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Biden Says Will Try to Get Border Deal Done

WASHINGTON, February 1 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Thursday that he will try to get the border deal done with the Congress, the White House pool reported.

When asked whether he would get the border deal done as some Republicans are calling the deal a non starter, Biden stated: "We'll see, I will try."

US House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Wednesday that the Ukraine aid-border security bill being negotiated by the Senate does not include any meaningful border and immigration policy changes.

Johnson said he opposes a reported proposal to include a new presidential authority in the bill that would allow the US president to shut down the southern border once daily illegal crossings exceed 5,000 a day. Media also reported that the deal may include a new authority to suspend asylum for migrants who enter the United States between ports of entry.

White House and Senate negotiators have been in discussions for weeks on a border deal that would include President Joe Biden's supplemental request that earmarks more than $60 billion for Ukraine. Republican senators have refused to support Biden's request unless he commits to backing meaningful changes to US border policy in order to mitigate the crisis on the southern border.

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Biden to Issue Executive Order Thursday to Punish Extremist West Bank Settlers - Reports

WASHINGTON, February 1 (Sputnik) – US President Biden is expected to issue an executive order on Thursday to punish Israeli settlers attacking Palestinians in the West Bank, Politico reported, citing documents, an official, and a congressional aide.

It is unclear what the punishment would entail. In December, the State Department implemented a US visa ban on extremist settlers in Israel "believed to have been involved in undermining peace, security or stability in the West Bank." However, dual US-Israeli citizens were exempted from the ban.

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US Drug Enforcement Agency Targeted Top Venezuelan Officials in Covert Operation - Reports

WASHINGTON, February 1 (Sputnik) – The US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) conducted a multi-year spy operation in Venezuela to build drug trafficking cases against Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and other top officials, The Associated Press reported on Thursday, citing a secret 2018 memo it obtained last year.

"It is necessary to conduct this operation unilaterally and without notifying Venezuelan officials," the 15-page memo stated about the expansion of "Operation Money Badger," which was first established by the DEA and Miami prosecutors in 2013.

As the expansion of the operation risked violating Venezuelan and international laws, it needed to be approved by the Sensitivity Activity Review Committee, which is comprised of senior officials from the state and justice departments.

Operation Money Badger went on to investigate around 100 Venezuelans, AP reported, citing two unnamed sources. Maduro ally Alex Saab, who was recently released by the US in a prisoner exchange, was one of the people ensnared by the operation.

It is unclear whether the operation is still ongoing.

The memo was accidentally uploaded to a file share website by the US Attorney's Office in Manhattan last year during the bribery conspiracy trial of two former DEA agents. The AP is not publishing the memo or identifying the DEA informants to protect their safety.

In an annual address to the nation in January, President Maduro said several plots to assassinate him and other top officials were thwarted in 2023. He accused ultra-right forces, drug trafficking groups, the DEA and the CIA of conspiring against him.

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US House Passes Bill to Ban Hamas, October 7 Attack Participants From Entering Country

WASHINGTON, February 1 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives passed legislation to ban members of the Palestinian movement Hamas and persons linked to the October 7 attack on Israel from entering the United States.

House lawmakers passed the bill, dubbed the No Immigration Benefits for Hamas Terrorists Act, on Wednesday in a vote of 422 in favor and two opposed.

"We cannot allow these barbaric terrorists who hate our country and everything America stands for to cross our borders or live in our communities. House Republicans are bringing legislation to ensure Hamas terrorists are kept out of our nation," House Majority Leader Steve Scalise said in a statement on the bill.

On October 7, Hamas launched a large-scale attack on Israel from Gaza in which some 1,100 Israelis - both military and civilians - were killed. Israel imposed a complete blockade on Gaza, started massive bombardments and a ground invasion of the Palestinian enclave. More than 26,000 Palestinians have been killed so far and well over 60,000 others wounded.

The legislation makes any person who participated in, planned, financed or provided material

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support for the attack inadmissible to the United States.

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US House of Representatives Passes Bipartisan Tax Relief Legislation

WASHINGTON, February 1 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives passed bipartisan tax relief legislation, which would reform the child tax credit and other fiscal policies.

House lawmakers passed the legislation, dubbed the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act, on Wednesday in a vote of 357 in favor and 70 opposed.

“Our tax deal is pro-growth, pro-jobs, and pro-America. There is not a single state or community across the country that won’t suffer if Congress fails to act and provide immediate tax relief for small businesses,” House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Jason Smith said in a statement on the bill.

Smith announced the framework alongside US Senate Finance Committee Chairman Ron Wyden earlier this month. Wyden said he hopes to get the legislation passed in time for taxpayers to benefit in the upcoming tax filing season.

The legislation changes calculations used to determine the maximum refundable child tax credit. Under current policies, taxpayers multiply their income by 15%. The bill modifies the policy by then multiplying that figure by the number of qualifying children.

The current maximum refundable child tax credit is limited to $1,600, but the legislation raises the limit to $1,800 in tax year 2023 and to $2,000 by tax year 2025.

