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1/30/24 Tuesday

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The 'US Economy' is Not the 'American Economy'

During the World Economic Forum in Davos, newly elected Argentine President Javier Milei blamed "collectivism" as the "root cause" of the world's economic problems.
Milei's assessment is backward, says author, journalist and political analyst Caleb Maupin speaking to Sputnik's Critical Hour on Tuesday.
"Since the 1980s and the late '70s, we've been destroying the welfare state. Here in the United States, we've been deregulating. We have schools for profit," Maupin explained. "We've got private corporations fighting our wars. [We've] got prisons for profit in multiple states. The idea that we're moving towards socialism in the West is just absurd. We're gutting the welfare state."
The reason the West has been gutting the welfare state is because it is controlled by global corporations.
"The US economy is not the American economy. It is the economy centered around big banks, the corporations, ultra monopolies, trust cartels and syndicates based here in the West," Maupin argued.
"But really, the US government and the US monopolies are the big corporations at the top of our economy [that] are propping up a global system. They're not really concerned about the domestic economy of the United States"
This is dangerous because as the American empire flounders, it will take increasingly desperate measures to hold onto its hegemony.
"The Biden administration is trying to escalate every one of these international confrontations as quickly as they can," Maupin said, pointing to the conflicts in Ukraine, the Middle East and rising tensions with China as evidence. "They're almost hoping that they can play a game of bluff, and that they can push as close to the edge of that cliff of a straight up World War Three confrontation as they can get."
Maupin warned that "we've increasingly got a West led by the United States, the center of the NATO alliance, that is trying to remind everybody who they once were," adding that the "bluster" coming from the US is it being "forced to adjust to the fact that we're having a much more multipolar world [and] that, the world is not going to be centered, economically speaking, around Wall Street and London for much longer."
Russia and China do not want a third World War, Maupin said. But he warned that if a World War does start, "everyone knows" that "Russia and China are going to win," adding that the aggressive policies of the US are "not strategic for America at all."

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Potential US Attack Against Iran Would Trigger 'Catastrophic' Effect on Global Economy

After a drone attack on a US base in Syria near Jordan resulted in the deaths of three US service members, US President Joe Biden and other US officials promised a strong response. His comments have led to speculation that the US may hit targets in Iran, which has long been a goal of neocons in Washington.

An attack on Iran would be "catastrophic to the global economy," Mohammad Marandi, a professor of English literature and Orientalism at the University of Tehran, told Sputnik's Fault Lines on Tuesday.

"It would drive oil prices through the roof," Marandi explained. "It would definitely be catastrophic for the global economy."

This possibility, Marandi believes, will prevent the US from attacking Iran directly and will instead continue its attacks on Syria and Iraq, qualifying his comments by admitting he "could be wrong."

Referring to the recent attack on the US garrison in Al-Tanf that killed three US soldiers, Marandi said the confusion over whether the base is located in Syria or Jordan doesn't really matter because the confusion itself "basically" shows that the US is "carrying out activities in Syria."

US officials have insisted that the attack occurred at Tower 22, a small US outpost in Jordan placed there with the cooperation of the Jordanian government. However, Jordanian spokesman Muhannad al Mubaidin told local media that the attack actually targeted Al-Tanf base, which the Syrian government describes as an illegal occupation and is used to train anti-government militia forces.

Attacks on US forces are likely to continue, Marandi asserted, because the US is seen as working hand-in-hand with Israel in its war on Gaza.

"The Americans and the Europeans are financially supporting Israel, they are sending weapons for Israel, they are carrying water for Israel. They are also, now, preventing aid from getting to Gaza, and the Americans are attacking those forces that are trying to impede the genocide," Marandi said.

Leadership in the US is making decisions that harm its interests because "they tend to believe their own propaganda," Marandi said, "and then they calculate based on that propaganda and … miscalculation."

"The damage that the United States has done to itself, through supporting genocide, through supporting these hourly massacres and the extermination of the Palestinian people in Gaza is not something we can calculate," Marandi explained. "The United States has demolished its credibility across the board."

That includes, Marandi explains, the leaders in the United States who are ostensibly liberal. "It's very sad for me to say: liberals in the West are utterly racist, utterly racist, and liberalism only counts for inside the borders of the United States. But outside the United States' borders, they are as medieval as it gets."

Marandi said he doesn't believe Israel will survive the current conflict. "I think it will collapse just like apartheid South Africa collapsed. It is a colonial project. It is an apartheid regime that has been imposed upon the indigenous population in the region and it won't last," he explained, noting earlier that the US is also "declining as we speak."

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“We've been talking about [Israel's actions in Gaza] so much over the past three months that it sounds sort of like we're talking about McDonald's or something. This is children being killed morning to night, every day as we speak. This is completely unforgivable. But this is the reality that we live in today.”

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Biden Hopes Voters Will ‘Shake it Off’- Cartoon

With his poll numbers plummeting, particularly among young voters concerned about his administration supporting a potential genocide in Gaza, US President Joe Biden is hoping to secure the endorsement of mega-star Taylor Swift before the Presidential election in November. The 34-year-old pop star was recently named Time’s Person of the Year and has a rabid fanbase that could potentially buoy Biden’s support with young voters. Swift endorsed Biden in 2020 and some Democratic congressional candidates in 2018, but she has remained silent on the 2024 election so far.
The campaign has gone as far as to suggest that the President could join her on tour, but considering Biden’s penchant for getting confused on stage, it seems unlikely that he will be able to keep up with the show’s choreography.
If the administration does have him ride in on a drone during a concert, they better make sure they get the prop dimensions correct.

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The US will not attack Iran because doing so would be “catastrophic” for the global economy, Professor Mohammad Marandi told Radio Sputnik.

“It would drive oil prices through the roof,” Marandi explained. “It would definitely be catastrophic for the global economy.”

Marandi also contends that the US is “in decline as we speak” and that its support of Israel’s war in Gaza has hurt its reputation globally.

“The damage that the United States has done to itself, through supporting genocide, through supporting these hourly massacres and the extermination of the Palestinian people in Gaza is not something that we can calculate. The United States has demolished its credibility across the board,” he said.

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Marandi also took aim at liberals in the US, who seem not to care about what their country does overseas. “It's very sad for me to say [this]: liberals in the West are utterly racist, utterly racist, and liberalism only counts for inside the borders of the United States. But outside the United States' borders, they are as medieval as it gets.”

Ultimately, he believes the conflict will cause Israel to collapse.
“I think that it will collapse just like apartheid South Africa collapsed. It is a colonial project. It is an apartheid regime that has been imposed upon the indigenous population in the region, and it won't last,” Marandi predicted.

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“The US economy is not the American economy. It is the economy centered around big banks, the corporations, ultra monopolies, trust cartels and syndicates based here in the West,” Maupin argued. “But really, the US government and the US monopolies are the big corporations at the top of our economy [that] are propping up a global system. They're not really concerned about the domestic economy of the United States”

This, he said, has led the US to push its geopolitical rivals to the brink of a third World War in an attempt to hold onto its disintegrating global hegemony.

“The Biden administration is trying to escalate every one of these international confrontations as quickly as they can,” Maupin said, pointing to the conflicts in Ukraine, the Middle East and rising tensions with China as evidence. “They're almost, you know, hoping that they can play a game of bluff, and that they can push as close to the edge of that cliff of a straight up World War Three confrontation as they can get.”

Russia and China do not want a third World War, Maupin said. But he warned that if a World War does start, “everyone knows” that “Russia and China are going to win,” adding that the aggressive policies of the US are “not strategic for America at all.”

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Opinion: US Sanctions on Venezuela Aren’t About Democracy, They’re About Control

“The United States seems destined by Providence to plague Latin America with misery in the name of liberty” – Venezuelan revolutionary hero Simón Bolívar, 1829
US sanctions have killed tens of thousands of Venezuelans, according to the 2021 United Nations report that examined the effects of banking restrictions and economic embargo imposed on the South American country.

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"Sectorial sanctions on the oil, gold and mining industries, the economic blockade, the freezing of Central Bank assets, the targeted sanctions imposed on Venezuelans and third country nationals and companies and the over-compliance by banks and third-country companies have exacerbated the pre-existing economic and social crisis, with a devastating effect on the entire population," the report concluded. "No strata of society has been untouched."

The United States, naturally, claims the sanctions are for Venezuela's own good. In fact, the Biden administration is threatening to tighten them further.

"Do as we say, or suffer the consequences," would appear then to be the command of the United States. If that doesn't sound appealing to you, it didn't to Nicaraguans either. Alarmed by growing support for the country's Sandinista movement, US President Ronald Reagan demanded the country hold free elections to legitimize its popular governance.

They did, and the Sandinistas won with two-thirds of the vote. And so, Nicaraguans suffered the consequences as US-funded death squads wreaked havoc across the country. The Contras were responsible for some 1,300 terrorist attacks throughout Nicaragua, targeting schools, health clinics, and using rape as a weapon of war.

