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1/25/24 Thursday

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Turkish Military Aircraft Forced to Make Emergency Landing - Video

The Turkish military aircraft was forced to make an emergency landing after it experienced a technical malfunction during a training flight.
A Turkish C-160D aircraft was forced to make an emergency landing at the Kayseri 12th Air Transport Base Command in central Turkiye after it experienced a technical malfunction on Thursday morning. The aircraft belongs to the 2th Command of the Main Air Transport Base, according to a recent report. The malfunction occurred during a routine training flight.
A video of the incident was shared to X (formerly Twitter), showing the aircraft flying low over cars and other eyewitnesses as it descended into its emergency landing.
According to a separate report, the aircraft is one of two special mission aircrafts and is in the MilKar-2U configuration for Electronic Warfare radio-frequency jamming systems, and belongs to the 221 Filo Squadron.
The pilot was able to successfully perform an emergency landing back at the base. And no injuries to the pilot or crew occurred, according to the Ministry of National Defense. Damage to the aircraft, however, was reported.
“Our aircraft suffered minor damage,” the Turkish Ministry of Defense said in a statement. “The health of our pilots and crew is good.”
The Turkish Air Force said that the C-160 received slight damage after making its emergency landing, but a video shared to X (formerly Twitter) claims the damage it received was significant. In the video the aircraft appears to make a crash landing.
The aircraft was developed by the French-German syndicate Transport Allianz. It is a twin-engine plane that can carry about 16 tons of freight, 91 passengers, 60 paratroopers, or 62 wounded on stretchers. France retired the aircraft in 2021 while Germany retired theirs a year later. The Turkish Air Force is the last remaining operator of the two C-160D Transall aircrafts.

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Expelled From 'MAGA Camp' - Cartoon

Haley raked in $1 million in donations to her campaign after the former president threatened her donors on his social media site Truth Social.
Former President Donald Trump took to his social media site Truth Social on Wednesday to lambast his GOP primary opponent Nikki Haley, warning her supporters that if they donated to her campaign they would be “barred from the MAGA camp”.

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"Anybody that makes a 'Contribution' to Birdbrain, from this moment forth, will be permanently barred from the MAGA camp. We don't want them, and will not accept them, because we Put America First, and ALWAYS WILL!" Trump said in reference to Haley.
In response, Haley took to X (formerly Twitter) and wrote: "Well in that case… donate here. Let's Go!" and added a link to her fundraising page.
During a rally in North Charleston, South Carolina, Haley boasted that she was able to bring in $1 million in online donations within just 24 hours. But one outlet revealed that billionaire Reid Hoffman has paused funding for her campaign following the New Hampshire primary result.
Haley recently lost to Trump by 11 points in Tuesday's New Hampshire primary. The race was widely viewed as one of her best chances to take Trump down in their race for the White House. The race will now continue in Haley's home state of South Carolina.
On Sunday afternoon, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis dropped out of the race and endorsed Trump. Ryan Williams, a Republican strategist, pointed out that Haley "needed a win in New Hampshire and she didn't get it" adding that "this race is all but decided".

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Court Rules Against Trudeau's 'Draconian' Use of Emergencies Act in 2022 Freedom Convoy

The Freedom Convoy protests in 2022 saw thousands of protestors clogging the streets of Ottawa and swarming Parliament Hill as a way to protest vaccine mandates for truckers and other COVID-19 mandates.
On Tuesday, a Canadian federal court judge ruled that Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's use of the 1998 Emergencies Act was "not justified" in addressing the 2022 Freedom Convoy protests against COVID-19 restrictions. The Emergencies Act enabled authorities to freeze truckers' personal and corporate bank accounts and also allowed for the towing of vehicles. Federal Court Justice Richard Mosley said that doing so led to the infringement of constitutional rights. The government will reportedly repeal the result.
Dimitri Lascaris, a lawyer and journalist who joined Sputnik's The Final Countdown on Thursday, said the implementation of the Emergencies Act to address the 2022 trucker protest in Ottawa was "draconian" and "not necessary".
"In defense of the citizens of Ottawa, this was a very difficult period because these trucks were there for weeks on end. They were blocking major thoroughfares into the center of the city. And they were producing a tremendous amount of noise and a lot of pollution. And even though I myself routinely participate in protests around a variety of issues, I recognize that there have to be some constraints and limits on protest that, to accommodate innocent members of society," said Lascaris.
Lascaris added that at the time of the protests he had written two articles analyzing whether or not the Emergencies Act—which was invoked by Trudeau's government for the first time in history—were necessary or appropriate.
"I wrote two articles as a lawyer analyzing the situation and said, absolutely not, this is not necessary, nor is it appropriate. And in fact, I have serious problems about the existence of this

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legislation, the Emergencies Act, because seizing people's bank accounts, what they did was they froze bank accounts with no due process. Nothing. There was no court order, no court process, no opportunity contested," he explained.

"If you lose the ability even for a temporary period to access your bank account, you might not be able to pay your rent. You might not be able to buy food. You might not be able to buy medicines. I mean, this is outrageous that they went to this length," Lascaris added. "I'm not at all surprised by this decision.

"If this decision stands, I'm hopeful that no Canadian government will ever attempt something this preposterous again."

Sputnik's Jamarl Thomas then asked what other decisions Trudeau could have made to address the truckers' protests that would not have involved invoking the Emergencies Act.

"I'll give you an example of something that's happening right now," Lascaris answered. "It doesn't involve invocation of the Emergencies Act. It relates to protests in support of Palestinian rights in Toronto. There's a group who have been going on overpasses of major freeways in the city, and they're waving flags."

Lascaris explained that "under pressure" the police have begun to arrest people they find on that overpass and have charged them with mischief and disturbing the peace.

"They don't have to invoke the Emergencies Act to do that. And that's precisely what the cops could have done in Ottawa, they could have gotten out there, started handing out tickets, and told people to clear the streets. If they didn't do that: arrest people, charge them with mischief, charge them with disturbing the peace," he added.

"This is part of a larger trend that's happening in Western society right now. There is a broad-based assault on our right to free assembly, free protest and freedom of speech. And it's happening in many different ways. The invocation of this draconian legislation and circumstances, as I said, I don't even think this legislation should exist. But if it exists, it should be used in only the most extreme of circumstances. And this is just one example of the ways in which our basic civil liberties are being increasingly eroded by Western governments," he added.

Thomas then asked Lascaris why the authorities resorted to using federal power to address the protests in 2022 as opposed to basic policing.

"I have my suspicions," said Lascaris. "I thought perhaps to some degree this was a trial run. They wanted to see if they could get away with it. And there were circumstances, they picked a moment when there was widespread anger, not just in Ottawa, but across the country with these protests."

"It was the height of the pandemic and there was a tremendous amount of antipathy towards people who weren't getting vaccinated. So Trudeau found himself in a situation where he could invoke legislation with widespread public support," he said, adding that many from his left-wing party agreed with Trudeau's decision.

"And if this decision is overturned, sooner or later, this law is going to be wielded against us," Lascaris warned. "Those of us who disagreed with the truckers for reasons having nothing to do with health policy or pandemic policy, for example, you know, we might be out there protesting in support of Palestinian rights, and we have a government in power that is intensely hostile to our protest. They may use that legislation against us if they get away with it this time. So I'm very

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concerned about what's going to happen with the appeal. And I very much hope that the appellate court upholds this decision."
As for Trudeau and his party's political future, Lascaris said they're "in trouble".
"Trudeau just held his cabinet retreat here in Montreal where I am. And the talk of the town was that the Liberals are in serious political trouble, and they're trying to figure out a way to regain their popularity. So [Trudeau] can barely put his face in public now without being heckled and booed on a whole range of issues. So this court rendering this decision at this time is very bad for the political prospects of Trudeau, and I'm sure he's hoping beyond hope that the appellate court is going to overturn the decision."
In February of last year, a public inquiry found that the government had acted appropriately when it invoked the Emergencies Act. But the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA) and the Canadian Constitution Foundation applied for a judicial review. Political opponents of Trudeau and his party have used Tuesday's decision as a talking point to criticize the prime minister. The Conservative party is currently polling far ahead of the Liberal party in an election that is expected to occur next year.

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'I Wanted to Live': Words of Ukrainian POW Killed by Kiev Regime Haunt From Beyond the Grave

A Ukrainian soldier complained about Kiev's disregard for its own troops in a video resurfacing after the downing of a plane carrying POWs Wednesday.
As information continues to emerge about the crash of a Russian IL-76 transport plane carrying Ukrainian POWs Wednesday, security analyst Mark Sleboda once again joined Sputnik's Fault Lines program to offer insight on the evolving situation.
It's been revealed that among the 65 Ukrainians killed in the tragic incident was Konstantin Danilchenko, a Ukrainian soldier held by Russia since 2022. Sleboda recalled that Danilchenko came to prominence that year when he spoke of Kiev's apparent disregard for its own troops in a video released by the Russian Ministry of Defense.
"I wanted to live," said Danilchenko, explaining his surrender to Russian forces. "We are considered as cannon fodder. Everyone understands why our leadership is so cold towards us."
"They don't explain anything, they just throw us on the battlefield," he added, claiming he was surrounded by ill-prepared Ukrainian troops who "don't know anything about military affairs." He recounted fighting alongside a "55-year-old grandfather who was half-shell shocked."
Sleboda called the video "an eerie fortune telling of the war," that has seen thousands of Ukrainians downed by better-trained Russian troops. Recently, reports have emerged of Ukrainian civilians being arrested on buses and off the streets to fight in the Donbass against their will. The country is currently struggling to push through a bill to conscript 500,000 new soldiers, among them women and older men.
"Indeed, it seems that some [of] the Ukrainian military or the Ukrainian government or someone involved indeed considered him [Danilchenko] meat," observed Sleboda. He accused the

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Zelensky regime of a "callous attitude towards Ukrainians who surrender towards Russian forces," suggesting that Kiev may have shot down the transport plane intentionally.
The analyst noted the "numerous times" Ukraine has "attacked their own prisoners of war, such as at Elenovka and Bakhmut [and] Artemovsk where on two separate occasions they used HIMARS to hit detention facilities where POWs were held."
Sleboda called the country's targeting of Ukrainian POWs an "established pattern." "They often send FPV drones out hunting the vehicles down that are carrying the POWs back to Russian lines," he added.
The Ukrainian military may target its own troops in an effort to prevent Russia gaining leverage by taking soldiers captive, a strategy reminiscent of Israel's infamous "Hannibal directive."
The Ukrainian POWs were reportedly being transported by Russia to be exchanged in a planned prisoner swap with Kiev. Ukrainian intelligence officials were informed of the plans and acknowledged the exchange was to take place, according to the Russian Ministry of Defense.
Sleboda speculated that the apparent Ukrainian snafu could be an effort to discredit Armed Forces commander-in-chief Valery Zaluzhny as talk emerges the military leader could replace unpopular President Volodymyr Zelensky. In the meantime the incident is seen as a major public relations debacle for the Kiev regime.
The entire interview can be heard on Sputnik's Fault Lines program with hosts Jamarl Thomas and Melik Abdul on Rumble and various podcast platforms.