The bill also modifies tax dedication policies for domestic research and experimental costs, provides tax benefits to Taiwan residents and extends disaster-related tax relief.

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WH Resists Biden's Ukraine Speech Release, Oversight Demands Drafts by Feb.7 - Letter

WASHINGTON, February 1 (Sputnik) - The White House is refusing to release Joe Biden's draft speeches concerning foreign policy decisions tied to the dismissal of Ukrainian prosecutor Victor Shokin, prompting the Oversight Committee to demand the release of drafts by February 7, Representatives James Comer, Jim Jordan and Jason Smith wrote in a letter to the White House.

"For more than five months the White House has declined to authorize the production of these draft speeches to the Oversight Committee or to assert a valid privilege over them... The Committees now demand that the White House permit NARA [National Archives and Records Administration] to produce the following information no later than February 7, 2024," the letter said on Wednesday.

The letter added that if the White House doesn't provide the information by February 7th, the

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Oversight Committee will consider using compulsory processes to ensure the release of the speeches.

The letter comes amid investigations by US House lawmakers into alleged foreign bribery and influence peddling by Hunter Biden and then-Vice President Joe Biden. Lawmakers allege that the Bidens received millions of dollars to help pressure Ukraine to fire Shokin and end his probes into Burisma.

Joe Biden has repeatedly denied discussing foreign business matters with his son.

In late August 2023, Shokin in an interview with Fox News says he personally believed Biden family members received bribes from sources in Ukraine to help shut down his corruption investigations.

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IMF Executive Board Allows Disbursing of $4.7Bln to Argentina - Statement

WASHINGTON, February 1 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said that it has completed the seventh review of the extended arrangement under the Extended Funds Facility that will allow for a disbursement of $4.7 billion to Argentina.

Following the completion of the last reviews, Argentina's already large imbalances and distortions grew more acute, and the program went significantly off track, reflecting the inconsistent policies of the previous government, the IMF said in a release on Wednesday.

The IMF Executive Board approved the payment, which is part of a refinanced $44 billion dollar program whose fate was in question during Argentina's fraught election cycle, the release said.

The plan centers around the establishment of a strong fiscal anchor and policies aimed at curbing inflation, bolster reserves, and work through obstacles to growth, the release said.

The IMF Executive Board approved the arrangement's extension through December 2024, the release added.

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Actor Alec Baldwin Pleads Not Guilty to Manslaughter in Fatal Set Shooting - Court Records

WASHINGTON, February 1 (Sputnik) - Actor Alec Baldwin pleaded not guilty to involuntary manslaughter in the fatal shooting of cinematographer Halyna Hutchins on a movie set in 2021, court documents revealed.

Baldwin pleaded not guilty in a state court in New Mexico, according to court documents on Wednesday.

Baldwin was recently indicted in New Mexico on two new charges related to the shooting death of Hutchins on the set of the movie "Rust" in October 2021. Baldwin faces one count of negligent use of a firearm and one count of involuntary manslaughter without due caution or

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circumspection.
Last April, New Mexico prosecutors dropped manslaughter charges against the Hollywood star. He had pleaded not guilty to those charges as well.
Hutchins was killed when a gun allegedly held by Baldwin fired during a scene rehearsal on the movie set at the Bonanza Creek Ranch. A wrongful death lawsuit was filed against Baldwin and other important members of the movie production on February 15, 2022.

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John Podesta Will Take Over as White House Climate Envoy - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, February 1 (Sputnik) - White House clean energy advisor John Podesta will take over as Special Presidential Climate Envoy, following John Kerry's departure from the role, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said.
"President Biden's appointment of John Podesta to continue to lead our global climate efforts demonstrates the President's steadfast commitment to tackling the climate crisis," Sullivan said in a statement on Wednesday. "John is a key architect of turning President Biden's bold vision - that tackling the climate crisis also represents the single biggest economic opportunity of our time - into a reality here at home."
Podesta has served in a variety of governmental and political positions throughout his career, including as White House Chief of Staff for President Bill Clinton and as chairman of Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign as well as counselor to President Barack Obama.
Podesta brings a "deep understanding" of how countries around the world can pursue clean, inclusive and resilient economic growth, the statement said.

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Some Pacific Islands Still Uninhabitable Due to US Nuclear Tests in 1950s - Report

WASHINGTON, February 1 (Sputnik) - Radioactive contamination and fallout from US thermonuclear weapons tests carried out in the 1950s continue to make several small islands, or coral atolls in the Pacific Ocean, uninhabitable to this day, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) said.
"In the Marshall Islands, contamination from nuclear weapons tests and the resulting fallout remains measurable on several atolls, some of which are still uninhabitable," the report said on Wednesday.
US Cold War activities also resulted in radioactive contamination in Greenland and Spain, the report said.
"In Greenland, radioactive liquid - generated by a small nuclear reactor that powered the US Camp Century base - remains entombed under ice. In Spain, a mid-air collision resulted in

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radioactive contamination around Palomares," the report said.
The United States and Spain have cleaned up much of the radioactive material and have monitored the remaining material since, the report added.