Six years later, support for the Sandinistas' social programs remained high, but Nicaraguans were eager to put the Dirty War behind them. The Sandinistas lost the presidential election.

A few months ago, President Nicolás Maduro was asked about the United States' criticism of Venezuela's electoral system. "Do you want free elections?" he asked. "We want elections free from sanctions, blockades, aggression and economic warfare. Lift all the sanctions."

Maduro insisted he wouldn't be blackmailed by US threats. And, with polls showing him set to win the country's upcoming election, it seems the Venezuelan people won't be, either.

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FBI Director to Tell Lawmakers Chinese Hackers Plan to 'Wreak Havoc' in US - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - FBI Director Christopher Wray is going to warn US lawmakers that Chinese hackers are allegedly getting ready to "wreak havoc and cause real-world harm" to the United States in a series of attacks, CNN reported on Wednesday.

Wray will deliver his warning during a testimony for the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party later in the day.

Wray is planning to say that Chinese hackers will target a range of US infrastructure objects like water treatment plants, electrical grid, oil and natural gas pipelines, and transportation systems, the report said.

"China's hackers are positioning on American infrastructure in preparation to wreak havoc and cause real-world harm to American citizens and communities, if or when China decides the time has come to strike," the report quoted Wray as saying in his prepared-for-delivery remarks.

The FBI director will also state in his remarks that the Chinese efforts in cyberspace go beyond technology and "target our freedoms, reaching inside our borders, across America, to silence, coerce, and threaten our citizens and residents."

In addition to Wray, Commander of US Cyber Command Paul Nakasone, CISA Director Jen

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Easterly, and Director of the Office of the National Cyber Director Harry Coker will also testify on alleged Chinese cyber threats.

China says it firmly opposes and combats cyber attacks and cyber theft in all forms. Instead, the Chinese Foreign Ministry once called the US the world's major "hacker empire" and "monitoring nation."

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IMF Downgrades Mideast, North Africa Outlook by 0.5 Percentage Points to 2.9% - Report

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) – The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has downgraded its 2024 economic outlook for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region by 0.5 percentage points to 2.9%, according to a report out Wednesday.

"Projected growth in the MENA region this year is downgraded by 0.5 percentage points to 2.9 percent (relative to the October 2023 Regional Economic Outlook)," the IMF said in its new report.

Among major factors weighing on regional growth, the fund cited the Gaza conflict, oil production cuts, and social unrest in some countries.

"The outlook for the MENA region is highly uncertain, and downside risks are resurgent. An escalation or spread of the conflict beyond Gaza and Israel, as well as an intensification of the disruptions in the Red Sea, could have a severe economic impact, including on trade and tourism," the report said.

The IMF also warned that the war between Israel and Hamas led to a sharp deterioration of the economic outlook in the conflict zone.

"In 2023, real GDP growth in West Bank and Gaza is estimated to have dropped to about -6 percent. This reflects a 9-percentage-points downgrade (from the October 2023 Regional Economic Outlook)," the report said.

The fund also pointed out to an "almost complete collapse" of economic activity in Gaza and a deep contraction in the West Bank. Inflation in the region is expected to surpass 15% on an annual basis at the end of December 2023, and the current account deficit is estimated to be sizable, it added.

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Congress Urges Biden to Leverage Qatar Ties for Release of Gaza Hostages - Letter

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) – In a letter spearheaded by Rep. Josh Gottheimer, members of Congress urged US President Biden on Wednesday to "leverage" the US relationship with Qatar to secure the immediate release of the remaining American hostages held in Gaza.

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"We request that you leverage the U.S. partnership with Qatar to secure the immediate release of the remaining hostages. Time is of the essence and every option must be on the table to achieve that goal," the letter stated, according to a copy obtained by Axios.

They argued that Qatar was "not fully utilizing its unique leverage over Hamas to secure the release of the hostages, especially the Americans." At the same time, Qatar enjoyed the benefits of being a US partner, including designation as a key non-NATO ally, billions of profits on investments in the US, and immunity from terror victim civil lawsuits, the letter said.

They warned that if more hostages, including all of the Americans, were not released in the coming days, Congress would consider "fast-track legislative options to hold Qatar accountable."

While exact hostage numbers have never been clear, as of mid-January, the White House believed there were more than 100 hostages remaining in Gaza, including as many as six Americans. Four Americans have been released so far.

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US House Democrats Discuss UNRWA Alternatives With Israeli Official - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - Some 10 Jewish House Democrats discussed possible alternatives to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for getting assistance to the Gaza Strip in a meeting with a senior Israeli official, Axios reported on Wednesday.

The lawmakers met with Elad Goren, a top official at the Israeli Defense Forces' Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) unit, the report said, citing four people who took part in the meeting.

Goren reportedly suggested about half a dozen alternatives to UNRWA, including UNICEF and the UN World Food Programme, the report said.

The United Nations has no backup plan to get money for UNRWA after a number of donor nations paused their funding, spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday.

Last week, UNRWA head Philippe Lazzarini said Israel had shared with the agency data on the alleged involvement of some of its staff members in the October 7 Hamas attack and vowed to hold accountable anyone involved in "acts of terror."

The United States, Finland, the United Kingdom, Italy, Australia, Canada, Germany, Japan, along with some other countries have since suspended funding for UNRWA.

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Biden Scores Poorly on Immigration; Trails Trump in Swing States – Poll

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WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) – More than 60% of Americans in swing states believe US President Biden is “very responsible” (41%) or “somewhat responsible” (20%) for the surge of migrants at the US-Mexico border, according to a Morning Consult-Bloomberg poll released on Wednesday.

While the economy remained Americans’ top concern in the 2024 presidential election, an increased share instead cited immigration – a major concern pushed by the Republican Party.

On Tuesday, House Republicans on the Homeland Security Committee successfully voted to impeach Department of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas for his alleged “willful and systemic refusal to comply with the law” and “breach of public trust” in his handling of the migrant crisis at the US-Mexico border.

The poll also found that Biden continued to trail Donald Trump across the seven swing states – by six percentage points in a head-to-head match and by nine percentage points with other presidential candidates included.

The poll of 4,956 registered voters in the swing states of Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin was conducted January 16-22.

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US House Homeland Security Committee Votes to Impeach Mayorkas

WASHINGTON, January 31(Sputnik) - US House Republicans on the Homeland Security Committee successfully voted to impeach Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas for a willful and systemic refusal to comply with the law and for a breach of public trust in his handling of the illegal immigrant crisis at the United States border with Mexico.

"Mayorkas has willfully and systematically refused to comply with the laws passed by Congress and breached the trust of Congress and the American people. The results have been catastrophic and have endangered the lives and livelihoods of all Americans," Homeland Security Committee Chairman Mark Green said in his opening remarks.

In response, Ranking Member Bennie Thompson characterized the impeachment as a "baseless sham" designed to "distract the public from the fact that Republicans have ceded their power to Donald Trump.

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US to Take Steps to Protect Tech From Being Used to Undermine National Security- Sullivan

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - The United States will soon take further action to prevent US technology from being used to undermine US national security, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said during a discussion hosted by the Council on Foreign Relations.

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"We will take further steps as we go forward," Sullivan said on Tuesday about ensuring US technology cannot be used to undermine national security.

Sullivan said he could not yet reveal the nature and timetable of those additional measures.

However, Sullivan mentioned that the measures will be tailored in a way that addresses US national security concerns but does not decouple US technological ecosystems or economies.

Last year, the United States imposed export controls designed to prevent China's access to advanced US semiconductor technology with dual-use purposes that could benefit China's military.

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Biden, Xi 'Should Speak' by Telephone Soon- Sullivan

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi both agree that US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping should speak soon by telephone.

"We agree that President Biden and President Xi should speak and speak by telephone relatively soon," said Sullivan on Tuesday.

Last week, Sullivan met with Yi met in Bangkok to discuss efforts to resume military communication, among salient issues such as the attacks in the Red Sea.

US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed to restore military communications at a summit in San Francisco in November.

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US Navy Shot Down Houthi Anti-Ship Missile Heading to Red Sea - CENTCOM

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - A US Navy warship shot down a Houthi anti-ship missile fired from Yemen toward the Red Sea, US Central Command (CENTCOM) said in a statement.

"On Jan. 30, at approximately 11:30 p.m. (Sanaa time), Iranian-backed Houthi militants fired one anti-ship cruise missile from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen toward the Red Sea. The missile was shot down by USS Gravely (DDG 107)," CENTCOM said on Tuesday.

There were no injuries or damage reported in this incident, according to CENTCOM.

Iran has repeatedly rejected accusations from Western countries over Tehran's alleged involvement in the Houthi attacks on merchant ships in the Red Sea. In addition, Iran emphasized that resistance groups in the Middle East, such as the Houthis, do not receive any instructions from Iran.

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US Navy Orders 70 More Kratos Aerial Targets for Training Exercises - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - Kratos Unmanned Aerial Systems has received a more than $57 million contract extension from the US Navy to make 70 more BQM-177A Surface Launched Aerial Targets, the Defense Department announced.

