

6/3/24 Monday

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European Gas Price Hits Highest This Year Following Norway Outage

The price rose more than 13% - its highest since early December.

On [Monday](#), Europe's gas price jumped to its highest level this year. The price jump follows a sharp decline of Norwegian gas exports to Europe after the shutdown of the offshore Sleipner hub which halted operations at the Nyhamna onshore processing plant, Gassco said.

A crack was discovered in a two-inch pipeline onboard Norway's offshore Sleipner Riser Platform, said Gassco. While the crack is not considered dangerous, it remains unknown how long the repair will take. The skyrocketing cost of gas highlights the "increasingly pivotal nature" of Norwegian supplies after Europe rejected its use of Russian imports, the [Financial Times](#) reported.

While Nyhamna is able to process up to 79.8 mcm per day, the shutdown has resulted in a loss of 56.7 mcm as of Monday, said [Alfred Hansen](#), the head of pipeline system operations at Gassco.

"The field operator will give us a more accurate estimate for how long it could take to repair, and we will then update our forecasts accordingly," Hansen said.

Since departing from Russian imports, Norway is now the single largest supplier of natural gas to Europe and made up 30% of the continent's supplies last year. While the price increase is sharp, Europe had a reportedly "comfortable" level of gas in storage with EU sites being more than 70% full as of Saturday which is the second-highest level on record for this time of year, the Financial Times reported.

"Even before the eruption of the Ukraine conflict, Norway was the second-largest gas supplier to the EU after Russia. Gazprom was the king of gas supplies to the EU, particularly the EU's largest economy, Germany," Dr. Mamdouh Salameh, an international oil economist and a global energy expert, told Sputnik in May.

"It is an acknowledged historical fact that Europe's economies, particularly Germany's, have been built since the 1970s on cheap and plentiful Russian piped gas until the US conned and pressured the EU to impose sanctions on Russia and ban its oil and gas exports," Salameh added.

The price surge has highlighted the "fragility of the European gas market and increased overreliance on a smaller pool of supply sources", said Wayne Bryan, director of European gas research at LSEG. "Until storages close in on EU-mandated levels, European gas prices will remain elevated, vulnerable and exposed to heightened price volatility from any disruption in supply."

The Financial Times adds that Asia is also depending on liquefied natural gas as a heatwave has raised the continent's demand, forcing Europe to compete for LNG cargoes. But before the Ukraine war, Russian energy officials estimated that US LNG supplies were already 40 - 50% more expensive than Russian pipeline gas deliveries.

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A Foreign Policy Bungle 'Killing Tens of Thousands'

While the US has framed the potential ceasefire deal as an Israeli proposal, Israeli officials are now trying to distance themselves from that narrative. Ophir Falk, Netanyahu's top foreign policy advisor, said there would not be a ceasefire until all of Israel's "objectives" are met.

A senior Israeli official [reportedly](#) said on Monday that US President Joe Biden's description of Israel's ceasefire proposal was "not accurate" and claimed that Biden had only announced a partial version of the ceasefire plan in his speech on Friday. The [official](#) said they did not agree to fully withdraw their troops from the Gaza Strip, adding that they would only do so once their "objectives are met including destroying Hamas' military and governing capabilities".

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's own government is also pressuring him to reject the proposed plan, with Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir threatening to resign should the prime minister accept the proposed deal. [Hamas](#) released a statement and said they viewed the proposed plan "positively" while a senior US official said the proposal is nearly identical to one which Hamas accepted from Egypt the same day Israel launched its attack on Rafah.

Both the Israeli official, and National Security Council Spokesman John Kirby have argued about where the plans for the ceasefire had originated, with the US and Israel accusing the other of concocting the ceasefire plans. Robert Fantina, a Palestine activist, author and journalist joined [Sputnik's The Critical Hour](#) to discuss the rampant miscommunication between the Western allies.

"Biden made the announcement, announced the potential deal, saying that he got the information and got the terms of the deal from Israeli officials. Now, the Israelis are saying, no," said Fantina. "So, Biden, of course, is desperate to bring this genocide to a close because throughout the US people are blaming him for it, as they should. He has financed it."

"And, he's up for reelection in just six months. So, it might have been a political speech and he's trying to appease the people who are anti-genocide, in the US there are a lot of them, especially the young people whose votes he needs," the journalist and author added. "But the idea that he said he got it from Israel and Israel is just saying this is not a deal that we agreed to, it also may say something about Joe Biden's cognitive abilities at this point."

"And as they bungle their way through, they're killing tens of thousands of people in the process," Fantina added. "But this is a time for statesmanship, for diplomacy and for positive action and neither Biden nor Netanyahu is up to that job."

Sputnik's Garland Nixon then suggested that this miscommunication between the US and its ally could be a sign of "complete dysfunction not only in the Biden administration" but in the relationship between the governing powers of the US and Israel.

"Biden seems to be caught between a rock and a hard place between coming down the right side of history, coming down to the side of international law, justice and human rights, and also appeasing Israel and the Israeli lobbies. So he's struggling for some kind of foothold that's going to give it some credibility and as has been the case for the last several months, he's failing," said Fantina.

"Israel has said the war will last at least another seven months, which takes us past the next election. People aren't going to forget. They've seen horrific, horrific pictures of burned and mutilated children, body parts, of children starving to death," he added. "These are not things they're going to forget about very soon, especially, as you mentioned, the under 30 [years of age] group that's very politically attuned, very politically active and they are rejecting Biden by huge numbers today."

"[That] doesn't mean they're going to vote for Trump, but there are third-party candidates that they can vote for," Fantina added. "Those candidates don't have a chance of winning due to the way the US elections are set up. But, it's a protest vote. You voted for the lesser of two evils when it doesn't seem as there's much difference to them. Why vote for evil at all?"

On Sunday, it was reported that Smotrich had threatened Palestinians in the West Bank by telling them that their cities could turn "into ruins" like those in Gaza, according to an [article](#) published to Antiwar.com. The finance minister said in Hebrew: "Our message to the neighbors beyond the fence in Tulkarem, Nur Shams, Shuweika, and Qalqilya: We will turn you into ruined cities like in the Gaza Strip if the terror you are exerting on the settlements continues."

[Rohan Talbot](#), a director of advocacy and campaigns for the UK-based Medical Aid for Palestinians said to take Smotrich's threats "seriously" and claimed that "refugee camps and Area C communities" have already fallen under attack. Since October 7, Israeli forces have killed over 500 Palestinians in the West Bank.

"Smotrich's threat is shocking. How can any world leader outside of Israel hear that and continue to support the Israeli government? This is horrifying, not only for the people in the West Bank, but the people of Lebanon, in Yemen and all surrounding areas, which are going to get involved in this," Fantina responded.

"Saudi Arabia has wanted to normalize relations with Israel based on a Palestinian state. But, if Israel is going to slaughter the people of the West Bank the way that it slaughtered people in the Gaza Strip, this isn't going to fly with the people in Saudi Arabia," he added. "Smotrich's threats, which are appalling on any level, are only - if he brings it to fruition - going to increase instability, increase violence, and increase death."

Actress and progressive activist Cynthia Nixon said on [Friday](#) that it was "shameful" of Democratic Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) to co-sign a formal letter alongside other Congress leaders that invited Netanyahu to address a joint session in Congress. Nixon then suggested that "perhaps Netanyahu can be arrested for his war crimes on the Senate floor." The Jewish-led human rights group IfNotNow also condemned the invitation, while US Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) said he would boycott the event.

On Saturday, Netanyahu accepted the invitation to speak to a joint session of Congress, calling it a "privilege" to present in front of the American people and the world the "truth about our just war". The prime minister's visit could present challenges, though, as the International Criminal Court has issued a warrant for his arrest.

"Studies have shown that the people of the US have very little influence over government policies. The government is representative of the lobbies that support them and pro-Israeli lobbies are among the largest and most significant supporters of members of Congress," said Fantina. "He should be arrested in the US, but the US plays by its own rules and doesn't care about international law. But, the fact that he's been invited by the Republican leadership, the Democratic leadership to speak to Congress is in and of itself shocking."

“What we're going to see, though, is some members will not attend,” the author said of Netanyahu's tentative speech to Congress. “Some who do attend may respond in some way publicly. There may be disruption of his speech by outside people who support human rights and international law. Although security is going to be extremely heavy if he does come and it will be next to impossible for any protester to get anywhere near [him].”

