

5/23/24 Thursday

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US Influence Slipping as Bahrain Calls for Russia's Help in Ending Gaza War

On Thursday, King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of Bahrain said that for the first time, the Arab League is united in calling for an end to the war in Gaza and that a peace conference should be held. He said that Russia was the first country he asked to support the initiative, calling Moscow “the most influential country on the international stage.”

The decision to pick Russia represented yet another thumb in the eye to the United States, which has long seen itself as the only country capable of mediating relations between Israel and Palestine.

“At the Arab summit in Bahrain, the situation in the Gaza Strip was discussed, and we want the war to stop,” the king said. “There is full agreement among Arab countries on the need to hold a peace conference to resolve the Middle East issue. Russia is the first country to which we have turned with a call to support its holding, as Russia is the most influential country on the international stage.”

Filmmaker and documentarian Regis Tremblay noted that the League turning to Russia first rather than the United States or a regional ally was an important signal.

“What is extremely important from my perspective: they are turning to Russia to be a mediator in the end of this conflict,” Tremblay noted on Sputnik’s [The Critical Hour](#). “What a statement the Arab League has made to their sugar daddy, the United States of America for all these years.”

The United States and the West have played an oversized role in shaping the region for years, brokering deals with Egypt and Jordan to normalize relations with Israel but have made little progress since 1994.

“[The Arab countries] realize that there has not been any progress. That this has been duplicitous and mendacious all these years. You’re talking 80 years now,” Tremblay explained. “And now turning to Russia as a mediator. For Russia, this is huge, not only for its international reputation and prestige but for its direct influence in the Middle East. Huge.”

In November, Saudi Arabia signed a \$7 billion currency swap with China, deepening the two countries’ ties and a potential major step towards Saudi Arabia selling oil priced in Chinese Yuan. And last year, Saudi Arabia resumed diplomatic relations with Iran seven years after severing them.

King Hamad also called for the normalization of relations with Iran, another sign of the US’ waning influence in the region.

“We used to have problems with Iran, but now there are practically none. There is no reason to delay normalization of relations with Iran,” he said.

The Arab League was formed in 1945 and currently consists of 22 Middle Eastern and North African nations, including Jordan and Egypt, two countries seen as friendly to Israel as well as Saudi Arabia, which was reportedly in discussions to normalize relations with Israel before October 7.

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Gaza Pier Used to Feed IDF Before Palestinians - Journalist

Earlier this month, Israel seized the Palestinian side of the Rafah border crossing in Gaza, the main crossing between Gaza and Egypt. Since that time, humanitarian aid coming into Gaza has slowed to a crawl, despite the much-hyped US-built pier constructed off the coast. According to a journalist with sources on the ground in Gaza, the US-built pier that was constructed off the coast of Gaza ostensibly to bring in aid for hungry Palestinians was first used to bring in military equipment and then food, but the first batches of food went to Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldiers and not the starving citizens of Gaza.

Leila Hatoum was a guest on [Sputnik's Fault Lines](#) on Thursday, where she described the current situation with the controversial pier.

"The first batch of trucks that came in, they had weapons, they didn't have aid. There were a few trucks that came in that actually had some aid, but they didn't go to the north [where hunger is worst in Gaza.] They went over to the [IDF] base near the Netzarim corridor to the American and Israeli soldiers," Hatoum, who is the editor and chief for MENA Uncensored explained. "And there was some aid that when the Palestinians approached to take them from the trucks, they were shot at. This is what the US is doing and in their media, they're trying to insinuate otherwise."

Critics have questioned the US' intentions in building the pier since US Joe Biden announced the plan during a State of the Union address in March. The \$320 million pier is only capable of bringing in 150 aid trucks daily, according to US officials, though some doubt it is even that much. Aid organizations estimate that Gaza needs at least 500 trucks a day to feed the population. That has led many organizations to declare it a complicated and costly distraction when the easier solution would be for Israel to allow aid to flow through land routes.

Some have also pointed to nearby Israeli military bases and the significant natural gas reserves off the coast of Gaza as potential alternative motivations for the US.

"[Israel and the US] are not opening borders. They have stopped the airdrops and they've been fixating everything on that port. Why?" Hatoum asked. "What are they getting through that port? It's heavily, heavily guarded by the Israeli and US militaries," she added, noting that they have created an 8km by 3km area that no one is allowed to enter.

The US has described the pier as temporary.

On Wednesday, the Pentagon admitted that none of the aid that had gone through the pier made it to the Palestinian population, blaming hungry Palestinians for intercepting the trucks. On Thursday, the US Central Command announced that three US troops suffered non-combat injuries during the mission, including one who "was medivac" but declined to provide further details.

Even if the pier begins running at full capacity, the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has repeatedly emphasized that it will not be enough and Israel must open land routes to allow aid in.

"Getting aid to people in need into and across Gaza cannot and should not depend on a floating dock far from where needs are most acute," OCHA spokesperson Jens Laerke said.

“Land routes are the most viable, effective and efficient aid delivery method, which is why we need all crossing points to be opened,” he added.

On Monday, the special prosecutor for the International Criminal Court (ICC) announced their intention to seek an arrest warrant for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and several other high-ranking Israeli officials. On Wednesday, Norway, Spain and Ireland announced that they will [formally recognize Palestine](#) as a state later this month, bringing the total number of UN member states that recognize Palestine to 146 out of the 193 members of the General Assembly. However, the addition is significant because many of the holdouts are in Western Europe.

While the decision was condemned by Israel, Hatoum argues the European nations are trying to salvage what they can of the state of Israel.

“They are trying to save the Israeli entity. Israel at the moment is under immense pressure and it’s in trouble. It hasn’t recorded any victories in the past eight months,” she explained. “October 7th established one of two things. Either the speeding of a two-state solution, or we will not see the Israeli entity as we used to.”

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The Adopted Son - Cartoon

On Monday, just as his legal authority in Ukraine came to an end, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky pressed his Western benefactors to send him more weapons at a quicker pace and to get more directly involved in Ukraine’s conflict with Russia.

Russia has been making significant gains on the battlefield, both in the northern Kharkov region and in the east, including the city of Chasov Yar, where fighting has been going on for months. The repeated request for aid after continual battlefield failures – remember NATO has already built two armies for Ukraine that Zelensky squandered – must have reminded US President Joe Biden of his dear son, who has continually asked him for help with his drug problem.

Emails included in the laptop Hunter Biden left behind at a computer repair shop revealed emails and texts of the younger Biden asking his father for money to enter drug rehabilitation facilities. Videos on that same laptop also showed the future first son smoking what appears to be crack cocaine while nude in an isolation tank at a drug rehabilitation facility.

Then again, repeated failure is not something that seems to bother the Biden family.

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Slovak Media Explores Ukrainian Link to Fico Assassination Attempt

Last week, Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico was shot four times after a gunman fired five shots in his direction. He was rushed to the hospital where he remains in stable but critical condition. He is expected to survive.

Elements of the Slovak media are starting to whisper about a potential Ukrainian connection to the alleged assassin who attempted to kill Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico last week. Initially, it was reported that the alleged shooter, 71-year-old pensioner Juraj Cintula acted as a "lone wolf" when he shot the prime minister four times, nearly killing him. However, authorities in Slovakia announced that they are now considering the "more likely" scenario that he was working with a group.

"It seems more likely the attack was coordinated with some group," Slovak Interior Minister Matúš Šutaj-Eštok said on Slovakian television on Tuesday. "We are working with the fact that it was not a lone attacker, but that something was going on behind it, which we are trying to clarify."

The comments came after Slovak authorities revealed that Cintula's Facebook* communications and history were deleted four hours after the attack and that he nor his wife, described as "tech-illiterate" did it.

Slovakian Deputy Prime Minister Robert Kaliňák [said that the shooter](#) was communicating with an online community and told them of their plans, but it is unclear if the community was intended to be humorous or nefarious, he said some users mocked Cintula's plan.

A woman suspected to be Cintula's wife was seen in the custody of police, though it is not clear from reports if she was detained or was being held for her protection. Her name has not been published. Rumors have swirled about her, but Slovakian authorities have not confirmed their veracity, citing the ongoing investigation.

Slovakian media outlets have started to ponder if the country that has the most reason to be angry at Fico could be involved. Fico was elected on a promise to end his country's aid to Ukraine, a campaign promise he fulfilled once he was elected.

"The previous Slovakian government [before Fico] was fully onboard [with Ukraine aid]. They sent hundreds of millions of dollars worth of weapons, airplanes, tanks, artillery - everything they had, they just shipped it over, no questions asked," explained journalist Nebojsa Malic [on Sputnik's Fault Lines](#). "When Fico came to power last fall and he's like, nope, I'm stopping this and he did."

Writing in SIA News, columnist Lucas Leiroz [called for an investigation](#) into outside involvement. "It is necessary to investigate whether there was international involvement and whether foreign agents financed the attack or influenced it in any way. Knowing that there are groups interested in removing Fico, it is possible that there is a large conspiracy behind the cause," Leiroz wrote (translated from Slovak), noting the terrorist attacks suspected of being linked to Ukraine, like the Crocus City Hall massacre and the bombing of Russia's embassy in Brazil.

Leiroz also notes that world leaders who have opposed funding Ukraine have found themselves on the notorious "Mirotvorets" Ukrainian kill list, including Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

"Knowing that Kiev openly wants to kill 'pro-Russian' politicians, Slovak authorities must expand their investigation beyond the country's borders," Leiroz concluded.

Leiroz was not alone in suggesting that the shooter was influenced by an outside group. Writing for Slovakian outlet Skspravy, Norwegian analyst [Stephen Karganovic blamed](#) "globalists" and "Project Ukraine" for the shooting, noting that the "lone wolf" theory echoed the official narrative of the assassination of US President John F Kennedy.

“We may soon see how this horrific Jack Ruby-type explanation plays out as the Slovak authorities press their investigation,” he warned (translated).

Jack Ruby was convicted of assassinating Lee Harvey Oswald, the alleged “lone gunman” who was arrested for shooting JFK but died before he could stand trial.

“As the position of the collective West crumbles, any European leaders who might consider missteps or advancing the interests of their nations before dutifully following orders have been put on notice,” Karganovic argues.

If there is a connection found between Cintula and Ukraine, it would undoubtedly have massive implications for the world stage, potentially upending NATO.

“It would be sort of ironic and hilarious at the same time if Bratislava invokes Article Five [which requires NATO to protect an ally that is attacked] and says, ‘We were attacked by Ukraine. Will NATO help protect us?’” Malic wondered. “NATO would be obligated to do something, but this is the same alliance that’s arming Ukraine to the teeth.”

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King Hamad also called for the normalization of relations with Iran and the Arab League, another sign of the US’ waning influence in the region.

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Hatoum also questioned the motives behind the pier. "[Israel and the US] are not opening borders. They have stopped the airdrops and they've been fixating everything on that port. Why?" Hatoum asked. "What are they getting through that port? It's heavily, heavily guarded by the Israeli and US militaries," she added, noting that they have created an 8km by 3km area that no one is allowed to enter.

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Yellen Discusses Frozen Russian Assets with EU, Italian Counterparts - Treasury

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen discussed frozen Russian assets during her meetings in Italy with European Commissioner for the Economy Paolo Gentiloni and Italian Minister of Economy and Finance Giancarlo Giorgetti, the Department of the Treasury said on Friday.

"Secretary Yellen also discussed ways to unlock the value of immobilized Russian sovereign assets to support Ukraine's continued resistance and long-term reconstruction, and ways to constrain Russia's access to the goods it needs to build weapons, including the role China plays in supplying Russia's military industrial complex," the Treasury said in separate statements regarding the two meetings.

They also exchanged views on Chinese industrial practices, according to the statements.

Yellen and Gentiloni focused on the EU's economic growth, falling inflation, and strengthening of the labor market. During the meeting with Giorgetti, she discussed G7 priorities.

The two meetings took place on the sidelines of the G7 Finance Minister and Central Bank Governor Meetings in Stresa, Italy.

Moscow has criticized the efforts to seize its sovereign assets as the biggest theft in history and

a violation of international law. The European Central Bank has said that seizure would pose reputational risks to the euro in the long term.

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Canada, US, EU Express Deep Concern Over Escalating Conflict in Myanmar – Joint Statement

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) – Canada, the United States, the European Union and other allies expressed deep concern over escalating violence in Myanmar, according to a joint statement released on Friday.

“We, Australia, Canada, the European Union, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States, are deeply concerned by the escalating conflict in Myanmar and in particular the increasing harm to civilians, which is driving a worsening and devastating human rights and humanitarian crisis across the country,” the statement published by Global Affairs Canada said.

On Thursday, the United Nations said the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar was closely following the escalation of hostilities in Myanmar's western coastal state of Rakhine to assess whether crimes against humanity are being committed during the fighting.

In their joint statement, the states express their concern over the alleged restriction of humanitarian aid deliveries, the growing toll of civilians killed by landmines, and the military government's implementation of the 2010 conscription law which they believe seeks to “divide communities” and fuel ethnic-based violence in the country.

There must be accountability over the “atrocities” being committed in Myanmar, the statement said. Countries must prevent or cease the flow of arms or military and dual-use material, including aviation fuel, to the Myanmar military, it added.

In February 2021, the military seized power in Myanmar using a constitutional mechanism for transferring powers in an emergency situation. They arrested government officials, accusing them of rigging the general election, and later appointed a new administration. However, the military takeover sparked major civil unrest, resulting in widespread armed resistance. The opposition has created an underground alternative government of national unity, which includes former members of the toppled National League for Democracy party and representatives of ethnic political forces, which call for an active confrontation with the military government.

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Zelenskyy's Plunging Rating Reflects Ukrainians' Frustration - Russian Mission to UN

UNITED NATIONS, May 24 (Sputnik), Lenka White - Volodymyr Zelenskyy's plunging approval rating appears to reflect the growing frustration with his leadership in Ukraine and the Ukrainian people must ultimately decide whether he has legitimacy, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy told Sputnik.

"I think it's up to Ukrainians to decide and today, during a meeting, I replied to the allegations of

the representative of the Kiev regime saying that they need first to convince Ukrainians themselves of the position that he was reading for 10 minutes about the alleged legitimacy of President Zelenskyy, because only 17% of Ukrainians support the president right now and most of them are frustrated," Polyanskiy said on Friday.

Zelenskyy's presidential term expired on May 20. Ukraine was due to hold a presidential election on March 31, but it was delayed allegedly because of martial law having been imposed in the country.

Polyanskiy said the Ukrainian people are depressed knowing that the presidential administration was cowardly avoiding any consultations with the constitutional courts on the topic of Zelenskyy's legitimacy.

On Thursday, Ukrainian opposition politician Viktor Medvedchuk said Zelenskyy's functions cannot be performed by the head of his office, Andriy Yermak, as it contradicts the country's constitution.

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Russia Seeks to Save Manpower on Battlefield Unlike Ukraine - Mission to UN

UNITED NATIONS, May 24 (Sputnik), Lenka White - Russia's pace on the battlefield is determined by its efforts to minimize losses and save manpower, unlike Ukraine which is hunting after men on the streets to use them as cannon fodder, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy told Sputnik.

"The biggest challenge on the battlefield [for Russia] is of course to save lives, to save manpower. That's why our advance is not as swift as some people would expect, because we are saving manpower, we are trying to save civilian targets, civilian objects," Polyanskiy said in an interview. "We are very sad to see how the Ukrainian regime is dealing with the lives of their own men who are being caught on the streets to become cannon fodder."

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Antwerp Says Wants to Prevent G7 Russian Diamond Ban Disruptions to Global Market

(Adds details in paras 7,8; 10-12 background in 5,6,9)

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - The Antwerp World Diamond Centre (AWDC) is working with relevant stakeholders to ensure that the global diamond market is not overwhelmingly disrupted when a G7 ban on Russian diamonds is fully enforced starting in September, AWDC spokesperson Ine Tassignon told Sputnik.

Last week, media reported that the United States is reevaluating the most rigorous regulations of a G7 ban on Russian diamonds due to the diamond sanctions having faced backlash from industry players in Africa, India, and New York because of increased bureaucracy and costs. The state-run Diamond Office in Antwerp is entrusted with verifying the origin of diamonds for admission to European Union markets within the G7 ban on imports of Russian-mined polished diamonds.