"Kratos Unmanned Aerial Systems [of] Sacramento, California, is awarded a $57,673,542 modification contract ... to procure full rate production Lot Five of the BQM-177A Surface Launched Aerial Targets," the Defense Department said in a press release on Tuesday.

Kratos will also manufacture and deliver 70 Rocket-Assisted Takeoff attachment kits, as well as associated technical and administrative data in support of weapons system test-and-evaluation and fleet training for the Navy, the release said.

Work on the program will be carried out in Sacramento, California (50%); Dallas, Texas (20%) and other locations across the United States, the release added.

Work on the program extension is expected to take just over two years and is expected to be completed in April 2026, according to the release.

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US Navy Orders $53Mln More Ship Alterations to 2 AEGIS Missile Destroyers - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - General Dynamics NASSCO of San Diego has received a more than $53 million US Navy contract extension to carry out further ship alterations on the Arleigh Burke AEGIS missile destroyers Chung-Hoon and James E. Williams, the Defense Department announced.

"General Dynamics NASSCO [of] San Diego, California is awarded a $53,137,125 ...modification ...contract ...for ship alteration ...[to] the USS Chung-Hoon (DDG 93) and USS James E. Williams (DDG 95), the Defense Department said in a press release on Tuesday.

The work on the two ships will be carried out under the Fiscal Year 2024 Depot Maintenance Period availability, the release said.

Work on the project will be performed in Norfolk, Virginia (53%) and San Diego, California (47%) over the next three months and is expected to be completed by April 2024, the release added.

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US Navy Extends Maintenance Contract on Kuwait's F/A-18 Super-Hornet Force - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - Kay and Associates have received a more than $153 million extension on their US Navy contract to maintain and operate F/A-18 fighter jets for Kuwait, the US Defense Department announced.

"Kay and Associates [of] Buffalo Grove, Illinois is awarded a $153,366,987 modification contract ... to provide maintenance, operation, and management support services for the F/A-18 ... facilities for the government of Kuwait," the Defense Department said in a press release on Tuesday.

The services will include missile maintenance repair and storage in Kuwait, the release said.

The contract w extension will run over the coming year and is expected to be completed in January 2025, the release added.

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US, Saudi Arabia Resume Talks on Strengthening Defense Ties After Brief Pause - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - The United States and Saudi Arabia have resumed talks on strengthening the bilateral defense relationship after a brief pause caused by the Gaza conflict, Bloomberg reported.

The report said on Tuesday that a meeting took place earlier this month in Saudi Arabia between Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman and several US senators.

The discussions included a defense pact between the two countries, the report added.

Last year, media reported that the Biden administration was exploring establishing a defense agreement with Saudi Arabia that required the United States to defend the desert kingdom if it was attacked in exchange for the Saudis normalizing relations with Israel.

However, issues related to Israel remain an obstacle for the plan to come to fruition, the reports said.

The White House, Pentagon and the Senate Foreign Relation Committee did not immediately respond to Sputnik's request for comment on the matter.

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Delaware Judge Rules Musk Cannot Keep His $55Bln Compensation Package From Tesla - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - A Delaware judge has ruled that billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk cannot keep his $55 billion compensation package from the electric vehicle manufacturer Tesla, the Wall Street Journal reported.

The report said on Tuesday evening that Delaware Chancery Court Judge Kathaleen

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McCormick ruled in favor of the company's shareholders that no one has proven the compensation plan for Musk was fair, the report said on Tuesday.

Tesla must now draft a new compensation plan for Musk after the judge issued the ruling, the report said.

Musk suggested in a statement on his social media platform X that he never incorporated a business in the state of Delaware, which is where the compensation case was held.

The CEO pay package that Tesla granted Musk made him the richest person in the world, according to the report.

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Trump Campaign Says US Voters Consider Nikki Haley 'Warmonger' Seeking Endless Conflict

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - Voters in the United States consider former US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley a warmonger who would push the United States into endless conflict, Trump campaign spokesperson Steven Cheung said in a statement.

"The fact is that Haley knows she doesn't have a cogent argument or even a coherent reason for why she should be President. But what voters do know is that she's a warmonger who would rather throw America into endless wars," the statement said on Tuesday.

Earlier this week, Haley urged the Biden administration to target Iranian leadership, as well as infrastructure in Iraq and Syria, in response to attacks on US troops in the Middle East, which the Pentagon has linked to Iran-backed groups.

US adversaries have been emboldened by "weak and incompetent" leadership in the White House, the statement said. The situation would be no different with Haley as president, the statement added.

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Russian Billionaire Dmitry Rybolovlev Loses Suit Against Sotheby's for Art Fraud - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - Russian Billionaire Dmitry Rybolovlev lost the lawsuit in which he had accused the auction house Sotheby's of helping an art buyer defraud him by having him excessively overpay for several pieces of art, CNBC reported.

The suit, which was brought by Rybolovlev in a US federal court in New York, accused his long-time art buyer Yves Bouvier of inflating the actual sales prices of the art in question by nearly 100% and that Sotheby's helped him get away with the scheme, the report said on Tuesday.

Sotheby's was accused of helping Bouvier justify the fraudulent prices he charged Rybolovlev's companies, Accent Delight International Limited and Xitrans Finance Limited, the report said.

One of the art works mentioned in the lawsuit was Leonardo da Vinci's painting "Salvator

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Mundi," which Bouvier purchased from Sotheby's for $83 million only to sell it to Rybolovlev for $127.5 million a day later, the report said.

Rybolovlev later sold the same painting at an auction for a record $450.3 million, the report also said.

Attorneys representing Sotheby's maintained that the auction house had no knowledge of Bouvier's lies and did not participate in any misconduct, the report added.

Rybolovlev settled his claims last month with Bouvier for an unspecified sum of money, according to the report.

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Washington, Berlin Not Ready to Support Ukraine's NATO Bid at 75th Summit – Reports

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) – While Kiev and its Eastern European allies want to see a formal NATO invite for Ukraine as soon as the upcoming 75th summit in July, the United States and Germany do not believe the time has come for their ally to become a member of the military alliance, the Foreign Policy magazine reported citing current and formal officials in the know.

Poland and the Baltic states are facing a significant pushback from Washington and Berlin which believe it is too soon for Ukraine to become a full member of NATO while it is still engaged in a conflict with Russia, the report said on Tuesday.

Officials in both countries think that instead of discussing Ukraine's imminent NATO membership it makes more sense to focus on supplying the country with everything it needs to fight against Russia, the report added.

“The U.S. has been telling allies, ‘look, don’t put this on the agenda,’” the report cited Jim Townsend, a former US Defense Department official for NATO policy, as saying. “They’re going to have to come up with something that is reassuring, and is something of substance for Ukraine, and is a signal to Russia that we’re not backing off.”

Some officials in Europe and the United States think that Ukraine in NATO would become a game changer in the conflict as Russia will refuse to continue battlefield hostilities and will sit down at the negotiating table, according to the report.

During an annual NATO Summit in Vilnius in July, NATO leaders agreed on a package of three elements to bring Ukraine closer to the alliance. However, NATO has not extended an official invitation to Ukraine yet.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said that NATO expansion to include Ukraine creates a direct national security threat for Russia and Moscow considers the non-aligned status of Ukraine to be extremely important. Putin also said that Russia has always stood against Ukraine's membership in NATO due to its national security concerns, but never opposed its aspirations to join the European Union.

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US House Passes Legislation to Criminalize Fleeing From Border Patrol in Vehicle

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives passed a bill to criminalize fleeing from US Border Patrol agents in vehicles, following the December 2022 death of Border Patrol Agent Raul Gonzalez during a vehicular pursuit.

House lawmakers passed the legislation, dubbed the Agent Raul Gonzalez Officer Safety Act, on Tuesday in a vote of 271 in favor and 154 opposed.

"High speed chases often result in tragic losses of life, whether it's migrants in the cars when traffickers crash, Americans struck by illegal immigrants fleeing capture, or law enforcement officers in the line of duty," House Majority Leader Steve Scalise said in a statement on the bill. "House Republicans are sending traffickers, cartels, and other illegal immigrants the message that if they risk the lives of American citizens, we will hold them to the full extent of the law."

The legislation creates a new criminal offense for operating a vehicle within 100 miles of the United States' southern border while fleeing from Border Patrol agents or any law enforcement officer assisting them.

The House of Representatives passed the bill amid negotiations in the US Senate on supplemental funding legislation, to which Republicans are seeking to attach more stringent border security measures.

US Customs and Border Protection documented more than 302,000 migrant encounters on the US southern border in December, marking the highest single-month figure ever recorded. The Biden administration has experienced three consecutive years of record illegal migration on the southern border.

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Rep. Tenney Nominates Former President Trump for Nobel Peace Prize - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - US Representative Claudia Tenney has nominated former President Donald Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize, hailing his role in the Abraham Accords treaty as a contribution to peace in the Middle East, Fox News reported on Tuesday.