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South African Suit Against Israel Could "Open the Floodgates" of Accountability for Colonial Powers

South Africa's case could be the first of many to hold Western powers responsible for the crimes of colonialism, imperialism, and genocide.
South Africa's genocide suit against Israel in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) could prove to be a watershed moment for efforts to hold Western countries accountable for their historical crimes. That's according to author and historian Dr. Gerald Horne who joined Sputnik's The Critical Hour program as reports emerged that the ICJ plans to make a ruling on South Africa's case Friday.
"There is a strong and distinct possibility that the International Court of Justice in the Hague in the Netherlands will issue what amounts to a cease-and-desist order, i.e., an injunction… demanding that Israel's forces stop its genocidal campaign against Palestinians in Gaza," said Horne.
"If that order is issued it will then go to the Security Council, where it will likely face a veto from Israel's protector – speaking of the United States of America," explained the University of Houston professor. "But it does not necessarily stop there because with some maneuvering, it's possible that ICJ opinion can be forwarded to the General Assembly of the United Nations, that is to say, 190-plus member states."

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Horne claimed a ruling in favor of an emergency injunction against Israel would be a significant development, as the decision could form the basis for increased pressure and even sanctions on the country. The verdict would also be a setback for the United States which has repeatedly defended Israel's conduct in Gaza while serving as its ally's chief supplier of military aid.

The author claimed the United States is already flexing its diplomatic muscle to discredit South Africa.

"Washington also, it seems to me, is trying to crack down on South Africa," said Horne. "That is the import of the present tour of Africa by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. Recall that he has visited Nigeria, the continent's largest economy and most populous state."

Horne said Nigeria has historically remained more neutral on the Palestinian question, perhaps owing to anti-Islamic sentiment. He claimed Blinken's visits to countries like Nigeria and Angola were designed to isolate South Africa, noting the United States' long history of interference across the continent. The United States worked with apartheid South Africa in the 1970s in an attempt to prevent anticolonial forces from coming to power in Angola.

Recently Namibia's President Hage Geingob made headlines when he slammed Germany's intervention in the ICJ on behalf of Israel. The president noted Berlin has repeatedly refused to provide reparations to Namibia for their genocide of the Namaqua and Herero people in the early twentieth century.

Host Garland Nixon asked if the development illustrates the potential for countries of the Global South to band together and file claims in the ICJ seeking justice for the historical abuses of European colonial powers.

"I think that, believe it or not, a key answer or a critical answer to that question will be emerging from North America," responded Horne. "Not only with regard to Black Americans filing what amounts to a front of the court brief with the ICJ in support of the South African claims against Israel, on the basis that certainly the genocide that has been perpetrated against Black people gives credence to the idea that the United States and London have aided and abetted genocide in historic Palestine. But also, the numerous Native American groupings."

Horne expressed optimism that South Africa might in turn side with African American groups to file a claim against the United States for carrying out a "genocide against Black Americans." He recalled that the idea was suggested by American civil rights activist Paul Robeson in 1950. Robeson was persecuted by the US government for his socialist politics and outspoken defense of the Soviet Union. The legendary musician was one of a number of civil rights advocates targeted by US intelligence, including Malcolm X and Fred Hampton, who was assassinated on orders from the FBI. US agencies also famously surveilled Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., monitoring his correspondence and sending him anonymous threats.

In 1999, a jury found that the US federal government was likely involved in a conspiracy to assassinate the consequential civil rights leader.

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‘Prudent’ or ‘War Psychosis’: What Are Prospects for European Military?

An expert speaks with Sputnik about the challenges posed by military integration across the continent.

Online media outlet Politico published a highly imaginative piece of speculative fiction Wednesday with an article envisioning a future war between Russia and NATO. In the year 2027, US President Donald Trump has abandoned the longstanding military alliance in author Laura Kayali’s framing of events. Conflict explodes when Russian forces, for reasons not fully explained, venture into the Baltic republics with an invasion of Estonia.

Veteran analyst Dr. Alessandro Politi opined on the website’s exercise in creative writing, calling it “more campaign bluster” than serious analysis. Still, talk has persisted for decades of an integrated European military force capable of defending the continent. Politi spoke with Sputnik about the prospects of a European military and the major roadblocks such a proposal would face.

Firstly, the idea would face serious practical and economic challenges, according to Politi. “There is an example of how a European army today would look,” said the Luxembourg-based strategist. “It's like the Ukrainian army today – a logistical nightmare. Bottom line is it's not so much about spending more, but about spending better, which means we have to standardize our armaments.”

Politi noted the idea would likely prove unpopular with European defense industries because it would “reduce profits.” Weapons manufacturers would earn less income from producing a smaller selection of widely-adopted armaments produced by other companies throughout the continent. Recently, British arms industry exports ballooned to over $10 billion annually, representing an important part of the country’s economy.

Still Politi said “standardizing is not any more an optional” choice for European military planners, insisting, “it is a must.”

An integrated European military would also face substantial political barriers. Politi said the creation of NATO had gone some way in reconciling military culture throughout the continent, calling it “a great amalgamator.” But he claimed more progress was necessary.

Further, he insisted a compulsory draft would be necessary to fight off any significant threat to the continent – a highly controversial proposal. “Even the best professional army doesn't simply keep up with the losses that happen on battlefields,” the analyst claimed. “If people talk about scenarios and then they say, well, we have just to procure more weapons, I think they are deluding themselves.”

Politi also noted that internal politics in countries like France and Greece had threatened military cooperation throughout the continent in the past, and such tensions could do so again.

But the analyst concluded that the marker of success in military integration is not ultimately measured in soldiers recruited or Euros spent, but in whether peace prevails.

“The strength of NATO is that, for a number of actions and circumstances, it has avoided a war,” said Politi. “It was reciprocal deterrence, of course, but there was no war fought. This is a major achievement.”

Historical events since the 1990s may leave some observers to conclude the reciprocal nature of Cold War deterrence is at risk, with the United States fomenting the Euromaidain coup in Ukraine and NATO recklessly expanding towards Russia. If the balance of power is upset, one

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party naturally seeks to take advantage of the situation. Therefore the true way to peace may lie in restoring mutual respect between Russia and the West.
“Instead of thinking about war fighting, which is a consequence if deterrence fails, we need to think about a credible deterrence, that then would allow to have a security agreement that reassures everybody,” said Politi. “Which is not the case now.”

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US, Iraq to Reportedly Hold Talks 'Soon' on Ending American Foothold

The Iraqi parliament had previously passed a resolution to expel US-led coalition forces from the country.
In 2021 the United States’ 20-year war in Afghanistan finally came to a close with the final withdrawal of American troops from the country. Now, another long-running US conflict could be about to end with the United States reportedly set to begin talks on pulling out of Iraq.
US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin announced the development on Thursday, following through on an agreement made between the two countries last year. The US-Iraq Higher Military Commission will include representatives from both the United States and Iraq and will focus on moving toward “an enduring bilateral security partnership” according to Austin.
The US reportedly informed the Iraqi foreign minister Fuad Hussein of the plans in a letter on Wednesday.
The announcement comes as American troops throughout the Middle East have faced attacks amidst US support for Israel’s deadly military operation in the besieged Gaza Strip. The United States has vigorously defended Israel at the United Nations and in other international venues while providing the country with billions of dollars in lethal aid.
The death toll in the territory has reached nearly 26,000 Palestinians according to the latest numbers released by local authorities. It’s been revealed that women and children make up about 70% of the casualties.
The Iraqi government has faced substantial domestic pressure to ensure an end to the US presence in the country. Meanwhile, attacks on US troops continue throughout the region amidst strong opposition to US support for Israel.

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“I wanted to live,” said Russian-held Ukrainian soldier Konstantin Danilchenko in a haunting video that resurfaced after he was reportedly killed in Kiev’s downing of a plane carrying Ukrainian POWs for a planned prisoner swap.

“We are considered as cannon fodder… they don’t explain anything,” he added, echoing complaints of ill-prepared Ukrainian troops arriving on the battlefield with little military training.

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Security analyst Mark Sleboda called the video "an eerie fortune telling of the war," as he joined Sputnik's Fault Lines program Thursday to discuss the incident. Sleboda claimed the Kiev regime has targeted Ukrainian POWs "numerous times," alleging the government's "callous attitude towards Ukrainians who surrender towards Russian forces."

The analyst speculated the incident could be designed to discredit Ukrainian President Volydymyr Zelensky's rival Valery Zaluzhny, the head of Ukraine's armed forces.

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"There is a strong and distinct possibility that the International Court of Justice in the Hague in the Netherlands will issue what amounts to a cease-and-desist order… demanding that Israel's forces stop its genocidal campaign against Palestinians in Gaza," said author Dr. Gerald Horne on Sputnik's The Critical Hour program Thursday.

The discussion came as reports emerged that the ICJ would issue a decision in South Africa's case against Israel Friday morning. A ruling against Israel could lead to increased pressure or even sanctions against the country; it would also be an embarrassment for its most important defender, the United States.

Elsewhere in Africa, Namibian president Hage Geingob made headlines recently when he slammed Germany's defense of Israel at the ICJ, pointing out Germany's 20th century genocide of the Namaqua and Herero people in Namibia.

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"There is an example of how a European army today would look… It's like the Ukrainian army today – a logistical nightmare," said political and strategic analyst Dr. Alessandro Politi in an interview with Sputnik on Thursday.

The discussion came after a fear mongering article in the European edition of Politico's website which envisioned a Russian invasion of NATO countries in the coming years. Politi likened the piece to "campaign bluster" but insisted the continent should work sincerely towards maintaining peace in Europe.

The creation of an integrated European military would face various practical and political challenges, the analyst explained. Politi said that "a security agreement that reassures everybody" would be necessary long term, "which is not the case now."

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Two years after the country's withdrawal from Afghanistan the United States is set to bring another long-running military presence to an end as talks begin to remove US-led coalition forces from Iraq.

US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin made the announcement Thursday after informing the Iraqi foreign minister in a letter the day before. The US-Iraq Higher Military Commission will include representatives from both countries and is the culmination of an agreement made last year.

The US has faced intense opposition throughout the Middle East amidst its material and diplomatic support for Israel in its military campaign in the Gaza Strip, which has killed nearly 26,000 Palestinians. US forces continue to face attacks throughout the region.

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US to Increase Policing Resources to Counter Violent Crime in Washington - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 26 (Sputnik) - The US Justice Department said in a statement on Friday that it will increase law enforcement resources to counter violent crime in Washington.

"The Justice Department announced today that it will surge additional law enforcement tools and resources to target those most responsible for violent crime and carjackings in Washington, DC," the statement said.

US Attorney General Merrick Garland acknowledged in the statement that the authorities have much work to do to keep order in the country, including in the nation's capital.

"This surge in law enforcement resources will build on the [Justice] Department's efforts to target the individuals and organizations that are driving violent crime in the nation's capital," Garland said.

The additional resources include a multi-component Gun Violence Analytic Cell (GVAC), which is led by the FBI with partners from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the statement said.