"We are actively and constructively cooperating with all relevant stakeholders, in order to ensure a smooth transition when the so-called sunrise period ends," Tassignon said. "We want to avoid that the diamond industry gets overwhelmed by an abrupt transition towards a fully fledged traceability system, so we make every effort to make a transition as gentle and smooth as possible."

The ban is currently under a "sunrise period," which began on March 1 and will end on August 31, that allows the industry to adjust to the new rules before they are fully enforced in September.

From March to August, G7 importers, including from the United States, can choose to use either the traceability-based certification and certification mechanism or other evidence proving the non-Russian origin when they import polished diamonds that weigh one carat or more.

However, as of September 1, importers will be mandated to use the traceability-based certification and certification mechanism, and it will apply to diamonds 0.5 carats and larger, including with diamonds set in watches and jewelry.

Tassignon said the AWDC shares US concerns about making sure regulations in the G7 ban on Russian diamonds are acceptable for all involved parties.

However, the AWDC is hesitant about adopting a new regulation system that weakens the ban on Russian diamonds and opens the doors for loopholes for sanctioned goods that will allow

these goods to continue to enter major G7 markets, she added.

Media reported that internal disagreements in the AWDC over the organization's regulation system have led to key resignations, including departures by former AWDC CEO Ari Epstein and former AWDC board chairman David Gotlib.

Diamond industry analyst Edahn Golan told Sputnik that the United States and the European Union might not end up reaching an agreement on how to implement sanctions on Russian-origin diamonds.

"The US understood that the suggested single node in Antwerp won't adequately address the goals of the sanctions," Golan said. "The G7 agreement does not require that all G7 countries implement the sanctions in the same way. Therefore, we may find that while self-declaration is employed in the US, the EU may adopt a different approach."

Antwerp's bureaucratic approach to implement the sanctions faces "great resistance" from the diamond and jewelry industry. Golan added. The United States prefers a self-declaration system based on the adoption of the position that certification is best done at mining sites, he said.

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Last week, media reported that the United States is reevaluating the most rigorous regulations of a G7 ban on Russian diamonds due to the diamond sanctions having faced backlash from industry players in Africa, India, and New York.

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West 'in Panic' Over Situation on Battlefield in Ukraine - Russia's UN Mission to Sputnik

UNITED NATIONS, May 24 (Sputnik), Lenka White – The West is panicking over the situation on the battlefield in Ukraine and because Ukrainians refuse to fight for the Kiev regime amid forced conscription, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy told Sputnik.

"It's absolutely clear that the Western backers of Kiev are in panic right now because of the situation on the ground and because of the fact that Ukrainians, as it is obvious, are not willing to fight. There is a forced conscription in the country, which doesn't bring the results that were hoped or promised by the leader of the Kiev regime," Polyanskiy said.

Polyanskiy quipped that only psychiatrists could explain why Europeans, including French President Emmanuel Macron and British Foreign Minister David Cameron, are increasingly calling for raising the stakes in the conflict by either sending troops to Ukraine or proposing strikes deep into Russian territory. Meanwhile, the United States is taking a more balanced position by putting certain limitations on the use of its weapons by Kiev, he said.

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Antwerp Diamond Center Says Shares Concerns Around G7 Russian Diamond Ban Implementation

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - The Antwerp World Diamond Centre (AWDC) shares US concerns about making sure regulations in the G7 ban on imports of Russian-mined polished diamonds are acceptable for all involved parties, AWDC spokesperson Ine Tassignon told Sputnik.

Last week, media reported that the United States is re-evaluating the most rigorous regulations of a G7 ban on Russian diamonds due to the diamond sanctions having faced backlash from industry players in Africa, India, and New York because of increased bureaucracy and costs. The state-run Diamond Office in Antwerp is entrusted with verifying the origin of diamonds for admission to European Union markets within the G7 ban on imports of Russian diamonds.

"We share the same concerns as the US government," Tassignon said. "We believe all G7 countries are conscious of the importance of the implementation of a workable system for all parties involved, without any disruptions for non-sanctioned goods."

"Since we at AWDC are absolutely striving for a transparent diamond industry from mine to finger and we place the utmost importance on high ethical standards, we are hesitant about a system that weakens the ban on Russian diamonds and opens the doors for loopholes for sanctioned goods that will allow these goods to continue to enter major G7 markets," the spokesperson added.

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Antwerp Diamond hub shares concerns of industry players over G7 Russian diamond ban, but hesitant about easing sanctions - spokesperson to sputnik

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West Aware of Consequences If Kiev Strikes Russia With Their Weapons - Russia's UN Mission

UNITED NATIONS, May 24 (Sputnik), Lenka White - Western states are familiar with the consequences of using weapons that they supplied for targets inside Russia and have no illusions about this, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy told Sputnik.

"We are not really paying very much attention to these things, because Western countries know perfectly what might be the consequences of using or not using weapons, or long-range weapons for certain targets," Polyanskiy said in an interview. "I don't think that they have any illusions about this."

Russia is pursuing the goals of its special military operation and is not distracted by the positions of Western leaders, he added.

Russians "have gotten used to this lying and to the misinformation of the international community. So the reality is being shaped on the battlefield, and that's what we're doing," Polyanskiy said.

Earlier this week, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Grabielius Landsbergis said that Ukraine should be allowed to use Western-delivered weapons to Kiev and strike inside Russian territory. Earlier this month, French President Emmanuel Macron said he would not rule out sending French troops to help Kiev in fighting Russia. On the other hand, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said that the US does not want Kiev shooting targets inside Russia and that Washington is not planning to send trainers to Ukraine.

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Iranian President's Death Could Escalate Mideast Tensions - Russia's UN Mission

UNITED NATIONS, May 24 (Sputnik), Lenka White - Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's death could exacerbate the already tense situation in the Middle East, but all sides appear to be demonstrating restraint so far, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy told Sputnik.

"The situation is indeed so tense right now that anything could have an impact on it. It depends on how it will be exploited and what will be the consequences of that," Polyanskiy said in an interview. "Everyone is trying to be quite restrained in this regard."

When asked about the helicopter crash that killed the Iranian leader and his delegation, Polyanskiy suggested waiting for a proper and complete investigation by Iran.

A helicopter carrying President Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and other officials crashed on May 19 in the country's northwest, killing everyone on board.

The delegation was returning from a visit to Azerbaijan, where Raisi and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev participated in the opening ceremony for the Giz Galasi hydroelectric complex and the commissioning of the Khoda Afarin hydroelectric complex on the joint border.

Iranian authorities said the accident took place in a remote mountainous region due to poor weather conditions and thick fog.

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Biden at Risk of Being Excluded From Ohio Ballot For Not Meeting Criteria - Experts

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden is at risk of being excluded from the Ohio ballot in the upcoming presidential election for failing to meet certain criteria in the state law, experts told Sputnik.

Ohio law requires political parties to certify their candidates with the Secretary of State on or before 90 days prior to an election, but the Democratic National Convention where Biden will be officially nominated as the Democratic presidential candidate won't take place until August 22, which is 75 days before the election.

The Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose said she won't grant Biden any special exception from the law, and recommended that the Democratic Party find a legally acceptable remedy. The state legislature also isn't willing to attempt to change the state law in Biden's favor, she added.

Case Western Reserve University political science professor Jonathan Entin, who also used to be a law clerk for the late Ruth Ginsberg when she was a lower-level judge, told Sputnik the risk of Biden not appearing on the Ohio ballot is shocking.

"Everyone involved claims that Biden will appear on the Ohio ballot this fall, but so far the situation remains unresolved," Entin said. "The prospect that a major party's presidential candidate will not appear on the ballot is genuinely shocking - as is the unwillingness of the legislative leadership to resolve the problem quickly and without controversy."

However, Entin expects the Biden campaign to file a lawsuit soon that will likely be successful.

"It is also possible that we will see some sort of workaround in which the Democratic National Committee creates some kind of improvised certification before Ohio's August 7 deadline," Entin added.

University of Cincinnati Political Science Professor David Niven told Sputnik that he expects Biden will eventually end up on the ballot in Ohio but it will take some extraordinary effort to make it happen.

The Democratic Party could hold a pre-convention meeting to designate Biden as the nominee within the required timeline in order to qualify him for the ballot, Niven said.

If Democratic efforts fail, it will be devastating for the entire Democratic ticket in Ohio if Biden were left off the ballot, Niven said.

"Leaving the president off the ballot is simply intolerable for Democrats," Niven said. "Since the Republican-dominated state legislature in Ohio petulantly refused to pass a waiver, it will be up to the Democratic Party to find a mechanism to officially nominate President Biden before their scheduled convention."

Biden currently trails former President Donald Trump in the national polls by one point, according to an aggregation by RealClearPolitics.

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Trump Claims Most Gaza Hostages Dead, Reason Why Talks Unproductive

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump said during a campaign rally in New York City that he believes most of the hostages in Gaza are dead.

"Many of the hostages that you're waiting for, and everybody's waiting for those hostages, many of them are dead," Trump said on Thursday. "Many of them are dead."

Trump claims that Hamas negotiators are unwilling to agree to a hostage deal with Israel because most of their hostages are dead.

Three Trump-era diplomats were in Israel on Monday to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for an update on the Gaza conflict.

Although the Trump officials did not go to Israel at the direction of the former US president, they were expected to brief him about their meetings with Israeli officials, media reported.

CIA Director Bill Burns is reportedly traveling to Europe to attempt to revive hostage talks.

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Trump Says Biden 'Doesn't Know He's Alive'

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) — Former President Donald Trump says US President Joe Biden doesn't know he's alive while asserting during a rally in South Bronx that he can make the people of New York happy.

"It's really about the people and in this case, the people of New York City, New York State, we're going to make you very happy and Biden can't do it. He [Biden] doesn't know he's alive," Trump said on Thursday.

Trump and Biden recently agreed to debates on June 27 and September 10, but Biden rejected additional debates proposed by NBC News and Fox News in the coming months.

The Trump campaign has been calling on Biden to agree to have a debate each month leading to the November 5 vote in the US presidential election.

Furthermore, Trump said he would demand a drug test before a debate with Biden.

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US Launching Comprehensive Review of Bilateral Cooperation With Georgia - Blinken

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - The United States is launching a comprehensive review of bilateral cooperation with Georgia over the passing of a "foreign influence" law in the country, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement.

"I am also launching today a comprehensive review of bilateral cooperation between the United States and Georgia. It remains our hope that Georgia's leaders will reconsider the draft

law and take steps to move forward with their nation's democratic and Euro-Atlantic aspirations. As we review the relationship between our two countries, we will take into account Georgia's actions in deciding our own," Blinken said on Thursday.

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US Implements Visa Restriction Policy on Georgia Officials 'Undermining Democracy'-Blinken

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - The United States is implementing a visa restriction policy on Georgian officials, and their families, who are responsible for facilitating passage of a controversial foreign agents law that could derail the country's path to join the European Union, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a press release.

On Saturday, Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili vetoed the controversial foreign agents bill that had been adopted by the country's parliament last Tuesday. The parliament needs a simple majority to override the veto.

"In response to these actions, the Department of State is implementing a new visa restriction policy for Georgia that will apply to individuals who are responsible for or complicit in undermining democracy in Georgia, as well as their family members," Blinken said on Thursday. "This includes individuals responsible for suppressing civil society and freedom of peaceful assembly in Georgia through a campaign of violence or intimidation."

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Us launching comprehensive review of bilateral cooperation with Georgia over "foreign influence" law - Blinken

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Kart LLC. Additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US implementing new Visa Restriction policy for Georgia that Target's Those Undermining Democracy, Suppressing Civil Society, Assembly Rights -blinken

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US Navy Gives Raytheon New \$227Mln Contract to Maintain AIM-9X Missiles - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - The US Navy has given Raytheon a new more than \$227 million contract to provide support engineering for AIM-9X Sidewinder missiles for the US armed forces, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"Raytheon Company [of] Tucson, Arizona is awarded a \$227,350,165 ...contract ...to support AIM-9X and AIM-9X Block II missile sustainment efforts for the Navy, Air Force, Army, and

Foreign Military Sales customers," the release stated on Thursday.

Most of the work on the contract will be performed in Tucson, Arizona (93%) over the next five years and is expected to be completed in May 2029, the Defense Department said.

The AIM [Air Intercept Missile]-9 Sidewinder is a short-range air-to-air missile that entered service with the US Navy in 1956 and the US Air Force in 1964. It is regarded as one of the oldest, cheapest, and most successful air-to-air missiles in the world, according to published sources.

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US Navy Extends Contract to Build 2 New Constellation Class Frigates - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - The US Navy has extended a contract with the Marinette Marine Corporation by more than \$1 billion to design and build two new Constellation-class guided-missile frigates, the Defense Department announced.

"Marinette Marine Corporation [of] Marinette, Wisconsin is awarded a \$1,044,529,113 ...modification ...contract ...for detail design and construction of two Constellation-class guided-missile frigates, FFG 66 and FFG 67," the Defense Department said in a release on Thursday.

Slightly more than half the work on the two ships will be performed in Marinette, Wisconsin, with the rest at various locations across the United States, the release said.

The building of the two ships is expected to take six years, and to be completed by April 2030, the release added.

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Hersh Says US Diplomacy Needed to Avoid Ukraine's 'Overwhelming' Defeat

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) -Diplomatic efforts from Washington, which are withheld due to President Joe Biden's irrational views on Russia, could have resolved the Ukrainian conflict that Americans and their allies are now unable to win, Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist Seymour Hersh said.

"America, in the years Biden has been in office, has spent \$175 billion to fight a war that cannot and will not be won. It will only be resolved by diplomacy—if rationality prevails in Kiev and Washington," Hersh wrote in a Substack article on Thursday.

Otherwise, the "undertrained, understaffed, and poorly-equipped Ukrainian army faces an overwhelming defeat," he predicted.

In addition, Hersh, citing a longtime senior US official said that the US intelligence community has been concerned about Biden's views on Putin and Russia, which date back to his time serving in the Senate.

However, some within the American intelligence community believe that the United States bears its own share of responsibility for the conflict in Ukraine, Hersh added.

"Putin and his predecessors in Moscow watched for three decades—since the reunification of Germany in 1990—as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) added member states that brought NATO to Russia's doorstep," Hersh said. "Putin's apparent fear as the Biden administration took office—that Ukraine would be the next to sign up—could have been soothed with a few words from Washington. But none was coming from Biden and his key foreign policy and national security aides, who echoed the president's dour fears about Putin's intentions."

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Oil Settles at Multi-Month Lows as Federal Reserve Seeks to Keep Rates Higher for Longer

NEW YORK, May 24 (Sputnik) - Oil prices settled down a fourth day in a row on Thursday and at the lowest level since the first quarter as the prospect of the Federal Reserve keeping US interest rates higher for longer damped investor sentiment across Wall Street, including the energy markets.

West Texas Intermediate (WTI) the benchmark for US crude, settled at \$76.87 per barrel, down 70 cents, or 0.9% on the day.

That was the lowest daily settlement for WTI since February 8, when it finished at \$76.22. After four days in the negative, the US crude benchmark was poised for a weekly loss of 3.8%, the most since the final week of April, when it gave up 6.9%.

UK-origin Brent crude, the global benchmark for oil, settled at \$81.36 a barrel, down 54 cents, or 0.7% on the day. Week-to-date, Brent was off 2.9%, the most since the final week of April when it lost 7.3%.

Also weighing on oil prices this week was an unexpected build in US crude stockpiles that raised questions about demand for oil in the run-up to summer driving - typically the United States' busiest period for fuel consumption.

The US Energy Information Administration said domestic crude balances rose by 1.825 million barrels during the week to May 17, after a prior weekly draw of 2.508 million. Energy analysts on Wall Street had anticipated a drop of 2.4 million barrels instead.

While demand was a concern on the market, the bigger worry has been US inflation and its impact on interest rates, according to analysts.

With interest rates already at two-decade highs, Fed policy makers discussed the possibility of even tighter monetary policy should inflation not recede as expected months down the road, the central bank revealed in its latest policy meeting minutes published on Wednesday.

