudis to Pave Way for Normalization With Israel

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - The United States and Saudi Arabia are very close to reaching an agreement on the bilateral parts of a potential Saudi-Israeli normalization deal, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Thursday.

"I'm not gonna speak to a US-Saudi defense pact in specific terms. What I will say is that the Secretary did meet with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia this week when he was in Riyadh," Miller said during a press briefing. "We are very close to reaching an agreement on the bilateral pieces of a normalization agreement."

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Oil Eyes Worst Week in 3 Months on Economic Headwinds From, Ironically, Crude Itself

NEW YORK, May 2 (Sputnik) - Crude prices were headed Thursday for their worst weekly loss since January as economies from the United States to those in Asia braced for higher inflation caused, ironically, by this year's early rally in oil.

Crude markets rose with little interruption between January and March, resulting in a gain of as much as 13% for oil by the close of the first quarter. That led to renewed inflationary pressure for the global economy, which has come back to bite at oil.

April ended with a loss of 1.3% for global crude benchmark Brent and 1.5% for its US peer, the West Texas Intermediate (WTI).

Those losses have extended into this month. As the first week of May approaches its close, UK-origin Brent is eyeing a drop of 7% and WTI 6%.

In Thursday's session, Brent hit a seven-week low of \$83.06 and WTI at \$78.42. The slide came in a belated reaction to Wednesday's US government data that showed domestic crude inventories jumping almost 7.3 million barrels last week to reach their highest since June 2023.

The crude inventory data landed a few hours before the Federal Reserve decided at its May meeting not to cut US interest rates, standing at two-decade highs. Wall Street has been anticipating a pivot in rates since the end of last year to ease credit conditions for business. On Wednesday, Fed Chair Jerome Powell made clear no rate cut would be possible with the central bank's uncertainty over inflation and the economy.

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Canada's TD Bank Fined \$6.7Mln Over Failure to Report Suspicious Transactions - Watchdog

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) – Canada's Toronto-Dominion (TD) Bank has been slapped with a C\$9.2 million (\$6.7 million) monetary penalty over its failure to report suspicious transactions possibly tied to money laundering or terrorist activity, the country's financial watchdog said on Thursday.

"Following a compliance examination in 2023, this bank [TD] in Toronto, Ontario, was imposed an administrative monetary penalty of \$9,185,000 on April 9, 2024, for non-compliance with Part 1 of the Proceeds of Crime (Money Laundering) and Terrorist Financing Act and its associated Regulations," the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Center of Canada (FINTRAC) said in a statement.

TD Bank was found guilty of failure to submit suspicious transaction reports where there were reasonable grounds to suspect that transactions were related to a money laundering or terrorist activity financing offense; failure to assess and document money laundering/terrorist activity financing risks; and failure to take the prescribed special measures for high risk.

Failure to conduct ongoing monitoring of business relationships; and failure to keep a record of the measures taken and information obtained when conducting ongoing monitoring of business relationships were also among the listed administrative violations.

FINTRAC emphasized that the penalty was imposed solely for administrative violations committed by TD Bank under the Proceeds of Crime (Money Laundering) and Terrorist Financing Act and its associated Regulations and not for criminal offenses for money laundering or terrorist activity financing.

The Toronto-Dominion Bank becomes the country's third banking institution slapped with administrative monetary penalties on similar grounds. In December, the Royal Bank of Canada and the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce were respectively fined C\$7.4 million and C\$1.3 million.

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More Than 40% of US Voters Believe Second Civil War 'Likely' in Next Five Years - Poll

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - More than four in ten prospective voters in the United States believe that a second civil war in the country is likely within the next five years, according to a Rasmussen Reports poll released Thursday.

Forty-one percent (41%) of respondents believe that a second US civil war is likely in the next five years, the poll report said. The figure includes 16% of respondents who believe that a second civil war is very likely, the poll report said.

However, nearly half of respondents, 49%, believe that a civil war is not likely within the next five years, including 20% who believe it is not likely at all, the poll report said. Ten percent (10%) of respondents are unsure, the poll report added.

