

**5/30/24 Thursday**

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Ukraine 'Advocates' Are Fighting for Its Destruction

The most adamant and feverish Ukraine supporters do not actually support it at all and are instead promoting its use as a pawn in the United States and the West's geopolitical chessboard.

On Sunday, Russian President Vladimir Putin signaled that he is open to talks with Ukraine and its Western benefactors, building off an agreement that was nearly reached in Istanbul, Turkiye at the start of the conflict. However, Russia also insists that the territory its soldiers fought and died for since that time will remain in Russian hands.

Ukraine and its Western supporters have repeatedly insisted that Ukraine's 1991 borders be restored, an impossible ask even at the start of the war that has only appeared more deluded as time has gone on.

"You have to think about how does it benefit [Ukraine] to be bombed and brutalized and have its people killed and maimed for another three months? Half a year? How long is this meant to go on?" asked author Branko Marcetic on Sputnik's [The Critical Hour](#), who recently wrote a piece in [Responsible Statecraft](#) on this subject.

Support for Ukraine comes in two main forms. There is the political and military support provided by Western nations, and there is public support, which has been waning but still includes a vocal contingent online who has named themselves "[NAFO](#)." While the so-called NAFO Brigades are useless to Ukraine on the battlefield, they have been useful in manufacturing consent for the wars and providing political cover for politicians who are spending on Ukraine rather than their own countries.

They are also advocating for the continued destruction of the very country they claim to be protecting. While they sit safely in their Western countries, typing Russophobic slurs through their keyboards and virtually patting other "fellas" on the back, actual Ukrainians are attempting to flee the country at an astounding rate.

Polish media estimated that around 80,000 Ukrainian men of military age have entered the country since February 24, 2022, when the restrictions against men leaving Ukraine came into effect in the country. Ukraine claims that it has caught some 13,000 men attempting to illegally cross the border.

In April, the Kiev regime ended consulate services for Ukrainian men abroad, a brazen attempt to force war refugees to the frontlines. This is on top of the countless videos posted on social media of Ukrainian men inside the country trying to avoid the draft, fighting with recruitment officers, and wearing old man masks in an attempt to go unnoticed.

These are clearly men who do not want to fight and die for a cause that even Western military analysts say is a lost cause. Yet Western leaders and the NAFO troll farms gleefully send them to their deaths, while proclaiming that they are the ones supporting Ukraine.

"There is no other conflict in the world where this is the position," explained Marcetic. "That the country where troop morale is low as it is in Ukraine, has suffered the kind of casualties that it

has... there's no other conflict where you have those conditions and the response is 'let's keep this going indefinitely because there'll be more enemy forces killed.'"

Ukraine has suffered more than half a million casualties in the conflict according to the Russian Ministry of Defense. The country is also swamped in [foreign debt](#) and will likely have to spend more than \$500 billion reconstructing the country.

Meanwhile, the Kiev regime has halted elections past Zelensky's legal term while banning religious sects, political parties and media outlets, all for what US President Joe Biden calls the defense of "democratic values."

"I think people have done a real disservice [to Ukraine] the people who have cheered on this war from the beginning, rather than trying to push for some kind of end to hostilities," Marcetic explained. "Even though they present themselves as Ukrainians' greatest defenders, by taking the option of a ceasefire or negotiated settlement out of the realm of political commonsense and basically making it a toxic subject to discuss... it's proven just disastrous for the country."

Noting that most of the "ordinary people" who support Ukraine in the West were likely well-meaning, Marcetic hopes that they won't be so easily fooled by "Bush-era-like invocations of democracy and freedom" to justify wars in the future.

"The people at the top have very different ulterior motives. For them, Ukraine is a piece on the chessboard and they have been used, basically, as an expendable pawn in this conflict."

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Is Biden Escalating Towards WWII to Improve His Election Chances?

On Thursday, US President Joe Biden gave Ukraine the go-ahead to use US weapons against Russia inside Russian territory, though he instructed them to limit attacks to the Kharkov area. The decision came after weeks of numerous European countries also permitting Ukraine to strike inside Russia –without the restriction of keeping the attacks near Kharkov– including France and Germany, which had been publicly lobbying for the US to lift those restrictions. The decision is part of a string of escalations by NATO countries who are risking a global nuclear holocaust to keep Ukraine on life support for a little while longer. Like previous escalations, this latest change in policy by NATO countries will not change the reality on the battlefield but will move the world closer to a catastrophic confrontation that could end civilization as we know it.

Not unlike his close personal friend, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Biden is growing evermore unpopular at home. According to recent polls, Biden is the most unpopular US President at this point in his first term since the 1940s. It is also conventional political wisdom in the United States that an ongoing war is usually a boon to a President's approval rating. That was the case for both Presidents George H. W. Bush and George W. Bush. Biden also cannot afford another foreign policy defeat, having been embarrassed in [Afghanistan where his withdrawal](#) was horrifically botched and in the Red Sea, where he has proven unable to lift the [Houthi blockade](#) of shipping lanes. As long as the war in Ukraine continues, Biden doesn't have to admit defeat, as political cartoonist and co-host of Sputnik's The Final Countdown pointed out on Thursday.

"If you say you have a new idea, in this case allowing strikes within Russia, then you can credibly claim that the war is not over yet," Rall contended.

With Pro-Palestinian protests occurring across the country and large majorities of the country now, Biden finds himself in a perilous position. A recent poll found that 20% of Democratic and Independent voters in swing states said that his handling of Gaza makes them less likely to vote for him, more than enough to swing the election.

"There have been ample opportunities for peace agreements that could end this horrific conflict in Ukraine, but the Biden administration seems adamant on provoking a war with Russia," managing editor of Covert Action Magazine Jeremy Kuzmarov said on [Sputnik's The Final Countdown](#). "It's an election year. The Israel situation is really ugly, there are a lot of huge protests against him. Maybe he thinks he can rally the people against Russia."

Kuzmarov noted that while it hasn't been as vehement or quick as in Palestine, US public sentiment has soured on the Ukraine war as well. "So I don't know if this is a winning strategy politically if that's what he's after."

While other NATO countries led the way in lifting their restrictions on striking inside Russia, they too are facing political unrest at home and possible defeats in EU Parliament elections next month. In France, President Emmanuel Macron's ruling coalition is losing badly to the Rassemblement National party and the Socialist party is nipping at their heels for second place. Meanwhile in Germany, the Alternative for Germany party, an obscure party not too long ago, has moved into second place in the country.

Leaders in those countries could likewise be trying to keep Ukraine afloat for a little longer and avoid a humiliating defeat before the elections.

"The leadership [in Europe is] adopting aggressive policies against Russia and supporting Ukraine to the hilt and aligning with the United States in this war," said Kuzmarov, noting that Slovakia is a notable exception "and their leader was targeted in an assassination attempt."

It has also been reported that some European countries have granted permission to the Ukrainians to use F-16 fighter jets over the territory of Ukraine. The jets are capable of carrying missiles that hold nuclear warheads.

"Therefore, we cannot help but view the supply of these systems to the Kiev regime as a deliberate signaling action by NATO in the nuclear sphere. They are trying to convey that the US and NATO are ready to go to any lengths in Ukraine," Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told Sputnik, adding that he hopes that the joint military exercises between Belarus and Russia, which included practice with non-strategic nuclear warheads, would serve as "a sobering reminder to our opponents of the catastrophic consequences of further escalation up the nuclear ladder."

With leaders in the West seemingly hellbent on either provoking World War III or moving as close to the line as possible in a futile attempt to improve their poll numbers, it falls on the people to force their leaders to change course.

"Hopefully these movements grow and I think we may see more protests and we may see protesters who are protesting the Israel-Palestine [conflict], make the connection between rotten policy there and the West and rotten policies in many other regions in the world, including this real danger spot," Kuzmarov predicted, calling for a broader movement "equivalent to the '60s movements or something [even] bigger, which really is needed because the leaders are off the rails."

“We need, I think, massive civil disobedience against leaders who are not leading in the interest of humanity or the public,” he added later.

Writing in his substack, The Gray Zone journalist Aaron Maté agreed. “[I]t would also be in everyone’s interest to end this proxy war between the world’s two nuclear powers. But as they continue to mount the escalation ladder, Biden and his aides are clearly not thinking about the rest of us down below.”

The most adamant and feverish Ukraine supporters do not actually support it at all and are instead promoting its use as a pawn in the United States and the West’s geopolitical chessboard.

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These are clearly men who do not want to fight and die for a cause that even Western military analysts say is a lost cause. Yet Western leaders and online “supporters” gleefully send them to their deaths, while proclaiming that they are the ones supporting Ukraine.

“There is no other conflict in the world where this is the position,” explained Marcetic. “That the country where troop morale is low as it is in Ukraine, has suffered the kind of casualties that it has... there’s no other conflict where you have those conditions and the response is ‘let’s keep this going indefinitely because there’ll be more enemy forces killed.’”

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The decision came after weeks of numerous European countries also permitting Ukraine to strike inside Russia –without the restriction of keeping the attacks near Kharkov– including France and Germany, which had been publicly lobbying for the US to lift those restrictions.

According to recent polls, Biden is the most unpopular US President at this point in his first term since the 1940s.

Biden also cannot afford another foreign policy defeat, having been embarrassed in Afghanistan where his withdrawal was horrifically botched and in the Red Sea, where he has proven unable to lift the Houthi blockade of shipping lanes. As long as the war in Ukraine continues, Biden doesn't have to admit defeat, as political cartoonist and co-host of Sputnik's The Final Countdown pointed out on Thursday.

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"There have been ample opportunities for peace agreements that could end this horrific conflict in Ukraine, but the Biden administration seems adamant on provoking a war with Russia," managing editor of Covert Action Magazine Jeremy Kuzmarov said on Sputnik's The Final Countdown. "It's an election year. The Israel situation is really ugly, there are a lot of huge protests against him. Maybe he thinks he can rally the people against Russia."