The Fed intends to bring interest rates down but is also averse to making rate cuts when inflation is still stronger than its 2% per year target.

The US Consumer Price Index (CPI), a key inflation indicator, went from an annualized growth of 3.1% in January to 3.2% in February and 3.5% in March, before retreating to 3.4% in April. The CPI hit a four-decade high in the aftermath of the 2020 coronavirus breakout, growing by as much as 9.1% in the year to June 2022.

The Fed then hiked interest rates 11 times, bringing them to a range of between 5.25% and 5.5%, versus the pre-pandemic range of between zero and 0.25%.

The current range of rates has been unchanged since July 2023 due to uncertainties in the

inflation outlook.

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First Batch of Ukrainian Pilots Completed F-16 Training in Arizona - National Guard

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - The first batch of Ukrainian pilots completed F-16 training at a base in the state of Arizona, an Arizona National Guard spokesperson told Sputnik.

"The first batch of Ukrainian students have graduated," the spokesperson said on Thursday.

The spokesperson did not disclose the number of graduates but noted that there are still several Ukrainian pilots undergoing F-16 training and that they should all be done by August.

Initially, 12 Ukrainian pilots were training on F-16 fighter jets at the military base in Arizona.

Ukraine is expected to start receiving its first deliveries of F-16 fighter jets by this summer.

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US Congress Votes To Block Central Bank Digital Coin That Fed Isn't Even Pursuing

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - The House of Representatives voted Thursday to block the Federal Reserve from issuing a central bank digital currency, or CBDC, saying unelected representatives should not be in control of a financial surveillance tool that could shape American lives.

It was the second digital currency-related bill to pass Congress in as many days, after The Financial Innovation and Technology for the 21st Century Act, which won approval Wednesday. That so-called FIT 21 bill was a bid by Republican rivals of President Joe Biden to create what they called "regulatory clarity" to boost the crypto industry's growth.

"For more than two years, we have worked to educate, grow support, and pass this important legislation, which prevents unelected bureaucrats from issuing a financial surveillance tool to fundamentally undermine our American values," House Majority Whip Tom Emmer said during Thursday's vote on the CBDC Anti-Surveillance State Act.

The US Senate, which is dominated by Biden-aligned Democrat lawmakers, could prevent both the CBDC and FIT 21 bills from becoming law, observed analysts.

Some alluded to politics being behind the Republican actions in Congress, with Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell saying in March that the central bank was "nowhere near" close to creating its own digital currency.

"If we were to ever do something like this, and we're a very long way from even thinking about it, we would do this through the banking system [and] the last thing ... the Federal Reserve would want would be to have individual accounts for all Americans," Powell had said.

CBDCs have grown in popularity over the last four years, largely due to the security offered by government supervision of such digital coins versus the inherent risks in open-market crypto.

The Fed has wavered on its own CBDC despite progress achieved on that front by China's digital yuan, India's digital rupee, and the ECB's upcoming digital euro. While the US central

bank has voiced concerns many times about the dangers posed by unregulated digital money, it has not decided if a CBDC would be an absolute necessity for Americans to spend and store their cash.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) -

BAHRAIN-RUSSIA TALKS

* There are good trends in the development of trade cooperation between Russia and Bahrain, Russian President Vladimir Putin said at talks with King of Bahrain Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa in Moscow on Thursday.

* Al Khalifa told Putin during a meeting in the Kremlin that Russia's support was crucial for organizing a peace conference on the war rocking the Middle East.

* The unprecedented growth of Russia's economy has a positive impact on the situation in the Arab world, Al Khalifa said at a meeting with Putin.

* Russian metallurgical company Normikel plans to build a platinum production plant in Bahrain, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said.

UN RESOLUTION ON SREBRENICA GENOCIDE

* The UN General Assembly adopted a controversial resolution on the "genocide" in Srebrenica in 1995, a Sputnik correspondent reported on Thursday.

* The newly approved resolution by the UN General Assembly on the genocide in Srebrenica is meant to undermine the existing Dayton Peace Agreement despite the speeches by certain member states that that is not the case, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said.

US REACTION ON ALLEGED RUSSIAN SATELITE LAUNCH

* Russia did not formally notify the United States about the launch of a satellite earlier this month, but it did file a flight ban under the Hague Code of Conduct, a Pentagon spokesperson said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* Ukraine did not take back its prisoners of war for exchange for several months, Russian human rights commissioner Tatyana Moskalkova said on Thursday.

* Western arms supplies to Ukraine can only make the fate of Ukrainians more difficult, and this is an irresponsible and dangerous position, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

* The Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (NPP) has lost connection to the only remaining power line outside the site due to reported short circuit, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said.

* The G7 countries are all now broadly supportive of the US idea to provide Ukraine with a loan

that would be backed by the interest and profits from Russian assets frozen in Europe, Bloomberg reported, citing officials familiar with the discussions.

* A settlement in Ukraine requires talks between Russia and the United States, which will define the security system in Europe for 20-30 years, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban said.

RUSSIA-AFRICA RELATIONS

* Russian-African trade amounted to \$25 billion last year, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Thursday.

* African countries are playing an increasingly important role in addressing pressing issues on the international agenda, Russian President Vladimir Putin said.

* Russia is preparing to open diplomatic missions in South Sudan, Niger and Sierra Leone, Lavrov said.

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One Million Pounds of Humanitarian Aid Delivered to Gaza Via Pier to Date - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - More than one million pounds of humanitarian aid has been delivered to Gaza through the maritime corridor since the operation began last week, US Central Command Deputy Commander Vice Admiral Brad Cooper told reporters on Thursday.

"In terms of distribution, 506 metric tons of aid has been distributed from the beach transfer point to the people of Gaza by the United Nations as of last night," Cooper said during a press briefing. "It's more than 1 million pounds to put it in simpler terms."

US Agency for International Development Levant Response Management Team Director Daniel Dieckhaus said during the briefing that the pier alone is not enough to meet the staggering needs in Gaza, but emphasized that it is an important addition.

Dieckhaus further underscored that not enough trucks carrying humanitarian aid are reaching Gaza from overland border crossings.

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New Hampshire Man Faces 24 Charges, \$6M In Fine for Biden Mimicking Robocalls - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - New Hampshire resident Steve Kramer has admitted to making robocalls that mimicked President Joe Biden in January to discourage people from voting in the presidential primary and is now facing 24 criminal charges, including 13 felony charges, and a \$6 million fine, Fox News reported on Thursday.

In January, the New Hampshire Justice Department said in a statement that it had launched a probe into AI-generated voice messages sent to multiple state voters encouraging them to skip the January 23 presidential primary and instead vote in the November presidential election.

The New Hampshire Justice Department qualified the incident as an unlawful attempt to disrupt

the presidential primary in the state and to suppress New Hampshire voters.

Kramer is a political consultant who previously said that he produced the calls as a stunt to demonstrate the need to regulate AI technology.

Biden and his predecessor Donald Trump won in the New Hampshire primary while Biden was not even present on the state ballot but won via write-in votes.

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US, EU Launch Coordination Mechanism to Stop Misinformation in Western Balkans - Statement

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - The United States and the European Union have launched a coordination mechanism on information integrity to prevent misinformation in the Western Balkans, the US Department of State said in a statement on Thursday.

"The US Department of State and the European Union's External Action Service (EEAS) launched a joint USEU Coordination Mechanism on the Western Balkans - focused exclusively on foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI), which includes disinformation and propaganda," the statement said.

The announcement resulted from the bilateral Trade and Technology Council Ministerial held in Belgium last month, the statement said.

The new mechanism will strengthen the integrity of the information environment in the region, the statement also said.

"This mechanism will empower like-minded partners to become self-sufficient in addressing the FIMI threat and to work together to reduce Russia's and the People's Republic of China's ability to employ propaganda and information manipulation campaigns in the region," the statement added.

The two sides noted they are working to integrate the Western Balkans into Euro-Atlantic structures and emphasized the importance of an open and fact-based information domain to prevent the spread of manipulated information, according to the statement.

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Three US Soldiers Sustain Non-Combat Injuries During Gaza Pier Operation - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - Three US soldiers recently sustained non-combat related injuries while operating the humanitarian maritime corridor off the coast of Gaza, US Central Command Deputy Commander Brad Cooper said on Thursday.

"Three injuries, two were very minor routine injuries, those individuals returned to duty," Cooper said, noting that one soldier sustained an ankle injury and another a back injury.

The third injured soldier is undergoing care at an Israeli hospital after he was injured on a ship while out at sea, Cooper said.

More than one million pounds of humanitarian aid has been delivered to Gaza through the pier

as of Wednesday night, Cooper added.

The first shipments of humanitarian aid through the maritime corridor began to arrive in Gaza last week.

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Bipartisan US Congressmen Group Urges Trudeau to Uphold NATO Spending Commitment – Letter

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) – A bipartisan group of 23 US lawmakers on Thursday called on Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to uphold Ottawa's commitment to spend 2% of GDP on defense in order to ensure the strength of the NATO alliance.

"Dear Prime Minister Trudeau ... we write to urge your government to uphold the commitment agreed to by all North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Allies at the 2014 Wales Summit and again at the 2023 Vilnius Summit to strengthen our collective security by increasing defense spending levels to two percent of each country's gross domestic product (GDP)," the lawmakers wrote in a letter.

Although Canada has made valuable contributions to NATO, the alliance is currently facing its most "severe threat landscape" since its inception 75 years ago, the letter said. Canada and other member states must uphold their commitments to ensure a strong and sustainable NATO, it added.

The Congressmen said that by the end of 2024, 18 NATO member states will have reached the 2% spending baseline but noted that Canada would not be among those countries. They further expressed concern about Canada not reaching the target by the end of the decade.

At the upcoming NATO Summit in Washington, the US will expect from all non-compliant member states to present a plan on how they intend to reach the benchmark as soon as possible, the letter continued.

In mid-April, the Ministry of National Defense released its defense policy update "Our North, Strong and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada's Defense."

Under the update, Canada plans to invest C\$8.1 billion (\$6 billion) over the next five years, and C\$73 billion over the next 20 years. The increased spending would bring the country's defense budget to 1.76% of its GDP by 2029-2030.

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Northrop Grumman Extends Intelsat In-Orbit Maintenance Services by 4 Years - Statement

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - Northrop Grumman's Space Logistics division has concluded a deal to extend, by four years its in-orbit services through Mission Extension Vehicles (MEVs) for the satellite operator Intelsat, the US aerospace giant announced in a press release on Thursday.

"Northrop Grumman Corporation SpaceLogistics announced its agreement to extend by four

years the revolutionary on-orbit life-extension services its Mission Extension Vehicles (MEVs) provide to satellite operator Intelsat," the release stated.

At the end of the current servicing period, MEV-1 will relocate and release the Intelsat 901 (IS-901) satellite into the Geosynchronous Earth Orbit (GEO) graveyard and provide service for another Intelsat satellite, the release explained.

MEV-2 will remain docked to Intelsat's current vehicle, Intelsat 10-02 (IS-10-02), providing life extension for an additional four years – nearly doubling service from the original contract, Northrop Grumman said.

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Collins Aerospace Wins Multi-Billion Deal to Build New US Air Force Command Systems

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - Collins Aerospace has won a multi-billion-dollar subcontract as part of a team led by the Sierra Nevada Corporation (SNC) to create systems for a new aircraft under the US Air Force's Survivable Airborne Operations Center (SAOC) program, Collins' parent company Northrop Grumman announced on Thursday.

"Collins Aerospace was awarded a multi-billion-dollar subcontract as part of a team led by SNC to design, develop and deliver systems and products for a new aircraft under the US Air Force's SAOC program," Northrop Grumman said in a press release.

The SAOC program's goal is to build and deliver the next generation E-4B National Airborne Operations Center to give top US military commanders leaders a survivable aircraft from which to operate the National Military Command System, the release said.

"We are bringing together systems from across RTX [Raytheon] to help the team deliver an advanced, survivable airborne operations center to the U.S. Air Force," Collins Aerospace Strategic Solutions Vice President Conn Doherty said in the release, adding that the mission was urgent.

The US Air Force awarded SNC a \$13 billion contract in April to build the SAOC to replace the current Boeing E-4B Nightwatch as the service's airborne nuclear command-and-control aircraft and primary transport for the secretary of defense, according to published reports.

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US Senate Rejects Cloture Motion on Revived Border Security Bill

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - The US Senate on Thursday declined to advance a border security bill revived by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, after the legislation was rejected by lawmakers earlier this year.

A motion to invoke cloture on a motion to proceed to the bill failed in a vote of 43 in favor and 50 opposed, with 60 votes required to pass the motion.

Earlier this week, US President Joe Biden called Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and

House Speaker Mike Johnson to urge the Republican leaders to support the bill. However, Johnson said the legislation would be “dead on arrival” in the House of Representatives, even if it managed to clear the Senate.

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Tesla CEO Elon Musk Says Does Not Want US Tariffs on Chinese EVs

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - Billionaire electric vehicle pioneer Elon Musk rejected Thursday US tariffs on imported Chinese EVs, saying his Tesla company competed well enough in China without any protection for cars made in that country.

The Biden administration last week said it was placing a 100% tariff on Chinese-made electric vehicle imports to the United States in a bid to stop cheap Chinese EVs from flooding the US market. Musk, speaking at the VivaTech conference in Paris, said he preferred a level playing ground for EVs in America.

“I was surprised when they were announced,” Musk said, referring to the US tariffs. “Tesla competes quite well in the market in China with no tariffs and no preferential support. So, in general, I’m in favor of no tariffs.”

It’s a change in stance for Musk, who suggested earlier this year that Chinese EV companies might crush competitors outside their country with the absence of trade restrictions. “Frankly, I think, if there are no trade barriers established, they will pretty much demolish most other companies in the world,” he said on Tesla’s earnings call in January.

His shift comes surprisingly at a time when Tesla has been struggling from an aging fleet of EVs, weaker consumer demand and increased global competition, most notably in China. Tesla’s revenue in the first three months of this year slumped by its most for a quarter since 2012, with its stock price down almost 30%.

Tesla and China’s BYD are currently the world’s largest electric-vehicle makers, becoming direct competitors in the Chinese market as well as much of the world outside the United States. Other EV startups from China, such as Nio, Li Auto and Xpeng, are also gearing up for a slice of the global market. The rivalry comes as Tesla is already losing sales momentum in the United States — it delivered fewer cars in the first-quarter of this year than even the most bearish estimates of Wall Street analysts despite its own price cuts.

US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said in April that the United States decided to embark on “early decisive action” to shield its electric vehicle industry from China’s price discounting and other harmful subsidies. Tai said China’s threat to the American EV industry was evolving in a pattern seen earlier with the US steel, aluminum and solar panel businesses.

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US to Direct \$21Bln to Help Poorest Countries Via IMF in Coming Weeks - Biden

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - The United States will direct in the coming weeks an additional \$21 billion to the International Monetary Fund to help the poorest countries, according to a joint United States-Kenya Joint Leaders' Statement published on Thursday.

"The United States intends to make available in the coming weeks lending of up to \$21 billion to the International Monetary Fund to support financing needs for the poorest countries," the statement said.

The new funding is on top of the \$250 million that was made available earlier this week to the International Development Association Crisis Response Window at the World Bank to support crisis response in the world's poorest countries, according to the statement.

Kenyan President William Ruto is on an official three-day state visit in Washington, which includes a bilateral meeting with President Joe Biden. The visit comes as the United States is losing influence to Russia and China in the African continent after it was required to withdraw US forces from Niger and Chad by those respective governments.

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Russia Did Not Notify US of Satellite Launch, But Filed Flight Ban - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - Russia did not formally notify the United States about the launch of a satellite earlier this month, but it did file a flight ban under the Hague Code of Conduct, a Pentagon spokesperson said on Thursday.

"Russia did not directly contact the U.S. about the launch or the payload; they did file a flight ban through the Hague Code of Conduct, generally notifying nations of the planned launch," the spokesperson said in a statement.

On Tuesday, Defense Department spokesperson Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder said that on May 16 Russia launched a satellite allegedly carrying a counter-space weapon that is presumably capable of attacking other satellites in low Earth orbit.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov called the allegations misinformation, adding that Moscow is not going to respond to it.