A greater proportion of respondents believe that a civil war is more likely to occur if US President Joe Biden is reelected than if former US President Donald Trump wins the White House — 37% and 25%, respectively — the poll report said.

Thirty percent (30%) of respondents believe that the outcome of the 2024 presidential election will not impact the chances of a civil war, the poll report said.

The poll surveyed 1,105 likely US voters from April 21-23. The poll maintains a margin of error of plus or minus three percentage points with a 95% confidence level.

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Quebec Prime Minister Says Wants Police to Clear Student Encampment at McGill University

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) – The Prime Minister of Canada’s Province of Quebec Francois Legault said on Thursday that he would like to see law enforcement clearing student encampments erected on the campus of Montreal’s McGill University.

On Wednesday, a Quebec Superior Court judge rejected an injunction requested by McGill and students due to concerns over behavior described as “antisemitic.” If granted, it would have forced the students and protesters to dismantle the encampment and vacate campus.

Justice Chantal Masse wrote in her ruling that plaintiffs had failed to prove the protests were causing “irreparable harm” or that demonstrators intended to block access to exams and university buildings.

“To dismantle encampments ... at the time that they will judge that will be the right one,” Legault told reporters when questioned on what he would like law enforcement to do at McGill.

When questioned on why he deemed it necessary for police to dismantle the student encampments, the Premier stressed that every citizen must respect the provincial laws, something he said protesters are currently violating.

On Saturday, pro-Palestinian protesters began establishing an encampment at McGill’s downtown lower field campus in a bid to emulate similar actions undertaken by students at university campuses across the United States.

McGill allowed the protests, emphasizing that it supported the right of students to freely assemble and express themselves, but made it clear that encampments would violate the university’s policies and the law.

The university said the situation “significantly changed” on Monday as the number of encamped

persons increased threefold whereby the majority did not belong to the student community and used antisemitic language while behaving in an intimidating manner.

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US Air Force Accounted for 11 Fatalities in 4 Aviation Mishaps Since Oct. 2022 – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) – At least 11 US Airmen, including two contractors, have lost their lives in four aviation accidents since October 2022, which is a record number of mishaps in the US Air Force, a Pentagon spokesperson told Sputnik on Thursday.

“Since October 1, 2022, the U.S. Air Force has accounted for four aviation mishaps resulting in fatalities, a loss of nine Airmen and two contractors,” the spokesperson said in a statement.

An accident involving a CV-22 Osprey helicopter was the deadliest one since October 2022, resulting in eight US airmen killed.

On March 15, another US airman was fatally injured while performing maintenance on an F-22 fighter jet in the US state of Alaska, according to the statement.

Two contractors died in two respective mishaps during MQ-9 drone testing in California on September 7 and a C-17 unpressurized airdrop in Alaska on August 21, 2023, the statement said.

Earlier this week, Congressman John Garamendi said during a House Armed Services Committee hearing that he is alarmed by the record number of fatalities in the US Air Force.

Director of Defense Capabilities and Management, Government Accountability Office Diana Maurer said on Wednesday that the US military is experiencing significant sustainability challenges across all branches, including the failure of F-35 jets to pass the annual mission readiness goal and belated maintenance of Navy ships.

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US Trade Deficit Little Changed at \$69.4Bln In March, Near One Year-High - Commerce Dept

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - The US trade deficit was barely changed in March, sliding by just \$1 billion to \$69.4 billion, the Commerce Department said Thursday, presenting data that showed a deficit at still near one-year highs.

The United States' trading balance with the world has widened against its favor since the end of last year. In December 2023, the deficit stood at just \$64.2 billion. It rose to \$67.4 billion in January. By February, it had hit \$69.5 billion, its highest since April 2023.

A trade deficit weighs on a country's gross domestic product since it means the economy is relatively importing more than it is exporting.

In March, US imports stood at \$327 billion, versus exports at \$257.6 billion.

Some economists argue that trade deficits are not necessarily bad as the purchase of more

goods is the sign of a healthy economy. The United States is also at an advantage to buy imports now due to the dollar's strength against most global currencies, they say.