Thus far an estimated 36,439 Palestinians have been killed in the Gaza Strip and 82,627 wounded since October 7, according to the Palestinian enclave's Health Ministry. The World Health Organization (WHO) stated that practically no health services remain in Rafah after the al-Helal al-Emirati hospital closed, Sputnik reported on [Sunday](#).

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Israel, US Point Fingers in Potential Ceasefire Deal

The proposed ceasefire would last for six weeks, and see the return of women, children and vulnerable hostages in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, as well as the full withdrawal of IDF forces. Even as the US president announced the ceasefire plan, he acknowledged that Israel has not fully agreed to the plan.

Sputnik reported on Sunday that [Israel had accepted a new deal](#) that would secure a ceasefire in Gaza and lead to the release of all hostages, citing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's chief foreign policy advisor. The plan was first announced on Friday by US President Joe Biden who said that Hamas could no longer carry out a large-scale attack because of Israel's offensive in Gaza.

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Ryan Cristian, the founder and editor of the Last American Vagabond, joined [Sputnik's The Final Countdown](#) on Monday to discuss the tumultuous ceasefire proposal, as well as Netanyahu's potential speech to the US Congress.

“I think we need to recognize that if Netanyahu is going to be invited, which he is by every angle of our Congress, and he is currently - there are arrest warrants from the ICC, the obligation from the United States government should be to arrest him. This is not going to happen, obviously. This is a major statement of a group screaming about the rules-based international order, or that they claim that they're different because they acknowledge international law - unlike Hamas - and it's completely contradicting all that,” said Cristian of Netanyahu's possible speech to Congress.

A senior Israeli official [reportedly](#) said on Monday that the US president's description of Israel's ceasefire proposal was “not accurate” and claimed that Biden had only announced a partial version of Israel's proposed plans in his speech on Friday. The official said that they did not agree to fully withdraw their troops from the Gaza Strip, and added that they would only do so once their “objectives are met including destroying Hamas' military and governing capabilities”.

Both the Israeli official, and National Security Council Spokesman John Kirby have argued about where the plans for the ceasefire first originated from, with the US and Israel accusing the other of concocting the three-stage ceasefire plan.

"It's clear that there was an agreement on this for Israel and the US before it was submitted to Hamas, just like last time," said Cristian. "We don't know for sure whether this was Israel bluffing and using the US to be the deliverer of that bluff and then just when Hamas accepted and called their bluff, that's when they pulled back because, well, they don't want this war to end. I believe that in every possible sense."

"And so this is ridiculous. This is just admitting on the surface that they agreed, they set the plan out. That's why we saw across the board everybody from US politicians to Israeli politicians saying Hamas better take this, everything's on the table," he added. "And Hamas then said we'll take it, and Israel then just said never mind. That's what happened. It's very simple."

Sputnik's Angie Wong then asked their guest if he believes it would have been possible for the US president to have already had a conversation prior to his press conference on Friday as a possible preemptive measure for Netanyahu's visit to Congress.

"Let's understand that even the US government is very fractured as well, right? They're not all on the same page. I think it's very clear that they have aggressive and almost unanimous support for Israel, but they're also fractured when it comes to their own dynamics," Cristian explained. "But we can prove, as Israel has stated and as the US has stated in many different dynamics - Blinken himself - that this involved Israel. This was directly from Jerusalem [and the main coalition] of Netanyahu's people."

"And you can see that this is about at least trying to present to the world that they care about the people," he added. "And I mean even including the hostages and detainees, which both exist within Gaza right now. Some were IDF members, some were civilians that shouldn't have been taken."

"Long before October 7th, the 75 years of brutal occupation and what [Israel has] been doing for such a long time and one can prove very clearly that they've engaged with this dishonestly as far back as one can look. It doesn't mean that there are no elements within this or the people themselves that want something else," Cristian suggested. "I'm talking just about the Zionist organization, the government."

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Kremlin Mulls Response as NATO Enables Ukraine's Terrorism Against Russian Civilians

As Moscow pursues restraint in its military operation in Ukraine an extremist Kiev regime is resorting to attacks against noncombatants – an inconvenient reality ignored by Western media.

“NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg on Friday shrugged off warnings from Russian President Vladimir Putin against NATO countries allowing Ukraine to strike Russian territory with Western weapons,” [reported](#) the website Antiwar.com Monday.

“Stoltenberg’s comments came after the US and several other NATO countries gave Ukraine the greenlight to strike Russian territory near [Kharkov],” according to the online outlet. “The step marks a significant escalation in the proxy war and could provoke a major response from Russia despite Stoltenberg downplaying the risks.”

The provocation has prompted President Vladimir Putin to warn of “serious consequences” for NATO countries that permit their armaments to be used to strike within Russia. Kiev has increasingly resorted to terrorist attacks in residential areas and against Russian civilians as the chances of Ukrainian victory on the battlefield grow ever more remote. Shelling of a town in Russia’s Belgorod region over the weekend [left six people injured](#), with a local official tragically dying as a result of detonation of ammunition during the attack.

Security analyst Mark Sleboda joined Sputnik’s The Critical Hour program Monday to examine the Russian president’s options amid another Western escalation of the proxy conflict.

“First of all, a statement about anyone invading anyone else coming from the secretary general of NATO and some type of admonition is pretty rich,” said the international relations expert.

“Last time I checked, Stoltenberg’s been in that office quite a long time and NATO and its member states have been involved in the invasions, regime changes, and occupations of more countries in the last 30 years that can easily be mentioned.”

The military pact, which frequently characterizes itself as a defensive alliance, has played key roles in Western operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and the former Yugoslavia. US-led military intervention in the Middle East has indirectly led to the death of [at least 4.5 million people](#), according to a study by researchers at Brown University, while residents of Serbia continue to face elevated rates of cancer and birth defects after NATO’s use of radioactive depleted uranium there.

The end of the Cold War brought about the dissolution of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact, but NATO leaders resisted calls to disband the alliance. The military coalition, which was formed with the explicit aim of opposing Moscow, has continued to expand eastward, threatening to establish itself along Ukraine’s almost 1,500-mile border with Russia with the alliance’s proposed inclusion of Kiev.

Sleboda noted that “NATO mercenaries” have covertly trained Ukrainian fighters in special operations centers throughout the country, but so far such efforts have achieved little.

“So this game that NATO and its member states can punch Russia through the sock puppet of their [proxy putsch regime](#) in Kiev, in Ukraine, continues,” he observed. “And Stoltenberg does not fear Russian threats – that’s a problem.”

“Russia is not clearly setting red lines and then dictating consequences and carrying through with them on NATO countries,” the expert argued. “Now, they may not feel that they have had to thus far in this conflict because they are winning on the battlefield... They just keep on carrying on what they’re doing and winning the battle on the battlefield in Ukraine, and don’t wish to potentially escalate this directly against NATO in a way that could spin out of their and anyone’s control.”

“But here’s the problem, it’s that this type of response does create an Overton window where NATO now feels complete impunity with escalations.”

Sleboda pointed out that Russia has enjoyed considerable success in disabling NATO weaponry via electronic warfare, even [earning plaudits in Western media](#) for its technological supremacy in that area. But going forward, the analyst said Russia would need to consider how to effectively deter Ukrainian aggression, balancing the desire to respond proportionally with the need to create deterrence.

“This escalation right now is so pathetic that it doesn't necessarily necessitate a response,” he claimed, noting that the Biden administration has only publicly condoned Ukrainian strikes against military targets in Kharkov's border region. “But what is already signaled is the next provocation level. That one is far more serious.”

“So do you make a deterrence now? Or, do you wait until that provocation happens?” Sleboda asked, summarizing Russia's current options. “That's the dilemma that the Kremlin finds itself in now. Do we demonstrate a deterrence now with a response? Or, do we wait for the next one that could actually do some significant harm? Although it certainly won't result in a change in the endgame of this conflict.”

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Zelensky's Sham Summit in Switzerland Slammed as 'Pep Rally', 'PR Stunt'

One analyst portrayed the event as an act of desperation on the part of the embattled leader as Ukraine suffers the consequences of the West's failed foreign policy.