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"We need, I think, massive civil disobedience against leaders who are not leading in the interest of humanity or the public," Kuzmarov concluded.

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Salvadoran Police Say Foiled Plot to Carry Out Bombings on President's Inauguration Day

WASHINGTON, May 31 (Sputnik) - The Salvadoran police said on Friday that they had foiled a plan by an "insurrectionist" group to carry out bombings of several locations throughout the country during the inauguration of President Nayib Bukele on June 1.

"This night we have apprehended seven war veteran leaders for planning explosive attacks at various locations of the country for the coming June 1," the National Civilian Police (PNC) said via X.

The seven veterans were part of a group called "The Salvadoran Insurrectionist Brigade," the PNC said. Their objective included blowing up gas stations, supermarkets and public institutions, according to the police.

The investigation into the matter identified a former lawmaker for the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, Jose Santos Melera Yanez, as the financier of the plot, the PNC said.

One of those arrested had acquired knowledge in handling explosives during the Salvadoran Civil War. Part of the explosives were found in the municipality of Guazapa, the police said.

On June 1, Bukele will be inaugurated in the nation's capital to assume a second mandate after achieving an overwhelming victory in the February election.

Among the attendees of the ceremony are King Phillip VI of Spain, Argentine, Paraguayan and Honduran presidents, as well as a high-level US delegation headed by Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas.

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Blinken Expects More NATO Nations to Finalize Security Agreements with Ukraine by Summit

WASHINGTON, May 31 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Friday that he expects that "many more" NATO countries will reach individual bilateral security agreements with Ukraine by the time of NATO's summit in July.

"Thirty-two countries are also negotiating individual bilateral security agreements with Ukraine. Thirteen have already been concluded. I expect many more will be concluded by the time of the summit," Blinken said at a press briefing.

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NATO to Announce Robust Package of Support for Ukraine at Washington Summit - Blinken

WASHINGTON, May 31 (Sputnik) - NATO will unveil a robust package of support for Ukraine during the Washington summit in July, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Friday

"There will be a robust package of support for Ukraine at the summit, a package that strengthens NATO's cooperation support for Ukraine, that advances Ukraine's integration into NATO," Blinken told reporters in Prague.

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OpenAI Says They Disrupted Russia, China 'Influence Operations'

WASHINGTON, May 31 (Sputnik) - ChatGPT maker OpenAI said this week that it disrupted a number of "influence operations" allegedly linked to Russia, China, Iran and Israel.

"In the last three months, we have disrupted five covert IO [influence operations] that sought to use our models in support of deceptive activity across the internet. As of May 2024, these campaigns do not appear to have meaningfully increased their audience engagement or reach as a result of our services," OpenAI said in a statement on Thursday.

The company said it disrupted a previously unreported operation from Russia, which it dubbed Bad Grammar, operating mainly on Telegram and targeting Ukraine, Moldova, the Baltic States, and the United States.

"The people behind Bad Grammar used our models to debug code for running a Telegram bot

and to create short, political comments in Russian and English that were then posted on Telegram,” it said.

OpenAI also linked to Russia another operation, known as Doppelganger.

“People acting on behalf of Doppelganger used our models to generate comments in English, French, German, Italian and Polish that were posted on X and 9GAG; translate and edit articles in English and French that were posted on websites linked to this operation; generate headlines; and convert news articles into Facebook posts,” it said.

The company also disrupted a Chinese network that used its models to research public social media activity and generate texts in different languages. Those texts were then posted across platforms, including X, Medium, and Blogspot, and debug code for managing databases and websites, according to the statement.

OpenAI also disrupted two other operations, which it linked to Iran and Israel.

“The content posted by these various operations focused on a wide range of issues, including Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the conflict in Gaza, the Indian elections, politics in Europe and the United States, and criticisms of the Chinese government by Chinese dissidents and foreign governments,” the statement said.

None of these operations have benefited from meaningfully increased audience engagement, it added.

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nato allies to announce robust package of support for ukraine at upcoming summit - blinken

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Fed's Favorite Inflation Indicator PCE Grows 2.7% In Year To April - Commerce Department

WASHINGTON, May 31 (Sputnik) - A US inflation tracker closely followed by the Federal Reserve showed zero growth in April, according to Commerce Department data Friday that gave the central bank flexibility over its decision on interest rates.

The Personal Consumption Expenditures Index, often simply known as the PCE, was unchanged from its annualized March growth of 2.7% as the Fed awaited signs that inflation was cooling enough for it to cut rates. Another key US inflation gauge — the Consumer Price Index — eased in April by growing 3.4% on the year versus 3.5% in March.

The Fed’s target for annual inflation is 2%.

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US Imposes Visa Restrictions on China, Hong Kong Officials - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 31 (Sputnik) - The United States is imposing new visa restrictions on officials in China and Hong Kong in response to guilty verdicts imposed under the country's National Security Law, State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said in a statement on Friday.

"The United States is deeply concerned by the guilty verdicts announced in the National Security Law trial of pro-democracy organizers in Hong Kong," Miller said. "In response, the Department of State is taking steps to impose new visa restrictions on PRC and Hong Kong officials responsible for implementing the National Security Law, pursuant to Section 212(a)(3)(C) of the Immigration and Nationality Act."

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US Imposing Visa Restrictions on China, Hong Kong Officials Responsible for Implementing National Security Law - State Dept.

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US Navy Boosts F-35 Engine Production Contract by \$301Mln to Buy 148 More - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 31 (Sputnik) - The US Navy has extended its existing contract with Pratt and Whitney Military Engines by more than \$300 million to make 148 additional F135 engines for the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, the most expensive aircraft and military project in history, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"Raytheon Technologies Corporation, doing business [as] Pratt and Whitney Military Engines, East Hartford, Connecticut, is awarded a \$301,762,768 modification ...contract ...[for] the manufacture, assembly, inspection, acceptance, and delivery of 108 conventional takeoff and landing F135 propulsion systems, 27 short takeoff and vertical landing F135 propulsion systems, and 13 Carrier Variant F135 propulsion systems," the release said on Thursday.

Under the contract, Pratt and Whitney would also provide spare engines, power modules, and other hardware supporting the US Navy, Air Force and Marine Corp versions of the aircraft, the Defense Department said.

Work under the contract extension is scheduled to last three years and to be completed in June 2027, the Defense Department said.

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US Navy OKs \$516Mln Contract Extension to Build Ocean Surveillance Ship - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 31 (Sputnik) - The US Navy has approved a more than half a billion dollar contract extension to the Alabama-based shipbuilder and defense contractor Austal USA to continue its design and construction of the Lead Ship of the T-AGOS 25 class of ocean

surveillance vessels, the Department of Defense said in a press release.

"Austal USA [of] Mobile, Alabama is awarded a \$516,481,569 ...modification ...contract ...for ordering long lead time material, continue/complete detail design and Construction of the Lead Ship of the T-AGOS 25 Class," the release said on Thursday.

Work will be performed in Mobile, Alabama (42%); Houma, Louisiana (13%); Camden, New Jersey (13%) and other locations across the United States, the Defense Department said.

Work on the extended contract is planned to take four years and to be completed by May 2028.

The US Navy in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 ordered the first of a planned class of seven new TAGOS-25 class ocean surveillance ships at a cost of \$434.4 million. However, according to the Navy's FY2024 budget submission, the ship's cost had already risen to \$789.6 million - an increase of \$355.2 million, or 81.8%, according to published sources.

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US, Chinese Officials Talk Taiwan, Ukraine, Mideast in Washington Visit - White House

WASHINGTON, May 31 (Sputnik) - US Deputy National Security Adviser Jon Finer held talks with China's Vice Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxu in Washington earlier to discuss a range of topics including Taiwan, Ukraine, and unrest in the Middle East, the White House said in a press release.

"Mr. Finer affirmed the importance of maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait," the release said on Thursday. "He underscored US support for international law and freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. The two sides also discussed Russia's war against Ukraine, challenges in the Middle East, and efforts to advance the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula."

US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan also joined the meeting for a while to exchange views with Ma on key issues, according to the release.

Finer and Ma also discussed ongoing work to continue military-to-military communication and advance cooperation in areas of mutual interest, such as counternarcotics, the release said.

The White House described the discussions between the two sides as "candid and constructive."

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin is scheduled to meet his Chinese counterpart Admiral Dong Jun on the sidelines of the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore on Friday.

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Ex-US Prosecutor Says Expects Trump Conviction in Hush Money Case to Be Reversed in Appeal

WASHINGTON, May 31 (Sputnik) - Ex-US federal prosecutor Ron Sievert told Sputnik that he expects former President Donald Trump's conviction in the hush money case in New York will be reversed in an appeal because the judge overseeing the trial violated laws that guarantee a

fair trial.

"At some point this case will be reversed on appeal because the trial judge violated long standing principles of American law that guarantee a fair trial," Sievert said on Thursday.

Sievert explained that the trial judge did not require the prosecutor to tell the defense the nature of the charges before trial; he allowed the jury to convict without being unanimous on all charges; he admitted into evidence highly prejudicial and irrelevant evidence; and he refused to let the jury hear the one witness, expert on election law, who would have testified there was no election crime in this case.

Earlier on Thursday, a New York jury found Trump guilty on all 34 criminal counts of falsifying business records to cover up a hush money payment to adult film actress Stormy Daniels.

The New York Supreme Court set the sentencing date for July 11.

Trump called the decision a disgrace and claimed the trial was rigged and that he is innocent. The Trump legal team is expected to appeal the decision.

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West Thoroughly Involved in Ukraine Conflict Widening War - Ex-US Official

WASHINGTON, May 31 (Sputnik) - The West is thoroughly involved in the ongoing Ukraine conflict and is also widening it, former US Assistant Treasury Secretary Paul Craig Roberts told Sputnik commenting on the latest US announcement that President Joe Biden allowed Ukraine to use its weapons near Kharkiv.