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White House 'Deeply Concerned' Over Georgia's 'Foreign Agent' Bill - Kirby

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - The White House said Thursday that it was "deeply concerned" over Georgia's "foreign agent" bill.

"We're deeply concerned by this legislation in what it could do in terms of stifling dissent and free speech, and more critically what it can do potentially to injuring the vibrant ... democracy that Georgia is rightly so proud of," White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said at a press briefing.

Riot police dispersed protesters after Georgia's parliament approved the second reading of the bill on Wednesday. A third reading will take it to President Salome Zourabichvili's desk, and although she has said she would veto the bill, the governing Georgian Dream party has enough members in parliament to overrule her decision.

Georgian Dream argues the bill will boost the transparency of foreign funding, while its opponents say it could be used to suppress dissent ahead of parliamentary elections and derail Georgia's path to EU membership.

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White House Says No Response Yet From Hamas on Ceasefire Proposal

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - The United States and mediators have not received an official response from Hamas regarding the latest proposal on a ceasefire in Gaza, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Thursday.

"No," Kirby told a press briefing when asked if the US or any of the mediators have heard an official response from Hamas on the proposal.

The proposal reportedly includes a 40-day ceasefire and the release of thousands of Palestinian prisoners in exchange for freeing Israeli hostages.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to reject any ceasefire deal with Hamas if the latter keeps insisting on the end of hostilities in the Gaza Strip, Israeli news portal Walla! reported on Wednesday, citing senior Israeli and US officials.

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Canada Hits \$1.67Bln Trade Deficit in March, Largest Since June 2023 - Statistics Agency

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - The Canadian economy had a large C\$2.3 billion (\$1.67 billion) trade deficit in March - the largest on record since June of 2023, Statistics Canada said on Thursday.

The country experienced a 5.3% decline in merchandise exports, whereas imports fell by 1.2%, Statistics Canada said in the latest edition of its "The Daily" bulletin.

"As a result, Canada's merchandise trade balance with the world went from a surplus of \$476 million [US\$347 million] in February to a deficit of \$2.3 billion [US\$2.3 billion] in March," Statistics Canada said. "This represents the largest trade deficit since June 2023," Statistics Canada said.

Total exports were down 5.3% to C\$62.6 billion (US\$45.6 billion), something largely attributed to a marked reduction in exports of unwrought gold, Statistics Canada said.

After observing an important increase in February, it decreased in March. Falling exports of metal and non-metallic minerals were also cited among the causes.

"In real (or volume) terms, total exports fell 4.7% for the month," Statistics Canada also said.

In addition, imports also fell by 1.2% to reach C\$64.8 billion (US\$47.2 billion) - a decrease that was notably led by less importations of electronic and electric equipment, Statistics Canada added.

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US Claims Russia Shipping Petroleum to North Korea Beyond UNSC Cap – White House

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) – The US believes Russia has been shipping refined petroleum to North Korea from Port Vostochny above an annual cap mandated by the UN Security Council (UNSC), White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Thursday.

"Russia has been shipping refined petroleum from Port Vostochny to the DPRK. Russian shipments have already pushed DPRK imports above the 500-barrel annual cap mandated by the UNSC," Kirby said at a press briefing.

According to UNSC Resolution 2937, adopted in 2017, North Korea cannot import more than 500,000 barrels of refined oil per year.

In April, Russia vetoed a US-drafted UN Security Council resolution to extend the mandate of the Panel of Experts overseeing sanctions on North Korea for one year.

Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said that the process of updating the sanctions regime against North Korea is long overdue in the UN Security Council, but Western countries do not want to move away from their "destructive and punitive rhetoric" in relation to the country.

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Biden Says No Place for Anti-Semitism, Hate Speech on US College Campuses

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Thursday that there is no place for anti-Semitism or so-called hate speech in the United States or on its college campuses, amid pro-Palestine protests across the country.

"There should be no place on any campus, no place in America, for anti-Semitism or threats of violence against Jewish students. There is no place for hate speech or violence of any kind," Biden said during remarks at the White House.

However, Biden said that he is opposed to sending in the National Guard to break up protests. The protests will not compel the Biden administration to change its Middle East policies, he added.