“The security of a country should not be pursued at the expense of others,” read [a Chinese government statement](#) last year on the ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia. “The security of a region should not be achieved by strengthening or expanding military blocs. The legitimate security interests and concerns of all countries must be taken seriously and addressed properly.”

The document, which urged global powers to abandon a “Cold War mentality,” did not mention NATO by name, but its critique of the Western alliance's steady march eastward was unmistakable.

Now as the ultimate failure of the United States' proxy war against Russia is made clear, the West is suffering the consequences of its decades-long disregard for Russian security and interests, according to former US Defense Department senior security policy analyst Michael Maloof. The expert discussed the issue and Zelensky's so-called "peace summit" scheduled for later this month on [Sputnik's The Final Countdown program](#) Monday.

“China certainly has announced that it's not even coming,” said the author about the event. “Russia wasn't even invited... All that this is to me is a pep rally, a PR stunt by Zelensky to garner support. This is not diplomacy.”

“Diplomacy occurs when you get two opposite sides sitting down at the same table and working something out, working out a compromise,” he claimed. “They had that. This is all being ignored.”

Zelensky released a slickly-produced video last week urging the US and Chinese President Xi Jinping to participate in the purported peace talks, set to be held at a luxury resort in

Switzerland. Zelensky now accuses China of supporting Russia and attempting to “undermine” the meeting, [echoing recent attacks](#) by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

Various observers have criticized the event for failing to include representatives from Russia. Ukrainian officials are legally prevented from engaging in talks with the country per a late 2022 edict by Zelensky that outlaws negotiations with Russia.

“What's being ignored are the underlying causes. There was an agreement and it was signed,” said Maloof of widely-reported talks between Ukraine and Russia that took place during the early months of Russia’s special military operation. “It was just under pressure from the UK and the US on Zelensky not to implement. And there was a reason for Putin's undertaking his special military operation, because Ukraine was threatening to join NATO and he could not have that.”

“What was ignored was six existing agreements on indivisibility. What that meant is that you don't arm the West at the expense of the East. They were all torn up by the West through NATO expansion... All of that has been ignored.”

The analyst claimed the proposed summit is a desperate attempt to garner international support as reports suggest Ukraine's strained armed forces are nearing collapse. Continued support from the United States has also been placed in doubt as polling reveals the US public increasingly opposes sending more aid to Kiev.

Malooof noted that Zelensky would likely be denied an audience before a joint session of US Congress as lawmakers on both sides of the aisle now question US involvement in the proxy conflict.

“He's at his limit,” the expert claimed. “He knows that he's finished. He knows the war is basically over, and he's trying to get more of a popularity type of thing going and people aren't buying into it... Russia's stated over and over again they're prepared to sit down with the Ukrainians to work something out. And Zelensky has said he will not do it.”

“I have never seen anything that Zelensky has done as logical,” he added. “This is a comedian who, all of a sudden, gets elevated to the position of the president of his country on the promise that he was not going to go to war with Russia. And look where he is now.”

“This clown has just absolutely become authoritarian,” Malooof said of the de facto leader, who has been heavily criticized for shutting down independent media outlets and banning opposition parties. “He's defied every aspect of why we're even in there in the first place. ‘Oh, we're trying to defend democracy and all that stuff.’ That's just total nonsense, particularly given how this current government came about in 2014 through a coup of a legitimate government – and we backed it. We supported it and we basically initiated it.”

The analyst claimed the US and UK have “no one to blame but ourselves” for stoking the military conflict, which has led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians.

Malooof clarified that the violence began not when Russia's special military operation was launched, but in 2014 when the Ukrainian government attacked ethnic Russian separatists in the country's eastern regions. Conflict in the Donbass, including events such as a deadly attack on trade unionists in Odessa, was rarely discussed in the West.

“What most Americans don't realize is that that shelling of the East has been going on for nine years now, and the Western media never reported it,” he said. “And they finally called in for Russian assistance, and that's what led to where this happened.”

“Putin warned about NATO extensions, about how this is crossing a red line,” he continued. “And even in December of 2021 he was sending memorandums to the State Department outlining his concerns. And they were ignored... The Russian diplomats were talked down to. They really resented that. And I don't blame them because they regard themselves as an equal power.”

“Look, they have more nuclear weapons than we do, for heaven's sake. They've got hypersonic weapons that we don't even have. Yet we treat them like a second-class power. And they really resented that. We didn't respect them. And that's what you need in diplomacy, is respect.” Zelensky's sham summit in Switzerland slammed as 'pep rally', 'PR stunt' (Part 1)

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“Russia wasn't even invited,” he noted. “All that this is to me is a pep rally, a PR stunt by Zelensky to garner support. This is not diplomacy. Diplomacy occurs when you get two opposite sides sitting down at the same table and working something out, working out a compromise. They had that. This is all being ignored.”

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Zelensky's sham summit in Switzerland slammed as 'pep rally', 'PR stunt' (Part 2)

“What's being ignored are the underlying causes. There was an agreement and it was signed,” said Maloof of widely-reported talks between Ukraine and Russia that took place during the early months of Russia's special military operation. “It was just under pressure from the UK and the US on Zelensky not to implement. And there was a reason for Putin's undertaking his special military operation, because Ukraine was threatening to join NATO and he could not have that.”

“What was ignored was six existing agreements on indivisibility. What that meant is that you don't arm the West at the expense of the East. They were all torn up by the West through NATO expansion... All of that has been ignored,” Maloof emphasized.

The analyst claimed the proposed summit is a desperate attempt to garner international support as reports suggest Ukraine's strained armed forces are nearing collapse. “He's at his limit,” the expert claimed. “He knows that he's finished. He knows the war is basically over, and he's trying to get more of a popularity type of thing going and people aren't buying into it... Russia's stated over and over again they're prepared to sit down with the Ukrainians to work something out. And Zelensky has said he will not do it.”

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Kremlin mulls response as NATO enables Kiev's terrorism against Russian civilians

Ukraine has increasingly resorted to terrorist attacks in residential areas and against Russian civilians as the chances of its victory on the battlefield grow ever more remote. Shelling of a town in Russia's Belgorod region over the weekend left six people injured, with a local official tragically dying as a result of detonation of ammunition during the attack.

Security analyst Mark Sleboda joined Sputnik's The Critical Hour program to examine President Vladimir Putin's options amid repeated Western escalation of the proxy conflict against Russia.

“This game that NATO and its member states can punch Russia through the sock puppet of their proxy putsch regime in Ukraine continues,” Sleboda observed. “And [NATO Secretary-General Jens] Stoltenberg does not fear Russian threats – that’s a problem.”

“Russia is not clearly setting red lines and then dictating consequences and carrying through with them on NATO countries,” the expert argued. “Now, they may not feel that they have had to thus far in this conflict because they are winning on the battlefield... They just keep on carrying on what they’re doing and winning the battle on the battlefield in Ukraine, and don’t wish to potentially escalate this directly against NATO in a way that could spin out of their and anyone’s control. But here’s the problem, it’s that this type of response does create an Overton window where NATO now feels complete impunity with escalations.”

Sleboda pointed out that Russia has enjoyed considerable success in disabling NATO weaponry via electronic warfare, even earning plaudits in Western media for its technological supremacy. But going forward, the analyst said Russia would need to consider how to effectively respond to Ukrainian aggression, balancing the desire to react proportionally with the need to create deterrence.

Whatever Moscow’s response, the analyst noted that Ukraine’s provocations “certainly won’t result in a change in the endgame of this conflict.”

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Biden Says Age Not Factor in Running for Re-Election

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said that he never thought about not running for re-election over his advanced age of 81 years, according to a transcript of a May 28 interview with Time.

"No, I didn't," Biden said when asked if he considered not running for re-election in 2024 because of his age.

"I can do it better than anybody you know," Biden said, when the reporter pointed out that he would be 86 years old at the end of his potential second term.

Biden’s mental fitness has been an ongoing point of contention among his opponents. According to a recent Pew Research Center survey, only 21% of Americans say they are confident in Biden’s mental fitness and 15% in his physical fitness.

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Biden Claims Putin Wants to Reestablish Soviet Union

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden claimed that Russian President Vladimir Putin is pursuing the goal of reestablishing the Soviet Union.

"He says this is part of reestablishing the Soviet Union. That's what this is all about," Biden said in an interview with Time.