Roberts pointed out that the Ukraine conflict has been widening ever since it started with the West sending every weapon to Ukraine that initially it said it would not.

"Troops would never be sent, but the French Foreign Legion is now sent, and the NATO consensus is building to send NATO troops," he said. "[Russian President Vladimir] Putin's slow paced 'limited military intervention' permitted the West to get thoroughly involved in the conflict thus widening the war."

A State Department spokesperson told Sputnik on Thursday that Biden has greenlighted Ukrainian strikes using US-supplied weapons inside the Russian territory for counter-fire purposes in the Kharkov (also known as Kharkiv) region of Ukraine, but has not authorized the use of long-range missiles, including ATACMS, inside Russia.

"There is no reason for long-range missiles supplied to Ukraine by Washington except to hit distant targets. Long-range missiles are not battlefield weapons," Roberts asserted. "If the missiles are not intended to be used for their purpose, why give them to Ukraine?"

Roberts went on to say that although Russia has won in its stated goal of liberating Donbas, that region is not the endgame for the West.

"Putin has won his version of the war - the liberation of Donbas - but Washington's version of the war is not limited to Donbas," he said. "If Putin doesn't quickly use the necessary force to bring the conflict to a quick end, he will be faced with NATO troops in Western Ukraine and the incorporation of Ukraine west of the Dnieper into NATO with nuclear missile bases on Russia's expanded border."

Ukraine has received billions of dollars in donations and loans from its allies since Russia

launched its special military operation in February 2022. The United States alone has provided more than \$100 billion in military, economic and humanitarian aid. Russia has repeatedly warned countries supplying weapons to Ukraine that it sees military shipments as legitimate targets.

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Robert Kennedy Jr. Says Russian Electronic Weapons Puts US to Shame

AUSTIN, May 31 (Sputnik) - US presidential candidate Robert Kennedy Jr. said that Russia's military means to conduct electronic warfare have put the United States to shame.

"They have electronic weaponry that is dwarfing America's. That's why these offensive weapons have all failed in Ukraine because the Russians have stunned the world because of the sophistication and capacity of their electronic warfare. It really puts us to shame," Kennedy said in an interview on the sidelines of a Bitcoin conference in Austin, Texas, on Thursday.

Kennedy said the US Defense Department conducted modeling exercises a couple of years ago to conclude that Russia's defensive weapons exceeded the efficacy of those of the United States.

"Their defense systems are better than ours," Kennedy said.

The Defense Department also conducted a study about what would happen in a direct nuclear exchange with Russia and concluded that 90 million Americans would die within the first 20 minutes, he said.

Kennedy also noted that the late US president and his relative, John F. Kennedy, established a direct communications line with Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev.

On Wednesday, the Kennedy campaign said that it filed a complaint with the US Federal Election Commission (FEC) accusing President Joe Biden, former President Donald Trump and the corporate media outlet CNN of violating US election laws.

The Kennedy team claims CNN unlawfully colluded with the Biden and Trump teams to schedule a debate that would only include them.

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Robert Kennedy Jr. Says Guilty Verdict Will Help Trump in 2024 Presidential Election

AUSTIN, May 31 (Sputnik) - The New York jury's guilty verdict in the case so-called "hush money" case involving presumptive Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump will help the former US president in the 2024 presidential race, US presidential candidate Robert Kennedy Jr. said.

"First of all, I'd say this was probably the weakest case," Kennedy said during a discussion on the sidelines of a Bitcoin conference in Austin, Texas, on Thursday. "My belief is that it will end up helping President Trump among Americans."

Kennedy said the American people now believe the US judicial system has been weaponized

against Trump and that is bad for the United States.

Earlier on Thursday, a New York jury found Trump guilty on all 34 criminal counts of falsifying business records to cover up a hush money payment to adult film actress Stormy Daniels. The New York Supreme Court set the sentencing date for July 11.

Trump called the decision a disgrace and claimed the trial was rigged and that he is innocent. The Trump legal team is expected to appeal the decision.

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Trump's Jury Verdict in New York Means Tyranny Future For US - Ex-US Official

WASHINGTON, May 31 (Sputnik) - The guilty verdict the New York jury delivered in former President Donald Trump's "hush money" case means the tyranny future for the United States, former US Assistant Treasury Secretary Paul Craig Roberts told Sputnik.

"This means the future of America is tyranny," Roberts stated. "An appeal will be made, but a state as corrupt as New York is incapable of producing a decision based on law. If there is any fight left in Americans, and I am unsure, a prison sentence from the totally corrupt judge should launch a civil war...If not, the people have submitted to tyranny."

Earlier in the day, a New York jury found Trump guilty on all 34 criminal counts of falsifying business records to cover up a hush money payment to adult film actress Stormy Daniels.

"Keep in mind that these are 34 made-up felonies based on how an expense was recorded by accountants and attorneys. Trump did not record the expense. The expense was recorded according to accounting standards," Roberts said.

Roberts went on to say that the New York case is a civil case "somehow turned into a felony case."

"Keep in mind that it is a civil case without complainants, without harmed parties," he added. "It is a case brought by a prosecutor who can show no party harmed."

"What is frightening is that legally this is a case for which there are no legal grounds for bringing it," Roberts said. "Yet, the bar associations, the law schools, the media said nothing. Getting Trump was so important that law was sacrificed for the purpose."

Trump called the decision a disgrace and claimed the trial was rigged and that he is innocent. The Trump legal team is expected to appeal the decision.

The court set the sentencing date for July 11.

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US Congressman Says Trump Conviction Part of Democrats' Effort to Destroy Political Rival

WASHINGTON, May 31 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump's conviction in the so-called "hush money" case is part of the Democrats' plan to destroy their biggest political opponent, US Congressman Paul Gosar said.

Earlier in the day, a New York jury found Trump guilty on all 34 criminal counts of falsifying

business records to cover up a hush money payment to adult film actress Stormy Daniels.

"I completely disagree with this shameful verdict," Gosar said in a press release on Thursday. "This trial has been a sham from the beginning and while I am angry with the decision, I am not at all surprised by the Democrats' actions and efforts to silence and destroy their greatest political opponent and threat."

Trump called the decision a disgrace and claimed the trial was rigged and that he is innocent. The Trump legal team is expected to appeal the decision.

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White House Says Respects Rule of Law After Jury Delivers Guilty Verdict in Trump Case

WASHINGTON, May 31 (Sputnik) - The White House respects the rule of law and has no additional comment regarding the New York jury delivering a guilty verdict in former President Donald Trump's "hush money" case, White House Counsel's Office spokesperson Ian Sams said.

"We respect the rule of law and have no additional comment," Sams said in a statement on Thursday.

Earlier in the day, a New York jury found Trump guilty on all 34 criminal counts of falsifying business records to cover up a hush money payment to adult film actress Stormy Daniels.

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Trump Calls 'Hush Money' Trial Rigged, Disgraceful After Guilty Verdict

(Updates with more details in paras 5-7)

WASHINGTON, May 31 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said that the so-called "hush money" trial, in which he was convicted on 34 counts of falsifying business records to cover up an alleged affair with adult film actress Stormy Daniels, was rigged and disgraceful.

"This was a disgrace. This was a rigged trial by a conflicted judge who is corrupt," Trump said on Thursday at the courthouse, following the jury's decision.

The real verdict will occur on Election Day on November 5, Trump said, adding that he is a very innocent man.

Trump has repeatedly characterized the case as a form of election interference amid the 2024 US presidential election.

The Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) issued a statement saying Trump's political opponents know they cannot defeat him at the ballot box so they are resorting to other means.

The so-called "lawfare" against Trump will backfire, the statement said.

The verdict marks a tragic day in US history, the statement added.

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Trump Listened to Jury's Decision With His Head Bowed - Sputnik Correspondent

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump listened to the jury announcing his guilty conviction on 34 counts in his "hush money" trial with his head bowed, a Sputnik correspondent reported from the courtroom.

The jury deliberated all day. And around 4:15p.m., Judge Juan Merchan announced that he would send the jury home at 4:30 p.m.

Trump's mood visibly improved, and he raised his chin and communicated with his lawyer Todd Blanche, gesturing actively. Blanche, in turn, covered his mouth with his hand. Both exchanged smiles.

However, the judge returned to the courtroom shortly afterward and announced that the jury had agreed on a verdict. Another half hour later the verdict was announced.

The jury found Trump guilty on all 34 counts of falsifying business records to cover up an alleged affair with adult film actress Stormy Daniels. Trump listened to the verdict in silence.

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Biden Campaign Says 'No One Above Law' After Jury Delivered Guilty Verdict in Trump Case

WASHINGTON, May 31 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration said that the guilty verdict the New York jury delivered in Trump's "hush money" case shows that no one in the United States is above the law.

"In New York today, we saw that no one is above the law," the Biden administration said in a statement on Thursday.

Trump always mistakenly believed that he would never face consequences for breaking the law for his own personal gain, but the American people can only keep him out of the Oval Office through voting regardless of the verdict, the statement said.

"The threat Trump poses to our democracy has never been greater. He is running an increasingly unhinged campaign of revenge and retribution, pledging to be a dictator 'on day one' and calling for our Constitution to be 'terminated' so he can regain and keep power," the statement said.

Earlier on Thursday, a New York jury found Trump guilty on all 34 criminal counts of falsifying business records to cover up a hush money payment to adult film actress Stormy Daniels.

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Tucker Carlson Says Trump Guilty Verdict Marks End of US Justice System as World's Fairest

WASHINGTON, May 31 (Sputnik) - A New York jury's decision to convict former President Donald Trump on 34 counts of falsifying business records to cover up an alleged affair with adult film actress Stormy Daniels marks the end of the United States' justice system as the fairest in the world, US journalist Tucker Carlson said.