GVAC will use data analytics to identify additional federal investigations that should be opened to combat violent crime and carjackings, the statement added.

The number of homicides in Washington increased by more than a third in 2023, to 274 from 203 a year before, and robberies increased 67%, to 3,470 in 2023 from 2,076 in 2022.

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

US Pauses Additional Funding for UNRWA Over Suspicion of Involvement in October 7 Attack

WASHINGTON, January 26 (Sputnik) – The United States has temporarily paused additional funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) amid allegations of UNRWA staff involvement in the October 7 attack on Israel, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Friday.

"The United States is extremely troubled by the allegations that twelve UNRWA employees may have been involved in the October 7 Hamas terrorist attack on Israel. The Department of State has temporarily paused additional funding for UNRWA while we review these allegations and the steps the United Nations is taking to address them," Miller said in a statement.

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US Kills 6 Al-Shabab Terrorists in Airstrike in Somalia – AFRICOM

WASHINGTON, January 26 (Sputnik) – The United States killed six al-Shabab terrorists in an airstrike in Somalia, the Africa Command (AFRICOM) said on Friday.

"The initial assessment is that the U.S. airstrike killed six al Shabaab terrorists and that no civilians were injured or killed," AFRICOM said in a statement.

The airstrike was conducted at the request of the federal government of Somalia on January 24 in the vicinity of Caad, it added.

Al-Shabab is based in Somalia and linked to the al-Qaeda terrorist group (banned in Russia). The former has long been engaged in an insurgency campaign against the Somali federal government and staged numerous terror attacks in an effort to impose a radical version of Sharia law in the country.

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Biden Pauses All Pending Decisions on LNG Exports - White House

WASHINGTON, January 26 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Friday paused the approval of new liquefied natural gas (LNG) export projects, citing a need to better assess climate, health and economic considerations of pending licenses.

"Today, the Biden-Harris Administration is announcing a temporary pause on pending decisions on exports of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) to non-FTA countries until the Department of Energy can update the underlying analyses for authorizations," the White House said in a fact sheet.

The fact sheet said that the current economic and environmental analyses that the Energy Department uses to underpin its LNG export authorizations are some five years old and do not

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adequately account for such considerations like potential energy cost increases for both US consumers and manufacturers.

"Today, we have an evolving understanding of the market need for LNG, the long-term supply of LNG, and the perilous impacts of methane on our planet," the fact sheet said. "We also must adequately guard against risks to the health of our communities, especially frontline communities in the United States who disproportionately shoulder the burden of pollution from new export facilities."

The White House stressed that the decision to halt LNG exports will allow the time to integrate these considerations.

In a separate statement, Biden stressed that the pause on new LNG project approvals shows that the climate crisis is "the existential threat of our time."

"While MAGA Republicans willfully deny the urgency of the climate crisis, condemning the American people to a dangerous future, my Administration will not be complacent," Biden said. "We will not cede to special interests."

US Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Energy Resources Geoffrey Pyatt said in November that the United States expects to retain its status of the world's top LNG exporter "for years and years to come."

According to the US Energy Information Administration, the US led global LNG exports in the first half of 2023, with an average of 11.6 billion cubic feet per day. The rise in US LNG exports was attributed to the resumption of operations at one of its significant facilities, driven by sustained global demand for LNG, particularly in Europe.

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Biden Says ‘More Pressing Than Ever’ to Remember Holocaust, Scourge of Anti-Semitism

WASHINGTON, January 26 (Sputnik) – The October 7 Hamas attack on Israel made it "more pressing than ever" to remember the Holocaust and the scourge of anti-Semitism, US President Joe Biden said on Friday in a statement marking International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

"This year, the charge to remember the Holocaust, the evil of the Nazis, and the scourge of antisemitism is more pressing than ever," Biden said in the statement.

The president pointed to an "alarming rise of despicable antisemitism at home and abroad" in the aftermath of the October 7 attacks.

The world cannot remember all that Jewish survivors of the Holocaust experienced and then stand silently by when Jews are attacked and targeted again today, he stated.

"This includes Holocaust denialism and efforts to minimize the horrors that Hamas perpetrated on October 7," Biden said.

On October 7, Palestinian movement Hamas launched a large-scale rocket attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip while its fighters breached the border, opening fire on the military and civilians. As a result, over 1,200 people in Israel were killed and some 240 others abducted. Israel launched retaliatory strikes, ordered a complete blockade of Gaza and began a ground incursion into the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and

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rescuing the hostages.

Almost 26,000 people have been killed in the Gaza Strip as a result of Israeli strikes, local authorities said.

On November 24, Qatar mediated a deal between Israel and Hamas on a temporary truce and the exchange of some of the prisoners and hostages, as well as the delivery of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip. The ceasefire was extended several times and expired on December 1.

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Houthis Fire Missile Toward Destroyer USS Carney in Gulf of Aden - CENTCOM

WASHINGTON, January 26 (Sputnik) - The Houthis fired an anti-ship ballistic missile toward destroyer USS Carney in the Gulf of Aden on Friday, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) said.

"On Jan. 26, at approximately 1:30 p.m. (Sanaa time), Iranian-backed Houthi militants fired one anti-ship ballistic missile from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen toward Arleigh-Burke class destroyer USS Carney (DDG 64) in the Gulf of Aden," the CENTCOM said in a statement. "The missile was successfully shot down by USS Carney."

There are no injuries or damage reported, the command added.

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Evidence Shows Ukraine Downing of IL-76 Plane 'Premeditated Assault' - Russian Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, January 26 (Sputnik) - All available information about Ukraine downing the Russian IL-76 military transport airplane carrying Ukrainian prisoners of war shows an act of premeditated assault, Russian deputy envoy to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said.

"All of the information that we have today shows that we are dealing with a premeditated assault through crime," Polyanskiy said during a meeting of the UN Security Council on Thursday.

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Ex-Russian President Yeltsin Wished Russia Joined NATO First Followed By Others - Document

WASHINGTON, January 26 (Sputnik) - Former Russian President Boris Yeltsin told then-US President Bill Clinton during a dinner in Moscow that he wanted Russia to be the first to join

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NATO, followed by other European countries, according to newly declassified US documents.
Yeltsin told Clinton during the dinner in 1994 that "Russia has to be the first country to join NATO," followed by other states from Central and Eastern Europe, according to the cable the US Embassy in Moscow sent to the State Department.
Yeltsin also proposed "a kind of cartel of the US, Russia and Europeans to help to ensure and improve world security," but Clinton avoided expanding on any of Yeltsin's proposals, the documents showed.
Clinton, according to the documents, told Yeltsin that a "relationship of trust and confidence" between the United States and Russia "could guarantee the countries of Europe a century of peace or more."
These documents were published by the US National Security Archive, founded by journalists and scientists in 1985. The institution recently took legal action against the State Department, requesting the declassification of materials.

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Death Row Inmate Kenneth Smith's Counsel Files Last-Minute Stay of Execution - Court Doc

WASHINGTON, January 26 (Sputnik) - The attorneys of Kenneth Smith, convicted of murder and sentenced to death in the state of Alabama, have filed last minute replies to the state's Attorney General's objections to the stay of execution on the grounds that Smith had not been provided with adequate information regarding execution protocol, court documents filed late on Thursday show.
"... he had not seen ADOC's Protocol for executing condemned people by nitrogen hypoxia. He was only provided with a heavily redacted copy of the Protocol in late August, at the same time that the State informed him that he would be the first person subject to it and moved in the Alabama Supreme Court for authority to execute him under its procedures," wrote Smith's attorneys.
They continued by saying that Smith could not have endorsed these protocols without having seen them beforehand.
The protocols in question, according to the document, involve the use of a mask instead of other alternatives to deliver the nitrogen gas that will be used during the execution.
The states of Alabama, Oklahoma and Mississippi all approve of nitrogen gas executions, but the method has yet to be tested in the United States.
Earlier this month, the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said that it is alarmed by the planned execution and urged Alabama authorities to reconsider the action.
Smith has been on death row for more than three decades, following his murder conviction in 1988. Smith was scheduled for execution by lethal injection in 2022, but officials could not initiate the execution before the execution warrant expired.
Earlier this month, a US judge rejected an effort to block Smith's pending execution. On Wednesday, the US Supreme Court also declined to halt the execution.

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US Space Force Concerned About Counterspace Capabilities From China, Russia - Report

WASHINGTON, January 26 (Sputnik) - The US Space Force in a new report mentioned that the United States considers Russia and China as its key competitors in space, highlighting concerns about both nations allegedly developing counterspace capabilities that threaten US interests.

"The US's key competitors, China and Russia, both operate hundreds of space systems to strengthen warfighting capabilities, boost spheres of influence, and position themselves as leaders in the international space community," the report stated on Thursday. "At the same time, both of these competitors are developing counterspace capabilities capable of degrading or destroying space systems critical to civilian infrastructure and military operations."

Russia and China have repeatedly called for the peaceful use of space. In addition, both countries have jointly submitted a draft treaty to the Conference on Disarmament, seeking to prevent deploying weapons in outer space and to address the potential threat or actual use of force against objects in space.

The Space Force, in its report called "Competing in Space," claims that China is developing satellite inspection and repair systems that could function as weapons, and that Russia has deployed multiple prototype orbital anti-satellites in low Earth orbit to test kinetic kill capabilities.

The report makes no mention of the United States' own space capabilities, which are largely classified.

China and Russia, the report said, have further plans to improve, expand, and diversify their counterspace capabilities, which will enhance their ability to monitor and target emergent events, force deployments, and sensitive ground locations.

In October, Chinese Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Shen Jian urged countries to adhere to the international consensus on peaceful uses of outer space, but noted with regret that some states obsessed with great power competition have declared outer space to be a warfighting domain.

Konstantin Vorontsov, deputy director of the department for nonproliferation and arms control at the Russian Foreign Ministry, previously said that Russia, together with other countries, stands for preventing an arms race in space and preserving it for peaceful purposes.

Russia has repeatedly called for such talks to begin and that any US accusations are hypocrisy.

According to the report, the United States has 4,723 satellites, China has 647, Russia has 199, and the rest of the world has 1,527 combined.

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More Than Two Dozen Governors Back Texas in Border Standoff With US Government - Statement

WASHINGTON, January 26 (Sputnik) - More than two dozen Republican governors are backing Texas in its standoff with the federal government over efforts to secure the state's border with Mexico from illegal migration, according to a joint statement released by the Republican Governors Association.

"We stand in solidarity with our fellow Governor, Greg Abbott, and the State of Texas in utilizing every tool and strategy, including razor wire fences, to secure the border. We do it in part because the Biden Administration is refusing to enforce immigration laws already on the books and is illegally allowing mass parole across America of migrants who entered our country illegally," the statement said on Thursday.

The statement was signed by 25 Republican governors, including Ron DeSantis of Florida, Sarah Sanders of Arkansas, Brian Kemp of Georgia and Greg Gianforte of Montana.