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US Sees Turkey as 'Valued Ally' Despite Supporting ICJ Case Against Israel - White House

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - The White House said on Thursday that Turkey remains a valued NATO ally despite its decision to join South Africa's genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

"It's not tanking the relationship with Turkey, who is a valued NATO ally. We can disagree on things, as we do on this, and still value an ally," White House National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby said at a press briefing.

Kirby said he did not have anything to say on the issue of whether Turkey's decision to join the case at the ICJ was related to the postponement of the May 9 meeting between Turkish President Erdogan and US President Joe Biden at the White House.

On Wednesday, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan announced that Turkey planned to submit a declaration of official intervention to join South Africa's genocide case at the ICJ. Fidan said Turkey will continue to support the Palestinian people in all circumstances.

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US Intel Chief Claims Russia Continues to Be Focused on Influencing US Elections

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) – US Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines claimed on Thursday that Russia continues to be increasingly focused on influencing US elections.

"In the last several intelligence community assessments that we've done on election threats, we have identified Russia as really the main factor in this space, and we continue to see them [Russia] focused on this and increasingly so," Haines said in congressional testimony before the

Senate Armed Services Committee when asked if Russia is attempting to interfere in US elections.

In March, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Moscow does not interfere in any elections and will work with any elected US president.

Last year, then-National Security Agency chief Paul Nakasone said that the agency had not seen evidence of attempts by Russia or China to affect the 2024 US presidential election.

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US 'Absolutely' Continues to Probe Havana Syndrome Cases - National Intelligence Director

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - The US intelligence community is "absolutely" continuing to investigate anomalous health incidents, also known as the Havana syndrome, but currently has no hard evidence that a foreign actor is behind them, Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines said in a congressional testimony on Thursday.

"We absolutely are continuing to investigate what's happening with anomalous health incidents, and we identified ... a whole series of gap areas that we have to continue to work to ensure that we're collecting intelligence and making sure that we are in fact closing those gaps," Haines told the US Senate Armed Services Committee.

Haines underscored that the intelligence community has not changed its initial assessments with some members thinking it is very unlikely that a foreign actor would be behind the incidents.

On March 31, CBS reported that based on new evidence Russia was allegedly behind a series of Havana syndrome-style attacks, including against US officials in Vietnam ahead of Vice President Kamala Harris' trip there in 2021.

Following the report, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov called the accusations groundless and emphasized that no evidence has ever been provided to back such claims.

In early March, The Washington Post reported five US intelligence agencies concluded it was "very unlikely" that any foreign adversary targeted US diplomats and intelligence staff with the help of some sort of energy weapon that caused strange and painful acoustic sensations.

US government and related personnel have reported Havana syndrome symptoms since 2015, including dizziness, pain, visual problems and cognitive dysfunction following intrusive sounds and head pressure.

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White House Still Wants Israel, Saudi Arabia Normalization – Kirby

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) – The Biden administration still wants to see Israel and Saudi Arabia normalize their relations and believes this could facilitate a two-state solution to the

Palestinian-Israeli conflict, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Thursday.

"We still want to see normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia," Kirby said at a press briefing. "We believe that that could have a significant impact on our ability to get closer to a two-state solution, so we're still having conversations with both countries about this idea of normalization."

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US Intel Chief Says No Indications Russia Trying to Instigate Pro-Palestine Protests in US

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - The US intelligence community has no information suggesting that Russia is making efforts to instigate pro-Palestine protests in the United States, Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines said on Thursday.

"I don't have any information that suggests that they are doing that at this stage," Haines said during a congressional hearing.

Numerous pro-Palestine demonstrations have emerged on college campuses across the United States in recent days against the US military, financial and diplomatic support for Israel's military operations in Gaza, which have resulted in the death of more than 34,000 Palestinians and injuring over 77,000 Palestinians.

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

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Two-Thirds of Canadians Say Police Gives Preferential Treatment to Some Protests - Poll

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - Two in three Canadians say law enforcement gives preferential treatment to certain protests and causes, a new Angus Reid poll revealed on Thursday.