"This won't stop Trump. He'll win the election if he's not killed first. But it does mark the end of the fairest justice system in the world," Carlson said via social media platform X on Thursday. Anyone who defends the verdict is a danger to Americans and their families, Carlson added. Following the delivery of the guilty verdict, Trump called the trial rigged and disgraceful. Trump has repeatedly denied the accusations against him and characterized the case as election interference in the 2024 US presidential race.

The jury's decision makes Trump the first president in US history to have been convicted of a felony. The court scheduled a sentencing hearing for July 11.

US House Speaker Mike Johnson called the verdict a shameful day in history. The American people will recognize the case as a form of so-called "lawfare," Johnson said, adding that Trump will successfully appeal the verdict.

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Speaker Johnson Reacting To Trump Verdict Says This Is 'Shameful Day In American History'

WASHINGTON, May 31 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Mike Johnson criticized the conviction of former President Donald Trump in his so-called "hush money" trial, calling it a "shameful day in American history."

"Today is a shameful day in American history. Democrats cheered as they convicted the leader of the opposing party on ridiculous charges, predicated on the testimony of a disbarred, convicted felon. This was a purely political exercise, not a legal one," Johnson said in a social media post Thursday.

Johnson said that the weaponization of the justice system by the Biden Administration is evident in the decision, which shows Democrats' relentless efforts to silence dissent and crush political opponents.

"The American people see this as lawfare, and they know it is wrong — and dangerous. President Trump will rightfully appeal this absurd verdict — and he will win," Johnson added.

Earlier in the day, a New York jury found Trump guilty on all 34 criminal counts of falsifying business records to cover up a hush money payment to adult film actress Stormy Daniels.

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Trump Calls 'Hush Money' Trial Rigged, Disgraceful After Guilty Verdict

WASHINGTON, May 31 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said that the so-called "hush money" trial, in which he was convicted on 34 counts of falsifying business records to

cover up an alleged affair with adult film actress Stormy Daniels, was rigged and disgraceful.

“This was a disgrace. This was a rigged trial by a conflicted judge who is corrupt,” Trump said on Thursday at the courthouse, following the jury’s decision.

The real verdict will occur on Election Day on November 5, Trump said, adding that he is a very innocent man.

Trump has repeatedly characterized the case as a form of election interference amid the 2024 US presidential election.

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US Supreme Court Sets Trump Sentencing for July 11 - Judge

WASHINGTON, May 31 (Sputnik) - A New York Supreme Court judge set a July 11 sentencing date for former President Donald Trump after a jury found him guilty on all 34 criminal counts of falsifying business records to cover up a hush money payment to adult film actress Stormy Daniels, a Sputnik correspondent reported from the courthouse.

The jury’s decision on Thursday makes Trump the first president in the US history to be convicted of a felony.

Trump denied the accusations against him and has condemned the case as a form of election interference amid the 2024 US presidential election race.

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RFK Jr.: Lot of Room to Talk With Putin, Why Aren’t We Talking?

AUSTIN, May 30 (Sputnik) - US presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said on Thursday that the United States should engage in talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin and has many topics that it could discuss.

“I think that there’s lots of room to talk, and why aren’t we least talking?” Kennedy said in an interview on the sidelines of a Bitcoin conference in Austin.

Russia had valid historical reasons for wanting NATO away from the proximity of its territory, he added.

Kennedy noted that former President Donald Trump and other previous US leaders maintained dialogue with Putin. He also pointed out that his family relative, John F. Kennedy, established a direct line out of the White House with the Soviet Union’s leader Nikita Khrushchev.

Relations between the US and Russia sharply deteriorated in 2022 after Russia began its special military operation in Ukraine.

Kennedy has previously criticized the Biden administration for its role in the Ukraine conflict, saying US has supplied billions of dollars worth of weapons to Ukraine while cutting essential social services such as food stamps and medicare.

Ukraine has received billions of dollars in donations and loans from its allies since Russia launched its special military operation in February 2022. The United States alone has provided

more than \$100 billion in military, economic and humanitarian aid. Russia has repeatedly warned countries supplying weapons to Ukraine that it sees military shipments as legitimate targets.

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Biden Allows Ukraine to Use US-Supplied Weapons Near Kharkov – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 31 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden has greenlighted Ukrainian strikes using US-supplied weapons inside the Russian territory for counter-fire purposes in the Kharkov (also known as Kharkiv) region of Ukraine, but has not authorized the use of long-range missiles, including ATACMS, inside Russia, a State Department spokesperson told Sputnik in a statement.

“The President recently directed his team to ensure that Ukraine is able to use U.S.-supplied weapons for counter-fire purposes in the Kharkiv region so Ukraine can hit back against Russian forces that are attacking them or preparing to attack them. Our policy with respect to prohibiting the use of ATACMS or long-range strikes inside of Russia has not changed,” the statement said on Thursday.

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New York Jury Finds Trump Guilty on All 34 Counts in ‘Hush Money’ Case - Correspondent

WASHINGTON, May 31 (Sputnik) - A New York jury found former US President Donald Trump guilty on all 34 criminal counts of falsifying business records to cover up a hush money payment to adult film actress Stormy Daniels, a Sputnik correspondent reported from the courthouse on Thursday.

The jury’s decision makes Trump the first president in the history of the United States to be convicted of a felony.

Trump denied the accusations against him and has condemned the case as a form of election interference amid the 2024 US presidential election.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, May 31 (Sputnik) -

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

\* The US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) on Thursday alleged that Russia had used ballistic

missiles produced in North Korea during the Ukraine conflict.

\* The Biden administration has secretly permitted Ukraine to use US-supplied weapons to strike inside Russia, but only near Kharkiv, Politico reported.

\* The Western sponsors of Volodymyr Zelenskyy allowed his term in office to expire in May to create more obstacles for eventual peace talks between Ukraine and Russia, former Ukrainian minister Dmytro Tabachnyk told Sputnik.

#### WESTERN MILITARY AID TO UKRAINE

\* The United States has not changed its policies on the use of US-provided weapons by Ukraine and does not enable attacks in Russia, Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said on Thursday.

\* German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius has announced a new package of military assistance to Ukraine worth 500 million euros (\$540 million), German news agency DPA reported.

\* NATO intends to coordinate the military support for Ukraine in order to avoid earlier mistakes and delays in military supplies, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said.

\* Denmark will allow Ukraine to use its F-16 fighter jets to strike targets in Russia, Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen said.

#### PALESTINE

\* The increasing number of states that recognized Palestine indicates the growing tendency toward solving the Palestinian problem, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Thursday.

\* US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin discussed with his Israeli counterpart the urgent importance of opening the Rafah border crossing for the continued flow of aid, Pentagon spokesperson Pat Ryder said.

\* Israel is undermining the legitimacy of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) by characterizing it as a terrorist organization and is threatening the work of its employees, UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini said.

#### EU MEASURES AGAINST RUSSIAN ENERGY RESOURCES

\* The EU energy ministers have welcomed the proposal to create a working group on phasing out Russian energy resources, Belgian Energy Minister Tinne Van der Straeten said on Thursday.

\* Sweden is considering banning LNG imports from Russia if Hungary vetoes the ban on supplies at the EU level, Swedish Energy Minister Ebba Busch said.

#### PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN IRAN

\* Three candidates have registered to participate in the presidential election in Iran, election headquarters spokesman Mohsen Eslami said on Thursday.

\* Supreme leader of Iran representative in the Supreme National Security Council, Saeed Jalili, has registered to participate in the early presidential election, the Iranian news agency ISNA reported.

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#### Ukraine Aid Bill \$300Mln Provision Stays in US for Domestic Nuclear Research - Report

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - A \$300 million provision in the \$61 billion approved by Congress as aid to Ukraine will not go to Kiev at all but will be entirely used to advance nuclear reactors and fuels in the United States, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) said in a report on Thursday.

"According to the Department of Energy, the \$300 million appropriated for Nuclear Energy will go to support research on advanced nuclear reactors and fuels," the report said. "Department of Energy officials said that this effort was loosely related to Ukraine, in that it could support US and European energy independence from Russia, if and when advanced reactors using such fuel come online."

However, the language associated with this provision in the supplemental appropriations act did not specify that the funding must be used for activities related to Ukraine, the report said.

The Energy Department said the \$161.3 million appropriated to the National Nuclear Security Administration was allocated to three program offices to support a range of nuclear and radiological security efforts related to Ukraine, the report said.

Hundred-and-ten million dollars were allocated to the Office of Counterterrorism and Counterproliferation to support radiation detection and monitoring of Ukrainian nuclear facilities and response preparations in Ukraine to a potential nuclear or radiological incident, the report said.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission reported obligating \$832,000 to a US national laboratory to provide technical assistance to Ukraine organizations, such as Ukraine's nuclear regulatory authority, the report added.

This included modeling the performance of US nuclear fuels in Ukraine nuclear reactors to enable them to be less dependent on Russian fuel, according to the report.

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#### New York Jury Reaches Decision in Trump 'Hush Money' Trial - Correspondent

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - A jury in New York reached a decision in the so-called "hush money" trial involving former President Donald Trump, a Sputnik correspondent at the courthouse reported on Thursday.

The court will soon read the jury's verdict on whether Trump is guilty of falsifying business records to cover up an alleged affair with adult film actress Stormy Daniels. The jury began deliberations on Wednesday.

Trump has denied the accusations against him and characterized the case as a form of election interference amid the 2024 US presidential race.

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Vatican Expects 'Uncontrollable Escalation' if Ukraine Allowed to Strike Russia – Reports

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) – The Holy See believes that allowing Ukraine to strike Russian territory with NATO-supplied weapons could lead to an “uncontrollable escalation,” Italy’s ANSA news agency reported on Thursday.

Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin said everyone should be worried by the prospects of escalation resulting from giving Ukraine the authorization to strike Russia with NATO-supplied weapons, the report said.