Biden claimed that Putin wants to go back to the Cold War when NATO and the Warsaw Treaty Organization confronted each other.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said last week that the United States has kept NATO going after the dissolution of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact defense alliance in 1991 in order to use it as a tool to control Washington's allies in Europe.

Moscow has criticized NATO for years over its unprecedented build-up along the western Russian border under the pretext of "detering Russian aggression." The Kremlin has said that Russia will not ignore behavior that threatens its interests.

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Biden Says Not Ruling Out US Military Force in Taiwan Invasion

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) – US President Biden said he would not rule out the possibility of using US military force in the case of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan, according to a transcript of a May 28 interview with Time.

"Not ruling out using US military force. There's a distinction between deploying on the ground, air power and naval power, etc," Biden said.

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Biden Says North Korean Nuclear Threat Has Not Increased

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) – US President Biden believes the nuclear weapons situation with North Korea is not more threatening than it has been before, according to a transcript of his May 28 interview with Time.

"I think it's equally as threatening as it was before. I don't think it's more threatening and North Korea has something else that it has to deal with ... I put together an Indo-Pacific strategy that is incredibly broad," Biden said.

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Ex-US Army Soldier Extradited From Ukraine on Murder Charges – Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 4 – Former US Army soldier turned foreign fighter Craig Austin Lang made an initial appearance in a Florida court on Monday following his extradition from Ukraine to face numerous charges, including double homicide, armed robbery and aggravated identity theft, the Justice Department said in a press release.

"As alleged in the indictments, Craig Austin Lang went on an international crime spree that

included a double murder in Florida, attempts to travel internationally to engage in other acts of violence outside the United States, and a plot to evade law enforcement detection by trading guns, a grenade, and cash to use another person's identifying information to apply for a US passport under an assumed name," Nicole Argentieri, head of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, said in the release.

Lang faces criminal charges in three federal districts – the Middle District of Florida, Eastern District of North Carolina, and District of Arizona – some with maximum penalties of life in prison.

According to the Florida indictment, Lang and another former US Army soldier whom he had met in Ukraine, allegedly murdered a Brooksville couple in 2018 in the course of an armed robbery to steal the \$3,000 that the couple intended to use to buy firearms from them.

Lang is charged with violating the Neutrality Act; conspiracy to kill, kidnap, or maim persons in a foreign country; conspiracy to interfere with commerce by robbery; conspiracy to discharge a firearm during and in relation to a crime of violence; interference with commerce by robbery; and use of a firearm during and in relation to a crime of violence causing death.

According to the North Carolina indictment, Lang allegedly took various actions in September 2018 to evade law enforcement detection when traveling internationally to Ukraine. He allegedly devised a plan to use co-conspirators' identity documents in order for him and another man to apply for US passports under assumed names.

Lang is charged with conspiracy to commit passport fraud; aggravated identify theft; misuse of visas, permits, and other documents; aiding and abetting these offenses, as well as false representation of a social security account number.

The Arizona indictment charges Lang with misuse of a passport for allegedly presenting a US passport to Mexican authorities to obtain a visa, which was in violation of the conditions and restrictions of the passport.

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Biden Says Two-State Solution 'his Biggest Disagreement' with Netanyahu

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden told the Time that there needs to be transition to a two-state solution, and that is his biggest disagreement with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"There needs to be a two-state solution, a transition to a two-state solution. And that's my biggest disagreement with Bibi Netanyahu," Biden said in an interview.

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Biden Says Every Reason for People to Think Netanyahu Prolonging War for Political Aims

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden told the Time that there is every reason for people to think that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is prolonging the

Gaza conflict for his own political goals.

"I'm not going to comment on that. There is every reason for people to draw that conclusion. And I would cite that as—before the war began, the blowback he was getting from the Israeli military for wanting to change the constitution—change the court. And so it's an internal domestic debate that seems to have no consequence. And whether he would change his position or not, it's hard to say, but it has not been helpful," Biden said in an interview, when asked whether he thinks that Netanyahu is prolonging the war for his own political self-preservation.

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Biden Says Uncertain Whether Israel Committed War Crimes, But Many Innocent People Killed

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden told the Time he was not sure whether Israel has committed war crimes in Gaza, but admitted that too many innocent lives have been lost in Israeli military operations in the Palestinian territory.

"The answer is it's uncertain and has been investigated by the Israelis themselves," Biden said. "But one thing is certain, the people in Gaza, the Palestinians have suffered greatly, for lack of food, water, medicine, etc. And a lot of innocent people have been killed."

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Biden Says Endgame for Ukraine Does Not Mean NATO Membership

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden told the Time that the endgame for Ukraine does not mean NATO membership.

"Peace looks like making sure Russia never, never, never, never occupies Ukraine. That's what peace looks like. And it doesn't mean NATO, they are part of NATO. It means we have a relationship with them like we do with other countries, where we supply weapons so they can defend themselves in the future," Biden said in an interview, when asked what the endgame in Ukraine is.

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Biden Says Doesn't Believe Russia's Proposal to End Conflict is the Best for Ukraine

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden told the Time that he does not believe that Russia's proposal to end the conflict is the best that Ukraine can hope for at this point.

"No, it's not. And by the way, I don't know why you skip over all that's happened in the meantime. The Russian military has been decimated. You don't write about that. It's been freaking decimated," Biden said in an interview.

He also highlighted the strength of NATO and Western support of Ukraine.

"Europe has spent more money than the United States has, collectively Europe has spent more money in taking on Russia," Biden stated.

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biden on whether Israel committed war crimes: it's uncertain, but a lot of innocent people have been killed

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US Navy Pays Northrop \$119Mln to Fix Weapon Systems on E-2 Warning Aircraft - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - The US Navy has awarded Northrop Grumman Systems a \$119,581,704 contract to repair 17 weapon assemblies for E-2 Hawkeye Early Warning Aircraft (EWA, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"Northrop Grumman Systems Corporation [of] Melbourne, Florida is awarded a \$119,581,704 ... contract for the repair of 17 weapon replaceable assemblies ...in support of the E-2 aircrafts," the release said on Monday.

The contract will extend for 19 months and is scheduled to be completed by December 2025, the Defense Department said.

Most of the work on the contract will be carried out in Syracuse, New York (88%) and the rest at other locations within the continental United States, the Defense Department said.

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US House Panel Advances Bill to Sanction ICC for Israeli Leader Arrest Warrant Requests

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - The US House Rules Committee advanced legislation to sanction the International Criminal Court (ICC), in response to an ICC prosecutor's request for arrest warrants for Israeli leaders.

The panel advanced the legislation, dubbed the Illegitimate Court Counteraction Act, on Monday in a vote of 9 in favor and 3 opposed.

On May 20, ICC prosecutor Karim Khan filed requests for arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, as well as for leaders of Palestinian organization Hamas.

The bill enables the imposition of sanctions on the ICC and any other foreign actor that supports their effort to arrest, detain or prosecute protected persons of the United States and its allies. The legislation's definition of a protected person includes foreign citizens or lawful residents of a US ally that has not consented to ICC jurisdiction.

"If the ICC insists on targeting Israel, a democracy defending itself against evil, the US must

stand against them and ensure there are consequences for these international bureaucrats," House Majority Leader Steve Scalise said in a statement on the bill.

On October 7, Hamas launched a large-scale attack on Israel, killing nearly 1,200 people and abducting some 240 others. Israel subsequently launched military operations in the Gaza Strip, which have killed more than 36,400 people in the Palestinian enclave, according to local authorities.

Hamas is "wholly responsible" for deaths related to the conflict, Scalise said.

The Biden administration strongly opposes the legislation, the White House Office of Management and Budget said on Monday. There are more effective ways to defend Israel and preserve US positions on the ICC, the statement said, adding that the Biden administration is prepared to work with lawmakers on other options.

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Biden Admin. Buys 3Mln Barrels to Return to US Oil Reserve by November - Energy Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - The United States has bought an additional three million barrels of oil for its national reserve to be delivered in November, the Biden administration announced as crude prices neared four-month lows.

The US Department of Energy, under a procurement for the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR), said in a news release on Monday that the crude was "being purchased for an average price of \$77.69, well below the average of about \$95 per barrel that SPR crude was sold for in 2022."

The Biden administration added that the acquisition was "a good deal for taxpayers."