"Overall, two-thirds of Canadians (64%) say the police give preferential treatment to certain groups when dealing with protests. One-in-five (21%) disagree, led by those over the age of 54 (26%)," a report on the poll said.

The opinion that police institutions does not engage protests in a consistent manner was expressed by individuals from all political stripes, and that belief is shared by 60%, 68% and 73% of Liberal, Conservative and Neo-Democratic voters, respectively.

Conservatives say left-leaning causes get preferential treatment and specifically pro-Palestinian protests are given "unfair layaway." By contrast, Liberals and Neo-Democrats who think right-leaning causes, and to a lesser extent pro-Israeli protests, are given a better treatment by

police, the poll report said.

Despite the diverging views, the near majority (86%) said that the right to protest was a fundamental right of Canadians, the poll report said.

However, nearly three quarters of respondents (74%) say they believe that the right to protest is lost as soon as laws are broken and slightly more than half of respondents (52%) say those organizing protests should be held responsible and charged with crimes committed during the demonstrations, the poll report added.

The poll comes out amid increased social tensions throughout Canada over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and an uptick in protests against Israel's military campaign in the Gaza Strip, including at McGill University in Montreal, University of Toronto and University of Ottawa.

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US Files Forfeiture Action Against \$1.55Mln in Russia-Bound Aircraft Gear - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) – The US Justice Department has filed a forfeiture complaint against \$1.55 million worth of Boeing 737-800 aircraft landing gear purchased for a transhipper working with Russian companies, according to a release.

"The Justice Department today filed a forfeiture complaint against a set of aircraft landing gear for a Boeing 737-800 that was detained in September 2023 at Miami International Airport by US Customs and Border Patrol," the department said in the release on Wednesday.

It added that the gear was "purchased for the benefit of a Kyrgyz Republic-based transhipper of dual-use items servicing the Russian Federation, in violation of US economic sanctions."

A Florida-based aircraft parts overhauler and reseller had sold the gear for \$1.55 million in June 2023 to an intermediary for Russia in Istanbul, GQ Solution Elektronik Ekipman Limited Sirketi. The US sanctioned this company on Wednesday for supplying electronic components to companies in Russia.

After the onset of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, the West stepped up sanctions pressure on Moscow. Western states imposed restrictions including a ban on providing aircraft, spare parts, insurance and maintenance to Russian airlines, obligating leasing companies to terminate aircraft leases with them.

Addressing the issue during his end-of-year press conference in December, President Vladimir Putin said that the fleet of Russian airlines is overloaded with foreign aircraft as domestic air carriers used to purchase "too many foreign aircraft." Russia is set to develop own aircraft manufacturing with plans to produce over 1,000 aircraft by 2030, Putin said.

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Russia Making Progress on Battlefield, Breakthroughs Possible in Donetsk, Kharkiv - Haines

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - Russia is making progress on the battlefield in Ukraine and could soon make tactical breakthroughs in Donetsk and Kharkiv, US Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines said during a congressional hearing on Thursday.

"Russia is making incremental progress on the battlefield with the potential for tactical breakthroughs along the frontlines in areas such as Donetsk and Kharkiv," Haines said.

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US National Intelligence Chief Says Ukraine Conflict Unlikely to End Anytime Soon

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine will unlikely end any time soon, US Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines said on Thursday.

"The war is unlikely to end any time soon," Haines said during a congressional hearing.

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At Least 5% of Gaza Population Got Killed, Injured by April 12 Amid Ongoing War - UN

UNITED NATIONS, May 2 (Sputnik) - At least 5% of Gaza's population has been either killed or injured as of April 12 amid the ongoing Israeli military campaign, according to a United Nations report on the socioeconomic situation in Gaza released on Thursday.

"By 12 April 2024, at least 5 per cent of the population in Gaza had been killed, severely injured or injured," the United Nations Development Program report said.

"According to the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics, the Palestinian economy lost an estimated 8.7 per cent of its real gross domestic product (GDP) in 2023 and is estimated to lose 25.8 per cent in 2024," the report stated.

On top of this, around 7,000 people are reportedly missing in Gaza, it added.