“This could entail an escalation that no one will be able to control any longer,” he said according to the report. That is a very “disquieting prospect,” Parolin added.

The Holy See is currently working at the humanitarian level on the return of Ukrainian children to Ukraine, the report said. The mechanism was launched by Cardinal Matteo Zupp whose visit to Kiev and Moscow is reportedly “bearing fruit.”

Earlier in the week, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg confirmed he was in favor of lifting restrictions on the use of Western weapons on “legitimate targets” on Russian territory.

US media reported on Thursday that President Joe Biden has quietly lifted restrictions on Ukraine using US-supplied weapons to strike inside Russian territory, but only in areas bordering the Kharkiv region.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said that Moscow is following the statements on strikes inside its territory after several countries currently supplying weapons to Ukraine began endorsing the idea. He warned that NATO countries should be aware of what they are playing with.

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Biden Secretly Allows Ukrainian Strikes in Russia Using US Weapons - Politico

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has secretly permitted Ukraine to use US-supplied weapons to strike inside Russia, but only near Kharkiv, Politico reported on Thursday.

"The president recently directed his team to ensure that Ukraine is able to use US weapons for counter-fire purposes in Kharkiv so Ukraine can hit back at Russian forces hitting them or preparing to hit them," the report quoted a US official as saying.

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Harris Says America Won Control of Sky in Normandy 80 Years Ago, Has Kept it Ever Since

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - The United States secured its "dominance in the air" 80 years ago during the Normandy landings and "has kept it ever since," demonstrating its "unmatched superiority" in conflicts in the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan, Vice President Kamala Harris said during the Air Force Academy graduation on Thursday.

"Eighty years ago, over the beaches of Normandy, America won control of the sky and has kept it ever since. From air-to-air combat over the Korean Peninsula to providing close air support in Vietnam, from our dominance in Desert Storm and the Balkans to Iraq and Afghanistan, America's record of air and space superiority has been unmatched and unbroken. And today our allies are in awe and our adversaries are in fear because of America's dominance in the air," Harris said.

The world sees it on NATO's eastern flank where "our air patrols deter" Russia in Ukraine, which receives supplies of US weapons amid the ongoing conflict with Russia, in the Indo-Pacific where the US presence "ensures a free and open region," and in the Middle East where US air and space forces alongside allies "mounted an unprecedented defense" of Israel to repel Iran's retaliatory attack last month, Harris stated.

Speaking of the D-Day's 80th anniversary, she highlighted exclusively the role of the United States.

"That shining moment of allied bravery and sacrifice was made possible because of America's air power. In the months leading up to the landings, it was our pilots, our planes and our air crews that knocked the enemy from the skies. It was America's forces in the air that bombed train tracks and fuel depots to prevent Nazi reinforcements from reaching the front line and helped defeat tyranny and fascism in Europe," Harris said.

US President Joe Biden claimed earlier this month that it was the US armed forces that saved the world from Nazism and freed Europe in World War II, without mentioning the role of the Soviet Union in defeating Nazi Germany.

Russian Ambassador to the US Anatoly Antonov told Sputnik that the United States tends to progressively overestimate its own role in the victory over Nazi Germany in World War II and diminish the role of the Soviet Union and the other allies.

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Biden Secretly Allows Ukrainian Strikes in Russia Using US Weapons - Politico

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has secretly permitted Ukraine to use US-supplied weapons to strike inside Russia, but only near Kharkiv, Politico reported on Thursday.

"The president recently directed his team to ensure that Ukraine is able to use US weapons for counter-fire purposes in Kharkiv so Ukraine can hit back at Russian forces hitting them or preparing to hit them," the report quoted a US official as saying.

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## UN Not Making Contingency Plans for Peacekeeping Operations in Gaza - Official

UNITED NATIONS, May 30 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is not making contingency plans for a potential peacekeeping operation in Gaza due to the sensitivity of the topic, even though some states have expressed a desire for UN peacekeepers in Palestinian territories, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix said on Thursday. "Planning is always something explicit, planning is always something sensitive that has implications. So we don't do planning, but that doesn't prevent us from being aware that, you know, there is some attention that is paid by some member states, a group of member states, to that possibility," Lacroix told journalists at the United Nations.

Peacekeeping has to be based on an agreement between the parties, as well as a decision by the UN Security Council, he said.

Earlier this month, the League of Arab States called for the deployment of United Nations peacekeepers in Gaza and the West Bank before a two-state solution is implemented to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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## Austin May Discuss With China Counterpart Issues Related to Philippines, Taiwan - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and his Chinese counterpart Admiral Dong Jun may discuss during a meeting on Friday issues related to China's activities around several Philippine islands and Taiwan, Pentagon Deputy Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said on Thursday.

"Of course, issues that you raise, whether it be activities around some of the Philippine Islands, around Taiwan, that's of course something that I would expect to be discussed," Singh said during a press briefing when asked about the potential topics of discussion.

The US and Chinese defense leaders will meet on the sidelines of the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore being held May 31 to June 2.

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## Pentagon Says No Change in Ukraine Weapons-Use Policy, Does Not Enable Attacks in Russia

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - The United States has not changed its policies on the use of US-provided weapons by Ukraine and does not enable attacks in Russia, Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said on Thursday.

"There's been no change in our policy," Singh said during a press briefing, when asked whether the Pentagon is considering loosening weapons restrictions on Ukraine.

US security assistance is intended to be used within Ukraine, Singh said. The US neither encourages nor enables attacks inside Russia, Singh said.

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pentagon on whether us might ease restrictions on use of US weapons on russian territory: no change in policy, weapons can only be used within ukraine

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US Inflation Likely Won't Hit 2% Target Until 2026 - New York Fed's Williams

NEW YORK, May 30 (Sputnik) - The much-emphasized US inflation target of 2% per annum is unlikely to be reached until 2026, the central bank's chief for New York John Williams said Thursday.

"I forecast inflation to reach 2% in early 2026," Williams said in a speech to the Economic Club of New York. "I don't feel [any] urgency to act on monetary policy [in the interim]."

The Fed intends to bring US 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 Consumer Price Index (CPI), a key inflation indicator for US inflation, 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.

Williams underscored the central bank's position on inflation on Thursday by saying he did not know when the Fed will make a change to its monetary policy.

But he offered some hope to those betting on a cut not-too-far down the road.

"At some point interest rates will need to come down," Williams said. "We don't need to be exactly at 2% to cut rates. The economy is doing really well."

US gross domestic product grew at an annual rate of 1.3% in the first quarter, according to a second reading released on Thursday by the government on economic performance between the January to March period. The prior reading, released on April 25, showed a 1.6% gain due to an outsized estimate on consumer spending, the Commerce Department said.

The Fed has an opportunity to review interest 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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## US Does Not Assess Returning Nuclear Weapons to Indo-Pacific as Necessary – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) – The United States is not considering deploying its nuclear weapons to the Indo-Pacific region or the Korean peninsula at this time, US State Department deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Thursday.

"The US does not assess returning nuclear weapons to the Indo-Pacific as necessary at this time and the US has no plans to deploy nuclear weapons to the Korean peninsula," Patel said during a press briefing.

Earlier on Thursday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in an interview with Sputnik that Russia, in addition to abandoning its unilateral moratorium on the deployment of shorter- and intermediate-range missiles, may take measures in nuclear deterrence if the United States deploys such missiles in Europe or the Asia-Pacific region, but the decision is up to President Vladimir Putin.

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## Canadian Court Dismisses Appeal to Enforce \$76M In Ruling on Iran Over Flight PS752 Downing

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - The Supreme Court of Canada on Thursday dismissed an appeal from Flight PS752 victims' families trying to enforce a C\$107 million (\$76.3 million) judgment against Iran on grounds that Iranian property in Canada enjoys diplomatic immunity.

"The motion judge dismissed the applicants' request finding that the Iranian property continued to enjoy diplomatic immunity under Canadian law. The appeal was dismissed," the Supreme Court said in release.

The applicants comprised estates and family members of victims who died after the Iran Revolutionary Guard Corps downed Ukrainian Airlines Flight PS752 over Tehran on January 8, 2020, the release said.

Applicants had obtained a default judgment against Iran for C\$107 million plus interests and costs in May 2021, the release said. Applicants later moved to enforce the judgment against some of Iranian properties and bank accounts in Canada, the release added.

The PS752 incident claimed the lives of all 167 passengers on board the airplane - mostly Canadian and Iranian citizens - and nine Ukrainian crew members.

Iran admitted that the plane had been mistakenly shot down by its military, which mistook it for a cruise missile at a time when Iran's air defenses were active following strikes on a US military base in Iraq.

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## FAA Says Will Not Approve Boeing 737 MAX Production Increase Until Safety Issues Resolved

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) will not allow Boeing to increase its production of 737 MAX aircraft beyond the current cap until relevant safety issues are resolved, FAA Administrator Michael Whitaker said on Thursday.

Boeing provided the FAA with their roadmap to improve the company's safety regulations after the door plug of a Boeing 737 Max aircraft with Alaska Airlines fell off after takeoff on January 5.

"I made it clear to Boeing CEO Dave Calhoun and other senior leaders that this plan does not mark the end of our increased oversight of Boeing and its suppliers, but the beginning of the next chapter," Whitaker said during a press conference. "We will not approve production increases beyond the current cap, until we're satisfied."

To date, the FAA has permitted Boeing to produce 38 737 MAX aircraft per month.

The FAA will provide enhanced oversight of Boeing and its suppliers, including more safety inspectors, more feedback from employees to gauge the effectiveness of change, Whitaker said.

Additional inspections at critical points of the production process and monitoring metrics to identify areas of concern will also be undertaken, Whitaker added.

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Musk Says Never Discussed Potential White House Role With Trump

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - Billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk said on Thursday that he has not held discussions with former US President Donald Trump about a potential role in his administration if he wins the 2024 presidential election.

"There have not been any discussions of a role for me in a potential Trump Presidency," Musk said in a statement via social media platform X, in response to reports of such talks.