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Biden Says No Need to Reoccupy Afghanistan to Control Islamic State Terror Group

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Thursday that there is no need to again invade and occupy Afghanistan to control the Islamic State terror group (banned in Russia).

"There are ways to control ISIS [Islamic State] other than occupying Afghanistan, it was an unnecessary need," Biden said during a joint press briefing with Kenyan President William Ruto at the White House.

Regarding the prospects of uniting Afghanistan, Biden said it is very unlikely that anybody would be able to accomplish that.

In April, Assistant Defense Secretary Christopher Maier said in a congressional testimony that the ISIS-Khorasan terror group (banned in Russia) operating in Afghanistan has been strengthening its connections to the broader Islamic State enterprise and is increasing attacks across the region while exploiting links with Central Asian diasporas abroad to encourage attacks against the West.

The United States withdrew from Afghanistan in August 2021, following a rapid takeover of the country by the Taliban (under UN sanctions). The US military led the chaotic evacuation of thousands of people from Afghanistan via the airport in Kabul, where a terrorist attack killed 13 US troops and 170 Afghans.

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Biden to Issue Executive Order in June to Shut Down Southern Border If Necessary - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden is preparing to issue an executive order that would temporarily shut down the border to specific migrants if illegal entries into the United States exceed a certain threshold on a regular basis, NBC News reported on Thursday, citing multiple sources familiar with the matter.

Biden is expected to issue the executive order in June, but no final decisions have been made, and the timing of the announcement could change, the report noted.

The Biden administration is still working to finalize details in the executive order, and is also in ongoing talks with Mexican officials about their potential key role in this effort, the report said.

White House officials have been working on this plan for several months, according to the report. They intend to use a presidential authority known as Section 212 (f), which would let the US president unilaterally suspend the entries of specific groups of migrants when the number of attempted illegal border crossings reaches overwhelming levels.

Illegal crossings at the US southern border have gone through three consecutive record-breaking years since Biden took over the White House in January 2021, with nearly 8 million encounters with migrants recorded during that period, according to publicly available CBP data.

Since October 2023, an estimated 1.5 million migrants have been apprehended for illegally crossing into the United States on the southern border, CBP data shows.

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US Congressman Says Introduced Bill to Ban Taxpayer Funding of Online Censorship

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Thomas Massie said on Thursday that he introduced legislation to ban taxpayer funding of online censorship efforts by the federal

government, following the exposure of such activities in the so-called Twitter Files.

"The Twitter Files showed the government colludes with private companies and universities to violate the 1st Amendment. Congress must use the power of the purse to end this unconstitutional activity," Massie said in a statement via the social media platform X.

The First Amendment of the US Constitution provides protections against government restrictions on speech, expression, religion, petition, assembly and the press.

The legislation introduced by Massie would prevent taxpayer funds from being spent by any federal department or agency on "disinformation research grants" and eliminate funding for programs identified as key to the federal government's censorship efforts, the congressman said in a statement on the bill.

The bill is cosponsored by more than a dozen House Republicans, according to the statement.

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Biden Says Seeks to Make Kenya 1st African Country to Benefit From US CHIPS Act

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Thursday that he is working with Congress to make Kenya the first African country to receive funding under the CHIPS and Science Act.

"Today, I am proud to announce that I'm working with Congress to make Kenya the first country in Africa to receive funding under the CHIPS and Science Act," Biden said during a press conference with visiting Kenyan President William Ruto.

The CHIPS and Science Act is a 2022 law that aims to reinvigorate the US computer chip sector through billions of dollars in targeted government support.

Biden said the announcement is intended to boost investment opportunities between the two countries and also the Kenyan diaspora in the United States.

During their meeting, Biden and Ruto also discussed security, climate change, health, clean energy and debt affecting poor states in Africa.

In addition, Biden announced his intent to designate Kenya as a "major non-NATO ally."

Ruto's visit to the United States marks the sixtieth anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

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Russia Says Need to Redress Historical Injustice in Africa's UNSC Underrepresentation

UNITED NATIONS, May 23 (Sputnik) - The international community needs to correct the historical injustice related to Africa's underrepresentation in the UN Security Council, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Dmitry Chumakov said on Thursday.

"There is a need, most notably, to redress the historical injustice regarding Africa, whose representation in the Security Council today is not in line with either the total number of states

on the continent or their current role in international affairs," Chumakov said during a UNSC meeting.

Chumakov also pointed out the imbalance in representation, noting that Western states, which follow a strict bloc-based approach, are significantly overrepresented in the council.

Earlier in the day, the Security Council held an open debate on strengthening the role of African states in addressing global security and development challenges.

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US Rail Firm Agrees to \$310M In Settlement in East Palestine Incident - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - Norfolk Southern Railway has agreed to pay a \$310 million settlement to compensate for harm caused after one of its trains derailed in Ohio and spilled toxic chemicals into the surrounding environment in the town of East Palestine, the US Justice Department said on Thursday.

"Today, the Justice Department and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced a settlement valued at over \$310 million with Norfolk Southern Railway Company holding the company accountable to address and pay for the damage caused by the Feb. 3, 2023, train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio," the Justice Department said in a press release.

The settlement still needs to be approved by a federal judge, but if it's allowed to proceed, the company will be required to take measures to improve rail safety, pay for health monitoring and mental health services for the surrounding communities, fund long-term environmental monitoring, pay a \$15 million civil penalty and take other actions to protect nearby waterways and drinking water resources, the release said.

Norfolk Southern estimates that it will spend more than \$1 billion to address the toxic spill in East Palestine, which includes the \$310 million settlement as well as some \$780 million in environmental response costs that the company has incurred, the release added.

On February 3, 2023, a train hauling 20 cars from Norfolk Southern with hazardous materials derailed in East Palestine, causing a big fire and forcing officials to burn vinyl chloride inside five of the tanker cars to avoid a catastrophic explosion. The accident released toxic chemicals and despite repeated assurances that the air and water are safe, residents in the area have told Sputnik of recent health impacts, including headaches, burning skin and irritated eyes, as well as fears of long-term health risks such as cancer.

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Canadian Govt. Proposes to Extend Citizenship by Descent Beyond 1st Generation – Minister

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) – Canadian Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Marc Miller on Thursday introduced Bill C-71 - An Act to amend the Citizenship Act – that would extend citizenship by descent beyond the first generation.

"Today we introduced Bill C-71 ... The proposed legislation will extend citizenship by descent

beyond the first generation in a way that is inclusive and upholds the value of our citizenship," Miller said.

If passed, Bill C-71 will extend automatic citizenship to anyone who was born outside of Canada to a Canadian parent before the legislation comes into force, Miller added.

Moreover, children born abroad to a Canadian citizen who was also born outside of Canada will be able to obtain citizenship by birth as long as parents can prove they have "substantial ties to Canada" such as having accumulated 3 years spent in the country prior to the child's birth, Miller said.

The Bill also introduces amendments to address issues raised at Parliamentary Committees and Canadian courts over the so-called "Lost Canadians", Miller said. Accordingly, Ottawa will restore citizenship to those who never became citizens or lost their citizenship over previous and "outdated" legislative provisions.

In 2009, Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper cracked down on the "Canadians of convenience", essentially stripping children of Canadians born abroad of their automatic right to citizenship.

The measure was enacted in response to severe backlash over the C\$85 million bill footed by the government to repatriate Canadian citizens from Lebanon during the 2006 war between the Lebanese Shia movement Hezbollah and Israel.

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US Urges Israel to Stop Using Military to Escort Settlers - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - The United States has urged Israel to stop using troops to escort settlers in the West Bank, Assistant Secretary of State Barbara Leaf said in a congressional testimony on Thursday.

"We engaged with senior levels, military and civilian, in the Israeli government to cease the practice of army units escorting settlers, which they were doing at that time," Leaf told the US House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Leaf emphasized during her testimony that Israel has since decreased this activity but has not stopped it entirely.

"We really ask the Israelis to redouble their efforts to bring this down. We have seen a decrease, but it is by no means over," Leaf said.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in late April that the illegal Israeli settlements on Palestinian land are an obstacle to a two-state solution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and an overall peaceful resolution of the situation in the Middle East.

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Nebenzia Says Germany Has No Moral Authority to Mention Term 'Genocide'

UNITED NATIONS, May 23 (Sputnik) - Germany has no moral ground to lecture other states at the United Nations about genocide, Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said on Thursday.

Earlier in the day, the UN General Assembly adopted a controversial resolution sponsored by Germany and Rwanda on the 1995 Srebrenica "genocide." The resolution designates July 11 as the "International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica".

"We are convinced that Germany has no moral authority to even mention the term of genocide to describe anything other than their own atrocious crimes," Nebenzia said after the vote.

He added that the entire UN was created in response to the crimes committed by Nazi Germany and to prevent similar atrocities from occurring again.

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Biden Announces Intent to Designate Kenya as 'Major Non-NATO Ally' - Joint Statement

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Thursday said in a joint statement with Kenyan President William Ruto that he intends to designate Kenya as a "major Non-NATO ally."

"Underscoring the elevation of our strategic relationship, President Biden announced his intent to designate Kenya as a Major Non-NATO Ally – the first such designation for a sub-Saharan African country," the joint statement said.

The designation is a symbol of the close relationship shared by the United States and Kenya, the statement said.

The countries welcome the increased cooperation on security and mutual priorities signaled by the designation, the statement added.

The decision also reflects the US' respect for Kenya's increasingly significant contributions to solving regional and global challenges, according to the statement.

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US Justice Dept Seeks to Break Up Global Concerts Promoter Live Nation-Ticketmaster

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - The US Justice Department announced Thursday it was suing to break up the 14-year-old merger between concert promoters Live Nation and Ticketmaster which it says has created a monopoly in the global market for live performances that squeezes out competitors, forces fans to pay more for tickets and leaves artists with less earnings.

"We allege that Live Nation relies on unlawful, anticompetitive conduct to exercise its monopolistic control over the live events industry in the United States at the cost of fans, artists, smaller promoters, and venue operators," Attorney General Merrick Garland said. "The result is that fans pay more in fees, artists have fewer opportunities to play concerts, smaller promoters

get squeezed out, and venues have fewer real choices for ticketing services. It is time to break up Live Nation-Ticketmaster.”

Shares of the merged company, trading on the New York Stock Exchange under the LYV symbol for Live Nation Entertainment, were down almost 7%, hitting a three-week low of \$94.35 on news of the lawsuit.

Joined by 30 state and district attorneys general, the Justice Department said it seeks structural relief for competitors of Live Nation-Ticketmaster. The department also wants to restore competition in the live concert industry, provide better choices at lower prices for fans, and open venue doors for working musicians and other performance artists.

The Justice Department lawsuit contends that Live Nation-Ticketmaster harms both live music providers and consumers in multiple ways, including using outdated technology that locks in high fees.

“Live Nation-Ticketmaster’s exclusionary practices fortify and protect what it refers to as its ‘flywheel,’” the Justice Department said in a press release. “The flywheel is Live Nation-Ticketmaster’s self-reinforcing business model that captures fees and revenue from concert fans and sponsorship; [it] uses that revenue to lock up artists to exclusive promotion deals, and then uses its powerful cache of live content to sign venues into long term exclusive ticketing deals, thereby starting the cycle all over again. Live Nation-Ticketmaster’s anticompetitive conduct creates even more barriers for rivals to compete on the merits.”

Live Nation-Ticketmaster branded the Justice Department’s allegations as “absurd.”

The lawsuit “ignores everything that is actually responsible for higher ticket prices, from increasing production costs to artist popularity, to 24/7 online ticket scalping that reveals the public’s willingness to pay far more than primary tickets cost,” Live Nation-Ticketmaster said on its website. “It is also absurd to claim that Live Nation and Ticketmaster are wielding monopoly power. The defining feature of a monopolist is monopoly profits derived from monopoly pricing. Live Nation in no way fits the profile. Service charges on Ticketmaster are no higher than elsewhere, and frequently lower.”

Live Nation and Ticketmaster were two different companies before they merged in 2010. Although some Democratic lawmakers had opposed it then, the Obama administration allowed the marriage by imposing certain obligations to avoid potential harms to the industry. The lawsuit basically contends that the merged company did not live up to its promises.

In response, Live Nation-Ticketmaster accused the current Biden administration of pandering to the populist notion that companies that have grown large enough, in some nebulous way, to “dominate” markets should be subjected to antitrust legislation. It also contends that the world was in a better place now because of its merger, “not a worse one.”

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Elon Musk Says AI, Robots Will One Day Provide Any Goods, Services People Want

UNITED NATIONS, May 23 (Sputnik) - US billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk said on Thursday that artificial intelligence and robots will do in the future all the jobs one can think of and humans will not have to work unless they want to.

"I think that long term, in a benign scenario, any job that somebody does will be optional. If you want to do a job as a hobby, you can do a job. But otherwise, AI and robots will provide any goods and services that you want," Musk said during a virtual appearance at the Viva Technology forum.

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biden announces intent to designate kenya as major non-nato ally - joint statement

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Elon Musk Says 'Big Issue' AI Panders to Political Correctness Instead of Seeking Truth

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - Elon Musk said on Thursday that his biggest concern over the current biggest AI models, such as OpenAI of Microsoft or Google Gemini, is that they are too focused on political correctness instead of seeking the truth.

"The concern I have... I think it is a very big issue is that they are not maximally truth-seeking (Open AI of Microsoft and Google Gemini). They are pandering for political correctness," Musk said. "The AI could conclude that the best way to avoid misgendering is to destroy all humans."

Musk launched a rival to OpenAI called xAI last year that aims to build an AI capable of understanding the universe. At the same time, the US entrepreneur warned that AI could one day become a threat to society and to human existence itself.

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US Senate to Consider Georgia Sanctions Bill Over Foreign Agents Law - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - The US Senate will soon consider bipartisan legislation that will sanction Georgian officials who are behind the so-called foreign agents bill that has stirred up controversy among nations of the collective West, Politico reported on Thursday, citing a document.

The bill is expected to be introduced in the US Senate later on Thursday, the report said.

The bipartisan Georgian People's Act would impose travel bans and other sanctions on Georgian politicians accused of facilitating the passage of the law.

In addition, the bill would demand a permanent suspension of the US-Georgia Strategic Dialogue and provide at least \$50 million "to support democracy and rule of law projects in Georgia" as well as launch investigations into alleged foreign malign influence in that country.

On Saturday, Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili vetoed the controversial foreign agents bill that had been adopted by the country's parliament last Tuesday. The parliament needs a simple majority to override the veto and is expected to be able to do so.

The United States has its own Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), enacted in 1938, which

requires individuals or entities engaged in domestic lobbying or advocacy for foreign governments, organizations, or persons to register with the US Justice Department and disclose their relationship, activities and related financial compensation.

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US Wants to Open Interim Diplomatic Mission in Libya Amid Russia's Influence – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) – The United States plans to establish an interim diplomatic mission in Libya amid growing Russia's influence in the country, Assistant Secretary of State Barbara Leaf said on Thursday.

“Your support for the Department's plans to establish an interim diplomatic facility in Libya allows us to scale up our diplomacy amid the intensification of Russia's destabilizing influence,” Leaf said while testifying before the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

She did not clarify when such a mission could be opened.

Leaf also stressed that the US supports Libya's transition to a democratic, stable and unified state.

Washington closed its embassy in Tripoli in 2014 and has since then operated a diplomatic mission out of neighboring Tunisia.

Libya has faced multiple crises since the 2011 Western military intervention that toppled longtime leader Muammar Gaddafi and created a power vacuum that split the nation into rival factions. Although the warring parties agreed to a historic ceasefire in 2020, the differences have never been resolved, and the country continues to be ruled by two rival governments.

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US Needs 3Mln AI Workers Trained by 2026 to Be Ahead – National Science Foundation

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) – The United States would need to train about 3 million artificial intelligence (AI) workers by 2026 to stay ahead and outcompete China, Director of the National Science Foundation Sethuraman Panchanathan said on Thursday.

“We would need three million AI workers trained as early as 2026 in our country. We cannot wait. Our competitors are outcompeting and outinnovating. This is not the time to slow down, this is the time to accelerate really fast,” Panchanathan said in congressional testimony for the Senate Appropriations Committee.