The procurement announced on Monday was originally raised on May 17. The prerequisites for the purchase was that it had to be "United States produced sour crude oil for November 2024 delivery at a price no higher than \$79.99 per barrel".

Prior to this purchase, the Energy Department had announced a buying intent for another three million barrels on May 7.

Oil prices have tumbled since the end of April, facilitating SPR purchases.

In Monday's trade, the front-month July contract for US-origin West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude settled down almost 4% at \$74.22 per barrel, after plumbing a four-month low of \$74. In May, the US crude benchmark lost a further 6%.

The SPR had seen an outflow of around 200 million barrels over a two-year period before the Biden administration began refilling it.

Biden's use of the reserve has been a highly-charged issue for proponents of high oil prices and the president's political opponents. Both accuse him of turning the SPR into a political tool to subdue crude prices and shore up his standing with US voters, when the reserve is meant for emergency use.

Biden had said he was only acting to reduce record high pump prices of fuel, which stood at above \$5 per gallon in June 2022 and have stabilized since at around \$3.50. The administration had also blamed high crude oil prices for US inflation getting to four-decade highs of above 9%

in June 2022.

The sale of some 200 million barrels from the SPR succeeded in tamping the market price of crude down from mid-2022 highs of around \$100 per barrel to between \$70 and \$80 since.

According to Monday's release, the Biden administration had purchased a total of 38.6 million barrels of US crude from the open market at an average of \$77.24 per barrel to return to the SPR. The refill will continue as the administration looks out for the welfare of taxpayers, the release said.

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US Awards \$1.9Bln Contract to Lockheed Martin for Delivery of HIMARS by 2028 - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department announced that it has awarded a \$1.9 billion contract for the delivery of the M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) with an estimated completion date of May 31, 2028.

"Lockheed Martin Corp., Grand Prairie, Texas, was awarded a \$1,933,646,875 modification (P00001) to contract W31P4Q-24-D-0019 for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems. Work locations and funding will be determined with each order, with an estimated completion date of May 31, 2028," the Defense Department said in a press release on Monday.

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Delaware Court Seats Jury in Hunter Biden Firearm Form Trial - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - A court in Delaware seated a jury in the criminal trial of Hunter Biden for allegedly lying on a firearm purchase form, NBC News reported.

The court seated and swore in the jury, the selection for which began on Monday morning, the report said.

Biden faces up to 25 years in prison if convicted, although the Justice Department has said that actual sentences for such crimes are typically less than maximum penalties.

The White House said in December that US President Joe Biden would not pardon his son if he were convicted.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) -

WESTERN AID FOR UKRAINE

* White House National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby said on Monday that

Ukraine understands its restrictions on the use of US-supplied weapons for limited strikes inside Russian territory but did not disclose whether there were any guarantees in place to prevent abuse of this new guidance.

- * The Biden administration is having no diplomatic conversations with Russia after allowing Ukraine to strike Russian territory with US-made weapons, Kirby said.

- * The Swiss Senate has rejected the allocation of additional aid to Ukraine worth \$5.6 billion.

MIDDLE EAST

- * The leaders of the G7 countries on Monday expressed their full support for the proposal of US President Joe Biden on the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.

- * The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said that another four Israeli hostages have been killed and are currently in the possession of the Palestinian movement Hamas.

- * The United States is confident that Israel will accept a ceasefire deal with Palestinian organization Hamas, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said.

- * Russia condemns Israeli airstrikes on Syria, as such actions can provoke a serious armed escalation in the region, the Foreign Ministry said.

- * Israel is ready to accept a temporary ceasefire in the Gaza Strip for 42 days in exchange for freeing hostages, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

- * The situation at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant remains unstable and all seven pillars of nuclear safety have been fully or partially compromised, International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Rafael Grossi said on Monday.

- * The Ukrainian armed forces have lost up to 1,745 servicepeople in clashes with different Russian groups of forces in the special military operation zone in the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

- * A Ukrainian spy network, which planned to commit sabotage and terrorist attacks against military personnel of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, as well as military, transport and energy infrastructure facilities, was uncovered in Sevastopol, the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) said.

- * The Kiev regime has committed provocations with staging civilian deaths numerous times in the past, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said when asked about the information about a planned provocation in Kherson.

ELECTION IN MEXICO

- * Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday congratulated Claudia Sheinbaum on her victory in the Mexican presidential election, the Kremlin said.

- * Russia welcomes the victory of Sheinbaum in the presidential election and sees continuity in the line of the future president and constructiveness in her approaches to relations with Russia, Russian Ambassador to Mexico Nikolay Sofinsky told Sputnik.

- * US President Joe Biden congratulated Mexican President-elect Claudia Sheinbaum on winning the country's presidential election.

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Ex-US Intel Officer Ritter Calls Seizure of Passport by American Authorities Illegal

WASHINGTON, June 3 (Sputnik) - Former US marine intelligence officer and current political analyst Scott Ritter told Sputnik on Monday that the seizure of his passport by American authorities is illegal and he intends to challenge this decision.

Earlier Monday, Ritter told Sputnik that US border agents banned him from boarding a plane to Russia and confiscated his passport for a reason unknown to him. Ritter said he planned to fly to Russia to participate in the annual St. Petersburg International Economic Forum.

“What they [US authorities] did was badly illegal ... they chose to explain it as their business,” Ritter said in an interview. “I will be challenging them. There's no doubt about that.”

Ritter added that he cannot travel to Russia without a passport and noted that the US State Department is afraid he might participate in the forum.

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Oil Prices Down 3% to February Lows as Demand Worries Fuel Uncertainty Over OPEC+ Cuts

NEW YORK, June 3 (Sputnik) - Oil markets hit near four-month lows Monday as worries that OPEC+ output cuts will be inadequate to offset potentially weak summer demand for fuels sent crude prices down more than 3% on Monday.

The front-month July contract for US-origin West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude settled down \$2.27, or 3.6%, at \$74.22 per barrel. It sank to \$74 during Monday's session, the lowest since February.

The front-month August contract for UK-origin Brent crude, the global benchmark for oil, was down \$2.75, or 3.4%, at \$78.36 per barrel. The global crude benchmark hit a session low of \$78.17 earlier, its lowest since February.

The latest slump in crude prices came on the back of a torrid May for oil bulls, who witnessed a 6% loss on the US and UK crude benchmarks.

OPEC, the global oil producing alliance, affirmed on Sunday that it will carry out output cuts through 2024, extending commitments initially set until the end of summer. OPEC+, which groups the 13-member Saudi-led Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries with ten other oil producing nations steered by Russia, will attempt to cut 2.2 million barrels per day from its joint production .

The problem for oil bulls though is nagging market fear that the reductions will not be enough to compensate for potentially weaker-than-usual demand for fuels this summer, especially with rising crude output from non-OPEC+ producers led by the United States.

To add to market consternation, OPEC+ suggested that if demand improved by the year end, the alliance would add more than 500,000 barrels per day to the market by December, and 1.8 million by June 2025.

"Some people read the OPEC statement, particularly the part about the adding barrels back from the voluntary cut, as bearish," Helima Croft, head of global commodity strategy at RBC Capital Markets, said in comments carried by US media.

The US Energy Information Administration said last week that crude production across the country rose 0.6% in March to 13.2 million barrels per day, the highest since December.

The agency also said that large builds in fuel stockpiles in the prior week had offset crude draws, raising questions about energy demand in the runup to summer - the busiest time for travel in the country. Gasoline and distillates balances rose by over 2 million barrels each versus a 4-million-barrel draw in crude, the agency's inventory data for the week that ended on May 24 showed.

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US, EU Announce Sanctions on Iranian Drone Industry - US State Department

WASHINGTON, June 3 (Sputnik) - The United States and European Union are sanctioning four Iranian entities and one individual for their ties to Iran's drone industry, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

"The United States is sanctioning four Iranian entities and one Iranian individual connected with the development, manufacture, and proliferation of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), which the Iranian regime provides to Russia and militant proxies and partners to prolong conflict and destabilize the region," Miller said in a statement.

The US' action is taken concurrently with EU sanctions on Iran's drone industry, the statement said.