According to the report, Tenney said that Donald Trump played a key role in achieving the first new peace agreements in the Middle East in almost 30 years, challenging the long-held belief that additional agreements were impossible without resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The report added that, according to the Nobel Peace Prize, there was recognition for the peace accord between Israel and Egypt in 1978 as well as the Oslo Accords in 1994, but no acknowledgment for Trump's role.

Under the Trump administration, Israel normalized relations with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan as part of the Abraham Accords.

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US Pays Price for Keeping Illegal, Undefendable Bases in Syria, Iraq- Former UK Ambassador

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - The determination of the Biden administration to maintain US bases in Syria in outright defiance of international law is "a gift that keeps on giving" to Iran as it offers Tehran soft, vulnerable targets it can strike at any time, humiliating the United States and defying Washington to risk escalation, former United Kingdom (UK) Ambassador to Syria Peter Ford, a veteran diplomat and expert on the region, told Sputnik.

Last week, three US troops were killed in an attack on an outpost in Jordan. The White House said that the US will respond to the attack at a time and place of its choosing but does not seek a war with Iran or broader conflict in the Middle East.

The rational response to prevent such attacks from happening again would be by closing down US bases in Syria and Iraq, Ford advised.

"Sensible observers have been saying for a long time that the troops in those bases are sitting ducks. Their presence has no point beyond standing in the way of Syria and Iraq exercising full sovereignty over their own territory," he said.

Although Washington has continued to operate the bases in defiance of Syrian sovereignty and international law remains an embarrassment to Washington, Ford pointed out.

The US armed forces have maintained the bases with impunity under three presidents - Barack Obama, Donald Trump and Joe Biden.

The UK diplomat said he did not expect the Biden administration to abandon the bases immediately, despite the latest incident and the great probability of many more to come.

"Obviously, the sensible solution will not be taken, at least not initially. The United States will flail around like a stricken giant. In truth its options are probably limited to doing more of what it has been doing already - alone or alongside Israel - striking at Iran's allies in Iraq and Syria and carrying out assassinations of Iranian military leaders," he said.

In addition, Ford pointed out that it was 'surely' a matter of time before the Pentagon asserts itself and insists on doing the sensible thing, withdrawal, as it was in Afghanistan.

However, that cannot happen in the short term as it would play into the Republicans' hands with their claims that Biden is weak, Ford explained.

Biden said on Tuesday that he has decided how to respond to the drone attack on a military base on Jordan-Syria border that killed three US soldiers but indicated that he does not want a wider war in the Middle East.

The US president added that he holds Iran partly responsible for the deadly attack on US troops.

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US Defense Firms Avoiding Pentagon Contracts Due to Inflation Issues - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - US defense firms are rejecting contracts from the Pentagon due to inflation-related issues, the Wall Street Journal reported, citing defense industry leaders.

The report said on Tuesday that the heads of Northrop Grumman, L3Harris Technologies and Boeing have skipped out on several defense contracts to avoid losses due to cost overruns.

Northrop Grumman will not bid on a contract to make the next fighter jet to replace the F-22, and L3Harris dropped out of competing for a contract to make the new Navy missile, among others, the report said.

Northrop Grumman previously said it will lose money making the first batch of the new B-21 Raider bombers, which were valued at about $700 million each under a fixed-priced contract with the Pentagon. Under a fixed-price contract, defense companies have to pay for any cost overuns.

According to the report, Gen. James Rainey, who leads the US Army's modernization programs, has claimed that the Pentagon is working on making contracts more flexible to allow for unexpected economic conditions.

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US-China Panel Emphasizes Need to Coordinate on Counternarcotics Actions - White House

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - The US-China Bilateral Counternarcotics Working Group highlighted during its inaugural meeting the need to coordinate on law enforcement actions, the White House said.

"The two sides emphasized the need to coordinate on law enforcement actions; address the misuse of precursor chemicals, pill presses, and related equipment to manufacture illicit drugs; target the illicit financing of transnational criminal organization networks; and engage in multilateral fora," the White House said in a statement on Tuesday.

The delegations also discussed the importance of regular information sharing to ensure a common understanding of the threat posed by synthetic drugs, the statement said.

The working group was formed after a meeting between US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping in November.

The US delegation was led by Deputy Homeland Security Advisor Jennifer Daskal and included representatives of the departments of State, Justice, Homeland Security, Treasury and the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, the statement said.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) -

IMF WORLD ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

* The International Monetary Fund on Tuesday revised its global economic growth forecast for 2024 upward to 3.1%, according to the latest update to the IMF's World Economic Outlook (WEO).
* Global headline inflation is set to fall from 6.8% to 5.8% this year and to 4.4% in 2025, the IMF said in the WEO.
* US economic growth is expected to slow down from 2.5% last year to 2.1% in 2024 and 1.7% in 2025, the IMF said in the WEO.
* The IMF revised its economic growth forecast for Russia in 2024 upward to 2.6%, according to the WEO.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* Pentagon spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Tuesday that he is not tracking any changes in Ukraine's top military command amid reports that the country's commander-in-chief Valerii Zaluzhnyi has resignation.
* Ryder confirmed that the United States will provide Ukraine with small-diameter precision bombs as part of the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative funding.
* The Ukrainian armed forces have suffered 430 casualties in the Kupyansk and Krasnyi Lyman directions in the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
* The West has ignored the call of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy for an international investigation into the downing of the Il-76 military transport plane in Russia's Belgorod Region because it does not like such probes, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.

US SANCTIONS ON VENEZUELA

* The United States will not renew its general license in April that allows crude oil purchases from Venezuela unless there is progress between President Nicolas Maduro and the country's opposition, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Friday.
* Caracas will cancel all repatriation flights for Venezuelan migrants if the United States goes forward with its threat to revoke sanctions relief on Venezuela, Vice President Delcy Rodriguez said.

ISRAEL INVASION OF GAZA

* The Israeli military uses the methods of flooding the Hamas tunnels in the Gaza Strip, the Israel Defense Forces said on Tuesday.
* The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is concerned over Israel's operation in a hospital in the West Bank and will address this issue during its dialogue with the authorities, ICRC spokeswoman Fatima Sator told Sputnik.
* Israel will not withdraw its troops from Gaza until the complete victory over Hamas and will not free thousands of imprisoned Palestinians, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said.
* It is wrong to collectively punish the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine

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Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) before properly investigating the involvement of some of its staff members regarding the October 7 attack on Israel, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.

* Hamas has received a proposal regarding establishing a truce in Gaza and will respond after studying it, the chairman of the movement's political office Ismail Haniyeh said.

US BRODER CRISIS

* US House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Tuesday that the Senate's draft border security bill would not stop the crisis at the United States' border with Mexico.

* US House Republicans will be bringing four bills to the floor this week to address the illegal immigration crisis at the United States' border with Mexico enabled by President Joe Biden and Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, Congresswoman Elise Stefanik said.

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Pentagon on Kataib Hezbollah Vowing to Halt Attacks: 'Actions Speak Louder Than Words'

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - Commenting on the Iraqi-based militia Kataib Hezbollah's declaration about the suspension of attacks on US forces in the Middle East, Pentagon spokesperson Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder said that "actions speak louder than words."

"Actions speak louder than words," Ryder said during a press briefing on Tuesday. "When I say 'actions speak louder than words,' you know, there has been three attacks to my knowledge since the 28th of January, and I'll just leave it there."

Earlier in the day, Kataib Hezbollah issued a statement announcing "the suspension of military and security operations" against the United States in Iraq in order "to prevent embarrassment to the Iraqi government."

It came soon after President Joe Biden said he has decided how to respond to a drone attack that killed three US soldiers in Jordan, but indicated that he does not want a wider war in the Middle East.

On Monday, Pentagon deputy spokesperson Sabrina Singh said that the attack on a US military outpost in Jordan has "the footprints" of Kataib Hezbollah, but the United States is not yet ready to conclude that.

Three US soldiers were killed on Sunday and more than 40 were injured in a drone attack on a US military outpost in the northeast of Jordan near the border with Syria. President Biden blamed unspecified "Iran-backed" militant groups but said the United States was still gathering the facts about the attack.

Iran has denied playing any role in the attack.

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Europe Needs China As Partner in Fighting Climate Change-European Commission

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) -Margrethe Vestager, Executive Vice President of the European Commission for a Europe Fit for the Digital Age, said on Tuesday that Europe needs China as a partner in addressing climate change.

"From Europe, when we look at China we see a very complex relationship ," Vestager said. "We need China as a partner in fighting climate change."

Vestager went on to say that at the same time China is also a systemic rival and an economic competitor.

On December 13, the UN Climate Change Conference (COP28) in Dubai called for the tripling of renewable energy across the globe by 2030 as part of joint efforts to ensure deep and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and keeping the global temperature increase within 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) above preindustrial level.

The conference's final document declared the need for accelerating zero- and low-emission technologies, including renewables, nuclear, abatement and removal technologies such as carbon capture and utilization and storage, particularly in hard-to-abate sectors, and low-carbon hydrogen production.