On Monday, the US Supreme Court issued a temporary order allowing federal Border Patrol agents to remove barriers placed by Texas on its portion of the United States' border with Mexico. However, Texas Governor Greg Abbott maintains that the state has a constitutional authority to protect itself, due to the Biden administration's failure to secure the border.

Texas has every legal justification to protect the sovereignty of states across the country, the statement said.

Independent presidential candidate Robert Kennedy Jr., former US President Donald Trump and former US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley have also expressed support for Texas.

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China Calls for Direct Engagement, Negotiations Between Russia, Ukraine - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, January 26 (Sputnik) - China calls on Russia and Ukraine to strengthen direct engagement and gradually resume negotiations, and accumulate consensus, Chinese deputy envoy to the United Nations Dai Bing said.

"China calls on the relevant parties to strengthen direct engagement and dialogue, gradually resume negotiations and accumulate consensus," Dai said during a meeting of the UN Security Council on Thursday evening.

The Chinese diplomat also said the international community must demonstrate greater urgency and strengthen diplomatic mediation.

On Wednesday, the Russian Defense Ministry said an Il-76 military transport airplane carrying 65 Ukrainian prisoners of war set to be exchanged was shot down in the Belgorod region. All the prisoners of war, together with six crew members and three accompanying persons on board the aircraft, were killed. The ministry accused the Ukrainian forces of downing the airplane after an exchange of prisoners of war had been arranged.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov reiterated that Russia had informed Ukraine that an Il-76 plane was going to transport captured Ukrainian soldiers for a prisoner of war swap. Both

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Russia and Ukraine said they have opened criminal cases into the downing of the airplane.

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UN Urges Continued Prisoner of War Exchanges Between Ukraine, Russia - Official

UNITED NATIONS, January 26 (Sputnik) - The United Nations welcomes the recent exchange of prisoners of war between Ukraine and Russia and urges both states to persist in pursuing such exchanges, UN Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo said.

"We welcome the latest exchange of prisoners of war between Ukraine and the Russian Federation...We urge the parties to continue pursuing exchanges of prisoners of war," DiCarlo said during a meeting of the UN Security Council on Thursday.

On Wednesday, the Russian Defense Ministry said an Il-76 military transport airplane carrying 65 Ukrainian prisoners of war set to be exchanged was shot down in the Belgorod region. All the prisoners of war, together with six crew members and three accompanying persons on board the aircraft, were killed. The ministry accused the Ukrainian forces of downing the airplane after an exchange of prisoners of war had been arranged.

Later, the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ukrainian Defense Ministry said its staff was not aware that Russia's Il-76 airplane was transporting Ukrainian prisoners of war for a prisoner swap. However, the Ukrainian news portal Strana.ua reported the ministry had confirmed that a prisoner exchange between the parties was scheduled for Wednesday.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov reiterated that Russia had informed Ukraine that an Il-76 plane was going to transport Ukrainian prisoners of war for exchange. Both Russia and Ukraine said they have opened criminal cases into the downing of the airplane.

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Kiev Regime Digging Hole With Their Lies in Denying Downing of Il-76 Plane - Russian Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, January 26 (Sputnik) - The Kiev regime goes against clear facts and does not take responsibility for downing the Il-76 plane, the Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Thursday.

“Everything that we have seen so far was a very primitive and cowardly attempt by the representatives of the Kiev authorities to go against the obvious facts and and not take responsibility for this and by doing this, they have got carried away in their lies and are now digging a greater and greater hole for themselves,” Polyanskiy told the UN Security Council members.

Russia is also disappointed that representatives of international organizations pursue “double standards” and refuse to comment on the downing of the Il-76 airplane, he added.

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Western States Supplying Arms to Down IL-76 Makes Them Co-Conspirators - Russian Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, January 26 (Sputnik) - Should the information that Western countries supplied weapons used in the downing of the IL-76 Russian military transport airplane is confirmed, they will be implicated as direct participants in this heinous act, Russian deputy envoy to the UNited Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said.
"If this becomes confirmed, then these Western countries which supplied this weaponry, will become direct participants in this crime," Polyanskiy said during a meeting of the UN Security Council on Thursday.

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IAEA Chief Grossi Says Plans to Visit Ukraine, Russia in Next 10 Days

UNITED NATIONS, January 26 (Sputnik) - International Atomic Energy Agency chief Rafael Grossi told reporters that he is planning to visit Ukraine and Russia in the next ten days.
“I prepare to return to Zaporizhzhia [Nuclear Power Plant] within the next 10 days or so I will be there, then also in Kiev and Russia,” Grossi said on Thursday.
Zaporizhzhia NPP is located on the left bank of the Dnipro River and is the largest nuclear power plant in Europe. It came under the control of Russian forces in early March 2022 and has since been repeatedly shelled, raising international concerns over a possible nuclear accident. IAEA experts have been working at the ZNPP since September 1, 2022, following IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi's first visit to the facility.

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Evidence Shows Ukraine Downing of IL-76 Plane 'Premeditated Assault' - Russian Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, January 26 (Sputnik) - All available information about Ukraine downing the Russian IL-76 military transport airplane carrying Ukrainian prisoners of war shows an act of premeditated assault, Russian deputy envoy to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said.
"All of the information that we have today shows that we are dealing with a premeditated

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assault through crime," Polyanskiy said during a meeting of the UN Security Council on Thursday.

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Russia Condemns US, UK Attacks on Yemen as Violations of UN Charter - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, January 26 (Sputnik) - Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia has circulated a letter among the members of the UN Security Council condemning the United States and the United Kingdom for their attacks on Yemen and characterizing the the attacks as being in violation of the UN Charter.

"[T]he US and the UK actions are to be qualified as unlawful use force in violation of Article 2 (4) of the UN Charter constituting an act of aggression, and notification addressed to the Security Council under Article 51 does not legitimize it," the letter said on Thursday.

Nebenzia said the escalation of the situation in the Middle East is a result of the "carnage in Gaza" given that the United States and the United Kingdom are not seeking a solution to stop the bloodshed in the Palestinian enclave.

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Biden Associate Testimony Raises Question on Family Tie to China Energy Firm - House Panel

WASHINGTON, January 26 (Sputnik) - The House Oversight Committee said in a statement that it took testimony from a Biden associate that raises questions on the family's ties to the Chinese linked energy firm CEFC.

"Today, we interviewed Mervyn Yan, a Biden family associate affiliated with the Bidens' dealings with the Chinese government linked energy firm, CEFC," the committee said on Thursday. "His testimony raises many questions about the Bidens' dealings with the Chinese government linked energy firm."

The committee said that Mervyn Yan admitted on the record the Biden family had no experience in the energy and infrastructure sectors and was unsure how they contributed. A transcript from Mervyn Yan's interview will be available soon, according to the committee. The committee said it hopes to learn more about this matter on Friday during a testimony from Rob Walker, who is another Biden family associate.

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US Ban on Russian Diplomats at Grains Council 'Flagrant' Restriction of Travel - Embassy

WASHINGTON, January 26 (Sputnik) - The US government's effective ban on Russian diplomats' participation in the International Grains Council meeting in New Orleans earlier this week is yet another egregious restriction of official travel by the United States as a host country, the Russian embassy in Washington said in a statement to Sputnik.

"Another flagrant case happened recently - the ban on the participation of our diplomats in the meeting of the International Grains Council on January 24 in New Orleans. With such an act, the United States clearly demonstrated that it is ready to violate its obligations as the host country of multilateral meetings," the statement said on Thursday.

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Trump Says Encourages All Willing States to Deploy Troops to Texas to Defend US Border

WASHINGTON, January 26 (Sputnik) - All willing state governments in the United States ought to deploy their National Guard forces to Texas to help defend the southern US border from illegal immigration, former President Donald Trump said in a statement via the social media platform Truth Social.

On Monday, the US Supreme Court issued a temporary order allowing federal Border Patrol agents to remove barriers placed by Texas on its portion of the US border with Mexico. However, Texas Governor Greg Abbott said that the state has a constitutional authority to protect itself, due to the Biden administration's failure to secure the border.

"In the face of this National Security, Public Safety, and Public Health Catastrophe, Texas has rightly invoked the Invasion Clause of the Constitution, and must be given full support to repel the Invasion," Trump said on Thursday. "We encourage all willing States to deploy their guards to Texas to prevent the entry of Illegals, and to remove them back across the Border."

Trump said that if elected president in 2024, he will work with Texas and other border states to stop the illegal flow of migrants into the US. Current US President Joe Biden is aiding and abetting an invasion of the US by millions of illegal migrants, Trump said.

The governors of more than a dozen states have pledged to support Texas in its standoff with the federal government over border security, including Florida, Virginia, Montana, Arkansas and Wyoming.

Earlier on Thursday, Independent US presidential hopeful Robert Kennedy Jr. said in a statement via X that he also supports Texas and would work to secure the border if elected to be the next president of the United States.

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Quebec Archbishop Gerald Lacroix Accused of Sexual Misconduct - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 26 (Sputnik) - Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Quebec Archbishop Gerald Cyprien Lacroix is being targeted in a major class-action lawsuit for alleged sexual assaults, La Presse reported.

Lacroix's name first appeared on judiciary documents listing the alleged sexual assaults, the report said on Thursday. The archbishop has been accused of allegedly molesting persons on several occasions between 1987 and 1988 in Quebec City.

Lacroix will face a first round of questioning later in 2024 and potentially face a legal process next year, the report said, citing Alain Arsenault, a lawyer working for the law firm representing the plaintiffs.

The class-action suit against the archdiocese was approved in June 2022 by the Superior Court of Quebec. The law firm representing the plaintiffs had then confirmed to Sputnik that Cardinal of Quebec Marc Ouellet, which had been considered by many to be a potential successor to Pope Francis, was among the listed alleged sexual abusers.

The latter categorically denied the accusations and launched a defamation lawsuit in December 2022, seeking C$100,000 (US$74,200) in compensations for injuries to his reputation, honor and dignity.

Initially supported by 101 victims who alleged being abused between 1942 and 2018, the number of plaintiffs behind the lawsuit has since grown to 147 individuals. The number of targeted clergymen increased from 88 to more than 100.

The Seminary and the Grand Seminary of Quebec as well as the St-Francois-de-Laval College and an insurance company offering service to the church have also been added to the list of defendants.

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Schumer Says US Senate Will Continue Negotiating Supplemental Funding Deal Over Weekend

WASHINGTON, January 26 (Sputnik) - US Senators will continue negotiations on a supplemental funding deal over the weekend, US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said during floor remarks.

"Getting a bipartisan agreement on the supplemental is very difficult… but negotiators will work all weekend in an effort to get this done," Schumer said on Thursday.

On Monday, Schumer said that Senate negotiators continued work on an agreement through last weekend as well.

The negotiators are attempting to reach an agreement on the Biden administration's supplemental funding request, which includes billions of dollars in aid for Ukraine and Israel.

Republican members of the US Congress have insisted on the inclusion of more stringent border security measures in the legislation.

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Biden Nominates Tracey Jacobson to Become Next US Ambassador to Iraq – White House

WASHINGTON, January 26 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden nominated Tracey Ann Jacobson to serve as the US ambassador to Iraq, the White House said on Thursday.