On Wednesday, the US House Foreign Affairs Committee advanced legislation to allow the US Commerce Department's Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) to place export controls on artificial intelligence (AI) systems and other emerging technologies.

Earlier in May, the US Senate's Bipartisan AI Working Group released a roadmap for AI policy, in which they expressed support for \$32 billion in funding for AI innovation.

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UPDATE - Granholm Says US Must Accept Responsibility for Nuclear Testing During, After World War II

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - US Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said on Thursday that she supports reauthorizing the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) as it is critical for the United States to assume responsibility for the consequences of its nuclear-related activities during and after World War II.

"Yes," Granholm said during testimony before the US Oversight Committee when asked whether she supports reauthorizing RECA.

Granholm emphasized that it is critical for the United States to take responsibility for the consequences of its nuclear-related activities on humans during the war.

The unfortunate reality is that the process of eradicating all units of radiation has taken longer than it should have in several affected "cleanup communities," she said.

"We have a responsibility as a nation and I hope we live up to that responsibility," Granholm added.

The RECA Act of 1990 is a program for claims related to atmospheric nuclear testing and uranium industry employment that was adopted in response to the dismissal of lawsuits against the US government that alleged a failure to warn of exposures to known radiation hazards.

The United States conducted some 200 atmospheric nuclear weapons development tests from 1945 to 1962. Thousands of US workers mined and processed the uranium required in the production of the nuclear weapons.

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NASA Had to Scale Back Some Programs in 2024, 2025 Due to Budget Cuts – Nelson

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) had to scale back a number of its programs in the fiscal years of 2024 and 2025 when it received \$5 billion less, Administrator Bill Nelson said on Thursday.

"It's almost \$5 billion less in NASA over those two years, [20]24 and [20]25, and when you come into science that is an effect of almost \$2 billion over those two years, a billion a year just in science," Nelson said in congressional testimony for the Senate Appropriations Committee. "Mars Sample Return, OSAM, those missions had to be scaled back because something had to be scaled back."

Despite the cuts, NASA nevertheless was able to continue working and supporting a host of important projects, including the James Webb Telescope, the NASA project to hit and move asteroids, and the X59 supersonic jet developed by Boeing, Nelson added.

Nelson complained that NASA suffered from the US government's situation when constraints had to be put on the FY 2024-2025 budgets against the artificial ceiling of a debt ceiling that had to be raised so that the government would not go into default.

In June 2023, the Biden administration and House Republicans led by then-Speaker Kevin McCarthy reached a deal to once again increase the US national debt ceiling that entailed keeping spending flat in 2024 and capping 2025 increases at 1%, which resulted in certain budget cuts, including for NASA.

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Controversial Srebrenica Resolution Serves to Undermine Dayton Peace Agreement - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, May 23 (Sputnik) - The newly approved resolution by the UN General Assembly on the genocide in Srebrenica is meant to undermine the existing Dayton Peace Agreement despite the speeches by certain member states that that is not the case, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Thursday.

"A number of Delegations led by Germany decided to abuse the authorities of General Assembly and under the guise of a resolution to condemn to declare a day of commemoration, pass a political declaration, whose goal is despite the statements made by sponsors that it's the opposite, whose goal is to demonize one of the peoples of the former Yugoslavia to undermine the Dayton Peace Agreement," Nebenzia said after the vote on the resolution.

The controversial draft resolution on the alleged Srebrenica genocide in July 1995 during the civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina was adopted earlier on Thursday by the UN General Assembly.

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US Pause on LNG Export Permits Review Has No Impact on Current Activities - Granholm

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - The pause in reviewing export permits for liquefied natural gas (LNG) has absolutely no impact on the already existing activities, US Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said in a congressional testimony on Thursday.

"It [the pause] has absolutely no impact on any exports that are happening now. We have authorized 48 billion cubic feet of export of liquefied natural gas. 48 billion. That is three time what we are currently exporting," Granholm told the US House Oversight Committee.

Granholm noted that the United States was the largest LNG exporter in the world at 14 billion cubic feet and an additional 22 billion cubic feet have been authorized and are under construction.

The pause only applies to new application coming down the pipe, Granholm also said.

Those who have been authorized, are under construction and are currently exporting can proceed with their activities, Granholm added.

On January 26, the US Department of Energy announced it was taking a temporary pause in reviewing applications to export LNG to non-Free Trade Agreement countries while undertaking a review of its analyses that underpin public interest determinations.

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NOAA Says Expects Four to Seven Big Hurricanes to Hit US East Coast This Year

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is predicting an above-average hurricane season in the Atlantic Ocean and off Florida and the US East Coast this year, administrator Rick Spinrad told a press conference on Thursday.

"There is an 85% chance of an above-normal season, a 10% chance of a normal season, and a [only] 5% chance of a below-average season," Spinrad said.

NOAA predicted 17 to 26 named storms with a top speed of at least 39 miles per hour (mph), eight to thirteen hurricanes with maximum sustained winds of at least 74 mph, and four to seven of them becoming major hurricanes (Category 3 to Category 5) with maximum sustained winds of at least 11 mph, the NOAA chief said.

"The forecast for storms, high storms, and hurricanes is the highest NOAA has ever issued," he said.

The forecast was based on accumulated scientific observations including exceptional rises in local ocean temperatures and the second highest accumulated cyclone energy ever recorded, Spinrad said.

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UN General Assembly Adopts Controversial Resolution on 'Srebrenica Genocide'

UNITED NATIONS, May 23 (Sputnik) - The UN General Assembly adopted a controversial resolution on the "genocide" in Srebrenica in 1995, a Sputnik correspondent reported on Thursday.

The resolution "condemns without reservation any denial of the Srebrenica genocide as a historical event and urges member states to preserve the established facts."

The resolution also asks states to complete the process of finding and identifying the remaining victims of the Srebrenica genocide during the civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina that ensued with the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

In April, the Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said that the draft resolution on events in Srebrenica is one-sided and can only provoke a new and very serious spiral of escalation.

Chinese Ambassador to the UN Fu Cong ahead of the vote said the resolution would undercut efforts to promote reconciliation.

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China Says UN Resolution on 'Genocide' in Srebrenica Does Not Help Reconciliation

UNITED NATIONS, May 23 (Sputnik) - A UN General Assembly vote on a controversial resolution on "genocide" in Srebrenica will undercut efforts to promote reconciliation within Bosnia and Herzegovina, Chinese Ambassador to the UN Fu Cong said on Thursday.

"The hasty voting on the draft resolution which is still marked by major differences is not in line with the spirit of reconciliation and harmony within Bosnia and Herzegovina," Fu said in the UN General Assembly hall prior to the vote on the draft resolution.

The General Assembly is set to vote on a resolution on the alleged genocide in Srebrenica in 1995.

Republika Srpska President Milorad Dodik warned Thursday that the Serb-dominated region will propose an agreement on a peaceful division of Bosnia and Herzegovina within 30 days. The leaders of Serbia and Republika Srpska believe that that the resolution will declare Serbs a "genocidal nation" and raise the question of the legitimacy of Republika Srpska's existence within Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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Granholm Says US Must Accept Responsibility for Nuclear Fallout During, After World War II

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - US Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said on Thursday that she supports reauthorizing the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) as it is critical for the United States to assume responsibility for the fallout of its nuclear-related activities during and after World War II.

"Yes," Granholm said during testimony before the US Energy Department Oversight Committee when asked whether she supports reauthorizing RECA.

Granholm emphasized that it is critical for the United States to take responsibility for the fallout of its nuclear-related activities on humans during the war.

The unfortunate reality is that the process of eradicating all units of radiation has taken longer than it should have in several affected "cleanup communities," she said.

"We have a responsibility as a nation and I hope we live up to that responsibility," Granholm added.

The RECA Act of 1990 is a program for claims related to atmospheric nuclear testing and uranium industry employment that was adopted in response to the dismissal of lawsuits against the US government that alleged a failure to warn of exposures to known radiation hazards.

The United States conducted some 200 atmospheric nuclear weapons development tests from 1945 to 1962. Thousands of US workers mined and processed the uranium required in the production of the nuclear weapons.

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US to Announce \$275 Million in Military Aid for Ukraine on Friday - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - The US government is set to announce an additional \$275 million in military aid for Ukraine this week, AP News reported on Thursday.

According to the report, the package includes high mobility artillery rocket systems (HIMARS) and 155mm and 105mm artillery rounds.

On Monday, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said the United States has already delivered many of Ukraine's "top-priority requirements" and much more assistance is on the way. Austin added that he expects a steady flow of US assistance for Ukraine on a weekly basis.

Russia has consistently warned against continued arms deliveries to Ukraine, saying they would only prolong the conflict but would not change the situation on the ground.

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Funding 'Never-Ending' Conflict in Ukraine Not in US' Interest - US Senator Vance

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - It is not in the interest of the United States to fund an endless war in Ukraine, US Senator JD Vance said on Thursday.

"I do not think that it is in America's interest to continue to fund, effectively, a never-ending war in Ukraine," Vance said during remarks at the Quincy Institute.

There is no strategic end in sight to the conflict in Ukraine, Vance said. The conflict is not leading in a direction that will benefit the US, Vance said.

Moreover, the US is subsidizing the security of European countries and turning them into client states instead of allies, Vance said.

The US must allow different regions to "police" themselves due to the multipolar nature of the world, Vance said.

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

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US Experts Expressed Concern About Baltimore's Key Bridge Years Before Collapse - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - US marine experts expressed serious concerns about the safety of the bridges in Baltimore, Maryland, years before the collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge in the city, the Washington Post said on Thursday, citing previously unreported records.

In March, the commercial Singapore-flagged cargo ship Dali hit the Key Bridge in Baltimore soon after its scheduled departure for Asia. The bridge collapsed after the collision and six

people died in the incident.

The records of the meetings of the Baltimore Harbor Safety Committee, which includes experts from different government agencies, showed that its members repeatedly raised concerns over the possibility that an out-of-control vessel could imperil the bridge, the report said.

The committee discussed the safety of the major regional bridges - the Key and Chesapeake Bay bridges, among others. Maryland pilots, who board large vessels and then guide them safely in and out of port, expressed serious concerns about the existing infrastructure, emphasizing the need for additional protection from errant ships.

The discussions about the concerns regarding Key Bridge began in 2004. Joe Smith, a veteran captain and representative of the Association of Maryland Pilots, raised his concerns over the next six years and repeatedly warned about the necessity of additional protections from ship strikes. Smith also emphasized that ship captains needed clear communication protocols in case of such an emergency.

However, the discussions stopped several years ago and several members of the committee could not recall them.

The National Transportation Safety Board reported that the cargo ship Dali experienced a blackout during in-port maintenance about ten hours before leaving Baltimore and its generator failed again due to insufficient fuel pressure, causing a second blackout.

The port of Baltimore announced last week that a milestone was achieved with the successful detonation of controlled explosives to break apart the collapsed Francis Scott Key bridge and begin dislodging the Dali.

The insured loss from the bridge collapse could reach \$4 billion, making it the most expensive ship collision incident in modern history, according to media reports.

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Canada to Reiterate Call at G7 Meeting to Make 'Full Use' of Russian Assets to Aid Ukraine

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - Canada will reiterate its call to the Group of Seven (G7) states to use the frozen Russian assets in support of Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction, the Office of the Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland said on Thursday.

From May 23-25, the G7 will convene a Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors meeting in Stresa, Italy.

"At the G7, Canada will continue to call for making full use of frozen Russian Central Bank assets to pay for Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction," her office's statement said.

Canada continues to support proposals to use Russian assets in support of Ukraine," the statement said. Russia being "the aggressor" must foot the bill for the destruction caused during the conflict, it added.

The G7, led by the United States and the European Union, have been discussing ways to confiscate the Russian assets since the start of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine in February 2022. However, the European Central Bank and other relevant institutions and actors have warned that a seizure would pose "reputational risks" to the euro in the long term.

An estimated \$300 billion in Russian central bank assets are frozen in Western accounts. The

Kremlin has maintained that confiscating Russia's assets would amount to theft in violation of international law.

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US House Passes Crypto Bill Opposed by White House, Securities Regulator

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - The US House has passed a cryptocurrency bill opposed by the White House and its chief securities regulator, which says it fears "regulatory gaps" and "immeasurable risk" for capital markets if the motion ever becomes law.

Analysts, however, said the US Senate controlled by Democratic allies of President Joe Biden is unlikely to allow the Financial Innovation and Technology for the 21st Century Act, known as FIT 21 in short, to proceed.

"The Senate typically doesn't take House bills and just vote on them. It does its own thing," Capital Alpha Partners, a Washington-based political and investment advisory, told its clients in a note. "So while the Senate might eventually be interested in considering some kind of crypto legislation, it almost surely won't be this one."

The bill will decide the jurisdictional authority that regulatory agencies have over the United States' vast digital assets, say Republican sponsors of the act. They add that their aim is to create regulatory clarity that would indirectly boost the crypto industry's growth.

President Biden and his fellow Democrats, however, say the bill will adversely impact the existing regulatory landscape for the crypto industry. FIT 21 "in its current form lacks sufficient protections for consumers and investors who engage in certain digital asset transactions," the White House said in a statement.

The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) pointed out that the bill will not grant securities status for investment contracts recorded on a blockchain, thus denying investors protection under US securities laws. It added that the bill would also allow issuers of crypto investment contracts to certify themselves that their own products were digital commodities and were not subject to SEC oversight, leaving the agency just 60 days to challenge this.

"FIT 21 would create new regulatory gaps and undermine decades of precedent regarding the oversight of investment contracts, putting investors and capital markets at immeasurable risk," SEC Chairman Gary Gensler said in a statement.

Gensler in the past had led some of the heftiest crackdowns on the crypto industry, although the SEC's likely approval of exchange-traded funds for the spot trading of the digital coin ether indicated to some a softening of stance by the commission's chief.

Aside from its Republican sponsors, the crypto bill is supported by industry groups who see Gensler as an enemy of the crypto trade and an impediment to America's wider adoption of digital assets.

The SEC chief has always said the crypto trade should be subject to the same laws that apply to any securities trade. His argument about the unknown risks posed to investors by crypto is often underscored by his citation of the high-profile prosecutions, bankruptcies and business collapses revolving around the trade.

President Biden, who has authority to veto the Congress bill, also offered to cooperate in

finding a new way to resolve Republican concerns about the future of the crypto trade.

"The Administration is eager to work with Congress to ensure a comprehensive and balanced regulatory framework for digital assets, building on existing authorities, which will promote the responsible development of digital assets and payment innovation and help reinforce United States leadership in the global financial system," the White House statement said.

Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee in November's presidential election and challenger to Biden, has started accepting digital coin donations, his campaign for the White House announced on Tuesday, adding that it wanted to build a "crypto army" of donors.

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Biden Intends to Designate Kenya as Major Non-NATO US Ally- US Official

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden intends to inform lawmakers of his desire to designate Kenya as a major non-NATO ally, a senior administration official said.

"As part of this move towards elevating and acknowledging that Kenya's already a global partner of ours, President Biden is informing Congress that he intends to designate Kenya as a major non-NATO ally," the senior administration official told journalists during a briefing ahead of the meeting between Biden and Kenyan President William Ruto.

Ruto's visit to the United States is the transformation of Kenya from a partner on regional issues to a partner on global issues, the official said.

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US Navy Extends Lockheed Martin Space's Missile Support Contract by \$99Mln - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - The US Navy has approved an almost \$100 million extension of Lockheed Martin Space's current contract to provide missile production support, the US Department of Defense (DOD) has announced in a press release.

"Lockheed Martin Space, Littleton, Colorado is awarded a not-to-exceed \$99,000,000, cost-plus-incentive-fee, and cost-plus-fixed-fee unpriced letter contract modification ... to a previously awarded contract ... to provide systems engineering, test planning, and long lead material in support of missile production," the DOD said on Wednesday.

Most of the work on the extended contract will be performed in Denver, Colorado (63%), with the rest in Huntsville, Alabama (6%), Sunnyvale, California (7%), East Aurora, New York (9%) and other locations across the United States, the release read.

Work on the extended contract is expected to take two years and eight months and be completed by February 2, 2027, the Defense Department said.