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McConnell Says Biden Administration Must Hold US Senate Briefing on Middle East Situation

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration ought to provide a briefing to senators on the security situation in the Middle East, US Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said on Tuesday.

“It’s time for the administration to provide senators with a briefing on the current situation in the Middle East,” McConnell said during floor remarks.

The administration is obligated to inform lawmakers about its objectives and strategy in the region, McConnell said.

McConnell’s statement comes following an attack on US forces in Jordan on Sunday that killed three service members. The Pentagon said it is confident an Iranian-backed group is responsible for the attack, but has not named a particular entity.

The White House said that the United States will respond to the attack at a time and place of its choosing, but that it does not seek a war with Iran or broader conflict in the Middle East.

The Biden administration’s fear of escalation sends the wrong message to US adversaries, McConnell said.

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UN Has 'No Plan B' to Secure Funding For UNRWA After Donors Pause Aid - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, January 30 (Sputnik) - The United Nations has no backup plan to get money for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) after donors paused their funding, UN Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday.

"There is really no plan B," Dujarric said in a briefing, when asked whether the UN had a way to secure funding for UNRWA.

The UN operates on the basis of voluntary contributions and cannot print money, he added.

On Friday, UNRWA head Philippe Lazzarini said Israel had shared with the agency data on the alleged involvement of some of its staff members in the October 7 Hamas attack and vowed to hold accountable anyone involved in "acts of terror."

The United States, Finland, the United Kingdom, Italy, Australia, Canada, Germany, Japan, and some other countries have since suspended funding for UNRWA.

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UN Very Concerned About Increased 'Kinetic Activity' in Middle East - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, January 30 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is very worried about the increasing levels of "kinetic activity" in the Middle East, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday.

"We're very concerned about the exchange of fire, the kinetic activity that we've seen in the region, in Jordan, in Syria, in Iraq, and other places," Dujarric said during a press briefing.

An escalation of the already tense situation is the last thing the United Nations wants to see, Dujarric added.

On Monday, a source told Sputnik that two rockets fell near a US military base controlling the Al-Jabsa oil fields in the northeastern Syrian town of Ash Shaddadi. The US military scrambled helicopters in response to the attack, which came just a day after a drone attack killed three US troops and injured 25 others at another base in Jordan, near the border with Syria.

The United States and its allies control large swathes of land in Syria's northeastern region producing gas and oil. US troops are present in Syria without the approval of the UN Security Council and without being invited by the Syrian government.

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Venezuela to Cancel Repatriation Flights if US Revokes Sanctions Relief - Vice President

(Adds background in para 2, details in paras 5-6)

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) – Caracas will cancel repatriation flights for Venezuelan

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migrants if the United States goes forward with its threat to revoke sanctions relief on Venezuela, Vice President Delcy Rodriguez said on Tuesday.

Earlier in the day, the State Department said the US would not renew its general license in April that allows for crude purchases from Venezuela unless there is progress between President Nicolas Maduro and the opposition.

"The entirety of Venezuela rejects the gross and unwarranted blackmail, and ultimatum by the US government. If they take a wrong step toward intensifying economic aggression against Venezuela ... starting February 13, all repatriation flights for Venezuelan migrants will be immediately canceled, and all existing cooperation mechanisms will undergo a review," Rodriguez said via X.

In a statement shared by Foreign Minister Yvan Gil, Caracas unequivocally rejected the US's "interventionism" and "neocolonialism" against an independent Venezuelan sovereign state.

Venezuela has a right to choose its own destiny free from pressures by a government that is "complicit in the massacres in Gaza," has a record of human rights violations in the Americas, and represses its indigenous, Afro-descendent and migrant populations, the statement said.

It also accused the US of seeking to destabilize the Venezuelan economy and impose a coup by using coercion and threats. Caracas will not cede to any sort of blackmail, the statement said.

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Pentagon Says F-35 Fighter Jets for Turkey 'Not on Table' at Present Time

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - The provision of F-35 fighter jets by the United States for Turkey is not currently on the table due to Ankara maintaining Russian S-400 air defense systems, Defense Department spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.

"Right now, with Turkey maintaining the S-400, that is currently not something that is on the table," Ryder said during a press briefing.

Earlier this week, US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland said the United States would be open to discussing the provision of F-35 aircraft for Turkey if Ankara could resolve the S-400 issue.

The US restricted the provision of the F-35 jets to Turkey after Ankara signed a contract with Russia for S-400 systems instead of the US Patriot missile air defense systems.

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Pentagon Confirms US to Provide Ukraine With Small-Diameter Precision Bombs

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) – Pentagon spokesperson Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder confirmed on Tuesday that the United States will provide Ukraine with small-diameter precision bombs as

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part of Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI) funding.
"As we acknowledged last year, we will provide Ukraine with the ground-launched small-diameter bomb as part of our USAI-funded security assistance efforts. However, due to operational security reasons, we're not going to confirm specific timelines," Ryder said during a press briefing.
Ukraine is set to receive the first batch of the Ground-Launched Small Diameter bombs as soon as Wednesday, nearly a year since the US announced plans to deliver them to Kiev, Politico reported earlier in the day.
The Ground-Launched Small Diameter Bombs have a 90-mile range and are made by Boeing, the report said.

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Opportunities Exist to Increase UN Aid to Gaza by Land - Senior Official

UNITED NATIONS, January 30 (Sputnik) - Options exist to provide more UN humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip by land, UN Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator on the Situation in the Middle East Sigrid Kaag said on Tuesday.
"There are opportunities, obviously, to do more via land from Jordan. The Israeli government and the Jordanian government are in a very constructive discussion about that," Kaag said. "If you're looking at an increase in the number of crossings, the use of the crossing Kerem Shalom - Abu Salam [in Hebrew] could be enhanced given it's important currently for the humanitarian relief operations."
Kaag pointed out that there are a number of ways to increase UN humanitarian aid deliveries and noted that she had laid them out to the members of the UN Security Council.
Israel imposed a full blockade on Gaza after the attack by Hamas on October 7 in which some 1,100 Israelis - military and civilians - were killed and some 240 taken hostage. The blockade and accompanying massive bombardments as well as ground invasion have resulted in more than 26,000 Palestinians killed and well over 60,000 wounded, as well as made homeless 1.9 million out of the 2.3 million residents of the Palestinian enclave.
On November 24, Qatar mediated a deal between Israel and Hamas on a temporary truce and the exchange of some of the imprisoned Palestinians and Israeli hostages, as well as the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza. The ceasefire was extended several times and expired on December 1 and international humanitarian organizations have said the aid provided is woefully inadequate to satisfy the needs of the population of Gaza.

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Chicago Extends Migrant Shelter Stay Limits Until End of March - Mayor Johnson

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WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - Chicago will again enforcement of its 60-day limit on shelter stays for migrants until the end of March, Mayor Brandon Johnson announced.

"We have made the decision to extend the shelter state policy based on original exit dates from mid-January through the end of March," Johnson said on Monday during a press briefing.

Johnson initially said that the 60-day limit was implemented in coordination with the state's announcement of extra resources for resettlement and case management, emphasizing that the plan for temporary emergency shelter, was not intended as a long-term housing solution.

"We want to give every person and every single family that has come to our city enough time to process their work authorization, find housing, start a new life in our great city," Johnson added.

According to reports, the migrant mission is currently costing Chicago $1.5 million per day, with the allocated budget of $150 million for the entire year expected to be depleted by April.

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Sullivan Met With Qatari PM to Address Gaza Crisis, Hostage Release Efforts -White House

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan met with Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani of Qatar to address the ongoing Gaza crisis and the efforts for the release of all remaining hostages held by Hamas, the White House said on Tuesday.

"National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan met with Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani of Qatar today to discuss the ongoing crisis in Gaza and their efforts to secure the immediate release of all remaining hostages held by Hamas," the White House said in a statement.

The statement said that Sullivan expressed gratitude to Sheikh Mohammed for his efforts and emphasized the necessity of applying all possible measures to compel Hamas to release the hostages.

"They agreed to stay in regular contact until all hostages are reunited with their families," the statement added.

On October 7, 2023, the Hamas movement launched a large-scale rocket attack against Israel from Gaza and breached the border, killing 1,200 people and abducting around 240 others. Israel launched retaliatory strikes, ordered a complete blockade of Gaza, and started a ground incursion into the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages. Over 26,600 people have been killed so far in the Gaza Strip, 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. More than 100 hostages are still believed to be held by Hamas in Gaza.

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

Pentagon Not Tracking Any Changes in Ukraine's Top Military Command- Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) – Pentagon press secretary Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder said on Tuesday that he is not tracking any changes in Ukraine's top military command amid reports of Commander-in-Chief Valerii Zaluzhnyi's resignation.

"I'm not tracking any changes. Obviously, it's for Ukraine to discuss their internal domestic affairs," Ryder said when asked to confirm any changes to Ukraine's military leadership.

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Pentagon Says 'Confident' Iran-Backed Group Responsible for Attack on US Troops in Jordan

ASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department is confident that an Iran-backed proxy group is responsible for the attack on US forces in Jordan over the weekend, Pentagon spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.