On Wednesday, US media reported that Trump and Musk discussed a potential White House advisory role for the entrepreneur.

The discussion reportedly included ways to give Musk formal influence over border security and economic policies if Trump is reelected.

In March, Musk said that he had a chance encounter with Trump while having breakfast at a friend's house. Musk said that he will not donate money to any presidential candidate in the 2024 election but could endorse a candidate late in the race.

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US Plans to Convene Meeting With Egypt, Israel on Reopening of Rafah Crossing - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - The United States is working on convening a meeting with Egyptian and Israeli officials in Cairo next week to craft a plan for the reopening of the Rafah border crossing, Axios reported on Thursday, citing US and Israeli officials.

The United States seeks a trilateral meeting that would include National Security Council Senior Director for the Middle East Terry Wolff and his delegation, a delegation from Israel and

an Egyptian delegation comprised of military and intelligence service representatives, the report said.

The meeting will reportedly focus on how to reopen the Rafah crossing without having Israeli military presence on the Palestinian side.

On Friday, US President Joe Biden spoke by telephone with Egyptian President Abdul Fattah Sisi about resuming the flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza. Aid deliveries were halted in protest to Israel's takeover of the Palestinian side of the Rafah crossing and further plans to resume them need to be worked out.

Israel is proposing that the United Nations and Palestinian representatives from Gaza without links to Hamas provide assistance while the Israeli military would redeploy outside of the crossing and protect against potential Hamas attacks.

The United States has said it wants a plan that would include a crackdown on arms smuggling by building an anti-tunnel underground wall on the border between Egypt and Gaza.

If next the meeting materializes next week, a more senior US delegation will then continue the discussion on the reopening of the Rafah crossing.

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Washington Zoo Ready for New Pandas: Hammocks, Bread Recipe, Bamboo Language

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik), Liudmila Chernova - The Smithsonian's National Zoo in Washington is actively preparing to welcome two new Chinese giant pandas later this year with their future habitat being renovated and keepers learning the eating and behavioral habits of the young bears, National Zoo director Brandie Smith told Sputnik.

A pair of Chinese giant pandas will join the National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute in Washington by the end of the year.

"It's such a thrill to be able to announce the giant pandas will be returning to the National Zoo to our nation's capital," Smith shared with Sputnik right after the announcement was made by the Chinese ambassador on Wednesday. "I was always certain in my heart that pandas would come back but it's really a testament to our relationship with our colleagues in China that we have that we're welcoming them back so quickly."

#### PREPARATIONS

The zoo is already making some changes to their habitat to "make it more fun," including putting in more climbing structures, hammocks and different ways for them to play.

The keepers are also having conversations with their counterparts in China to get to know what those pandas are like, what they like to eat and do to "make this home as happy as possible for them."

"I think that this program serves as a model - working together with our colleagues, collaborating, cooperating having a common goal, I think that this program is just a model for how we can succeed," Smith stated.

During the first 30 days the pandas will go through a quarantine process, and then they will undergo a acclimation process to the exhibits, to the routine of the keepers and the diet, Dr. James Steeil, one of the supervisory veterinarians at the Smithsonian's National Zoo, told

Sputnik.

The diet of the pandas will be nearly exactly the same as in China with one difference, which is a bread-like substance that is given to them in China.

"We will probably use a biscuit but we have the recipe for the bread to help acclimate them to our biscuit," he added.

Steil also said that the pandas rarely get stressed while flying so there is no concern about their travel.

**WHEN ARE THEY GOING TO HAVE CUBS?**

The pandas, which are expected to fly to DC by FedEx before the end of the year are male Bao Li, who is the grandson of Mei Xiang and Tian Tian, who left Washington last fall, and female Qing Bao. Both bears are two years old and will be sent under a new 10-year research and breeding agreement.

"It'll be about three or four years before they can have cubs of their own. And so we'll have time just to enjoy them before we can say when are you going to have cubs?" Smith said. "Ideally, they'll have cubs, and then those cubs will be part of the bigger breeding program in China."

Mariel Lally, giant panda keeper, has been working closely with Giant Pandas for some eight and a half years and will be working with the new duo almost every single day.

"One of the best ways [to build a relationship with the new pandas] is to use food, so it's going to be a lot of spending time feeding them their favorite foods and showing them I'm somebody that you can trust and when you come to me you get the most delicious treat," she explained. "I think that working with them so closely, it won't take very long at all."

Lally also noted that giant pandas do not really want to spend a lot of time with their keeper as they like to hang out, eat and sleep.

The future residents of the DC zoo will not have to deal with the language barrier either, as it does not matter to them what language people speak.

"Luckily, it doesn't matter. Whatever language you speak. Pandas - I like to say they speak bamboo - so luckily, what goes on with them is they know their names, their names are pronounced the same whether it's in English or in Chinese," Lally explained. "But when we do training, we use a lot of hand signals with them. If I need their paw, I'll hold my hand up and they'll be able to do that. So, we make sure that our hand signals will be similar to what they're already doing."

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US Strongly Condemns DPRK's Recent Ballistic Missile Launches – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) – The United States strongly condemns North Korea's ballistic missile test launches on May 27 and May 29 and plans to continue its efforts to disrupt the country's alleged illicit revenue generation, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Thursday.

"The United States condemns in the strongest possible terms the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) May 27 and May 29 launches using ballistic missile technology in direct violation of multiple UN Security Council resolutions," Miller said in a statement. "We will

continue to work closely with the international community to disrupt the DPRK's illicit revenue generation.”

On Monday, the state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported that North Korea unsuccessfully launched a reconnaissance satellite. The first stage of the new satellite launch vehicle exploded in mid-air during flight, and the launch ended unsuccessfully, KCNA added.

On Thursday morning local time, North Korea launched about ten short-range ballistic missiles in the direction of the East Sea and flew approximately 350 km (217 miles) before landing in water, according to South Korean media reports.

On May 20, a spokesperson for the North Korean Foreign Ministry said that the country was forced to increase its overall nuclear deterrence readiness after the United States conducted another subcritical nuclear experiment at the Nevada National Security Site.

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Oil Prices Down Again; US Stockpile Builds Whittle Optimism Over Upcoming OPEC+ Action

NEW YORK, May 30 (Sputnik) - Global oil markets fell for a second day in a row on Thursday after the US government reported large weekly builds in fuel stockpiles that offset an equally substantial crude draw and questioned energy demand in the runup to summer — the busiest time for travel in the country.

The Energy Information Administration, the data wing of the US Department of Energy, said in its Weekly Petroleum Status Report that crude oil balances fell more than 4 million barrels last week versus builds of over 2 million barrels each in gasoline and distillates. Gasoline is the No. 1 motor fuel in the United States. Distillates are primarily processed into the diesel required by trucks, buses and ships, and also go into making airplane fuel.

With two hours to the settlement of Thursday's trade, the front-month contract for US-origin West Texas Intermediate crude was down \$1.25, or 1.6%, to \$77.98 per barrel, responding to the stockpiles data. On Wednesday, the US crude benchmark fell 0.8%. The combined losses have almost wiped out gains from the first two trading days of this week, boosted by talk of extended output cuts this summer by global oil producing alliance OPEC+.

UK-origin Brent crude, the global benchmark for oil, was down \$1.21, or 1.5%, to \$82.22 per barrel. The global crude benchmark fell 0.7% in the prior session. The combined losses leave Brent with a gain of just about 0.2% on the week.

Oil traders are awaiting a June 2 OPEC+ meeting which is expected to reinforce the alliance's plan to cut 2.2 million barrels per day in output through September. OPEC+ groups the 13-member Saudi-led Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries with 10 other oil producing nations steered by Russia. While the alliance is an important component of the bullish market psyche for oil, analysts say demand — in terms of the crude barrels processed by refiners and the actual fuel used by consumers — will be the ultimate arbiter of price.

“Prices are weaker despite a larger-than-expected draw in crude stocks,” Scott Shelton, an energy futures broker at ICAP in Durham, North Carolina, said, referring to the Weekly Petroleum Status Report. “Bottom line is that the optics of oil look pretty terrible here ... we are just in front of an OPEC meeting where they are expected to do very little [in further tightening

supply].”

The petroleum status report for the week ended May 24 showed US crude balances fell by 4.156 million barrels, after a prior weekly build of 1.825 million. Energy analysts on Wall Street had anticipated a drop of 1.6 million barrels.

Gasoline stockpiles rose by 2.022 million barrels during that week — more than double the prior weekly draw of 945,000 and the 1.0 million barrel build forecast by Wall Street.

Distillates showed a 2.544 million barrel build — adding to the prior weekly build of 379,000 — and way above the anticipated rise of 400,000.

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Middle East Integration Hard to Talk About Without Israel-Saudi Relationship - US Official

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - Saudi-Israeli peace remains crucial to the Biden administration's broader efforts to integrate the Middle East and connect it to neighboring regions, President for Energy and Investment Amos Hochstein said on Thursday.

"There is no doubt that its hard to talk about true integration of the region without the Israeli-Saudi relationship as Saudi is such as just physically large and critically important and influential country in the Gulf and beyond," Hochstein said.

The absence of peace deal between the two countries would leave a "gaping hole" in the administration's vision of an integrated region and would scuttle initiatives such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), Hochstein said.

IMEC, is a proposed ship and rail corridor that would connect India and Europe via the Middle East, including the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Israel and Greece.

The governments of India, the US, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, France, Germany and Italy signed a memorandum of understanding on IMEC during the 2023 G20 summit in New Delhi.

Hochstein said the corridor would lay the ground to allow the region to generate enormous amounts of revenue through green electricity, green hydrogen and other products and services.

"I think that is still on the table," he said, adding that the current peace talks with Saudi Arabia are "within that vision."

Earlier in May, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the Biden administration could finalize within weeks an agreement to normalize relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel.