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US Must Secure More Highly Enriched Uranium Supply by 2050s For Naval Reactors - Official

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - The United States needs to find an additional supply of highly enriched uranium to continue fueling its naval reactors beyond the 2050s, US Deputy Administrator for Office of Naval Reactors Admiral William Houston said during a congressional hearing.

"We have to get the capability in time to support about two to three metric tonne delivery to support our fleet needs in the 2050s," Houston told a Senate Armed Services subcommittee on Wednesday. "It's something that has our attention. We have to develop a plan to do that."

The United States' current supply of highly enriched uranium is projected to last to the 2050s even with increased demands, Houston noted.

The US Navy currently gets its highly enriched uranium from older US nuclear weapons that are reprocessed, he added.

US officials are also aware of the AUKUS deal putting pressure on the demand for highly enriched uranium, but it's considered a very small issue in the overall scheme, Houston said.

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Austin Speaks With Israeli Defense Minister About Situation in Gaza - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin spoke with Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant about the ongoing situation in the Gaza Strip, Defense Department said.

"Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III spoke with Israeli Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant today to discuss the situation in Gaza and the United States' ironclad support for Israel," the Defense Department said in a readout of the conversation on Wednesday.

Austin reiterated the United States' "strong objections" to the International Criminal Court prosecutor's application for arrest warrants against Israeli leaders, the readout said.

Austin also underscored the urgent need to increase humanitarian aid into Gaza and encouraged the Israeli government to conclude talks with Egypt to reopen the crossing in Rafah to allow aid from Egypt pass through into the Palestinian enclave, the readout said.

In addition, Austin advocated for an effective mechanism to deconflict humanitarian and military operations in Gaza, the readout said.

Both officials acknowledged a shared interest in defeating the Palestinian movement Hamas and the expedient release of all hostages it holds while minimizing civilian harm, the release added.

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Subcritical Testing Best Way to Maintain US Nuclear Stockpile - Energy Dept. Official

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - Subcritical nuclear testing is the best way for the United States to maintain its stockpile of nuclear warheads without having to carry out a full-scale nuclear test, National Nuclear Security Administration head Jill Hruby said during a congressional hearing.

Last week, the National Nuclear Security Administration - a unit of the US Energy Department - said that it had executed a "subcritical experiment" at a Nevada underground laboratory in order to collect information that will support the effectiveness of US nuclear warheads.

"So we anticipate this is the best way to maintain our stockpile without returning to nuclear testing, especially with the demands that we have right now in our production enterprise, as well as perhaps new weapons that we need in the future to meet these changing global conditions," Hruby told a US Senate Armed Services subcommittee on Wednesday.

These experiments are important because they allow the United States to study actual plutonium without creating a chain reaction, Hruby said.

The subcritical testing gives the department insight into the behavior of aged or newly produced nuclear material, Hruby added.

The Energy Department claims that its subcritical nuclear test was consistent with the moratorium on nuclear explosive testing that the United States implemented in 1992 because the test did not involve a self-sustaining, supercritical chain reaction.

On Monday, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said that Russia is closely monitoring the situation following the subcritical nuclear test conducted by the United States. Ryabkov emphasized that as long as the United States conducted no full-scale nuclear tests, neither would Russia.

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US Elite Bomber Force 'Close to Being Outpaced' by Growing World Threats - General

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - The US Air Force's elite Global Strike Command (AFGSC) is close to being outpaced amid the growing challenges and demand for operations it faces against peer adversaries around the world, Gen. Thomas Bussiere said in a congressional testimony.

"We are prepared, yet we are close to being outpaced to meet the demands we find in today's world," Bussiere told the US Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) in a written testimony on Wednesday. "AFGSC is acutely aware of the need to sustain our current force and modernize rapidly."

Bussiere warned that the domestic US military-industrial base has been failing to rise to the challenge and provide the Air Force with the replacement aircraft and weapons systems it urgently needed to face the challenges of a new age.

"We cannot slow down. AFGSC is building the force to face an uncertain future. ...However, the military-industrial complex is not keeping pace. Already, delays, inflation, and expanding overhead are chipping away at time margins and resources. Simply put, we need continued advocacy and bipartisan effort to field new capabilities and divest the old," Bussiere said.

The strategic bomber force no longer enjoyed any operational margin and therefore the preservation even of its much older legacy force for aircraft remained a vital national security objective, Bussiere added.

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AI Vital to Defend US Critical Infrastructure, Nothing Else Can Do Job - Sikorski

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - The use of artificial Intelligence (AI) is vital to defend US critical infrastructure, including railroads and pipelines from hostile cyber, malware and other attacks and nothing else can replace it in this role, Palo Alto Networks Unit 42 Chief Technology Officer and Vice President of Engineering Michael Sikorski told a Congressional hearing.

"To prevent the bad guys from winning, we must operationalize Artificial Intelligence for cyber defense," Sikorski told the US House Committee on Homeland Defense on Wednesday. "The bottom line is that AI makes security data actionable for cyber defenders. The AI impact for

cyber defense is already significant."

Each day, Palo Alto Networks detects 2.3 million unique new cyber attacks on the government and its business clients that were not present the day before and it succeeds in blocking a total of 11.3 billion attacks per day, Sikorski said.

"We have seen transformative [results] from AI -powered SOCs ... reducing the time to respond from two to three day to under two hours. ...We encourage everyone to embrace AI's transformative impact for cyber defense," Sikorski said.

AI had also resulted in a four fold increase in the amount of security data that could be ingested and analyzed by cyber defenders each day, Sikorski added.

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Biden Campaign in Search of Meme Manager to Get Support of Young Voters – Job Posting

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) – The Biden campaign is looking for a person who would be responsible for managing memes and other social media content in a bid to get more young voters to support Joe Biden in the upcoming presidential election.

"The Biden for President (BFP) campaign is looking for a Partner Manager to join the Digital Partnerships team. In this role, you will initiate and manage day-to-day operations in engaging the internet's top content and meme pages," the job listing said on Monday. "This position is full-time and based in Wilmington, DE."

The meme manager's key responsibilities include cultivating and managing relationships with top digital media companies, podcasters, and meme pages across several social media platforms, according to the listing.

The move looks like a damage control attempt on the part of the Biden campaign following a long list of slips of the tongue and falling incidents involving President Joe Biden.

The most notorious meme about Joe Biden came to life in October 2021 during a NASCAR race at the Talladega Superspeedway in the US state of Alabama when a 28-year-old driver, Brandon Brown, had won the race and the crowd started to chant "F*** Joe Biden." While interviewing Brown, an NBC Sports reporter suggested the crowd chanted "Let's go, Brandon." The phrase quickly became a very popular way to verbally attack Biden and his supporters by the Republicans.

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US Space Program Faces 'Lot of Risk' With Artificial Intelligence - NASA Administrator

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - The US space program faces "a lot of risk" with Artificial Intelligence (AI) but still uses it more than any other federal agency or department of government, NASA Administrator Bill Nelson told a podcast "town hall" meeting on the use of the technology.

"There's a lot of risk with AI," Nelson said on Wednesday. "If it is not applied properly, it could

be disastrous."

However, NASA Deputy Administrator Pam Melrose said the space agency was already heavily invested in AI technologies for the success of its satellites and space exploration programs.

"Using AI to analyze underlying trends ... we are already doing this and doing a lot of it," Melrose said.

NASA Chief Information Officer Jeff Seaton said AI had demonstrated a "democratizing" function because it made easily and quickly available a "treasure trove of information that previously was either inaccessible or could only be retrieved far more slowly."

AI was built into the space agency's missions, Seaton added.

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Nikki Haley Endorses Trump, Says He's Not Perfect But Biden 'Catastrophe'

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - Former Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley announced on Wednesday that she will vote for Donald Trump in November as he meets her priorities better than Biden.

"As a voter, I put my priorities on a president who is going to have the backs of our allies and hold our enemies to account..." Haley said at the Hudson Institute. "I will be voting for Trump."

Trump has not been perfect but Biden has been a "catastrophe," she said.

Haley also expressed hope that Trump will actively engage her voters rather than simply expect their support.

Earlier, an Axios report said that Trump's campaign is considering Nikki Haley for the vice presidential role.

Haley, who was a key Republican rival in the presidential race alongside Vivek Ramaswamy and Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, could be chosen if Trump believes she would enhance his chances of winning the November election, avoid potential imprisonment, and manage his multi-million dollar legal bills, the report added.

Members of the Republican Party close to both politicians believe that teaming up is in their mutual interest because Haley has deep ties with sponsors who are wary of Trump, and she could help him attract the votes of some college-educated Republicans, the report said.

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B-21 Raider Flight Testing Advances, Aiming to Become US Air Force Bomber Fleet 'Backbone'

CALIFORNIA, May 22 (Sputnik) — The B-21 Raider began flight testing on Dec. 2, 2022, and continues to advance toward becoming the backbone of the US Air Force bomber fleet, Edwards Air Force Base said on Wednesday.

"Following its formal unveiling, Dec. 2, 2022, the B-21 Raider began flight testing here where it continues to make progress toward becoming the backbone of the US Air Force bomber fleet," Edwards Air Force Base said in a statement.

According to the statement, the B-21 is a long-range, highly survivable stealth bomber that will gradually replace the B-1 and B-2 bombers and support national security objectives while reassuring US allies globally.

"The B-21 weapon system is manufactured under the Air Force's contract with Northrop Grumman. It is designed with an open systems architecture, enabling rapid insertion of mature technologies, and allowing the aircraft to remain effective as threats evolve over time. The aircraft is expected to enter service in the mid-2020s with a production goal of a minimum of 100 aircraft," the statement read.

Furthermore, earlier in May, Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics Andrew Hunter said during testimony at the Senate Armed Services Committee that B-21 Raider flight testing is progressing well and meeting timelines, the statement said.

The statement added that Hunter explained this is the first aircraft that is more digital than not, contributing to the program meeting requirements.

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White House Disputes UK Intelligence Indicating Weapon Flow From China to Russia

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Wednesday that the United States has seen no evidence of China providing weapons to Russia, in a direct dispute of a statement made by a UK official earlier in the day.

"Well, going back to 2022, I've actually stood at this podium and warned about my concern that China might supply weapons to Russia. We didn't see that in 2022; we didn't see that in 2023; we have not seen that to date," said Sullivan.

The comment by Sullivan came as he was asked by a reporter about a statement made by UK Defense Secretary Grant Shapps earlier in the day indicating that the UK and the US have proof that "lethal aid is now flying from China to Russia and into Ukraine".

"I look forward to speaking with the UK to make sure that we have a common operating picture; we have had one, we have been on the same page - I just want to understand better what exactly that comment was referring to," Sullivan added.

The Chinese Embassy in the United States told Sputnik earlier that China has not provided weapons to either Russia or Ukraine, adding that it has been playing a constructive role in facilitating a political settlement of the conflict in Ukraine. Moreover, the Embassy said normal trade between China and Russia should not be interfered with or restricted.

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Pentagon, NSC Still Support Ukraine Pushing Russia Back to February 2022 Lines – Blinken

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday that he believes the Department of Defense along with the National Security Council (NSC) still support the idea that Ukraine should be pushing Russia back to the pre-February 2022 lines on

the battlefield.

"Yes, absolutely," Blinken said in congressional testimony when asked whether the Pentagon and the NSC support Ukraine pushing Russia back to the February 2022 lines.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Saturday that the West is not showing its readiness for a "serious conversation" on peace, which is reflected in their calls to supply Kiev with more weapons, allowing strikes on Russian territory.

Russia launched its special military operation in Ukraine in February 2022. Russian President Vladimir Putin has said on several occasions that Moscow is not going to attack NATO countries. The Kremlin has said that Russia does not threaten anyone, but will not ignore actions that are potentially dangerous to its interests.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) –

MIDDLE EAST

* The United States believes it is wrong on a strategic basis for Israel to withhold funds from the Palestinian Authority, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Wednesday.

* EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said that he will continue working on the EU's common position regarding the recognition of the Palestinian state.

* France does not believe that the recognition of the Palestinian state can contribute to a political solution to the Middle East conflict, Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne said.

* Germany is not planning to nominally recognize Palestine yet, because a political solution to the Middle East conflict is needed first, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said.

* The decision of several European countries to recognize a Palestinian state would not prevent Israel from achieving a complete victory over the Palestinian movement Hamas, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said.

* US President Joe Biden supports the creation of a Palestinian state only through direct negotiations, the White House said after Norway, Spain, and Ireland said they would recognize Palestine.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Wednesday that he is personally engaged in preparations for a peace conference on Ukraine next month in Switzerland, but there is no announcement on the possible participation of President Joe Biden at the moment.

* The Ukrainian armed forces have attacked the territory of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (NPP) with a drone, the plant's press service said, adding that no casualties and damage were reported.

* Ukraine has lost up to 420 soldiers in the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) in battles with Russia's Tsent (Center) Group of Forces over the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

DEATH OF IRANIAN PRESIDENT

* The United States will push back very "strongly and directly" if Tehran accuses Washington of

being involved in the death of the late Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Wednesday.

* Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov arrived at the residence of Iranian Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali to personally express his condolences over the death of Raisi, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

* Russian State Duma speaker Vyacheslav Volodin held a meeting with acting President of Iran Dr. Mohammad Mokhber during his visit to Iran, the Russian Parliament said.

RUSSIAN ECONOMY

* Inflation in Russia amounted to 8.03% in annual terms as of May 20 compared to 7.91% on May 13, the Russian Ministry of Economic Development said on Wednesday.

* Inflation in Russia slowed to 0.11% on May 14-20 from 0.17% one week earlier, Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat) said.

WESTERN SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

* Moscow considers the decision by the EU to use income from frozen Russian sovereign assets to help Ukraine as expropriation, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Wednesday.

* The Kremlin spokesperson confirmed that the Russian government was aware of warnings made by international financial institutions regarding the West's plans to use revenues generated by frozen Russian state assets to give military assistance to Ukraine.

* EU permanent representatives have agreed on a new sanctions regime against Moscow that is allegedly linked to the situation inside Russia, an EU source told RIA Novosti.

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First Boeing Crewed Starliner Flight Postponed Yet Again, No New Date Set - NASA

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) - NASA has canceled the latest, long-delayed, and repeatedly rescheduled first crewed flight of the Boeing CST-100 Starliner to the International Space Station (ISS) that was due to take place on Saturday, May 25, the US space agency announced on Wednesday.

"NASA, Boeing Space and ULA Launch [United Launch Alliance] are forgoing the May 25 launch attempt for the agency's Boeing Crew Flight Test following meetings assessing flight rationale, system performance, and redundancy," the US space agency said on X.

The next possible launch opportunity is still being discussed, NASA said. The message gave no indication when this might be.

US astronauts Barry "Butch" Wilmore and Sunita "Suni" Williams were scheduled to fly in the Starliner to the International Space Station (ISS) but after previous delays, a pressure regulation valve on the liquid oxygen tank on the Atlas V rocket's Centaur upper stage had to be released.

The first manned Starliner flight was earlier scheduled for July 2023 but has been repeatedly postponed since then as parts failed to function properly during tests. Boeing has received more than \$5 billion in contracts to build the much-troubled spacecraft which is now \$1 billion over budget.

Starliner was supposed to complement the reliable and now repeatedly used and successful

SpaceX Dragon spacecraft which has already flown 50 astronauts, cosmonauts and civilians into orbit in 13 flights, 12 of them to the ISS.

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New US Solid Rocket Motor Completes Its First Static Fire Test - Northrop Grumman

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) - Northrop Grumman's Common 50 High Performance (C50HP) solid rocket motor has successfully carried out a static fire test at the US Air Force Arnold Engineering Development Complex at Arnold Air Force Base in Tennessee, the company announced in a press release on Wednesday.

"Northrop Grumman Corporation's C50HP solid rocket motor successfully completed a static fire test at the US Air Force Arnold Engineering Development Complex," the release said.

Northrop Grumman described the C50HP as a high-performance upper-stage rocket motor that can be adapted to support various missions, including flight in the region outside the Earth's atmosphere or other final stages of propulsion.

"C50HP is the company's first large solid rocket motor system entirely designed and developed in a digital environment using model-based systems engineering. This static test qualified the versatile motor for flight, validated digital modeling and simulations, and demonstrated the design's maturity and performance of the motor," the release stated.