The sanctions target four entities associated with Rayan Roshd Afzar Company, which procures critical parts for Iran's drone program, the US Treasury Department statement said. The sanctions also target an Iranian executive of Iran Aviation Industries Organization, which is a subsidiary of Iran's Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics that oversees drone manufacturers, the statement said.

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Netanyahu To Address US Congress On June 13 - Punchbowl News

WASHINGTON, June 3 (Sputnik) - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will address the US Congress on June 13, Punchbowl News reported on Monday.

On Saturday, Netanyahu accepted an invitation from US congressional leaders to address a joint meeting of Congress in support of Israel in the fight against terrorism.

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Biden Calls Mexico's President-Elect Sheinbaum to Congratulate Her - White House

WASHINGTON, June 3 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden had a telephone call with Mexican President-Elect Claudia Sheinbaum to congratulate her on her victory in Sunday's elections, the White House said on Monday.

"President Joe Biden called President-elect Claudia Sheinbaum of Mexico today to congratulate her on her historic electoral victory to become the next President of Mexico," the White House said in a press release. "The two leaders emphasized their commitment to continuing the strong and collaborative partnership that will advance democracy, security, and prosperity in both countries."

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Former US intelligence officer Ritter tells sputnik seizure of his passport by American authorities illegal, will challenge this decision

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UPDATE - One Dead, 4 Injured in Overnight Shooting in Toronto - Police

(Adds details provided by Toronto police in paras 6-7)

WASHINGTON, June 3 (Sputnik) - The Toronto Police Service said on Monday that they are investigating an overnight shooting outside of the North Albion Collegiate in the city's northeast that left one person dead and another four injured.

"Shooting: (additional info) ... 1 man in his 50's, transported to hospital w/life-threatening injuries ... 4 people (unknown age/gender) transported to hospital w/serious but non-life-threatening injuries," the Toronto Police Operations wrote via X. "One of the victims has succumbed to their injuries."

Law enforcement units answered to reports of a shooting at around 11:00 p.m. ET. in the Mt Olive Dr. & Kipling Ave area, the police said. Upon arrival, they found five individuals with gunshot wounds.

The police said that a black truck was seen fleeing the scene. A significant police presence is currently on the scene. The homicide unit has taken over the investigation.

The investigation outside of the North Albion Collegiate prompted the Toronto District School Board to close both the school and on-site daycare. Facilities will be closed to students and staff alike, the board said via X.

The shooting happened as a group of men aged between 40-60 gathered for a soccer game, the Toronto Police Service told Sputnik in an update. Currently, law enforcement is looking for two suspects wearing dark clothing and a dark pick-up truck, it added.

The deceased victim was identified as a 61-year-old man, police said. Four individuals remain in hospital, one of whom has life-altering injuries. The area of the incident is being canvassed

for evidence and video footage, according to police.

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Ukraine 'Understands' Limits on Use of US-Supplied Weapons, No Guarantees in Place - Kirby

WASHINGTON, June 3 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby said on Monday that Ukraine understands its restrictions on the use of US-supplied weapons for limited strikes inside Russian territory but did not disclose whether there were any guarantees in place to prevent abuse of this new guidance.

"I can appreciate that you may not like this decision by President Biden, and I'm sure that the outlet that you write for does not like this decision, I'm just here to tell you they understand the guidance that has been provided to them," Kirby said during a press briefing when asked by Sputnik on whether there were any guarantees.

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US Having No Conversations With Russia After Letting Kiev Strike Russian Territory - Kirby

WASHINGTON, June 3 (Sputnik) – The Biden administration is having no diplomatic conversations with Russia after allowing Ukraine to strike Russian territory with US-made weapons, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Monday.

"I do not have any diplomatic conversations with Russia to speak to," Kirby told reporters.

President Putin warned NATO nations last week that they should realize "what they are playing with" when they allow Ukraine to use Western weapons to strike Russian territory.

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ukraine understands restrictions regarding use of US-supplied weapons, but no guarantees are in place - kirby

Biden Aware USSR Was 'Deeply Engaged' in Defeating Nazis, No Intent to Ignore It - Kirby

WASHINGTON, June 3 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden is aware that the Soviet Union was "deeply engaged" in defeating Nazi Germany and has no intent to distract from its historic significance, White House Communications Adviser John Kirby said on Monday.

"The President's aware that the Soviet Union was an ally in World War II and certainly deeply engaged in defeating Germany, and we recognize that that's history that happened," Kirby said during a press briefing. "There's no way, nor would there be any intention, to distract from that or to undermine it or to ignore it."

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Biden Urges Qatar to Persuade Hamas to Accept Ceasefire Deal With Israel - White House

WASHINGTON, June 3 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden urged Emir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad al-Thani of Qatar to persuade Palestinian organization Hamas to accept a proposed ceasefire deal with Israel, the White House said on Monday.

"[Biden] urged Amir Tamim to use all appropriate measures to secure Hamas' acceptance of the deal and affirmed that Hamas is now the only obstacle to a complete ceasefire and relief for the people of Gaza," the White House said in a statement.

On Friday, Biden said that Israel offered a three-part proposal to achieve an enduring cessation of hostilities in the Gaza Strip and the release of hostages.

Biden confirmed to the emir that the United States will work with Qatar and Egypt to ensure the full implementation of the agreement, the statement said. Biden confirmed Israel's willingness to move forward with the deal as well, the statement said.

Biden thanked the Qatari leader and his team for their efforts to secure the release of hostages and agreed to remain closely coordinated in the coming days, the statement said.

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South Korea Amid Trash-Balloon Crisis Says Stands Ready to Convene UNSC Meeting Over DPRK

UNITED NATIONS, June 3 (Sputnik) - South Korea stands ready to call a UN Security Council meeting anytime in connection with North Korea's "provocations," South Korean Ambassador to the UN Hwang Joonkook said on Monday, amid Pyongyang's trash-balloon campaign.

The country holds the presidency of the UN Security Council for the month of June

"We stand ready to convene a meeting of the Security Council anytime in response to the provocations by the DPRK," Hwang said at the UN press briefing conference.

Over the past several days, North Korea has launched balloons containing garbage at South Korea in protest of the latter's leafleting campaigns.

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Adding More UN Resolutions Will Not Resolve Gaza Conflict - US Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, June 3 (Sputnik) - Creating additional UN Security Council resolutions on Gaza without properly implementing the existing ones will not help resolve the conflict there, South Korean Ambassador Joonkook Hwang said on Monday.

"Adding resolutions to resolutions do not resolve the conflict," Joonkook said at the UN press briefing conference.

It is important that all UN Security Council members implement all existing resolutions, Hwang added.

The UN Security Council has adopted three resolutions on Gaza. However, the United States has vetoed several other resolutions under various excuses. Algeria is presently preparing a new draft resolution to help the catastrophic humanitarian situation on the ground.

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US Had No Role in French Decision to Rescind Invitation to Russia for D-Day - Kirby

WASHINGTON, June 3 (Sputnik) - The United States was not involved in France's decision to rescind its invitation to Russia for a D-Day commemoration event this week, White House National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby said on Monday.

"As far as I know, this was a decision made by the French government," Kirby said during a press briefing.

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US Sees Slovenia's Recognition of Palestinian State as 'Not Helpful' - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 3 (Sputnik) - The United States does not consider Slovenia's recognition of the state of Palestine helpful or productive at present and believes that unilateral recognition is not a way forward to resolve the conflict, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

"Ultimately, we see those steps as not helpful or productive at this time," Miller said during a press briefing. "We have been quite clear that we support the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. But that ultimately is a step that needs to come not through unilateral recognition but through direct negotiations between the two parties."

On Thursday, the Slovenian government announced plans to recognize the state of Palestine,

but the country's parliament has not yet ratified the decision.

Slovenia is the latest country to recognize the state of Palestine as a sovereign and independent participant in international relations on an equal basis with Israel.

On May 28, Ireland, Norway and Spain formally announced that they recognize the state of Palestine, marking a total of 143 UN members who have done so.

Progress in the recognition of Palestine has come amid the renewed conflict in Gaza and the brutality of Israel's military operation in the Palestinian enclave, which has claimed the lives of more than 35,000 Palestinians.

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White House Says Use of Frozen Russian Assets 'an Idea That Should Be Explored'

WASHINGTON, June 3 (Sputnik) - The United States backs the idea of exploring ways to use frozen Russian assets to fund Ukraine aid, which is expected to come up during a meeting between President Joe Biden and his French counterpart later this week, White House National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby said on Monday.