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

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Печенье, гамаки и "бамбуковый язык": зоопарк Вашингтона в ожидании панд из Китая

ВАШИНГТОН, 30 мая - РИА Новости. Зоопарк Вашингтона готовится к долгожданному возвращению панд из Китая после многомесячного перерыва: для двух бамбуковых медведей - Бао Ли и Цин Бао - в американской столице обустраивают вольеры, учатся

печь специальный хлеб и вовсю вспоминают "бамбуковый" язык, рассказали РИА Новости представители зоопарка.

На фоне сложностей в двусторонних отношениях США и КНР Пекин решил не продлевать "арендные" соглашения на содержание панд с рядом американских зоопарков, из-за чего к началу 2024 года зоопарки в Штатах остались без бамбуковых медведей. В американской столице, к примеру, отбытие на родину "черно-белого трио" переживали особо тяжело: любимчиков города Мэйсян, Тяньтянь и их детеныша Сяо Цици провожали сотни Вашингтонцев под мощное информационное сопровождение мировых СМИ.

Накануне Смитсоновский национальный зоопарк объявил: две гигантские панды - самец Бао Ли и самка Цин Бао - приедут в американскую столицу до конца года. Первая леди США Джилл Байден окрестила возвращение панд "историческим событием".

Директор Вашингтонского зоопарка Брэнди Смит, комментируя РИА Новости предстоящее возвращение панд в американскую столицу, отметила, что к новому визиту черно-белых медведей активно готовятся, внося "некоторые изменения", чтобы сделать их условия проживания веселее: "мы устанавливаем больше конструкций для лазания и гамаков, а также различные способы для их игр".

"Я так счастлива, это так волнующе - иметь возможность объявить, что гигантские панды вернутся в Национальный зоопарк столицы нашей страны", - поделилась Смит.

Смит отметила, что представители зоопарка уже знакомятся с пандами ближе: в ходе дискуссий с китайскими коллегами узнают о любимых лакомствах и занятиях животных.

Один из ветеринаров Национального зоопарка Джеймс Стил рассказал РИА Новости, что в первый месяц по прибытии панд будет ждать карантин, а затем - акклиматизация к распорядку дня и зрителям.

"Они молоды, они активны, и поэтому нам придется познакомиться с ними поближе", - отметил он.

Стил при этом добавил, что рацион панд в США будет почти таким же, как и в Китае, но с одним исключением - из него уберут хлеб, которым животных угощают в Поднебесной.

"Мы, вероятно, будем использовать печенье, но у нас есть рецепт приготовления хлеба (которым панд кормят в КНР - ред.), который поможет им привыкнуть к нашему печенью", - подчеркнул он.

Смотрительница панд в зоопарке столицы США Мариэль Лалли в беседе с корреспондентом агентства отметила, что пандам не придется привыкать к английскому языку для коммуникации с сотрудниками зоопарка.

"Я не беспокоюсь о каком-либо языковом барьере... К счастью, это не имеет значения. На каком бы языке вы ни говорили. Панды... они говорят на "бамбуковом" (языке - ред.)", - отметила Лалли.

Большая панда - неофициальный символ Китая. Всего в мире насчитывается 1,6 тысячи панд, из которых в неволе за пределами Китая живут только около трех десятков. КНР практикует так называемую "дипломатию панд", периодически рассылая их в разные страны. Панды при этом продолжают считаться собственностью Китая так же, как и их потомство.

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Most Americans View Ukraine-Russia Conflict as Stalemate - Poll

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - Most voters in the United States believe that the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is essentially a stalemate, a new Rasmussen Reports poll revealed on Thursday.

A plurality of respondents (48%) believe that the conflict in Ukraine is currently at a stalemate, the poll report said.

Thirteen percent (13%) of respondents believe that Ukraine is winning, down from 16% in March, the poll report also said.

Twenty-three percent (23%) of respondents believe that Russia is winning, the poll report added.

The poll surveyed 1,096 likely US voters on May 23, 26-27. The poll maintains a margin of error of plus-or-minus three percentage points with a 95% confidence level.

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No Time to Wait on Syria Crisis Given Threat of Spillover From Gaza - UN Official

UNITED NATIONS, May 30 (Sputnik) - The international community cannot wait to make progress on the Syria crisis amid the threat of a spillover from the Gaza conflict, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths said on Thursday.

"But we cannot wait for the next cataclysm to make genuine progress toward ending this catastrophe - not least as the economic crisis deepens and as regional tensions from the war in Gaza threaten to spill across the region," Griffiths said in the UN Security Council meeting on Syria.

Griffiths said he urges all parties to the conflict in Syria to engage with UN Special Envoy for Syria Gair Pedersen on reaching a political settlement.

Syria has been torn by civil war since 2011 after the US-led collective West tried to topple the government of Syrian President Bashar Assad and aided various opposition as well as extremist groups.

Parts of Syria's oil wells are controlled by US troops, which are in the country illegally since 2016 under the pretext of fighting terrorists, and their allied militants.

The Syrian government has repeatedly said the presence of the US - and Turkish - troops in Syria is an act of military aggression and has demanded that they leave the country.

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## US Sanctions 2 Companies in Central African Republic Over Links to Wagner - Treasury

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) – The US Treasury announced Thursday that it is sanctioning two companies based in the Central African Republic that are allegedly linked to private military company Wagner Group, according to a release.

"Today, the Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) continues to counter Russia's destabilizing activities in Africa by sanctioning two companies that are linked to the Private Military Company 'Wagner' (Wagner Group)," the release stated.

The companies Mining Industries SARLU and Logistique Economique Etrangere SARLU are being sanctioned for purportedly enabling Wagner security operations and "Wagner-linked illicit mining endeavors" in the African country.

Prior to his death, Wagner chief logistician Valery Chekalov used Mining Industries to lease aircraft from Kratol Aviation, a UAE-based aviation company, the release said. OFAC designated Kratol last year. Wagner also uses aircraft leased by Mining Industries to move personnel and equipment through CAR and elsewhere in Africa, according to the Treasury.

In 2021, Logistique Economique Etrangere received hundreds of shipments of heavy materials from Limited Liability Company Broker Expert, a Russia-based company linked to Yevgeny Prigozhin that has supported Russian interests in Ukraine and throughout Africa, the Treasury said. OFAC designated Broker Expert in March.

Moscow has never meddled in Africa or tried to squeeze Western countries out of there, while African leaders themselves want to work with Russia, President Vladimir Putin said in a March interview to Rossiya Segodnya Director General Dmitry Kiselev for the Rossiya 1 broadcaster and RIA Novosti.

The Russian Defense Ministry had supported the Wagner Group as an organization from Russia and nothing more, Putin noted.

Putin also previously said that the Wagner Group does not exist in a legal sense since there is no law in Russia relating to private military companies.

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## UN Remains Open to Alternative Venues for Talks on Syrian Political Settlement - Official

UNITED NATIONS, May 30 (Sputnik) - The United Nations remains open to any alternative venues to discuss a political settlement in Syria, UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen said on Thursday.

"I remain open to any alternative venue that secures the agreement of both Syrian parties," Pedersen said during a UN Security Council meeting on the situation in Syria.

Pedersen said reaching a political settlement in Syria would require honesty, integrity and respect for all.

The United Nations proposed earlier this year Nairobi as a venue for negotiations of the Syrian Constitutional Committee but no agreement has been reached on the matter.

In June 2022, Russia suggested that a new venue should be chosen for meetings of the Syrian Constitutional Committee after Switzerland lost its impartiality and neutral status.

Syria has been in a state of conflict since 2011 after the US-led collective West tried to topple the government of Syrian President Bashar Assad.

Parts of Syria's oil wells are controlled by US troops, which are in the country illegally since 2016 under the pretext of fighting terrorists, and their allied militants.

The Syrian government has repeatedly said the presence of the US - and Turkish - troops in Syria is an act of military aggression and has demanded that they leave the country.

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Majority of Arab Americans in Key US States Oppose Biden Approach to Gaza Conflict - Poll

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - A significant majority of Arab Americans in key electoral states hold a negative view of President Joe Biden's handling of the conflict between Israel and Palestinian group Hamas in the Gaza Strip, a new Arab American Institute (AAI) poll revealed on Thursday.

AAI surveyed 900 Arab American voters in four key states for the 2024 US presidential election - Florida, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Virginia. The states were selected based on their sizable Arab American voter base and their close results in presidential contests, the poll report said.

Eighty-eight percent (88%) of respondents hold a negative view of Biden's handling of the conflict between Israel and Hamas, including "overwhelming" majorities across all party identifications, the poll report said.

Biden holds 8% support among Arab Americans in Florida, 15% in Michigan, 22% in Virginia and 29% in Pennsylvania. Overall, Biden holds 18% support among respondents, compared to 32% support for former US President Donald Trump, the poll report said.

One-quarter of respondents (25%) are not sure who they would vote for and 12% would vote for independent presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr, the poll report added.

The poll surveyed the respondents from April 9 to May 11. The poll maintains a margin of error of plus-or-minus 3.3 percentage points with a 95% confidence interval.

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US Can Not Lift Sanctions on Syria Absent Progress on Political Resolution - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, May 30 (Sputnik) - The United States cannot consider lifting the sanctions it has imposed on Syria due to a lack of progress on establishing a political settlement in the country, US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said on Thursday.

"Absent authentic and enduring progress toward a political resolution of the conflict, we cannot consider lifting US sanctions," Thomas-Greenfield said during a UN Security Council meeting on the situation in Syria.

The United States is worried that Syrian president Bashar Assad has allowed Iranian aligned

militia groups to operate in the country, while Iran provides these militias with advanced weapons systems.

Syria has been torn by civil war since 2011 after the US-led collective West tried to topple the government of Syrian President Bashar Assad.

Parts of Syria's oil wells are controlled by US troops, which are in the country illegally since 2016 under the pretext of fighting terrorists, and their allied militants.