"Today, President Joe Biden announced his intent to nominate the following individuals to serve as key leaders in his Administration: Tracey Ann Jacobson, Nominee to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Republic of Iraq," the White House said in a press release.

Jacobson is a career diplomat who most recently served as Charge d'Affaires ad interim at the US Embassy in Ethiopia. She also has been an ambassador to Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kosovo, as well as the Deputy Chief of Mission at the US Embassy in Riga, Latvia, the release said.

Now the US Senate will have to confirm or deny the nomination of Jacobson.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, January 26 (Sputnik) –

ISRAELI INVASION IN GAZA

* Palestinian movement Hamas said on Thursday that it is ready to observe a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip if the International Court of Justice (ICJ) makes such a verdict and if Israel adheres to it.

* President Biden plans to send CIA Director William Burns to broker a deal between the Israeli government and Hamas that would involve releasing all remaining hostages held in the Gaza Strip and establish the longest ceasefire so far in the war, the Washington Post reported, citing unnamed officials.

* The European Union still prefers another humanitarian pause in the Gaza Strip to a ceasefire, the bloc's lead spokesman for foreign affairs said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* A Ukrainian drone attacked a farm in Russia's Belgorod Region on Thursday and killed a civilian woman, the region's governor, Vyacheslav Gladkov, said.

* The International Court of Justice said on Thursday that it will deliver its judgment on Ukraine's lawsuit against Russia submitted in 2017 and related to the events in Donbas and Crimea on January 31.

* Ukraine has lost up to 310 soldiers in the Donetsk direction over the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

IL-76 PLANE CRASH IN RUSSIA

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* Russia has informed Ukraine about an Il-76 plane transporting Ukrainian prisoners of war promptly, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Thursday.
* Russia has called on the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to condemn terrorist acts committed by Ukraine, including the downing of the Il-76 plane in the Belgorod Region and the January 21 shelling of Donetsk, Russian Permanent Representative to the OSCE Alexander Lukashevich said.
* Hundreds of entrance holes from the striking elements of a missile were found on the wreckage of the downed Il-76 military plane that crashed in Russia's Belgorod Region, the striking elements were also found in the fragments of the outer layer of the aircraft, a representative of the emergency services told Sputnik.
* The United States is looking into the potential involvement of US weapons in the downing of the Russian Il-76 military plane, Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said.

US-IRAQ MILITARY COMMISSION

* The United States and Iraq will start working group meetings related to the future of US military presence in the country, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said on Thursday.
* The launch of the US-Iraq Higher Military Commission (HMC) does not mean the start of negotiations between the two countries about the withdrawal of the US forces from Iraq, a senior US Defense Department official said.
* The talks between Iraq and the United States on the creation of a commission on the future of the international coalition against ISIS (banned in Russia) have been successful, the Iraqi Foreign Ministry said.

ATTACKS IN RED SEA

* Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov on Thursday held a meeting with a delegation consisting of members of the Houthi movement, also known as Ansar Allah, and the sides condemned strikes on Yemen conducted by the United States and the United Kingdom, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.
* The United Kingdom imposed financial sanctions against a number of people in Yemen linked with the Houthi movement, also known as Ansar Allah.
* The US Treasury announced sanctions on four Yemeni nationals, including Houthi defense chief Mohamed Al-Atifi, according to its registry.

RUSSIAN ENERGY MARKETS

* Russia will continue to reorient its gas exports to new markets with an emphasis on the Asia-Pacific region and increase supplies through the Power of Siberia pipeline, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said on Thursday.
* The production of Russian oil and gas condensate decreased by less than 1% in 2023 to about 530 million tonnes due to the participation in OPEC+, Novak said.

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UN Says Received Lavrov's Request for List of Bucha Victims

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UNITED NATIONS, January 25 (Sputnik) - The United Nations has received a request from Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to share a list of Bucha victims featured in footage that was released by Ukrainian authorities after they entered the town following the departure of Russian forces, in what Moscow says was a provocation to frame its soldiers.

"Yes, the request has been received," spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said during a briefing on Thursday.

The remarks were in response to a reporter's question if Lavrov had sent such requests.

Speaking at a UN Security Council this week, Lavrov recalled that he had personally asked the UN secretary-general on several occasions to facilitate Kiev handing over the list of names of those allegedly killed by Russian soldiers in Bucha. His appeals remain unanswered, Lavrov said.

The UN secretary-general is "just not allowed to even try to establish the truth that exposes the Western puppet masters."

The Russian Defense Ministry said in April 2022 that the footage of Bucha published by Kiev was a provocation. The ministry said that not a single local resident was subject to any violent actions during the time the town was under Russian control.

All Russian troops completely withdrew from Bucha on March 30, 2022, and exits from the town in the northern direction were not blocked, while the southern outskirts, including residential areas, were shelled by Ukrainian troops around the clock from large-caliber artillery, tanks and multiple launch rocket systems.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Russia categorically rejects any accusations of involvement in the deaths in Bucha and demands that international leaders not rush into sweeping accusations against Russia, but listen to Moscow's arguments.

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Power Outage Affects Thousands in San Francisco, Cause Under Investigation - Spokesperson

SAN FRANCISCO, January 25 (Sputnik) - Almost 9,000 San Francisco customers experienced an outage, Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) Spokesperson Tamar Sarkissian told Sputnik on Thursday.

"At 7:04 a.m., an outage started impacting 8,897 San Francisco customers," Sarkissian said.

Sarkissian said that by 8:44 a.m., power had been safely restored to all customers.

"The cause is under investigation,"Sarkissian added.

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US Republican Party Considering Measure to Declare Trump 2024 Nominee - Draft Resolution

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WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - The Republican National Committee (RNC) is considering a measure to declare former US President Donald Trump as the party's presumptive nominee for the 2024 presidential race, according to a draft of the resolution released on Thursday.

The draft resolution, backed by RNC committeeman David Bossie, would cement Trump's place as the Republican nominee, despite former US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley continuing her campaign to win the Republican party presidential nomination.

"Resolved that the Republican National Committee hereby declares President Trump as our presumptive 2024 nominee for the office of President of the United States and from this moment forward moves into full general election mode welcoming supporters of all candidates as valued members of Team Trump 2024," the draft resolution said.

Only a fully united and singularly focused Republican party can win the 2024 election, the resolution said. Funds are better spent on fighting Democrats than on continuing the primary process, the resolution said.

The resolution comes following Trump's victories in both the Iowa caucus and New Hampshire primary. The RNC could consider the resolution at a meeting in Las Vegas next week, The Dispatch reported.

"Who cares what the RNC says?" Haley campaign spokeswoman Olivia Perez-Cubas reportedly said in response to the proposal. "We'll let millions of Republican voters across the country decide who should be our party's nominee, not a bunch of Washington insiders."

Perez-Cubas also suggested that RNC Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel organize a debate between Trump and Haley in South Carolina.

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US Court Sentences Russian National Vladimir Dunaev to 64 Months in Prison - Court Filing

WASHINGTON, January 24 (Sputnik) - A US court has sentenced Russian national Vladimir Dunaev to 64 months in prison and imposed other penalties on the two criminal counts against him related to cyber fraud, a court filing said on Thursday.

"Defendant committed to 64 months custody of the Bureau of Prisons, concurrent; five years of supervised release, with standard and special conditions, concurrent; fine waived; $100 special assessment, each count, total $200; restitution TBD [to be determined]; deportation," the document said.

The court has determined that Dunaev will be deported from the United States after being released from prison, the document added.

In May, the South Korean authorities arrested Dunaev and deported him to the United States in October. Dunaev pleaded guilty on all charges against him in December.

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US Not 'in Any Way' Involved in Deadly Crash of Il-76 Plane in Russia – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) – The United States was not involved in the crash of an Il-76 plane in Russia's Belgorod region with Ukrainian prisoners of war on board, US State Department deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Thursday.

"I can certainly say that the United States was not involved in this [plane crash] in any way," Patel said during a press briefing.

Later on Thursday, the Pentagon said that the US is looking into the potential involvement of US-made weapons in the downing of the plane.

On Wednesday, the Russian Defense Ministry said that an Il-76 military transport plane with 65 Ukrainian prisoners of war being transported for exchange had crashed in the Belgorod region. All the prisoners of war, together with six crew members and three accompanying persons on board the aircraft, died.

The ministry accused the Ukrainian forces of downing the plane. Later, the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ukrainian Defense Ministry stated that its staff was not aware that Russia's Il-76 was transporting Ukrainian prisoners of war for a prisoner swap, but Ukrainian news portal Strana.ua reported that the ministry had confirmed a prisoner exchange between the parties was scheduled for Wednesday.

Russia had informed Ukraine that an Il-76 plane was going to transport Ukrainian prisoners of war for exchange, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

Both Russia and Ukraine said they have opened criminal cases over the crash.

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Yellen Says US National Debt of $34 Trillion 'Scary Number,' But 'Manageable'

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Thursday that the $34 trillion US national debt is an alarming number but one that is manageable.

"The absolute level of our public debt is 34 trillion, and that is a scary number. but we also have a huge economy, and I think focusing on the interest costs associated with that debt in real terms is a better way to look at it, and so far that's been quite manageable," Yellen said during remarks at the Chicago Economic Club.

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

Trump Files Motion to Disqualify Georgia Prosecutor in 2020 Elections Case - Filing

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump on Thursday filed a motion alleging an improper relationship between Special Prosecutor Nathan Wade and District Attorney Fani Willis and claiming financial impropriety and lavish vacations funded by taxpayer money.

"President Trump moves the Court to adopt and supplement the above-titled motion filed by co-defendant Roman on January 8, 2024, which alleged, among other misconduct, that an improper intimate personal relationship existed between Special Prosecutor Wade and District Attomey (DA) Willis, that Wade has been paid over $650,000 by the DA, and that taxpayer monies were used by Wade to take the DA on lavish vacations," the court filing said.

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Russia Disappointed by US Failure to Crack Down on Arms Smuggling to Haiti - UN Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, January 25 (Sputnik) - Russia is concerned that the United States as the biggest producer of weapons in the region has failed to crack down on arms trafficking to Haiti as the Caribbean nation continues to reel from gang violence, First Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Thursday.

"We are very disappointed by the fact that the largest arms producer in the region either cannot or does not want to do anything about Haiti being flooded with its weapons," Polyanskiy said during a briefing on Haiti.

Gangs are extending their zones of control beyond their traditional turf in the capital, the diplomat said.

The sources and trafficking routes for these weapons have resulted in many reports by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Polyanskiy pointed out.

According to a UNODC report released last February, the principal source of firearms and munitions in Haiti is in the US, and in particular Florida.

Weapons are frequently procured through straw man purchases in US states with looser gun laws and fewer purchasing restrictions, the report said. Once acquired, they are transported to Florida where they are concealed and shipped to Haiti.

Consignments may be assembled and delivered in containers directly from ports in South Florida, with items hidden inside consumer products, electronic equipment, and other items. On arrival in Haiti, cargo is passed on to end-users via a host of intermediaries, the UN report sad.