"Central Command is still assessing, but again, we are confident that this attack was sponsored by Iranian-backed proxies," Ryder said during a press briefing.

On Sunday, three US troops were killed in an attack on an outpost in Jordan. The United States will respond to the attack at a time and place of its choosing but does not seek a war with Iran or broader conflict in the Middle East, the White House said on Monday.

Many questions remain about the attack, including how the attack drone penetrated the air defenses put in place and which specific group is responsible, Ryder said.

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Austin Will Personally Call Families of US Troops Killed in Jordan Attack - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin will personally call the families of the US troops killed in an attack in Jordan over the weekend, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.

"Secretary Austin will be calling each of the families to personally relay his respects, and is planning to attend the dignified transfer of remains at Dover Air Force Base on Friday as well," Ryder said during a press briefing.

On Sunday, three US soldiers were killed in an attack on an outpost in Jordan. The Pentagon is confident that an Iranian-backed group was responsible for the attack but has yet to identify a specific perpetrator, Ryder said.

The United States will respond to the strike at a time and manner of its choosing but does not seek war with Iran or a broader conflict in the Middle East, the White House said on Monday.

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US Says to Revoke Venezuela Oil Sanctions Relief Absent Progress Between Gov't, Opposition

(Corrects day of week in lede, adds Venezuela's reaction in para 5)

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - The United States will not renew its general license in April that allows crude purchases from Venezuela unless there is progress between President Nicolas Maduro and the opposition, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.

"In support of the Barbados Agreement, the United States issued General License 44, which provides relief to Venezuela's oil and gas sector," Miller said in a statement. "Absent progress between Maduro and his representatives and the opposition Unitary Platform, particularly on allowing all presidential candidates to compete in this year's election, the United States will not renew the license when it expires on April 18, 2024."

Additionally, the United States is revoking General License 43, which authorized transactions involving Venezuelan state-owned gold mining company Minerven.

"U.S. persons will have fourteen days to wind down any transactions that were previously authorized by that license," the spokesman added.

Venezuela has dismissed the US warning as "blackmail." If the US takes another step toward "intensifying economic aggression" against the country, Caracas will cancel repatriation flights for Venezuelan migrants and review other cooperation mechanisms, Vice President Delcy Rodriguez warned.

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Canada's Ontario Govt. Supports $1.5Bln Refurbishment of Nuclear Station - Statement

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - The Ontario provincial government announced in a statement on Tuesday that it will be supporting the refurbishment of the Pickering Nuclear Generating Station with C$2 billion (US$1.5 billion).

"OPG (Ontario Power Generation's) will now proceed with the Project Initiation Phase of refurbishment which will last through the end of 2024," the government's statement said. "The government is supporting OPG's $2 billion budget for this phase which includes engineering and design work as well as securing long-lead components that can require years for manufacturing."

Ontario is set to support the refurbishing of units 5-8 and upon completion of the work, the nuclear facility will be able to produce 2,000 megawatts of electricity - enough to power nearly 2 million homes throughout the province, the statement said.

The OPG has estimated that the complete renovation of the nuclear station would be achieved

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by the mid-2030s, the statement added.
The Pickering Nuclear Generating Station is the third largest nuclear facility in Canada, according to the statement.

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US Seeks to Buy 3Mln Barrels of Sour Crude Oil By June to Refill Reserves - Energy Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - The United States intends to purchase 3 million barrels of sour crude oil to refill the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve, the Energy Department said in a notice on Tuesday.
"The Department of Energy, Strategic Petroleum Reserve Project Management Office (SPRPMO) ... has a requirement to conduct a purchase of approximately three million barrels of United States produced sour crude oil for June 2024 delivery," the notice said.
On Monday, the Energy Department announced it would purchase 3.1 million barrels of oil from ExxonMobil, Macquarie Commodities Trading, Phillips 66, and Sunoco. that will be used to refill the national reserves.
According to the latest Energy Information Administration data, there are 356.51 million barrels of crude oil in the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve.
From November 2021 to July 2022, US President Joe Biden used the strategic US oil reserves to reduce soaring gasoline prices, which at times reached record levels.

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US Expects Israel to Comply With ICJ's Ruling on Preventing Genocide in Gaza – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) – The United States expects that Israel will comply with the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) order requiring it to do everything it can to prevent genocide in Gaza, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.
"We do expect them to determine what they need to do to comply with the court's ruling, and we will be engaging with them about that," Miller told reporters.
The ICJ last week issued a provisional ruling ordering Israel to take "all measures within its power" to prevent genocide in Gaza, including refraining from killing or causing harm to Palestinian civilians, preventing and punishing incitement to genocide and taking immediate action to allow basic aid into the enclave.
Miller said the US respects the court's decision and is discussing the situation with the Israelis both privately and publicly.
"We wanted to see them do more to allow humanitarian assistance to go into Gaza. We want to see them do more to ensure that civilians are protected," he said.
The ICJ's ruling came after South Africa filed a lawsuit accusing Israel of genocidal intent in

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Gaza with the court on December 29 in response to the rising civilian death toll in the besieged Palestinian enclave. It sought to prove that Israel's military campaign is genocidal in nature and targets Gazans as a part of the broader Palestinian people.

On October 7, 2023, the Hamas movement launched a large-scale rocket attack against Israel from Gaza and breached the border, killing 1,200 people and abducting around 240 others. Israel launched retaliatory strikes, ordered a complete blockade of Gaza, and started a ground incursion into the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages. Over 26,600 people have been killed so far in the Gaza Strip, 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. More than 100 hostages are still believed to be held by Hamas in Gaza.

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UNRWA's Role in Mideast 'Critical,' US Wants to See Its Work Continue - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) – The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) remains the only humanitarian organization capable of meeting people's basic needs in the Middle East and the United States wants to see its work continue, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.

"We very much support the work that UNRWA does. We think it's critical. There is no other humanitarian player in Gaza who can provide food, and water, and medicine at the scale that UNRWA does. We want to see that work continue," Miller said during a press briefing.

Earlier in the day, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that it is wrong to collectively punish UNRWA before properly investigating the alleged involvement of some of its staff members in the October 7 attack on Israel.

On Friday, UNRWA head Philippe Lazzarini said Israel had shared with the agency data on the alleged involvement of some of its staff members in the Hamas attack and vowed to hold accountable anyone involved in "acts of terror." The United States, Finland, the United Kingdom, Italy, Australia, Canada, Germany, Japan, and some other countries have since suspended funding for UNRWA.

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Venezuela to Cancel Repatriation Flights if US Revokes Sanctions Relief - Vice President

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) – Caracas will cancel all repatriation flights for Venezuelan migrants if the United States goes forward with its threat to revoke sanctions relief

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on Venezuela, Vice President Delcy Rodriguez said on Tuesday.
"The entirety of Venezuela rejects the gross and unwarranted blackmail, and ultimatum by the US government. If they take a wrong step toward intensifying economic aggression against Venezuela ... starting February 13, all repatriation flights for Venezuelan migrants will be immediately canceled, and all existing cooperation mechanisms will undergo a review," Rodriguez said via X.
In a statement shared by Foreign Minister Yvan Gil, Caracas unequivocally rejected the US's "interventionism" and "neocolonialism" against a sovereign state.

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Syphilis Cases in US Increased by 80% Since 2018 - Health Department

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - Cases of syphilis in the United States have risen by 80% since 2018, the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) said on Tuesday.
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported 207,255 total syphilis cases in the United States in 2022, marking an 80% increase since 2018 and following a decades-long upward trend, the HHS said in a statement.
"The syphilis crisis in our country is unacceptable. The Biden-Harris Administration is committed to addressing this urgent issue and using all available means to eliminate disparities in our health care system," HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra said in the statement.
HHS is responding to the syphilis crisis through the National Syphilis and Congenital Syphilis Syndemic Federal Task Force, the statement said.
The CDC reported more than 3,700 congenital syphilis cases in newborns in 2022 - more than 10 times the 2012 figure - the statement said.
Despite comprising 13% of the US population, black people represented nearly 32% of all primary and secondary syphilis cases, as well as approximately 30% of congenital syphilis cases, in 2022, the statement said.
However, primary, secondary and congenital syphilis rates were highest among American Indian or Alaska Native people, the statement said. There was one congenital syphilis case for every 155 births in the demographic category in 2022, the statement added.
Untreated syphilis can result in heart and brain damage, miscarriage and infant death, according to the statement.

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Rep. Cori Bush Confirms Justice Department Probe, Says is 'Fully Cooperating'

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - US Rep. Cori Bush confirmed Tuesday that she is the subject of a Justice Department probe and said her office is "fully cooperating" in the

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investigation.

"First and foremost, I hold myself, my campaign, and my position to the highest levels of integrity. I also believe in transparency which is why I can confirm that the Department of Justice is reviewing my campaign's spending on security services. We are fully cooperating in this investigation," Bush wrote in a statement.

Bush added that the complaints against her are "frivolous," and are the result of politicized attacks conducted by "right-wing organizations."