Full pressure and structural qualification testing was completed for the C50HP and they confirmed the advanced design's capability to withstand various loads and extreme environments, Northrop Grumman said.

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Biden Says Plans to Visit Africa in February 2025 After Being 'Re-Elected'

WASHINGTON, May 23 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Wednesday that he plans to visit Africa after he is re-elected in November.

"I plan on going in February after I'm re-elected," Biden said alongside Kenyan President William Ruto at the White House.

Biden currently trails former President Donald Trump in the national polls by one point, according to an aggregation by RealClearPolitics.

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US House Lawmakers Introduce Bill to Reform Presidential Ethics Standards - Statement

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) - Republican US House Oversight Committee Chairman

James Comer and Democratic Congresswoman Katie Porter introduced a bipartisan bill to reform presidential ethics standards, the lawmakers said on Wednesday.

"The Presidential Ethics Reform Act is landmark bipartisan legislation that delivers the transparency and accountability the American people deserve to ensure our public offices are not for sale," Comer said in a statement on the bill. "By creating this bipartisan legislation to provide greater transparency to the financial interactions related to the office of the president and vice president, we can ensure that moving forward American presidents, vice presidents, and their family members cannot profit from their proximity to power."

The bill requires presidents and vice presidents to disclose payments, transfers or other items of value from foreign sources received by them or a family member within two years of taking office, during their time in office and two years after leaving office, the statement said.

The bill also requires presidents and vice presidents to disclose conflicts of interest upon taking office and throughout their time in office, to disclose gifts valued at more than \$10,000 received from or by family members, and to disclose tax returns, the statement said.

Moreover, the bill requires presidents and vice presidents to disclose loans or loan repayments of any amount made to them by immediate family members, as well as those received by a family member from any source for over \$10,000, the statement said.

The US Congress can shine a light on improper conduct in the Executive Branch by boosting transparency through additional financial disclosures, Porter said in the statement. The reforms will help restore Americans' trust in government, Porter added.

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Michigan Farm Worker Diagnosed With Bird Flu - Michigan Health Department

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) - The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services said in a statement on Wednesday that a dairy farmworker has been diagnosed with bird flu, marking the first such case in the state.

"The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) is announcing the first case of influenza A (H5) virus identified in a Michigan farmworker who had regular exposure to livestock infected with influenza A (H5)," said the release.

Health officials have said the patient had mild symptoms and had been known to be in contact with infected animals. The patient is reported to have recovered.

"Farmworkers who have been exposed to impacted animals have been asked to report even mild symptoms, and testing for the virus has been made available," Dr. Natasha Bagdasarian, the state's chief medical executive, said in the statement.

At this time, health officials agree that because there have been no sustained human-to-human infections, risk to the general public remains low, the statement said.

Since 2022, there have been two previous human cases in the United States - one in Colorado in 2022 and one in Texas in 2024.

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Trudeau Says Prepared to Recognize Palestine 'at Right Time,' Not Necessarily as Last Step

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government stands ready to recognize a Palestinian state "at the right time" and not necessarily as a last step along the path toward a two-state solution, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Wednesday.

"We are prepared to recognize the State of Palestine at the right time, not necessarily as a last step along the path," Trudeau said, when asked about whether his government would follow in the steps of Norway, Spain and Ireland in recognizing Palestine as a state.

The prime minister stressed that there is an urgent need to build a credible path that will lead toward a lasting peace between Israel and Palestine and expressed his opposition to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejecting the two-state solution.

Trudeau noted that Hamas' presence in Gaza remains a problematic element as they have refused to either lay down their weapons or free the remaining hostages taken on October 7.

Canada has long adhered to the two-state solution as the outcome of a process toward lasting peace, but only when the "right conditions" are met. However, in a major shift earlier in May, it abstained on a UNGA resolution that backs the recognition of Palestine as a full UN member instead of voting against.

When questioned on the change, Trudeau said that Canada's vote reflects that the emergence of a Palestinian state might happen sooner than at the end of the process, as a way of pushing toward the two-state solution.

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Blinken Says US to Take Actions Against Georgian Politicians Over Foreign Agents Law

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration will take action against Georgian politicians involved in passing a law on foreign agents that Washington opposes, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday.

"We are looking very hard at what we can do in response to that and I anticipate we will take actions," Blinken said in congressional testimony for the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

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Israel Can Use AI in Weapons Only in Accordance With International Commitments - Fick

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) - Israel or any other country can use artificial intelligence (AI) in weapons systems only in accordance with their international commitments to respect fundamental rights, US Ambassador-at-Large for Cyberspace and Digital Policy Nathaniel Fick

said on Wednesday.

"The United States believes very strongly that the integration of critical and emerging technologies into military systems must be done in ways that are in keeping with other international commitments. Beyond that, I do not have any specifics to share about any particular applications of AI in weapon systems by Israel or by any other countries," Fick said.

Fick made the statement when asked to comment on reports that Israel allegedly used AI in military systems during operations in the Gaza Strip.

The ambassador emphasized the importance of respecting fundamental rights and maintaining an open dialogue with allies and partners on these issues.

Fick noted that numerous countries all around the world have the ability to integrate AI into weapon systems.

"The applications of AI are changing every aspect of national power," Fick said.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said earlier that he was worried about reports that Israel has been using AI to identify targets in its bombing campaigns in populated areas of Gaza.

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US House Panel Adopts NDAA Amendment to Ban Russian, Chinese Nationals From Research Labs

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) - The US House Armed Services Committee adopted an amendment to the Fiscal Year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) on Wednesday to ban Russian and Chinese nationals from national security laboratories and nuclear weapons production sites.

The panel adopted the amendment to the legislation during a markup hearing for the FY25 NDAA.

The amendment was offered by US Congressman Doug Lamborn.

The FY25 NDAA will prevent espionage by the Chinese Communist Party, the panel said in a statement via social media platform X.

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Fed Discussed More Rate Hikes If Inflation Doesn't Give Up - May Meeting Minutes

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) - With US interest rates already at two-decade highs, policymakers at the Federal Reserve discussed the likelihood of an even tighter monetary policy should US inflation remain stubbornly high, the central bank revealed in its latest policy meeting minutes published on Wednesday.

"Various participants mentioned a willingness to tighten policy further should risks to inflation materialize in a way that such an action became appropriate," the Fed minutes said, referring to the policymakers who participated at its two-day Federal Open Market Committee meeting that

ended on May 1.

The Fed intends to bring US interest rates down from their highest levels since 2002. But the central bank is wary of making rate cuts when inflation is still stronger than its 2% per annum target.

The US Consumer Price Index (CPI), a key inflation indicator, went from an annualized growth of 3.1% in January to 3.2% in February and 3.5% in March, before retreating to 3.4% in April.

The CPI hit a four-decade high in the aftermath of the 2020 coronavirus breakout, growing by as much as 9.1% in the year to June 2022.

Responding to that, the Fed hiked interest rates 11 times, bringing them to a range of between 5.25% and 5.5%, versus the pre-pandemic range of between zero and 0.25%.

The current range of rates has been unchanged since July 2023 due to uncertainties in the inflation outlook.

The Fed minutes released on Wednesday underscored that concern, saying policymakers at its May meeting were not sure when they could make good on the central bank's 2% inflation target.

"Although monetary policy was seen as restrictive, many participants commented on their uncertainty about the degree of restrictiveness," the minutes said. "These participants saw this uncertainty as coming from the possibility that high interest rates may be having smaller effects than in the past, that longer-run equilibrium interest rates may be higher than previously thought, or that the level of potential output may be lower than estimated."

While policymakers seemed in agreement that the current policy was well positioned to deal with evolving economic conditions, they also wanted it to be nimble enough to deal with unanticipated risks, the Fed minutes said.

"Participants discussed maintaining the current restrictive policy stance for longer should inflation not show signs of moving sustainably toward 2 percent or reducing policy restraint in the event of an unexpected weakening in labor market conditions," the minutes added.

The Fed has an opportunity to review rates at its next policy meeting on June 12. Should it pass on that, it will have four more chances to make a change before the year-end: July 31, September 18, November 7 and December 18.

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Blinken Calls Leak of Private US-Israeli Discussions on 2,000-Pound Bombs 'Unfortunate'

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday called the leak of private US-Israeli discussions on withholding weapons deliveries, including of US-made 2,000-pound bombs, "unfortunate."

"With regard to 2000-pound bombs, which in a dense urban environment can do terrible damage, we've been in discussions with Israel about that particular weapon and those discussions continue. Those were private discussions. It's unfortunate that it leaked to the press," Blinken said in congressional testimony before the US House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Blinken reiterated that Israel has other means to defeat Hamas without proceeding with a full-scale invasion of Rafah in the south of the Gaza Strip.

Earlier in May, the Pentagon confirmed media reports that the Biden administration halted deliveries of 1800 2000-pound bombs and 1700 500-pound bombs to Israel after the country began its allegedly limited military operation in Rafah while making public its plans to proceed with a major ground operation.

It remains unclear whether the suspension of weapons deliveries to Israel will make any difference and cause Israel to call off its Rafah operation. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly said that his country stands ready to proceed with its military plans no matter what the United States or any other country says or does.

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Blinken Says US to Take Actions Against Georgian Politicians Over Foreign Agents Law

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration will take action against Georgian politicians involved in passing a law on foreign agents that Washington opposes, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday.

"We are looking very hard at what we can do in response to that and I anticipate we will take actions," Blinken said in congressional testimony for the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

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Uvalde Agrees to Pay \$2 Million Settlement to Families of 2022 School Shooting - Attorney

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) — The city of Uvalde, Texas, has agreed to a \$2 million insurance settlement with families affected by the 2022 Robb Elementary School shooting, Connecticut-based attorney Josh Koskoff said on Wednesday.

"The city of Uvalde [Texas] has agreed to pay its insurance of \$2 million...These families could have pursued a lawsuit against the city, and there are certainly grounds for a lawsuit...But instead of suing the city and jeopardizing the finances of anybody, the families have accepted the insurance," Koskoff said during a press briefing.

Koskoff added that lawsuits will be forthcoming against the state of Texas, which "did nothing at all," and additional lawsuits are planned against the federal government.

According to a review by the Justice Department, on May 24, 2022, 18-year-old Salvador Ramos shot and killed 19 students and two teachers at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde. Police did not confront the shooter until 77 minutes after officers first arrived at the scene.

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UN Chief to Keep Working on 2-State Solution After 3 States Recognize Palestine -Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, May 22 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres will continue his efforts to pursue a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine after Ireland, Norway and Spain recognized Palestine as a state, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Wednesday.

"For our part, the Secretary-General will continue to work towards a two-state solution for two states - Israel and Palestine - living side by side in peace and security and to honor the the right of self determination of the Palestinians," Dujarric said during a press briefing.

Earlier on Wednesday, the Palestinian movement Hamas said it welcomed the statements from Norway, Ireland and Spain on recognizing Palestine as a state. Several other Arab states also welcomed the decision.

Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Al Safadi called the decision a step toward implementing the two-state solution, which would define the borders of independent Palestine as they were before the 1967 war.

Saudi Arabia praised the three European countries' decision as a step toward a lasting peace in the Middle East, saying it was time the rest of the world recognized Palestine as well.

The UN General Assembly voted in 1947 to divide UK-governed Palestine into Arab and Jewish states, with Jerusalem placed under a special international regime. The partitioning was planned to take place in May 1948, when the British mandate was due to end, but only the state of Israel was established. Palestinians seek diplomatic recognition of their independent state in the territories of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which is partially occupied by Israel, and the Gaza Strip.

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US House Panel Requests Probes Into Chinese Doping Allegations Ahead of Olympics - Letters

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) - The chair and ranking member of the US House Select Committee on the Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party sent letters to the US Justice Department and International Olympic Committee (IOC), requesting investigations into allegations involving doping by Chinese athletes.

The lawmakers requested that the Justice Department and FBI use their extraterritorial jurisdiction to investigate individuals involved in doping schemes at international sports competitions that involve US athletes, ahead of the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris.

The lawmakers expressed concerns about reports that the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) cleared 23 Chinese swimmers to participate in the 2021 games, despite positive drug tests. The Chinese government reportedly gave WADA \$2 million more than is required in the two years before the incident, the letter said.

"It is imperative to assess whether these alleged doping practices were state-sponsored, which could warrant further diplomatic measures by the United States and the international community," the letter said.

It is critical for the US to ensure that its athletes are competing in a fair environment in the 2024 Olympic Games, the letter said. The lawmakers requested a briefing on the matter no later than June 5.

The lawmakers also requested swift, decisive and transparent action on the matter from the IOC. The lawmakers' letter to the IOC called for an independent investigation into the 23 positive tests and WADA's decision to allow the athletes to compete.

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Kenya's Ruto Says Will Discuss With US House Speaker Terror Challenges Amid ATMIS Drawdown

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) - Kenyan President William Ruto said ahead of a meeting with House Speaker Mike Johnson on Wednesday that the two will discuss opportunities to ensure stability in East Africa as the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) reduces its force posture in the region amid the threat from the al-Shabaab terrorist group (affiliated with al-Qaeda, banned in Russia).

"Part of the conversation we're going to have is on how we can make sure that the drawdown of ATMIS troops does not create a vacuum that will end up being filled by Al Shabaab," Ruto told reporters alongside Johnson. "Kenya and the United States and frontline states need to work together to see how that can be done."

Ruto added that the timeline for the withdrawal of foreign forces deployed in Somalia should not be calendar driven but conditions based. ATMIS forces are currently mandated to wind down their security operation through this year and transfer those operations to the Somali National Armed Forces.

ATMIS consists of troops from the East African nations of Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda.

ATMIS had a 22,000-strong force in Somalia, but as of February has drawn down a total of 5,000 troops with another 4,000 expected to withdraw from Somalia in June.

Ruto is on an official three-day state visit in Washington, which will include a bilateral meeting with President Joe Biden. The visit comes as the United States is losing influence to Russia and China in the African continent after it was required to withdraw US forces from Niger and Chad by those respective governments.

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Sullivan Says Strategically Wrong for Israel to Withhold Palestinian Authority Funds

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) – The United States believes it is wrong on a strategic basis for Israel to withhold funds from the Palestinian Authority, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Wednesday.

"I think it's wrong on a strategic basis because withholding funds destabilizes the West Bank, it

undermines the search for security and prosperity for the Palestinian people which is in Israel's interests," Sullivan said during a press briefing.

Earlier in the day, The New York Times reported that the Israeli finance minister said that the country will not transfer funds to the Palestinian Authority after three European countries announced their plans to recognize a Palestinian state.

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US Says Engaged in Ukraine Peace Summit Preparations, No Announcement on Biden's Travel

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Wednesday that he is personally engaged in preparations for a peace conference on Ukraine next month in Switzerland, but there is no announcement on possible participation of President Joe Biden at the moment.

"I don't have any announcements on that today. What I will say is that I am personally engaged in preparations for that summit as others in our government," Sullivan said. "I can't make any announcements today about President's travel."

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US to Push Back 'Strongly' if Iran Alleges Involvement in Raisi's Death - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) - The United States will push back very "strongly and directly" if Tehran accuses Washington of being involved in the death of the late Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Wednesday.

"If at any point Iran tries to accuse us of having to do [something] with it, we will push back extremely strongly and directly," Sullivan said during a press briefing.

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US House to Vote on Crypto Bill Opposed by White House, Securities Regulator

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) - The US House is set to vote Wednesday on a cryptocurrency bill opposed by the White House and its chief securities regulator, which says it fears "regulatory gaps" and "immeasurable risk" for capital markets if the paper ever becomes law.

The Financial Innovation and Technology for the 21st Century Act, called FIT 21 in short, will decide the jurisdictional authority that regulatory agencies have over the United States' vast digital assets, say Republican sponsors of the act. They add that their aim is to create regulatory clarity that would indirectly boost the crypto industry's growth.

President Joe Biden and his fellow Democrats, however, say the bill will adversely impact the

existing regulatory landscape for the crypto industry.

FIT 21 "in its current form lacks sufficient protections for consumers and investors who engage in certain digital asset transactions," the White House said in a statement.