Another route by which firearms and ammunition are sent to Haiti is via the Dominican Republic and to a lesser extent Jamaica, according to the UNODC.

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

Allegations That Israel Committing Genocide in Gaza 'Unfounded' - US State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - The United States considers the allegations that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza to be "unfounded," US State Department deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Thursday.

"The allegations that Israel is committing genocide we believe to be unfounded," Patel said during a press briefing when asked to provide comments ahead of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) verdict on Israel's actions in Gaza.

The ICJ will deliver its order on the request for an indication of provisional measures in the case against Israel over alleged genocide in Gaza on Friday.

The United States has acknowledged that there are "too many" casualties among the Palestinian civilians, but that it is working with the Israeli war cabinet to convince it to take effective measures to reduce the number of casualties during its military operations in Gaza.

On October 7, 2023, Hamas attacked Israel from the Gaza Strip. As a result of the fighting, more than 1,200 Israelis - both military and civilians - were killed and some 240 others taken hostage. Israel launched massive retaliatory strikes and completely cut off Gaza from any supplies. Israel also launched a ground invasion of the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas and rescuing the hostages. More than 26,000 Palestinians have been killed so far and well over 60,000 have been wounded as a result of Israel's military operations.

On November 24, Qatar mediated a deal between Israel and Hamas on a temporary truce and the exchange of some of the Israeli hostages for imprisoned Palestinians as well as for the delivery of humanitarian aid into Gaza. The ceasefire was extended several times and expired on December 1.

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Yellen Says US National Debt of $34 Trillion 'Scary Number,' But 'Manageable'

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Thursday that the $34 trillion US national debt is an alarming number but one that is manageable.

"The absolute level of our public debt is 34 trillion, and that is a scary number. but we also have a huge economy, and I think focusing on the interest costs associated with that debt in real terms is a better way to look at it, and so far that's been quite manageable," Yellen said during remarks at the Chicago Economic Club.

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Pentagon Says Looking Into Whether US Weapons Used In Downing Of Russian Il-76 Plane

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - The United States is looking into the potential involvement of US weapons in the downing of the Russian Il-76 military plane, Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said on Thursday.

"It's something that we're looking into," Singh said during press briefing.

On Wednesday, the Russian Defense Ministry said that an Il-76 military transport plane with 65 Ukrainian prisoners of war being transported for exchange had crashed in Belgorod Region. All the prisoners of war, together with six crew members and three accompanying persons on board the aircraft, died.

The ministry accused the Ukrainian forces of downing the plane. Later, the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ukrainian Defense Ministry stated that its staff was not aware that Russia's Il-76 was transporting Ukrainian prisoners of war for a prisoner swap, but Ukrainian news portal Strana.ua reported that the ministry had confirmed a prisoner exchange between the parties was scheduled for Wednesday.

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Pentagon Says Working to Resolve Provision of F-16 Fighter Jets to Turkey

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department is working to resolve the provision of F-16 fighter jets to Turkey, Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said on Thursday.

"We're working towards a resolution on providing the F-16s," Singh said during a press briefing, when asked about efforts to supply Turkey with the fighter jets.

On Wednesday, US media reported that US President Joe Biden sent a letter to lawmakers, notifying them of plans to sell F-16s to Turkey once Ankara completes the NATO ratification process for Sweden.

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UN Human Rights Organizations Looking into Alleged War Crimes in Gaza - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, January 25 (Sputnik) - UN Human Rights are looking at alleged war crimes in Gaza, following concerns raised by a video showing Ramzi Abou Sahloul shot while waving a white flag, UN Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Thursday during a press briefing.

"Our human rights colleagues are continuing to monitor the situation and are pushing for investigation to all these cases," Dujarric said when responding to a reporter's question about whether he had seen the video of Ramzi Abou Sahloul being shot and if he considers it a war crime.

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According to reports, Ramzi Abu Sahloul, a 51-year-old merchant of children's clothes, was shot dead minutes after speaking to a British journalist, despite appearing non-threatening with his hands raised in the air.

However, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) contends that the footage was edited and criticizes ITV News for acting as a tool for Hamas's propaganda efforts, the report added.

On October 7, Palestinian movement Hamas launched a large-scale rocket attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip while its fighters breached the border, opening fire on the military and civilians. As a result, over 1,200 people in Israel were killed and some 240 others abducted. Israel launched retaliatory strikes, ordered a complete blockade of Gaza and launched a ground incursion into the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages. Over 23,000 people have been killed so far in Gaza.

On November 24, Qatar mediated a deal between Israel and Hamas on a temporary truce and the exchange of some of the prisoners and hostages, as well as the delivery of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip. The ceasefire was extended several times and expired on December 1.

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UN Deputy Envoy Participates in 'Constructive' Talks on Syria in Kazakhstan - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, January 25 (Sputnik) - UN Deputy Envoy Najat Rochdi participated in the Astana meetings on Syria, which were "constructive," United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Thursday.

"The Deputy Special Envoy for Syria Najat Rochdi attended the two day round of talks in the Kazakh capital. Rochdi held constructive meetings with representatives of the government of Syria, Russia, Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan," Dujarric said during a press briefing.

During the talks, Rochdi emphasized the need to deescalate the violence in Syria, Dujarric added.

The 21st international meeting on Syria took place in Astana from January 24-25 after the guarantor countries of the Astana format - Russia, Turkey and Iran as well as the Syrian government and opposition - requested holding the meeting.

The meeting agenda included discussions on the regional situation in Syria, the efforts for a comprehensive settlement and the humanitarian situation as well as mobilizing the international community to promote post-conflict reconstruction.

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UPDATE - Ex-Trump Adviser Navarro Sentenced to 4 Months for Contempt of Congress – Court Filing

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(Updates with more details in paras 2, 4; changes attribution)

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - Peter Navarro, former President Donald Trump's White House adviser, has been sentenced to four months in prison for contempt of Congress, according to a court filing published on Thursday.

"As to Counts 1 and 2, Defendant sentenced to concurrent terms of four (4) months of imprisonment. Fine imposed as to both counts in the total amount of $9500," the filing said.

Navarro argued in court that he had "an honest belief" that Trump invoked his executive privilege and for this reason, he did not have to comply with a Congressional subpoena, ABC News reported.

"The minute that violence erupted on Capitol Hill, it was one of the worst days of my life," the report cited Navarro as saying during the sentencing.

Navarro's attorneys have already appealed the sentence, according to a court filing.

In September, Navarro was convicted of contempt of Congress for refusing to comply with a subpoena regarding a probe into the events at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021.

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Red Sea Conflict Causes Higher Prices For Ships to Deliver Goods - UN Official

UNITED NATIONS, January 25 (Sputnik) - Shipping companies end up paying higher prices due to the conflict in the Red Sea, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development Jan Hoffmann said on Thursday.

"… [Ships are] not only limited to paying more days of shipping, but you also pay a higher price per day of shipping," Hoffman told a briefing.

The price of transmitting through Panama increased significantly and so did the shipping, he added.

The Houthis vowed in November 2023 to attack any ships associated with Israel until the country halts military actions in the Gaza Strip. US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin in response announced the creation of a multinational operation to secure navigation in the Red Sea.

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Biden Support for Ukraine, Israel Puts Him Among 'Most Reviled' World Leaders - Hersh

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden's support for Ukraine and Israel in the wars they are fighting has placed him in a group of leaders who face increasing condemnation around the world, US investigative journalist Seymour Hersh said on Thursday.

"Biden's support for Ukraine and Israel in their wars and his recent decision to attack the

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Houthis in Yemen have placed him in a club with two leaders, Bibi Netanyahu and Volodymyr Zalensky, who are increasingly reviled in much of the world," Hersh said.

The irony of Biden's tenure is that the respect for Russian and Chinese presidents Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping is growing outside of the collective West, Hersh said.

Biden's recent decision to attack Houthi positions in Yemen is demonstrating his political panic, he said.

Hersch noted that that during his tenure in the US Senate, Biden was considered by many of his colleagues to be "vain, lazy and not very bright." While Biden voted against authorizing the first US war in Iraq in 1991, he became "consistently hawkish" in his foreign policy views later on, he said.

Biden now shows no will to halt the provision of US weapons to Israel in its current war in Gaza and demonstrates no signs of joining those world leaders who call on Israel to stop its attacks in Gaza and the West Bank, Hersh said.

The Biden administration has requested supplemental funding worth more than $100 billion from Congress to provide aid to Ukraine and Israel. The request also provides for some border security measures, but Republican lawmakers have insisted on the inclusion of more stringent measures to address the illegal immigration crisis on the US border with Mexico.

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Ex-Trump Adviser Navarro Sentenced to 4 Months for Contempt of Congress - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - Peter Navarro, former President Donald Trump's White House adviser, has been sentenced to four months in prison for contempt of Congress, ABC News reported on Thursday.

In addition to the prison term, Navarro will also have to pay a fine of $9,500, the report said.

Navarro argued in court that he had "an honest belief" that Trump invoked his executive privilege and for this reason, he did not have to comply with a Congressional subpoena, the report said.

"The minute that violence erupted on Capitol Hill, it was one of the worst days of my life," the report cited Navarro as saying during the sentencing.

In September, Navarro was convicted of contempt of Congress for refusing to comply with a subpoena regarding a probe into the events at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021.

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US Trade Authorities Say Launching Probe Into Generative AI Investments, Partnerships

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - The US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) said on Thursday that it is probing investments and partnerships linked to generative artificial

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intelligence (AI) companies.
"The Federal Trade Commission announced today that it issued orders to five companies requiring them to provide information regarding recent investments and partnerships involving generative AI companies and major cloud service providers," the FTC said in a statement.
The agency will scrutinize corporate partnerships and investments with AI providers to better understand the relationships and their impact on competition, the statement said.
The FTC is specifically seeking information on the strategic rationale of investments and partnerships, the competitive impact of transactions and competition for AI resources, the statement said.
The FTC sent the information orders to Amazon, Alphabet, Microsoft, OpenAI and Anthropic, the statement said. The companies have 45 days to respond after receiving the orders, the statement said.

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Sullivan, China Foreign Minister to Hold Talks in Thailand in Coming Days - Reports
(Updates with more details in paras 2-5; modifies headline, lede)
WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi are planning to meet in the coming days in an undisclosed southeast Asian country to resume bilateral communications, the Wall Street Journal reported on Thursday, citing officials.
Biden administration officials have said that they have asked China to relay messages to Iran about avoiding a broader conflict in the Middle East since the start of the Gaza war, the report said.
China is communicating with Iran but the content of the messages remains unclear, the report said.
Beijing is deeply concerned over the recent rapid escalation of tensions in the Red Sea and has been in contact with various parties to ease tensions, the report cited Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin as saying.
The meeting between Sullivan and Wang will add to a series of unannounced meetings between them and will mark the first meeting following the November summit between presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping.

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Biden to Host Japanese Prime Minister Kishida in Washington on April 10 - White House

(Updates with details in paras 3,4)
WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will host Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida at the White House on April 10, White House National Security Council

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spokesperson John Kirby said on Thursday.