"In particular, the nature of these allegations have been around my husband's role in the campaign. In accordance with all applicable rules, I retained my husband as part of my security team to provide security services because he has had extensive experience in this area, and is able to provide the necessary services at or below a fair market rate," Bush said.

Bush's spending came under scrutiny after she paid $60,000 in 2022 to her now-husband, Cortney Merritts, to provide "security services" for her, and according to those earlier reports, Merritts received this pay despite not holding the required security license since 2012.

Last year, the Office of Congressional Ethics voted to dismiss allegations after finding that her husband, Cortney Merritts, had provided bona fide security for a price that was at or below market value.

News of the recent investigation came to light on Monday, when Speaker Mike Johnson and House Sergeant at Arms William McFarland said that their office received a Grand Jury subpoena for documents issued by the DOJ and that McFarland would comply with the subpoena.

It is not immediately clear whether the new DOJ probe is broader than the previous one by the Office of Congressional Ethics into Bush's spending.

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'Black Swan' Author Nassim Taleb Warns US in Death Spiral of Rising National Debt

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - Former options trader, risk analyst and hedge fund manager Nassim Taleb said the United States faces a dangerous level of rising national debt that is dividing politics in Washington, making it difficult to address the problem.

"So long as you have Congress keep extending the debt limit and doing deals because they're afraid of the consequences of doing the right thing, that's the political structure of the political system, eventually you're going to have a debt spiral. And a debt spiral is like a death spiral," Taleb said during an event for Universal Investments.

Taleb pointed out that he's a bit gloomy about the entire political system in the Western world.

Last week, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said that the $34 trillion US national debt is a scary number but manageable.

Yellen said US debt is manageable because the United States has a "huge economy."

Taleb's book "The Black Swan" about navigating a world full of uncertainty is a New York Times best-seller.

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Biden's Response to Drone Attack to Make Sure to Degrade Abilities Against US Forces-Kirby

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) -US National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said on Tuesday that the guiding principle of US President Joe Biden's decision on responding to the drone attack is ensuring that Washington continues to degrade the capabilities of the groups attacking US forces.

President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that he has decided how to respond to the drone attack that killed three US soldiers in Jordan, but indicated that he does not want a wider war in the Middle East.

When asked what is the guiding principle as the president makes his decision, Kirby said that it was making sure that the US continues to degrade the kinds of capabilities that these groups have at their disposal to use against US troops and facilities.

"And to send a strong signal to their backers in the IRGC that these attacks are unacceptable, and we are going to do, the president will do what he has to do to protect our troops and our facilities, and to look after our national security interests in the region," he added.

Three US soldiers were killed on Sunday and dozens were injured in a drone attack on a US military outpost in the northeast of Jordan near the border with Syria. President Joe Biden blamed unspecified allegedly Iran-backed militant groups, but said the United States was still gathering the facts about the attack. Iran has denied playing any role in the attack.

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US-Made Small Diameter Bomb Expected to Arrive in Ukraine as Soon as Wednesday – Reports

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) – The United States will deliver the first batch of new long-range precision bombs to Ukraine on Wednesday following successful tests almost a year after the US announced it would deliver the weapons to Kiev, Politico reported on Tuesday, citing a US official and other people in the know.

The Ground-Launched Small Diameter Bombs have a 90-mile range and are made by Boeing, the report said.

The bombs, which even the United States does not yet have in its arsenal, will be used for the first time on the battlefield in Ukraine and are expected to be “a significant capability for Ukraine,” the official said.

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China Commits to Boosting Law Enforcement Coordination, Data Sharing With US - Kirby

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - China has committed to boosting law enforcement coordination to curtail distribution and export of precursor chemicals for opioids and to enhance data sharing with the United States, US National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said on Tuesday following a meeting between delegations representing the two countries.

"They committed to cooperating on increased law enforcement coordination to tackle the distribution and export of precursor chemicals for the opioids that are taking so many lives, to deal with illicit financing and to increase our information sharing across the two governments," Kirby said.

Kirby noted that the US delegation included officials from the departments of State, Justice, Homeland Security and the Treasury.

"What was interesting was that the PRC [People's Republic of China] reciprocated - and they brought a whole of government delegation as well. It was a good set of discussions," Kirby added.

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Rep. Cori Bush Under DOJ Investigation Over Alleged Misuse of Security Funds - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - The Department of Justice is investigating Missouri Democratic Rep. Cori Bush for allegedly misusing government funds that were intended to pay for her security, Fox News reported on Tuesday.

The probe is related to allegations of federal security money being spent improperly, the report said.

The news comes after a subpoena announcement was read on the House floor on Monday, when Speaker Mike Johnson and House Sergeant at Arms William McFarland said that their office received a Grand Jury subpoena for documents issued by the DOJ and that McFarland would comply with the subpoena.

The investigation into Bush is believed to be connected to Monday's subpoena, the report said, citing sources familiar with the matter.

Bush's spending came under scrutiny after she paid $60,000 in 2022 to her now-husband, Cortney Merritts, to provide "security services" for her, and according to those earlier reports, Merritts received this pay despite not holding the required security license since 2012.

In March, a watchdog group called Foundation for Accountability and Civic Trust (FACT) filed a complaint asking the Federal Election Commission to investigate whether or not Bush used campaign funds for personal use when she paid Merritts for his services, the report said.

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NG-20 Cygnus Cargo Ship Successfully Launches to Space Station on Falcon 9 Booster -SpaceX

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - The latest Northrop Grumman NG-20 Cygnus unmanned spacecraft successfully launched to the International Space Station (ISS) from the Launch Complex 39A at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida on schedule at 12:07 pm Eastern Standard Time (EST), SpaceX said on Tuesday.

It was the first time that a Cygnus cargo spacecraft was launched on a reusable Falcon booster.

The Cygnus is scheduled to dock at 4 20 am Eastern Time on Thursday morning, SpaceX said.

The Cygnus carries a payload of 8,200 pounds including many new scientific experiments such as tests of a 3D metal printer, semiconductor manufacturing, and thermal protection systems for re-entry to Earth's atmosphere, SpaceX said.

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US State of Illinois Decides to Keep Trump on Republican Primary Ballot

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - Illinois state government officials on Tuesday decided to keep former President Donald Trump on the state's Republican primary ballot following efforts from some local voters to remove him.

Illinois' primary vote will be held on March 19.

The state board is made up of four Republicans and four Democrats, all of whom voted in favor of allowing Trump on the ballot.

Several voters in Illinois tried to get Trump off the primary ballot over his alleged role in the events at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021.

The states of Maine and Colorado have decided to remove Trump from their primary ballots, but the decision will not be in effect until the US Supreme Court makes a decision on this matter.

The Trump campaign has said states' decisions to remove Trump from ballots is unconstitutional.

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Xi Promised Biden in November China Would Not Interfere in 2024 Election - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - Chinese President Xi Jinping in November promised US President Joe Biden that China would not interfere in the 2024 US presidential election, CNN

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reported on Tuesday.
Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi reiterated Xi's assurances during his recent meeting with US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan in Thailand last week, the report said.
Biden was the one who raised the issue of potential election meddling by China during a brief exchange with Xi in November, the report said.
The issue of potential Chinese election interference has been raised several times during bilateral meetings between Chinese and US officials in recent months, the report added.
On Saturday, a senior Biden administration official said the United States expects that a telephone conversation will be held between Biden and Xi sometime in the spring, but no specific date has been chosen yet.

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Biden Says He is 'Fine' With Trump Remaining on Ballot

WASHINGTON, January 29 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday he has no issue with his predecessor, Donald Trump, remaining on the 2024 ballot.
"As far as I am concerned, that's fine," Biden said, when asked if Trump should be allowed on the ballot.
The US states of Maine and Colorado have decided to oust Trump from their state ballots, but those decisions will not be effective until a higher court rules on Trump's appeals of the decisions.
The US Supreme Court is set to hear oral arguments in the Colorado case starting on February 8.
Trump has denied any wrongdoing, stating he has a legal right to challenge the results of the 2020 election.

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New York Attorney General Sues Citibank for Not Reimbursing Defrauded Customers

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - New York Attorney General Letitia James said on Tuesday that she is suing Citibank for failing to reimburse customers defrauded by scammers.
"I'm suing Citibank for allowing scammers to steal millions of dollars from hardworking people and refusing to reimburse them when they were defrauded," James said in a statement.
New York seeks to have Citibank pay back defrauded New Yorkers with interest, pay penalties, and improve its anti-fraud defenses, the statement said.
Thousands of New York residents have been scammed out of millions of dollars, some even losing their life savings, the statement added.
Although Citibank is one of the largest banks in the United States, it fails to respond to fraud

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activity quickly, and when victims of fraud contact the bank for help and refunds, they are denied, according to the statement.

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Mayorkas 'Not Rattled' by US House Republican Impeachment Threat - Letter

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - US Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas wrote on Tuesday that he was not rattled by the alleged false accusations brought by House Republicans to impeach him for his handling of the border crisis, according to a letter addressed to House Homeland Security Committee Chair Mark Green.