"We believe that this idea about using frozen assets is an idea that should be explored as a way of holding Russia further accountable for what they've done to Ukraine ... this is an idea we believe holds promise. This is an idea we have consulted with our European allies and certainly at the ministerial level," Kirby said during a press briefing.

Kirby added that he expects Biden and French President Emmanuel Macron to discuss this matter during a bilateral meeting this week.

The Kremlin has maintained that any attempts to confiscate Russian assets amount to theft and a violation of international law.

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Deliverables Expected From Biden-Macron Talks on Ukraine, Indo-Pacific, Mideast - Kirby

WASHINGTON, June 3 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden during his upcoming meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron will discuss Ukraine, Indo-Pacific, and the Middle East, with deliverables expected from these talks, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Monday.

Biden will visit France for a state visit from June 5-9.

"During their bilateral meeting, presidents will discuss priorities like continuing to support Ukraine as it defends itself, the need for a free, open, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region, addressing the crisis in the Middle East, of course, and efforts to combat climate change," Kirby told reporters.

It is possible to expect deliverables on these issues, Kirby added.

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biden in state visit with macron will discuss ukraine, indo-pacific and middle east, deliverables expected from talks - white house's kirby

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Situation in Gaza Requires Reviving Negotiations on 2-State Solution - S.Korea Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, June 3 (Sputnik) - The situation in the Gaza Strip requires the international community to revive the negotiations to implement a two-state solution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, South Korean Ambassador to the United Nations Joonkook Hwang said on Monday.

"The current Gaza situation actually reminds us of the need to revive talks and negotiations toward a two-state solution," Hwang said.

The South Korean diplomat also emphasized the importance of diplomacy on the path toward a two-state solution.

Hwang noted that South Korea voted in favor of the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council resolutions on admitting Palestine as a full member in the United Nations, but added that that does not mean Seoul is ready to recognize Palestine as an independent state at present.

"We voted in favor of both of these resolutions, but as a separate matter, it does not mean that we recognize Palestine as a state. We will do that in a more appropriate time," Hwang said.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva said earlier on Monday that a group of United Nations experts and special rapporteurs called on all UN member states to recognize Palestine as an independent state.

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Envigo Fined \$35Mln in Largest Animal Welfare Act Case - US Attorney

WASHINGTON, June 3 (Sputnik) - Research animal breeder Envigo and its parent company Inotiv have been fined more than \$35 million, which marks the largest fine amount in a case involving the Animal Welfare Act, US Attorney for the Western District of Virginia Christopher Kavanaugh said on Monday.

"With the guilty pleas announced today and as corporate criminal enforcement action, Envigo RMS and Envigo Global Services, as well as its parent company Inotiv, are paying over \$35 million, in fines and additional payments, to include the largest fine ever in an Animal Welfare Act case in history," Kavanaugh said during a press briefing.

The action includes \$22 million in fines, a \$3 million payment to the Virginia Animal Fighting Task Force and the Humane Society, \$3.5 million to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and \$7 million for facility and personnel improvements.

According to a statement by the US Justice Department, Envigo RMS knowingly violated in 2022 the Animal Welfare Act by failing to provide adequate veterinary care, sufficient staffing and safe living conditions for beagles at the Cumberland County facility.

Furthermore, Envigo Global Services conspired to knowingly violate the Clean Water Act by failing to maintain the wastewater treatment plant properly, resulting in unlawful discharges and harming both the environment and the dogs at the facility.

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US Confident Israel Will Accept Ceasefire Deal with Hamas - State Department

WASHINGTON, June 3 (Sputnik) - The United States is confident that Israel will accept a ceasefire deal with Palestinian organization Hamas, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

"We are completely confident," Miller said during a press briefing, when asked about whether Israel will ultimately accept the deal, amid some opposition to the deal within the Israeli government.

On Friday, US President Joe Biden said that Israel offered a three-part proposal to achieve an enduring cessation of hostilities in the Gaza Strip and the release of hostages.

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Trump Spokesperson Says Confident Courts Will Overturn 'Hush Money' Conviction on Appeal

WASHINGTON, June 3 (Sputnik) - Donald Trump campaign spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt said on Monday that the former president's legal team is confident in their ability to overturn a New York jury's conviction of Trump for falsifying business records.

Last week, a jury convicted Trump on 34 counts of falsifying business records related to a so-called "hush money" payment to adult film actress Stormy Daniels.

"Our legal team is going to appeal this case all the way up to the Supreme Court if they have to, and they are 100% confident that this case ultimately will be overturned and truth will prevail," Leavitt said in an interview with Newsmax.

The case is a sham with no legal basis and the Trump campaign will continue its efforts despite the conviction, Leavitt said.

Trump will continue to campaign all the way through Election Day in November, Leavitt added.

A sentencing hearing in the case is scheduled for July 11. On Sunday, Trump said that he is prepared for a possible prison sentence, although he added that the public might not stand for it.

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

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Kirby on OPEC+ Decision: Biden Focused on Gasoline Prices at Pump in US

WASHINGTON, June 3 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden is focused on the prices of gasoline at the pump in the United States, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Monday in comments on the OPEC+ decision to extend current production quotas until 2025.

"I would just tell you that the president remains focused on those prices at the pump for consumers, and they continue to come down. I'm not going to be able to comment on what OPEC does from month to month," Kirby said during a press briefing. "Again, our fight, our focus is going to be on the prices to pump for consumers, and the President's confident that he's got the strategies in place to do that. I won't be able to comment much more beyond that."

The OPEC+ member states on Sunday decided to extend the existing collective level of oil production until the end of 2025.

A source told Sputnik following an OPEC+ ministerial meeting that the deal would be extended until the third quarter of 2025.

The OPEC+ alliance is an important format for stabilizing the energy markets and making global prices more predictable, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

The spokesman also called the OPEC+ decision to extend current production quotas until the end of next year an "outcome of common agreements."

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US Will Continue to Evolve Support for Ukraine as Battlefield Needs Change - White House

WASHINGTON, June 3 (Sputnik) - The United States will continue to evolve its support for Ukraine to meet its military needs as the situation on the battlefield changes, White House National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby said on Monday.

"We'll have those conversations with the Ukrainians, absolutely we will, and whether it leads to any additional policy changes, I can't say at this point ... we're going to continue to try to evolve our support to them as the battlefield evolves as well," Kirby said when asked about Ukraine wanting less restrictions on the use of US-supplied weapons to strike targets inside Russia.

Kirby reiterated that the guidance the United States issued last week limits Ukraine's use of US-supplied weapons to solely strike against Russian military targets that are just over the Ukraine-Russia border that are used to physically launch offensives against Ukraine.

The United States' policy with respect to prohibiting the use of ATACMS for long range strikes inside of Russia has not changed, Kirby said.

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COVID-19 Vaccine Is Not 100% Effective But Saved Millions of Lives – Fauci

WASHINGTON, June 3 (Sputnik) – US COVID-19 vaccines are not 100% effective but saved millions of lives in the United States and around the world, former Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Antony Fauci said on Monday.

Fauci made the remarks during a grilling before the House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic over the origins of and the US government's response to and policies on COVID-19.

“I do not believe any vaccine is 100 percent effective,” Fauci said during the hearing when asked about the effectiveness of the vaccine, given that many vaccinated people remain vulnerable to the virus.

However, Fauci pointed out that the vaccines were effective enough to save many people from the coronavirus.

“Those vaccines have resulted in saving hundreds of thousands of lives in the US and millions of lives throughout the world,” he said.

Fauci during his testimony was pressed by lawmakers on the origins of COVID-19, including the notion that the virus originated in a lab. The former official said he did not discuss Chinese bioweapons programs with the US intelligence community.

Fauci also said that relevant US authorities did sometimes provide briefings regarding possible biological attacks from terrorists, but he emphasized that those briefings were not related to COVID-19.

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Buffett's Berkshire Shares See Dramatic 99% 'Plunge' After Technical Glitch in US Stocks

NEW YORK, June 3 (Sputnik) - Shares in iconic investor Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway company showed a dramatic 99% plunge in a technical glitch that impacted US stocks on Monday, forcing the New York Stock Exchange to briefly halt trading to remedy the situation.