The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) pointed out that the bill will not grant securities status for investment contracts recorded on a blockchain, thus denying investors protection under US securities laws. It added that the bill would also allow issuers of crypto investment contracts to certify themselves that their own products were digital commodities and were not subject to SEC oversight, leaving the agency just 60 days to challenge this.

"FIT 21 would create new regulatory gaps and undermine decades of precedent regarding the oversight of investment contracts, putting investors and capital markets at immeasurable risk," SEC Chairman Gary Gensler said in a statement.

Gensler in the past had led some of the heftiest crackdowns on the crypto industry, although the SEC's likely approval of exchange-traded funds for the spot trading of the digital coin ether indicated to some a softening of stance by the commission's chief.

Aside from its Republican sponsors, the crypto bill is supported by industry groups who see Gensler as an enemy of the crypto trade and an impediment to America's wider adoption of digital assets.

The SEC chief has always said the crypto trade should be subject to the same laws that apply to any securities trade. His argument about the unknown risks posed to investors by crypto is often underscored by his citation of the high-profile prosecutions, bankruptcies and business collapses revolving around the trade.

President Biden, who has authority to veto the Congress bill, also offered to cooperate in finding a new way to resolve Republican concerns about the future of the crypto trade.

"The Administration is eager to work with Congress to ensure a comprehensive and balanced regulatory framework for digital assets, building on existing authorities, which will promote the responsible development of digital assets and payment innovation and help reinforce United States leadership in the global financial system," the White House statement said.

Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee in November's presidential election and challenger to Biden, has started accepting digital coin donations, his campaign for the White House announced on Tuesday, adding that it wanted to build a "crypto army" of donors.

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White House Consulting With Congress on Sanctions Against ICC, No Decision Yet – Sullivan

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) – The White House is consulting with Congress on potential sanctions against the International Criminal Court (ICC), but has not made any determinations yet, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Wednesday.

"We are in consultations on a bipartisan, bicameral basis with the Hill on all of the options for how to respond to what the ICC has just done. We haven't made any determinations," Sullivan said during a press briefing.

On Monday, ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan filed requests for arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, as well as for Hamas leader

in the Gaza Strip Yahya Sinwar, Hamas political bureau head Ismail Haniyeh and the leader of Hamas' military wing, Mohammed Diab Ibrahim Masri, over alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity committed since October 2023 based on evidence collected and examined by his office.

US officials slammed the ICC arrest warrants, with President Joe Biden calling it "outrageous" and saying that despite the ICC prosecutor's application for arrest warrants against Israeli leaders, Israel is not carrying out genocide in Gaza.

In addition, US House Speaker Mike Johnson said that lawmakers are exploring options, including sanctions, to punish the ICC if it proceeds with arrest warrants for Israeli officials.

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biden admin in consultations with lawmakers on bipartisan, bicameral basis on how to respond to icc warrants for israeli officials - white house

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US Joint Chiefs Chair Brown Says American Troops Could Return to Ukraine After Crisis

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) - US Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Charles Brown said on Wednesday that he expects American forces are likely to return to Ukraine after Russia's special military operation is over.

"I do expect when this conflict is over that we will have an opportunity to go back to what we were doing before the conflict," Brown said during a panel discussion hosted by the Atlantic Council (designated an undesirable foreign organization in Russia).

However, Brown emphasized that US troops would not be on the ground in Ukraine until it is no longer an active combat zone.

Brown noted that US forces were on the ground working closely with Ukraine before they were pulled out at the start of Russia's special military operation in February 2022.

Last week, Brown said that a NATO deployment of trainers to Ukraine appeared inevitable. For now, he said, an effort inside Ukraine would put "a bunch of NATO trainers at risk."

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US House Panel Advances Bill to Allow Export Controls on AI Systems

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) - The US House Foreign Affairs Committee advanced legislation on Wednesday to allow the US Commerce Department's Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) to place export controls on artificial intelligence (AI) systems and other emerging technologies.

The panel advanced the bill, dubbed the Enhancing National Frameworks for Overseas Restriction of Critical Exports (ENFORCE) Act, in a vote of 43 in favor and three opposed.

The legislation modernizes the Export Control Reform Act of 2018 by giving BIS clear legal authority to use export controls on activities related to AI systems and other national security-related emerging technologies.

The bill also allows BIS to require licenses for the export of AI systems. The legislation gives BIS the flexibility to develop appropriate controls by expanding its authorities, an official bill summary said.

Without the legislation, US companies could sell AI systems that threaten national security to Chinese companies, with no way for BIS to respond, the summary said.

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US House Panel Chair Says Hunter Biden Repeatedly Lied to Lawmakers in Biden Family Probe

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) - Hunter Biden repeatedly lied to US House lawmakers as part of their investigation into alleged criminal activity by the Biden family, House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Jason Smith said on Wednesday.

"New documents provided by the [Internal Revenue Service] whistleblowers show that Hunter Biden repeatedly lied to Congress in his February deposition to distance his involvement in what should be considered a clear scheme to enrich the Biden family," Smith said in a statement.

Evidence provided by the IRS whistleblowers indicate that Biden and his business associates made millions of dollars by selling access to Joe Biden, who denies the accusations, the statement said.

Documents released by the panel confirm the whistleblowers' claims and include evidence of the US Justice Department impeding an investigation into Hunter Biden, the statement said.

In 2021, Assistant US Attorney Leslie Wolf told investigators that they could not pursue Hollywood lawyer Kevin Morris as a witness based on information received from the CIA, the statement said.

"Congress cannot allow our oversight responsibilities to be undermined by lies told by anyone, including the President's son. Hunter Biden, despite what he may believe, he is not above the law," the statement said.

Lying to Congress is a serious offense, the statement added.

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US House Panel Advances Bill to Provide Oversight of Changes to Israel Arms Sales

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) - The US House Foreign Affairs Committee on Wednesday advanced legislation to provide for congressional oversight of changes to arms sales to Israel, following President Joe Biden's decision to pause the delivery of certain weapons over a

potential large-scale Israeli military operation in the Gaza Strip city of Rafah.

The panel advanced the bill, dubbed the Maintaining Our Ironclad Commitment to Israel's Security Act, in a vote of 33 in favor and 13 opposed.

The legislation prohibits the president from pausing, suspending or delaying the delivery of defense articles to Israel unless Congress is notified and given a policy justification.

The bill also expresses the sense of Congress that limiting or otherwise delaying the sale or delivery of US arms to Israel runs counter to the United States' commitments to Israel and undermines regional security.

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Johnson Says Opposes US Preventing Ukraine From Striking Russian Territory

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Wednesday that he opposes efforts by the United States to prevent Ukraine from conducting strikes on Russian territory.

"I think we need to allow Ukraine to prosecute the war the way they see fit," Johnson told reporters in a clip shared to social media, in response to a question about whether he supports Ukrainian strikes on Russian territory.

The US trying to micromanage Ukrainian activities is not good policy, Johnson said.

Earlier this week, a group of US House lawmakers sent a letter to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, urging the Pentagon chief to permit Ukraine to use US-supplied long-range weapons to strike Russian territory.

The Biden administration has repeatedly said that it discourages Ukraine from conducting strikes on Russian territory and restricts Kiev from using US-supplied weapons for such strikes.

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Oil Prices Hit Week Low; Demand Again Questioned By US Crude Stockpile Build

NEW YORK, May 22 (Sputnik) - World oil prices hit a week-low on Wednesday after the US government reported a fresh weekly build in domestic crude stockpiles, raising questions again about demand in the run-up to summer driving — typically the country's busiest period for fuel consumption.

Inventories of gasoline, the No. 1 fuel for cars, fell during the week ended May 17, boosting somewhat the demand component of the US petroleum complex. At the same time, stockpiles rose for distillates, which are used to turn out the diesel required by trucks, buses, and ships and also go into making fuel needed by airplanes.

As a result, crude prices tumbled in New York trading, before recovering slightly at midday. By 12:00 pm in the Eastern United States (6:00 pm UK), a barrel of West Texas Intermediate (WTI), the benchmark for US crude, was at \$77.66. It earlier hit a one-week low of \$77.36.

UK-origin Brent, the global benchmark for oil, was at \$81.88, after reaching \$81.58 earlier —

the lowest since May 15.

Based on their Monday-Wednesday showing and without an imminent recovery, crude prices could end the week about 2% lower, wiping out all of last week's gain, which was just about as much. This was despite the determination by oil producers in the OPEC+ alliance to extend output cuts this summer to bolster prices. OPEC+ groups the 13-member Saudi-led Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries with 10 other oil-producing nations steered by Russia. The alliance intends to maintain supply cuts of 2.2 million barrels per day until the end of June.

In the latest week to May 17, the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) said domestic crude balances rose by 1.825 million barrels, after the prior weekly draw of 2.508 million. Energy analysts on Wall Street had anticipated a drop of 2.4 million.

The Weekly Petroleum Status Report of the EIA also showed gasoline stockpiles down by 945,000 barrels during that week — well above the prior weekly draw of 235,000 but still lower than the 1.6 million forecast by Wall Street.

Distillates, meanwhile, had a 379,000 barrel build — against the prior drop of 45,000 and the anticipated draw of 100,000.

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Biden Admin Could Finalize Deal to Normalize Saudi-Israel Ties Within Weeks - Blinken

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday that the Biden administration could finalize within weeks an agreement to normalize relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel.

"Those agreements, in principle, are very close to being able to be concluded. Now, of course, we will come to Congress with them when they're ready to be reviewed, but we could be weeks away from being able to conclude them," Blinken said during a House Appropriations Committee hearing.

Blinken added that for normalization to proceed, Saudi Arabia requires calm in Gaza and a credible pathway to a Palestinian state.

Last week, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan held discussions with Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud in Dhahran.

The parties discussed the nearly final version of the draft strategic agreements between the two countries, as well as the need to find a credible path to achieving a two-state solution for Israel and the Palestinians.

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US House Republicans Lead Democrats in Voter Support Ahead of 2024 Elections - Poll

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) - Republican candidates for seats in the US House of Representatives lead their Democratic counterparts in support among likely voters ahead of the

2024 elections, according to a Rasmussen Reports poll released Wednesday.

A plurality of respondents, 47%, would vote for the Republican House candidate, the poll report said. Forty-two percent (42%) of respondents would vote for the Democratic candidate, the poll report said.

The Republican advantage has narrowed by one percentage point since March, the poll report added.

House Republicans currently hold a small majority in the lower chamber of the US Congress, while Democrats control the Senate. Both parties are vying to retain control of one chamber and win a majority in the other in the 2024 elections.

The poll surveyed 1,092 likely US voters on May 15-16 and 19. The poll maintains a margin of error of plus-or-minus three percentage points with a 95% confidence level.

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ANALYSIS - Raisi's Death Unlikely to Bring Any Positive Change to US-Iran Relations

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden, the vast majority of lawmakers in Congress, and the pro-Israel lobby in the United States will all ensure that there is no improvement in US-Iran relations following the death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, analysts told Sputnik.

On Sunday, Raisi, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian, and other senior Iranian government officials died in a helicopter crash in northwestern Iran while returning from a visit to Azerbaijan, with Iranian authorities attributing the crash landing in a remote mountainous region to poor weather conditions and thick fog.

It is not yet clear who Raisi's successor will be, but regardless of the choice, Washington remains dominated by opponents of improved bilateral relations, retired US Lt. Col. and former Vice President of the Eurasia Group Earl Rasmussen told Sputnik.

The United States on Monday extended its official condolences for the death of Iran's president and foreign minister, however, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the Iranian people are "probably better off" now that Raisi is dead.

"I do not see any significant improvement in relations with the United States, especially with this administration and based on the strong Israeli lobby's influence, not with the current Congress," Rasmussen said.

Raisi and Amir-Abdollahian were well regarded across Iran but the loss of two senior leaders will not make any difference to the policies guiding Iran, he said.

"Unlike many Western analysts. I do not see any change in Iran's role and importance in the region," Rasmussen said. "The government will remain intact and continue in their current direction."

Under the Iranian constitution, an early presidential election must be held within 50 days after the incumbent president is pronounced dead or incapacitated, and his powers are transferred to the first vice president.

IRAN EXPECTED TO MAINTAIN INDEPENDENT PATH

Former senior FBI intelligence analyst, Middle East expert, and political commentator Coleen

Rowley agreed that Iran would maintain its current independent path but also cautious alertness toward the United States.

"Obviously there's reason to hope Iran will continue a steady and cautiously pragmatic hand as it replaces the leaders it has lost," Rowley said.

Iran's election headquarters has proposed to register candidates for the post of Iranian president on May 28, with the date to be confirmed by the country's Guardian Council.

University of Stirling Lecturer in Politics and Religion Professor Bashir Saade said that Iran's institutional structure and long-lasting regime were likely to ride out the shock caused by Raisi's death.

"This seems to have been an accident. And it also does not look like it will produce some kind of political vacuum in Iran either," Saade said.

First Vice President of Iran Mohammad Mokhber will serve as head of state after Raisi's death for the next 50 days until a new presidential election is held by a special council.

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USCP Say Investigating Two Vials of Blood Found at RNC Headquarters in Washington

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) – The US Capitol Police (USCP) are investigating a package containing two vials of blood that was found at the Republican National Committee (RNC) headquarters in Washington D.C., the police said on Wednesday.

"At approximately 7:45 a.m. [11:45 GMT], the USCP responded to the 300 block of First Street, SE, for the report of a suspicious package. The package was just cleared by our Hazardous Incident Response Division. It contained two vials of blood. The source of the package and its contents will be further investigated," the police said in a statement widely quoted by US media.

The police put the RNC building under lockdown with staff evacuated and the blood being tested, according to media reports.

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Almost Half of Americans in Swing US States Fear Violence During Election - Poll

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) - Almost half of potential voters in the swing US states fear that there is a potential for violence during or after the presidential election in November, a new Bloomberg-Morning Consult poll revealed on Wednesday.

When asked if they trust the statement that the election and its aftermath will be free from violence, 18% of respondents said "not at all" and 31% said "not much," a report on the poll said.

Sixteen percent of respondents expressed complete agreement with the assumption and 35% said they have "some" confidence the election and its aftermath will be free from violence, the poll report said.

Fifty-five percent of respondents said they are confident the upcoming election will be free from

foreign interference, but 45% expressed the opposite view, the poll report said.

At the same time, 60% of respondents expressed doubt the election would be free from misinformation, while 40% said that that would not be a problem, the poll report also said.

The poll took place from May 7-13 among 4,962 registered voters in seven swing US states: Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

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US, Netherlands Conduct Bilateral Operations in South China Sea - US Navy

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) - The US and Dutch navies conducted joint naval operations in the South China Sea to increase interoperability and readiness in the Indo-Pacific, the US Navy said on Wednesday.

"The Netherlands and United States' navies conducted bilateral operations in the South China Sea, May 22," the Navy said in a press release. "The bilateral operation provided a valuable opportunity to improve allied interoperability and conduct complex scenarios to improve combined readiness."

US Navy Independence-variant littoral combat ship USS Mobile, Lewis and Clark-class dry cargo ship USNS Wally Schirra and Royal Netherlands Navy De Zeven Provinciën-class frigate HNLMS Tromp took part in the operations, according to the release.

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Biden After Countries Recognize Palestine: State Should Be Realized Through Negotiations

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden supports the creation of a Palestinian state only through direct negotiations, the White House said on Wednesday after Norway, Spain and Ireland said they would recognize Palestine.

"The president is a strong supporter of a two-state solution and has been throughout his career," a White House National Security Council spokesperson said, as quoted by CNN. "He believes a Palestinian state should be realized through direct negotiations between the parties, not through unilateral recognition."

Earlier in the day, the Norwegian government announced the country's decision to recognize Palestine as a state. It was followed by announcement by Ireland and Spain that they will officially recognize the Palestinian statehood on May 28, the day Norway's decision goes into effect.

Shortly after the announcements, Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz instructed the immediate recall of Israel's ambassadors to Ireland, Norway and Spain.

Palestinian authorities welcome the three countries' move, Wasel Abu Yousef, a member of the executive committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, told Sputnik.

Palestine until now has been recognized by nine EU member states. Eight countries — Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Romania and Slovakia —

recognized it in 1988, before joining the EU, and Sweden in 2014. A total of 142 countries recognize Palestine as a state, globally.