"I assure you that your false accusations do not rattle me and do not divert me from the law enforcement and broader public service mission to which I have devoted most of my career and to which I remain devoted," Mayorkas wrote in the letter sent ahead of the committee vote on impeaching him.

Mayorkas denied Green's repeated claims that he had refused to provide testimony regarding his proposed impeachment, noting that the Homeland Security Committee had constantly shifted its demands and then issued a statement that the majority had already rendered a decision.

In his seven-page letter, Mayorkas argued that the problems with the "broken and outdated immigration system" predated his tenure and required a legislative solution from Congress.

Mayorkas also said that the White House had requested supplemental funding in August and again in October to execute its border security and enforcement strategy, including hiring more law enforcement officers, asylum officers and non-intrusive inspection systems to block the flow of fentanyl from cartels.

At the opening of the 10:00 a.m. hearing, Green said Mayorkas' letter was sent at 4:48 a.m., adding that the "eleventh-hour response demonstrates the lack of seriousness with which Secretary Mayorkas views his responsibilities."

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US Sanctions ISIS Cyber Facilitators, Reinforces Global Counterterrorism Efforts -Treasury

WASHINGTON, January 29 (Sputnik) - The US announced the designation of two cybersecurity experts linked to ISIS(terrorist group banned in Russia) for providing training and facilitating virtual currency use, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) said in a statement on Tuesday.

"Today, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated two cybersecurity experts affiliated with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) for providing ISIS leadership and supporters with cybersecurity training, enabling their use of virtual

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currency, and supporting the terrorist group's recruitment," the statement said.
The statement said that, in addition, OFAC designated an ISIS financial facilitator involved in transferring funds to ISIS-affiliated individuals in Syria.
"These actions reinforce the United States' commitment to the mission of the Counter ISIS Finance Group (CIFG), a working group of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS comprising over 80 countries and international organizations," the statement said.
The statement added that these designations also align with the 19th meeting of the CIFG, where discussions revolved around the disruption of ISIS financing networks worldwide.

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Houthis Threatened or Attacked Vessels 36 Times Since November 19 – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) – Yemen's Houthi group has threatened or attacked commercial or navy vessels 36 times since November 19, Pentagon spokesperson Sabrina Singh said on Tuesday.
"The Houthis have attacked or threatened international and commercial shipping, as well as naval vessels, 36 times since November 19, 2023," Singh said in a statement in response to a question posed earlier in a briefing.
Singh added that the last Houthi attack on a vessel took place on Saturday.
She dismissed Houthi claims that it had attacked the USS Lewis B. Puller in the Gulf of Aden on Monday as "false."

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US Speaker Johnson on 5,000 Illegal Crossings Rule in Senate Bill: 'Why Would We Do That?'

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Tuesday that Republicans in the lower chamber of Congress would not agree to support a Senate bill that would include a rule allowing shutting down the border after "only" 5,000 immigrants cross it illegally per day.
"I can't make a full judgment on the national security supplemental as the full details have not yet been released, but based on the news reports of this agreement that had been leaked … it seems the new authority to shut down the border would kick in only after as many as 5,000 illegal crossings happen each day. Why? Why would we do that?" Johnson said.
Johnson added that House Republicans agreeing to this rule would be tantamount to a surrender.
On Monday, Johnson said any potential deal allowing even a single illegal border crossing into the United States is a "non-starter."
Senator Ted Cruz said on Monday that senators have only been provided bullet points on a

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potential border deal with the Biden administration. Cruz said allowing 5,000 immigrants to illegally enter the United States daily would amount to a yearly total of some 1.8 million people. Cruz added that any US president willing to enforce existing immigration laws does not need further legislation to secure the country's border.

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Biden Says Decided How to Respond to Attack on US Troops in Jordan, Doesn't Want Wider War

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that he has decided how to respond to the drone attack that killed three US soldiers in Jordan, but indicated that he does not want a wider war in the Middle East.

"Yes," Biden told reporters when asked whether he has chosen a response, adding, "I don't think we need a wider war in the Middle East, that's not what I'm looking for."

Biden also said he holds Iran partly responsible for the deadly attack on the US troops.

"I do hold them responsible in the sense that they're supplying the weapons to the people who did it," Biden said.

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Speaker Johnson Says Senate's Supplemental Bill 'Clearly' Not Enough to Secure Border

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) – US House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Tuesday that the Senate's draft border security bill would not stop the crisis at the US border.

"We haven't seen any bill text yet. We've been waiting I think two months now on that [bill]," Johnson told reporters. "But from what we've seen, clearly, what's been suggested in this bill is not enough to secure the border."

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US House Republicans to Promote 4 Bills This Week to Address Border Crisis - Congresswoman

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - US House Republicans will be bringing four bills to the floor this week to address the illegal immigration crisis at the United States' border with Mexico enabled by President Joe Biden and Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, Congresswoman Elise Stefanik said on Tuesday.

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"In addition to pursuing the impeachment of Mayorkas, we are bringing four important bills to the floor this week committed to addressing Biden's border crisis," Stefanik said.

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UPS Announces 12,000 Job Cuts Worldwide Amid Steady Decline in Revenue

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) – United Parcel Service (UPS), an American shipping giant, will cut about 12,000 jobs around the world over the coming months amid a continued decline in revenue, Director of Financial and Strategy Communications at UPS Brian Hughes said on Tuesday.

"In 2023, dynamic external and economic conditions led to lower volume and a more than $9 billion decline in revenue year over year. As a result, today UPS announced plans to right-size its global staffing and eliminate roughly 12,000 jobs around the world over the next several months," Hughes said in a statement to Sputnik.

UPS will provide support to all employees who will lose their jobs, including severance packages and outplacement assistance, the statement added.

Earlier in the day, UPS published its fourth-quarter 2023 consolidated revenues of $24.9 billion, a 7.8% decrease from $27 billion in the fourth quarter of 2022.

In 2024, UPS expects its revenue to range from $92 billion to $94.5 billion, according to the company's earnings data.

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Canada to Provide Additional $30Mln in Humanitarian Aid to Gaza - Global Affairs

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) – Canada has allocated C$40 million ($29.7 million) in additional humanitarian assistance for the Gaza Strip amid the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) said on Tuesday.

"Canada is providing an additional $40 million in funding for humanitarian assistance to address urgent needs stemming from the ongoing crisis in the Gaza Strip. This funding will help Canada's partners to provide food, water, emergency medical assistance, protection services and other life-saving assistance," GAC said in a statement.

The funding will be shared between the World Food Programme, World Health Organization, UN Population Fund, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UN International Children's Emergency Fund, and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Another C$5 million will go toward "experienced" Canadian non-governmental organization partners, GAC added.

On Friday, Canada announced it was halting its financing for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees amid a probe into allegations that some of its staff aided

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the October 7 Hamas attacks against Israel.

Canada will continue to work with the agency and other donors to support the investigation into "the serious and deeply concerning allegations," while maintaining its commitment to helping the most vulnerable Palestinian civilians in the region, GAC said in Tuesday's release.

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Federal Reserve's Potential Decision to Ease Policy Rate May Help Emerging Markets - IMF

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) expects that the potential decision of the US Federal Reserve to start easing the interest rate might help emerging markets, IMF Chief Economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas said on Tuesday.

"As the Federal Reserve might start easing its policy rate, this could lower the attractiveness of US investments and therefore ease the pressure in terms of the capital flows and currencies on other countries," Gourinchas said during a briefing.

The IMF expects that the Federal Reserve might decide to ease the ion might happen in the second half of the year, he added.

Gourinchas emphasized that a decision by the Federal Reserve to lower the policy rate could reduce the appreciation of the dollar and provide additional possibilities for developing countries.

"So that is something that would provide a little bit of breathing room also to emerging market economies in the second half of the year, and maybe even earlier, since it is likely anticipated by the markets already," Gourinchas said.

The Federal Reserve left US interest rates unchanged in December for the third time in a row after 11 prior interest rate hikes that helped ease inflation from four-decade highs. Chairman Jerome Powell, however, said he could not give any assurances about inflation or the US economy in 2024 and by how much the central bank would likely cut rates if it decides on that course of action.

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IMF Says Reviewing Decisions of 3 Nations to Withdraw From ECOWAS

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) – The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is looking at the situation around the decision of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger to leave the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Chief Economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas said on Tuesday.

"This is something, of course, we are monitoring. It is a bit early to assess what the impact is going to be," Gourinchas told reporters.

However, economic cooperation is a way to improve trade and growth, he added.

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"Moving away from this is going to have the opposite effects," Gourinchas said.

On Sunday, Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali said in a joint statement that they would withdraw from ECOWAS. They called the bloc a "threat" to its member states and criticized it for imposing "illegal, illegitimate, inhumane and irresponsible" sanctions on the three countries.

The three western African states were targeted with sanctions by ECOWAS after it demanded the restoration of civilian governments following coups in Mali in 2020, in Burkina Faso in 2022 and in Niger in 2023.

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