A Bloomberg screen capture distributed on the X platform showed Berkshire shares down to \$185.10 at one point from a previous \$627,400. Both numbers were wrong.

By 11:45 am in New York (15:45 pm in London), some two hours after trading for US stocks opened, Berkshire's Class A cited in the Bloomberg screen capture showed a decline of just around 1%, trading a little under \$634,000 — showing the matter had apparently been resolved.

As the exchange explained, a technical issue related to the upper and lower limits on stocks — which are mechanisms for controlling excessive volatility — triggered the false readings for Berkshire. The Buffett company aside, Barrick Gold and Nuscale Power were other stocks to witness dramatic falls during this episode.

According to reports, this was the second time in a week that a glitch had halted trading in US stocks. On Thursday, a disruption prevented prices from being printed on the S&P 500 index for

the top 500 US stocks.

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US Senate Republicans Blocking Bills Due to Trump Conviction Not to Impact NDAA - Source

WASHINGTON, June 3 (Sputnik) - A Republican-led blockade in the US Senate against Democratic legislation due to the conviction of former President Donald Trump will not impact ongoing bipartisan work on the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2025, a congressional source told Sputnik on Monday.

Last week, a group of Republican senators pledged to block the expedited consideration of Democratic legislation and the confirmation of some Democratic nominees in response to the prosecution and conviction of Trump in a New York court. The letter is backed by eight Republican senators, including Mike Lee, JD Vance, Rick Scott and Marco Rubio.

"Since the pledge only covers non-security related funding, the signers would not block NDAA provisions under its terms," the source said.

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 presumptive Republican presidential candidate said the verdict was a disgrace and part of a sham trial pushed by the Biden administration via a weaponized judicial system and a partisan judge in order to interfere in the 2024 presidential election. Trump said he will appeal the jury's decision.

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UN Still Clarifying Who Will Represent World Body at Swiss Summit on Ukraine - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, June 3 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is still working out details about who will represent the organization at the planned Ukraine peace summit in Switzerland this month, UN Spokesman Farhan Haq told Sputnik on Monday.

"Not yet. It's being worked out," Haq told Sputnik when asked who would represent the summit. Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy told Sputnik in May that the summit is a "questionable event" and the UN is therefore having issues with deciding who will represent it.

Earlier on Monday, Saudi Arabia reportedly announced would not attend the Swiss-hosted peace conference in June because Russia will not be represented.

Also earlier on Monday, the White House said Vice President Kamala Harris and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan would attend the gathering.

Switzerland will host the Summit on Peace in Ukraine near the city of Lucerne from June 15-16. 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 had no plans to participate in the event even if invited.

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Biden Congratulates Mexican President-Elect Sheinbaum on Election Victory - Statement

WASHINGTON, June 3 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Monday congratulated Mexican President-elect Claudia Sheinbaum on winning the country's presidential election.

The National Electoral Institute said earlier in the day that Sheinbaum, a candidate of the ruling leftist Morena party, was projected to win between 58.3% and 60.7% of the vote. Sheinbaum will become Mexico's first female president.

"I congratulate Claudia Sheinbaum on her historic election as the first woman President of Mexico," Biden said in a statement. "I look forward to working closely with President-elect Sheinbaum in the spirit of partnership and friendship that reflects the enduring bonds between our two countries."

Biden emphasized his commitment to advancing common values and interests and congratulated the Mexican people for conducting a successful democratic electoral process.

The official results of the election will be announced after the vote count later in the week. The inauguration of the winning candidate will take place on October 1 on the day of the transfer of federal executive power.

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Harris, Sullivan to Attend Ukraine Peace Summit in Switzerland - White House

WASHINGTON, June 3 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Kamala Harris and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan will attend the Summit on Peace in Ukraine that will be held in Switzerland later this month, the White House said on Monday.

"Vice President Kamala Harris will travel to Lucerne, Switzerland on June 15 to participate in the Summit on Peace in Ukraine...National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan will join the Vice President in representing the United States at the Summit," the White House said in a statement.

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us vice president harris to travel to lucerne, switzerland on june 15 to participate in summit on peace in ukraine - white house

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US Concerned About Potential Chinese Cyberattacks During Taiwan Conflict - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 3 (Sputnik) - The United States is concerned about China's ability to launch cyberattacks on the US and its allies in the event of a conflict involving Taiwan, The Wall Street Journal reported on Monday.

The US believes that China is attempting to access critical infrastructure networks in an effort to preposition for possible attacks in the future, the report said, citing US Cyber Command and National Security Agency chief Gen. Timothy Haugh.

US officials are concerned about China's ability to use such access to launch cyber attacks against critical infrastructure in the event of a conflict involving Taiwan, the report said.

The potential targeting of water systems is particularly concerning, Haugh reportedly said.

Chinese cyberattacks against the US are increasing in frequency and sophistication, Haugh said. The exact number of security breaches is unclear because the US does not notice every intrusion, Haugh added.

China has repeatedly denied accusations of cyberattacks by state-backed actors and accused the US of conducting its own attacks, the report said.

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Washington Concerned About Potential Major Terrorist Attack in US or Europe - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, June 3 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Monday that the potential for a major terrorist attack in the United States or Europe is among the crises currently concerning Washington.

"There are two or three big undertakings that we are really focused on right now," Sullivan said at the Global Impact Forum. "The first is dealing obviously with the urgent crises at the moment in Ukraine, in Gaza, in Sudan. And also looking around the corner to the crises that could come: the potential threat posed by North Korea, the potential for a mass casualty terrorist event in Europe, the United States or somewhere else. So there's the crisis bucket."

Sullivan said that the second undertaking involved ensuring the United States, rather than its adversaries, was writing the rules in a rapid changing world and cited AI as central to this effort.

The third undertaking involved working on development in Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia.

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Trudeau Congratulates Mexican President-Elect Sheinbaum on Her Victory - Statement

WASHINGTON, June 3 (Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Monday extended his congratulations to Mexico President-elect Claudia Sheinbaum on her victory in

Sunday's election.

The National Electoral Institute said earlier in the day that Sheinbaum, a candidate of the ruling leftist Morena party, was projected to win between 58.3% and 60.7% of the vote. Sheinbaum is poised to become Mexico's first female president.

"On behalf of the government of Canada, I congratulate Claudia Sheinbaum on her election as the first woman president of Mexico," Trudeau said in a statement.

The prime minister also said he hopes to work closely with Sheinbaum on strengthening the bilateral friendship and noted that Canada and Mexico can make life better for their citizens by jointly fighting climate change, strengthening international peace and security, promoting gender equality and advancing reconciliation with indigenous peoples.

"Through the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement, we will advance our work to create good middle-class jobs, grow our economies, and deliver fairness for every generation," Trudeau said.

Canada looks forward to deepening its ties with Mexico via the United Nations, the Group of Twenty (G20), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and other global forums, Trudeau added.

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Biden Says Has 'Boundless Love' for His Son as Dad, Won't Comment on His Gun Case

WASHINGTON, June 3 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden said on Monday that he will not comment on his son Hunter's court case as the president but expressed "boundless love" for him as a father.

"As the President, I don't and won't comment on pending federal cases, but as a Dad, I have boundless love for my son, confidence in him, and respect for his strength," Biden said in a statement.

Biden pointed out that he and his wife, Jill Biden, are proud of their son.

"Hunter's resilience in the face of adversity and the strength he has brought to his recovery are inspiring to us," he said, adding that the family will continue supporting Hunter.

Hunter Biden arrived at a court in Delaware earlier in the day to attend a trial in his case related to a firearm purchase. Jury selection is set to begin on Monday morning. The trial is expected to last from three to six days.

Biden is accused of lying about his history of drug use on the firearm purchase form, resulting in three felony charges. Biden's legal team unsuccessfully attempted to toss the case ahead of the trial, based on arguments that the charges violate the Second Amendment of the US Constitution.

The Second Amendment protects the right to keep and bear arms, although some restrictions on firearm ownership have been found legally permissible, including restricting ownership by felons and users of controlled substances.

Biden pleaded not guilty to the charges against him, after a plea deal and pre-trial diversion agreement that would have resolved the firearm charges and separate tax charges fell through. He faces up to 25 years in prison if convicted, but the Justice Department explained that actual

sentences for federal crimes are typically less than maximum penalties.