"President Biden and the First Lady will host Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan for a state visit on the 10th of April," Kirby told reporters.

The White House in a separate press release said Biden and Kishida will discuss efforts to strengthen bilateral political, security, economic, and people-to-people ties.

The two leaders want to ensure that the US-Japan alliance is positioned to address evolving challenges and advance shared interests in the Indo-Pacific region and world.

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Kirby Says 'No Disunity' on Ukraine Aid, Despite Failing to Reach Agreement With Congress

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) – White House's National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby declined on Thursday to recognize disunity among Ukraine's partners despite failing to reach an agreement with Congress on assistance.

"We have not seen any slack or disunity when it comes to supporting Ukraine," Kirby told reporters.

He stressed that the coalition of Ukraine's allies has "a lot of energy" in terms of providing support. Each country makes what it can in its own way, he said, adding that they are making their sovereign decisions.

The White House and Senate have been involved in weeks-long negotiations to reach a deal on President Joe Biden's supplemental funding request that includes more than $60 billion for Ukraine. Republican lawmakers have said they want the supplemental bill to include meaningful policy changes that will end the illegal immigration crisis on the US border with Mexico.

Recent polls conducted by the Pew Research Center and the Quinnipiac University in December revealed that almost half of Americans disapprove of Biden's approach to the conflict in Ukraine. Another poll, hosted by Redfield & Wilton Strategies, said that 41 percent of American voters believe the US should press for peace in the war in Ukraine.

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White House Says Hopeful 'Good Faith' Supplemental Talks Continue Despite Trump Influence

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - The White House is hopeful that "good faith" negotiations continue with the Senate on the Ukraine aid-border security bill despite reports that former President Donald Trump may be undermining the process, Deputy Press Secretary Olivia Dalton said on Thursday.

On Wednesday, Punchbowl News reported that US Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell in a private meeting with Republican colleagues referred to former President Trump as the Republican primary party "nominee" and that they should not "do anything to undermine him" as

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he aims to run his 2024 campaign centered on immigration issues.

"We've been engaging in good faith bipartisan negotiations with both Senate Democrats and Senate Republicans ... we believe that there's no reason that shouldn't continue," Dalton told reporters when asked about reports Trump is getting involved in the supplemental negotiations.

Dalton added that the White House believes there needs to be action on the southern border, and they are hopeful a deal can be reached on Ukraine aid and border security.

McConnell reportedly told his Republican colleagues that the politics on the supplemental bill have changed and there's now doubt that lawmakers will be able to link Ukraine aid and border security in the legislation to fund Biden's supplemental request, which includes more than $60 billion for Ukraine.

Last week, President Joe Biden said he expected that the Senate would be ready to finalize a deal on the supplemental bill this week. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and McConnell also said over the last several days that White House and Senate negotiators were making significant progress on the bill.

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IS Maintains 1,000 Supporters in Iraq, Syria - Senior US Military Official

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - The Islamic State terrorist group (banned in Russia) maintains approximately 1,000 supporters in Iraq and Syria, a senior US military official said on Thursday.

"We assess that the numbers are very much around 1,000 or so in Syria and Iraq," the senior military official said.

The figure includes fighters, financiers and facilitators in the terrorist group's network, the military official said. The supporters are typically outside of urban areas in complex and less governed terrain, the official said.

The Islamic State lacks operational capabilities to take large amounts of territory, although the group remains able to carry out small attacks, the official said.

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At Least 70 US Soldiers Injured in Attacks in Iraq, Syria Since October 18 - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - At least 70 US military personnel have been lightly injured in attacks in Iraq and Syria since October 18 with only one seriously injured, a senior US Defense Department official said on Thursday.

"We've had one very serious injury in all the attacks since October 18, and we've had 70 injured in various forms, lightly injured mostly. Those, to be frank, are from concussive events from rocket mortar, indirect fire, or one-way UAS [unmanned aircraft system] attacks with anything

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from 8 to 50 kilograms worth of explosives," the official said during a press briefing.

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US Still Trying to Gather Info on IL-76 Plane Crash - White House

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - The United States is still trying to establish facts surrounding the crash of an Il-76 plane in a Russian border region near Ukraine, White House Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Thursday.

"We're still trying to gather some more information on this, I'm afraid I don't have more details here," said Kirby during a press briefing.

On Wednesday, the Russian Defense Ministry said that an Il-76 military transport plane with 65 Ukrainian prisoners of war being transported for exchange had crashed in the Belgorod Region. All the prisoners of war, together with six crew members and three accompanying persons on board the aircraft, died. The ministry accused the Ukrainian forces of downing the plane.

Later, the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ukrainian Defense Ministry stated that its staff was not aware that Russia's Il-76 was transporting Ukrainian prisoners of war for a prisoner swap, but Ukrainian news portal Strana.ua reported that the ministry had confirmed a prisoner exchange between the parties was scheduled for Wednesday.

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US-Iraq Higher Military Commission Meeting 'Not a Negotiation' of US Withdrawal - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - The launch of the US-Iraq Higher Military Commission (HMC) does not mean the start of negotiations between the two countries about the withdrawal of the US forces from Iraq, a senior US Defense Department official said on Thursday.

"The HMC meeting is not a negotiation about the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq," the official said during a press briefing. "The United States and the coalition are in Iraq at the invitation of the Iraqi government to fight ISIS [Islamic State terror group, banned in Russia]. Our Iraqi partners have assured us of their commitment to working together to shape this future US military presence and ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS."

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Biden to Host Japanese Prime Minister Kishida in Washington on April 10 - White House

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WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will host Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida at the White House on April 10, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Thursday.

"President Biden and the First Lady will host Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan for a state visit on the 10th of April," Kirby said during a press briefing.

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CIA Director Aims to Broker Major Israel-Hamas Hostage Deal - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - President Biden plans to send CIA Director William Burns to broker a deal between the Israeli government and Hamas that would involve releasing all remaining hostages held in the Gaza Strip and establish the longest ceasefire so far in the war, the Washington Post reported on Thursday, citing unnamed officials.

Burns will meet in the coming days with Mossad Director David Barnea and Egyptian intelligence chief Abbas Kamel as well as with Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani in Europe for the negotiations, the report cited the sources as saying.

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Louisiana Faces Highest Risk of Cancer in US from Industrial Air Pollution – Rights Group

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) – Louisiana's "Cancer Alley" suffers the highest risk of cancer from industrial air pollution in the US, according to a report by Human Rights Watch released on Thursday.

"The fossil fuel and petrochemical industry has created a 'sacrifice zone' in Louisiana," said Antonia Juhasz, Human Rights Watch fossil fuels senior researcher sad in a release. "The failure of state and federal authorities to properly regulate the industry has dire consequences for residents of Cancer Alley."

"Cancer Alley" refers to a roughly 85-mile stretch along the banks of the Mississippi River between New Orleans and Baton Rouge, where communities exist side-by-side with some 200 fossil fuel and petrochemical operations.

The report documents how its residents suffer the effects of extreme pollution, including elevated rates and risks of maternal, reproductive, and newborn health harms, cancer, and respiratory ailments. Parts of the area suffer from the highest risk of cancer from industrial air pollution country and the harmful effects are disproportionately borne by Black residents.

Human Rights Watch said that Louisiana's regulatory authorities, particularly its Department of Environmental Quality, had failed for decades to address the harmful effects of fossil fuel and

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petrochemical operations and to enforce minimum standards set by the federal government. In addition, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) had not ensured that federal laws and mandates were enforced in the state.

It called on the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality to “increase regulations and enforcement, deny permits in already overburdened communities, and support local calls for moratoriums on new or expanded fossil fuel and petrochemical operations” and for the EPA to “order fossil fuel and petrochemical facilities posing an imminent and substantial endangerment to human health and the environment to immediately pause all operations…object to permits in already overburdened communities, support moratoria on new or expanded fossil fuel and petrochemical projects, and implement a remediation and relocation plan.”

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US Senator Says Biden Must Use Defense Production Act to Keep Aluminum Plant Open

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden must use the Defense Production Act to support an aluminum plant in the US state of Missouri that is set to shut down, Senator Josh Hawley said on Thursday.

"The plant accounts for nearly 30% of the nation’s aluminum. It’s vital to national security. President Biden must invoke the Defense Production Act and keep it open," Hawley said in a statement via the social media platform X.

The plant and its hundreds of workers are too important to the United States to allow the facility to close, the statement said.

The United States cannot allow "some billionaire" to shut down the plant and walk away with the profit, the statement added.

The Defense Production Act of 1950 grants the US president authorities to address defense material and service needs. The measure was passed in response to the start of the Korean War and was part of a broad war mobilization effort in the context of the Cold War.

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UPDATE - US Plans to Tighten Sanctions Imposed on Russia - State Dept.

(Updates with background in paras 5-7)

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - The United States plans to continue to tighten the sanctions it has imposed on Russia, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs James O'Brien said on Thursday.

"We need to tighten our sanctions and we will. We're going to drive up the costs of Russia's exports, and we're going to keep cutting its access to key components for weaponry," O’Brien said during a German Marshall Fund talk.

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While O'Brien noted that the sanctions were imperfect, he cited one estimate that without them Russia would have had $400 billion more at hand.

In addition, O'Brien claimed that there would be further reductions in Russian energy exports, as more US, Qatari and other sources of liquefied natural gas (LNG) became available.

Russian officials have pointed out that Russia is solving all the problems the collective West has created to contain and weaken the country's economy, but the West lacks the courage to recognize that the sanctions regime has failed.

Russian officials have also said the sanctions dealt a serious blow to the global economy and have actually increased the prices of electricity, fuel and food products in Europe and the United States.

In most Western countries, the opinion that the sanctions against Russia are ineffective and are hurting the economies of the collective West have repeatedly being voiced.

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US Still Collecting Information on Il-76 Plane Crash - Deputy UN Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, January 25 (Sputnik) - The United States is still trying to establish facts surrounding the crash of an Il-76 plane in a Russian border region near Ukraine, US Deputy Ambassador to the UN Robert Wood said on Thursday.

"We're still trying to ascertain the facts of what happened," Wood told journalists.

He called the crash a "terrible loss of life" and said that the US is in touch with Ukraine everyday.

An Il-76 military transport plane with 65 Ukrainian prisoners of war being transported for exchange, six crew members and three accompanying persons crashed in the Belgorod region on Wednesday. The Russian Defense Ministry said that the plane was destroyed by Ukrainian missiles launched from the Kharkiv region.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said that Kiev was aware of the planned exchange and the route that the prisoners of war would be transferred. Russia called it a terrorist attack.

The general staff of the Ukrainian armed forces said soon after the crash that it intended to "take further steps" aimed at destroying Russian "means of arms delivery."

The Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ukrainian Defense Ministry claimed that its staff was not aware of the fact that Russia's Il-76 was transporting Ukrainian war prisoners for a planned prisoner swap. However, Ukrainian news portal Strana.ua reported that the directorate had confirmed that a prisoner exchange between Moscow and Kiev was to take place on Wednesday.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he would insist on an international investigation into the downing of the aircraft. The Kremlin said it would support an international probe if it focuses on the "criminal actions of the Kiev regime."