The Syrian government has repeatedly said the presence of the US - and Turkish - troops in Syria is an act of military aggression and has demanded that they leave the country.

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#### Russia Says Concerned US Draft Bill Against Assad to Affect Syria's Most Needy Citizens

UNITED NATIONS, May 30 (Sputnik) - Russia is very concerned that the latest US draft bill stipulating imposing additional sanctions on Syria would first and foremost negatively affect the neediest Syrian citizens, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Dmitry Chumakov said on Thursday.

"We are greatly concerned about the progress of a new inhumane draft sanctions bill in the United States, titled The Assad Regime Normalization Act, which if adopted, would once again affect Syria's most needy citizens first and foremost," Chumakov said. "In this context, the publication of a special United Nations report on the impact of sanctions on humanitarian activities in Syria remains highly relevant."

Chumakov made the statement during a meeting on the UN Security Council on the situation in Syria.

The Russian diplomat said it is important to realize that 16.7 million Syrians require humanitarian assistance because the continued conflict driven by the West's geopolitical goals.

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#### Kiev Scheduled Swiss Summit Despite Being Told Biden Might Not Be Able to Attend - Reports

(Adds details, background in paras 3-7)

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - Ukraine proceeded with scheduling the Switzerland peace conference for June 15-16 even though Washington told Kiev that US President Joe Biden might not be able to attend it amid raised tensions between allies, the Financial Times reported on Thursday, citing US and Ukrainian officials.

Relations between Kiev and Washington have deteriorated significantly in recent months amid the successes of Russian troops on the battlefield, as well as disagreements over attacks on Russian territory, including Ukraine's attempts to target radars that are part of Russia's nuclear deterrence.

"We are farther apart than ever since the war started. It is very, very tense," the report quoted a senior Ukrainian official as saying.

Earlier this week, the office of Volodymyr Zelenskyy circulated an internal memo that instructs Ukrainian officials and members of the parliament to criticize Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping for not attending the summit, the report said.

Nevertheless, the United States and Ukraine are still on track to sign a new bilateral security agreement similar to the one Kiev has signed with 12 of its allies since the start of the year, including the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Canada and Finland, according to the report.

The security agreement has been in the works for weeks now and is expected to be signed by Biden and Zelenskyy during the upcoming G7 summit in Italy on June 13-15, the report added.

Switzerland will host a peace conference on Ukraine not far off from the city of Lucerne. Russia will not participate, but 120 heads of state are expected to attend. In April, the spokesman for the Russian Embassy in Bern, Vladimir Khokhlov, told Sputnik that Switzerland had not invited Russia to the summit, adding that Moscow was not planning to participate in the event even if invited.

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US Senator Menendez Secured Signatures to Run as Independent Amid Bribery Case - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - Democratic US Senator Bob Menendez obtained enough signatures to run as an independent in the 2024 Senate race amid a federal bribery trial, NBC News reported on Thursday.

Menendez requires 800 signatures by June 4 to secure ballot access but hopes to gather some 10,000 signatures by then, the report said, citing sources familiar with the matter.

Menendez faces 16 criminal charges for alleged crimes including bribery, wire fraud, acting as a foreign agent and obstruction of justice. Menendez has pleaded not guilty to the charges against him.

Prosecutors allege that Menendez received bribes in exchange for using his authority to assist the Qatari government and benefit Egypt. Prosecutors also accuse Menendez's wife of engaging in a scheme to return the alleged bribe money under the guise of loan repayment.

Menendez believes he has unfinished business in Washington and does not want his political legacy to end with a criminal trial, the report said, adding that he is not going down without a fight.

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US Defense Intel Agency Accuses Russia of Using DPRK Ballistic Missiles in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) alleged on Thursday that Russia had used ballistic missiles produced in North Korea during the Ukraine conflict, based on debris analysis.

"Analysis confirms that Russia used ballistic missiles produced in North Korea in its war against Ukraine. North Korean missile debris was found throughout Ukraine," the DIA said in a statement.

An unclassified report released today by the DIA and based on an analysis of open-source imagery allegedly confirms that debris found in Kharkov, also known as Kharkiv, on January 2, 2024, is from a DPRK short-range missile.

"The report provides a comparative analysis of publicly available images of North Korean missile debris and known North Korean missiles. The report shows that the missile debris in Ukraine is almost certainly of a North Korean ballistic missile," the statement said.

Russia has repeatedly dismissed media reports and US claims that Moscow is using North Korean missiles to attack targets in Ukraine. The United States has not provided to date any evidence supporting its claims.

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Kiev Scheduled Swiss Summit Despite Being Told Biden Might Not Be Able to Attend - Reports

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Musk Agrees to Testify on SEC Probe Into Deal to Acquire Twitter - Court Document

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - US billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk has agreed to testify in the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) investigation into his disclosures of the 2022 acquisition of Twitter (later renamed to X) stock, a court document said on Thursday.

"Respondent shall appear in person for testimony at one of four specified SEC offices identified by respondent on the date and time agreed upon in writing by the parties," the document said.

The date for Musk's testimony has not been scheduled yet, but the parties agreed that any changes can be done only upon written consent of the SEC or order of the court, the document also said.

Musk agreed that he would not seek delay or rescheduling of his testimony, the document added.

In mid-May, a US court sided with the SEC's efforts to compel Musk to provide new testimony related to his \$44 billion deal to acquire Twitter.

Musk has already provided the SEC with new documents related to his purchase of Twitter, but the SEC has said it is now looking into whether Musk violated federal securities laws when he acquired the social media platform.

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Pentagon Watchdog Says Ukraine, US Forces in Syria Received Non-Mission Capable Equipment

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - US forces in Syria and the Ukrainian military received non-mission capable equipment due to poor execution of storage and maintenance requirements by a contractor at a US military base in Kuwait, the Defense Department Office of Inspector General said in a report on Thursday.

"The Army did not effectively manage contractor execution of the storage, maintenance and accountability of APS-5 [Army Prepositioned Stock-5] equipment," the report said. "401st AFSBn-Kuwait [401st Army Field Support Battalion - Kuwait] officials issued non-mission capable equipment designated for Ukraine and military units in Syria."

Defense Department officials selected 57 pieces of equipment for inspection and found that 25 of them - 24 vehicles and one weapon - were defective and non-mission capable due to at least one maintenance deficiency, the report said.

The report also said that the APS-5 contractor failed to protect 5,885 pieces of equipment, or more than 10% of all equipment stored there, and to account for 51 weapons and other sensitive items between November 2021 and January 2023.

The inspection also identified 50 questionable contractor invoices for a total of nearly \$134 million that the Office of Inspector General recommended to be verified by the Defense Contract Audit Agency, the report added.

In 2023, the Office of Inspector General found that the same storage facility in Kuwait delayed the delivery of 29 Humvee vehicles and six M777 howitzers because the equipment was non-mission capable and required extensive maintenance.

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## Macron Pressured Trudeau to Relieve Airbus From Sanctions on Russian Titanium - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - French President Emmanuel Macron intervened on behalf of Airbus to persuade Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to issue a sanction waiver on Russian titanium used by the aircraft manufacturer, Reuters reported on Thursday.

In late April, media reported that Airbus had been granted a waiver by Canada permitting it to utilize Russian titanium in its manufacturing after the country banned the metal in one of its sanctions packages related to the conflict in Ukraine.

In a phone-call held in late March, the French president reportedly made significant efforts to persuade Trudeau in granting a sanctions exemption on several European aerospace firms, the report said, citing a source close to Macron's entourage. The message was reportedly passed at "all levels."

Macron contacted Trudeau ahead of French Prime Minister Gabriel Attal's visit to Canada and the latter also addressed the issue with Trudeau.

The request was made after Canada imposed the sanctions, which prompted great concerns at Airbus and other firms still relying on Russian titanium supplies for their plants in Canada and elsewhere.

Canada stood firm in the initial phases of dialogue, but it soon changed its stance and allowed the sanctions waiver for Airbus and other firms. The outcome would likely not have been possible were it not for Macron or Attal intervening in the matter, according to the report.

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## New York Official Plausibly Violated 1st Amendment to Suppress Gun Advocacy - SCOTUS

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court (SCOTUS) said on Thursday that the former superintendent of the New York Financial Services Department may have violated the First Amendment of the US Constitution by coercing entities to cut ties with the National Rifle Association (NRA) gun advocacy group.

The NRA sued the official, Maria Vullo, for allegedly coercing entities regulated by the state government to punish or suppress the group's gun advocacy.

"Held: The NRA plausibly alleged that respondent violated the First Amendment by coercing regulated entities to terminate their business relationships with the NRA in order to punish or suppress gun-promotion advocacy," the US Supreme Court said in a ruling.

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

The First Amendment prohibits government officials from relying on the threat of invoking legal sanctions and other means of coercion to achieve the suppression of disfavored speech, the ruling said.

A circuit court previously concluded that Vullo's actions were permissible government speech and legitimate enforcement action. However, the US Supreme Court vacated and remanded the

decision.

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Inviting Russia to D-Day Event Does Not Preclude Extreme Disagreement - Trudeau

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) – Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Thursday that it is important to recognize all countries involved in defeating Nazism, but it does not preclude extreme disagreements with Russia over the conflict in Ukraine.

Trudeau made the remarks in reply to a question on whether he felt uncomfortable about French authorities allegedly inviting Russian officials to D-Day commemorations next week.

"As we commemorate the victory over fascism and Nazism in World War Two, it's important to recognize all the countries that were involved, but that does not preclude our extreme disagreement with the endangering of people around the world and indeed of the rules-based order that the current Russian regime is involved in," Trudeau said.

In mid-April, French media reported that the organizers of the commemoration ceremony for the 80th anniversary of the Normandy landings had invited Russia to attend.

Moscow still has not received an invitation from France to participate in the D-Day celebrations, the Russian Foreign Ministry said last week.