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O'Brien Says Will Not Speculate on Ukraine Plan B if Supplemental Request Not Approved

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs James O'Brien said on Thursday that he would not speculate on a potential Biden administration "Plan B" for Ukraine if Congress does not pass the supplemental funding bill to secure additional money for that country.

"I'm going to resist the temptation to speculate on Plan B, because I think we are going to secure Plan A," O'Brien said.

The White House and Senate have been involved in weeks-long negotiations to reach a deal on President Joe Biden's supplemental funding request that includes more than $60 billion for Ukraine. Republican lawmakers have said they want the supplemental bill to include meaningful policy changes that will end the illegal immigration crisis on the US border with Mexico.

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US Plans to Tighten Sanctions Imposed on Russia - State Dept.

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"We need to tighten our sanctions and we will. We're going to drive up the costs of Russia's exports, and we're going to keep cutting its access to key components for weaponry," O'Brien said during a German Marshall Fund talk.

While O'Brien noted that the sanctions were imperfect, he cited one estimate that without them Russia would have had $400 billion more at hand.

In addition, O'Brien claimed that there would be further reductions in Russian energy exports, as more US, Qatari and other sources of liquefied natural gas (LNG) became available.

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Sullivan, China Foreign Minister to Hold Talks in 'Asian Country' in Coming Days - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi are planning to meet in the coming days in an undisclosed southeast Asian country to resume bilateral communications, the Financial Times reported on Thursday.

The meeting will add to a series of unannounced meetings between Sullivan and Wang as in

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the case of their secret discussions in Vienna and Malta last year and will become the first meeting following the November summit between presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping.

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US Economy Grew at 3.3% in Fourth Quarter of 2023 - Commerce Dept.

(Updates with more details in paras 5, 6; modifies headline, lede)

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - The United States' inflation-adjusted GDP increased at an estimated annual rate of 3.3% in the fourth quarter of 2023, marking a fall from the 4.9% recorded the previous quarter, the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), a unit of the Commerce Department, said on Thursday.

"Compared to the third quarter of 2023, the deceleration in real GDP in the fourth quarter primarily reflected slowdowns in private inventory investment, federal government spending, residential fixed investment, and consumer spending. Imports decelerated," BEA said in a press release.

Real GDP in 2023 increased overall by 2.5%, compared with the 1.9% growth in 2022, the release said. The growth primarily reflected increases in consumer spending (health care and recreational goods and vehicles); non-residential fixed investment (structures and intellectual property products); state and local government spending (structures and employee compensation); exports; and federal government spending, the release added.

These were partly offset by decreases in residential fixed investment (new single-family homes) and inventory investment (wholesale trade), while imports, mostly goods, also decreased, according to the release.

President Biden called the reported growth "good news for American families and American workers," with "wages, wealth and employment are higher now than they were before the pandemic," the White House said in a release.

Biden promised to lower costs for prescription drugs, health insurance premiums and clean energy, to fight junk fees as well as to push large corporations to pass on more savings to consumers, the release said.

A second GDP estimate for the fourth quarter of 2023, based on more complete data, will be released on February 28.

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US, UK Sanction Four Houthi Leaders, Including Defense Minister – Treasury

(Updates headline and entire story)

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) – The US Treasury announced sanctions in conjunction with the United Kingdom on Thursday on four Houthi leaders, including the defense chief, according to a release.

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"The Houthis' persistent terrorist attacks on merchant vessels and their civilian crews lawfully transiting the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden threaten to disrupt international supply chains and the freedom of navigation, which is critical to global security, stability, and prosperity," Brian Nelson, Treasury under secretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, said in the release. "Today's joint action with the United Kingdom demonstrates our collective action to leverage all authorities to stop these attacks."

The sanctions on the four Houthi officials come in advance of the US Department of State's recent designation of the Houthis, also known as Ansar Allah, as a global terrorist group, effective February 16. The Houthis control large parts of northern and western Yemen.

In response to Israel's war on Gaza, the Houthis have been launching ballistic missile and UAV attacks against ships transiting the Red Sea.

The sanctioned officials include Mohamed al-Atifi, the defense chief; Muhammad Fadl Abd Al-Nabi, the commander of the maritime forces; Muhammad Ali Al-Qadiri; the coastal defense forces chief; and Muhammad Ahmad Al-Talibi, the director of procurement, who leads efforts to smuggle in weapons allegedly supplied by Iran, according to the release.

Since January 11, the US and the UK have launched several rounds of strikes targeting Houthi positions in Yemen in an effort to degrade their maritime attack capability.

The US strikes have failed to prevent attacks on vessels in the Red Sea, Yemen's Ansar Allah leader Abdul Malik al-Houthi said on Thursday. The only way to stop the escalation is to allow unrestricted import of food and medicine into the Gaza Strip and stop the "genocide" of the population in Gaza, al-Houthi stated.

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US Gave Iran Advance Warning of Islamic State January 3 Terror Attack - Reports

(Updates with more details in paras 2-6)

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - The United States secretly gave Iran advance warning of the January 3 terrorist attack, claimed by the Islamic State (outlawed in Russia) that killed more than 80 people in Kerman who were commemorating the anniversary of the death of Qassem Soleimani, the Wall Street Journal reported on Thursday, citing US officials.

The United States passed on specific and timely intelligence that the branch of the Islamic State known as ISIS-Khorasan was planning an attack, but Iran failed to prevent or mitigate it, the report cited one official as saying.

The Iranian officials did not respond to the United States about the warning, the report said.

Some Iranian officials have suggested that the Islamic State was acting as mercenary group for the United States and Israel.

The twin bombing terrorist attack in Kerman came on the heels of Israel's airstrike assassination of senior Hamas political leader Saleh al-Arouri and other Hamas officials in Beirut, Lebanon, the previous day.

Soleimani was the top commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force. He was assassinated in January 2020 near Baghdad airport in a drone attack ordered by then US

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President Donald Trump.

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Joly Discusses Gaza, Middle East Escalation With Israeli Counterpart - Global Affairs

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) – Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly discussed the ongoing conflict in Gaza and its broader implications in the Middle East in a call with her new Israeli counterpart Israel Katz, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) said on Thursday.

"Minister Joly underscored Canada's diplomatic efforts to avoid further regional escalation, the impacts on civilians and the further deterioration of the humanitarian situation," GAC said in a statement.

During the call, Joly reaffirmed Israel's right to exist and defend itself "in accordance with international law, including international humanitarian law." The diplomat also reiterated Ottawa's "unequivocal" condemnation of the October 7 Hamas attack.

Joly also expressed "deep concern" over the humanitarian crisis currently faced by Gazans and stressed the need for Israel to ensure their safety and access to life-saving assistance amid the ongoing military operations in the enclave.

In addition, the minister reaffirmed Canada's commitment to a two-state solution, the statement said.

Other topics included "the threat" Hezbollah and other "Iran-backed" groups pose to Israel and its regional security, the statement added.

On October 7, Hamas launched a large-scale rocket attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip while its fighters breached the border, opening fire on the military and civilians. As a result, over 1,200 people in Israel were killed and some 240 others abducted. Israel launched retaliatory strikes, ordered a complete blockade of Gaza and began a ground incursion into the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages. Over 25,000 people have been killed in the Gaza Strip as a result of Israeli strikes, local authorities said.

On November 24, Qatar mediated a deal between Israel and Hamas on a temporary truce and the exchange of some of the prisoners and hostages, as well as the delivery of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip. The ceasefire was extended several times and expired on December 1.

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Musk Supports Texas in Dispute Over Border Security, Says Biden Abets Illegal Immigration

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) – US billionaire Elon Musk on Thursday voiced support for Texas in its dispute with the federal government over border security measures and accused the Biden administration of "abetting illegal immigration."

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Texas law enforcement placed razor wire fencing along the state's border with Mexico in order to deter the record level of migrants illegally coming into the United States. However, the US Supreme Court issued an order on Monday temporarily allowing federal Border Patrol agents to remove the razor wire fencing.

"Texas is absolutely right. This administration is deliberately breaking the law by aiding and abetting illegal immigration at an unprecedented scale!" Musk said in a post on the social media platform X, in response to a previous post by Texas Governor Greg Abbott.

Abbott in his post on Wednesday said that US President Joe Biden's administration is displaying hostility toward the rule of law in the United States by threatening to sue the state over a newly-imposed law designed to address the crisis on the southern border with Mexico.

The Justice Department has threatened to sue the state of Texas if it enforces a state law that allows local authorities to arrest illegal immigrants and deport them.

The US has witnessed three consecutive years of record illegal migration on the southern border with Mexico. Border security officials documented 302,000 migrant encounters in December, marking the highest single-month figure ever recorded.

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US Gave Iran Advance Warning of January 3 Terrorist Attack - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - The United States secretly gave Iran advance warning of the January 3 attack, claimed by the Islamic State terror group (ISIS, banned in Russia), that killed more than 80 people in Kerman who were commemorating the anniversary of the death of Qasem Soleimani, The Wall Street Journal reported on Thursday, citing US officials.

The officials said the US passed on specific and timely intelligence that ISIS-Khorasan was planning an attack, but Iran failed to prevent the twin suicide bombings, the report said.

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Forbes Editorial Union Plans First Walkout in 106 Years - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) – The Forbes editorial union is planning to begin the first walkout in the 106-year history of the magazine, Axios reported on Thursday.

The walkout will start on Thursday morning and continue three business days until 11:59 p.m. Eastern time on Monday, January 29, the report said.

Forbes employees intend to protest what their union believes are management's attempts to undermine the union's positions and slow down contract negotiations, it added.

The union has been unsuccessfully trying to force management to sign a contract since the time of its establishment in 2021, according to the report.

Forbes has expressed frustration over the union's planned walkout, saying it is working

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diligently to reach a collective bargaining agreement.

"We are disappointed by the Union's decision to stage a walk out, but respect their right to take this action," the statement said.

By staging a walkout, Forbes union members are joining their colleagues from other media outlets. Unions at Gannett, Insider, Washington Post, NBC News and others all recently went on strikes or walked off the job.

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US, Iraq to Start Working Group Talks on Future of US Troop Presence in Country - Austin

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) – The United States and Iraq will start working group meetings related to the future of US military presence in the country, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said on Thursday.

"The United States and the Government of Iraq will start working group meetings of the U.S.-Iraq Higher Military Commission (HMC) in the coming days, initiating a process the two sides committed to during the U.S.-Iraq Joint Security Cooperation Dialogue (JSCD) in Washington, D.C., on August 7-8, 2023," Austin said in a statement.

The two countries committed to form a higher military commission last summer to discuss the future of the presence of the US-led coalition against the Islamic State terrorist group (banned in Russia) in Iraq.

"The HMC will enable the transition to an enduring bilateral security partnership between the United States and Iraq, building on the successes of Iraq's Defeat-Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (D-ISIS) campaign in partnership with the Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve as part of the Global Coalition to D-ISIS," Austin said.

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