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US House Passes Bill to Ban Hamas, October 7 Attack Participants From Entering Country

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"We cannot allow these barbaric terrorists who hate our country and everything America stands for to cross our borders or live in our communities. House Republicans are bringing legislation to ensure Hamas terrorists are kept out of our nation," House Majority Leader Steve Scalise said in a statement on the bill.
On October 7, Hamas launched a large-scale attack on Israel from Gaza in which some 1,100 Israelis - both military and civilians - were killed. Israel imposed a complete blockade on Gaza, started massive bombardments and a ground invasion of the Palestinian enclave. More than 26,000 Palestinians have been killed so far and well over 60,000 others wounded.
The legislation makes any person who participated in, planned, financed or provided material support for the attack inadmissible to the United States.

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Sullivan, UK Defense Secretary Discuss Gaza, Houthi Attacks in Red Sea - White House

WASHINGTON, February 1 (Sputnik) - US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan met with UK Defense Secretary Grant Shapps to discuss the situation in the Middle East, including Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and the war in Gaza, the White House said.
"National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan met with Secretary of State for Defence Grant Shapps of the United Kingdom today to discuss US-UK cooperation on a variety of issues, including preventing regional escalation in the Middle East and ongoing efforts to defend against Iranian-backed Houthi attacks," the White House said in a press release on Wednesday.
The two officials also reviewed their countries' support for Israel and the efforts to address the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza, the release said.
The two officials also reaffirmed their countries' support for Ukraine amid its ongoing conflict with Russia and also noted progress under the Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) pact, the release added.

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Earlier on Wednesday, US media reported that a Houthi-launched missile came within one mile of a US destroyer ship in the Red Sea before it was able to shoot the missile down.

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Biden to Visit Ohio 1 Year After Train Derailment Disaster - White House

WASHINGTON, February 1 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden is set to visit East Palestine, Ohio, to mark the one year anniversary of the Norfolk Southern train derailment disaster, the White House said in a statement.

"In February, President Biden will travel to East Palestine, Ohio, to meet with residents impacted by the Norfolk Southern train derailment, discuss Federal support to the community, and hold Norfolk Southern accountable," the statement said on Wednesday.

On February 2, 2023, a train carrying hazardous materials derailed in East Palestine. The incident prompted authorities to begin controlled burns of the materials at the crash site, which spewed toxic phosgene and hydrogen chloride gas into the air and prompted mass evacuations.

The incident resulted in the death of local wildlife and reports of health complications among numerous people who were exposed to the toxins.

The US Justice Department and the Environmental Protection Agency filed a complaint against Norfolk Southern railroad company in March, alleging the unlawful discharge of pollutants and toxins.

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Chicago City Council Passes Resolution Calling for Ceasefire in Gaza Strip

WASHINGTON, February 1 (Sputnik) - The Chicago City Council passed a resolution in support of a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip and the immediate release of all hostages.

The council passed the resolution on Wednesday after Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson cast his vote to break a 23-23 tie.

The resolution calls for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza, the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, and access for humanitarian assistance for the enclave. It also includes a provision to send copies of the text to US President Joe Biden and the Illinois congressional delegation.

The resolution drew criticism from the Consulate General of Israel to the Midwest, located in Chicago.

“While this resolution will have no impact on the Middle East, it will create more division among communities in Chicago and inspire more antisemitism,” the consulate said in a statement.

On October 7, 2023, Palestinian movement Hamas launched a large-scale rocket attack

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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 26,900 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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San Francisco Police Responds to Shooting at Church, No Injuries Reported - Statement

SAN FRANCISCO, February 1 (Sputnik) - South San Francisco Police said in a statement that it responded to a reported shooting at a church but no injuries were reported and a male suspect was arrested.

"On Tuesday, January 30, 2024 at approximately 1:25pm, South San Francisco Police responded to a church, located on the 3700 block of Callan Boulevard on the report of a shooting. No one was struck by the gunfire and the male suspect was seen fleeing the area," the statement said on Wednesday.

According to the statement, detectives identified the suspect as 22-year-old Debari Charvel Augustine of San Francisco.

"In a coordinated effort with allied law enforcement agencies from San Mateo and San Francisco Counties, Augustine was placed under arrest on the unit block of Hudson Court in San Francisco," the statement said.

Augustine was subsequently transported and booked into the San Mateo County jail, facing numerous felony counts, including attempted murder, the statement added.

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Biden Pause on New LNG Exports 'Major Mistake,' Harms US Security - Industry Regulator

WASHINGTON, February 1 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden's decision to halt new liquified natural gas (LNG) exports is a major mistake that harms the US economy and national security, Christi Craddick, chairman of the industry regulator in Texas, told Sputnik.

On Friday, Biden paused the approval of new LNG exports, citing a need to better assess climate, health and economic considerations of pending licenses.

“The Biden administration’s announcement that they are halting all future LNG exports takes a unilateral hammer to the American economy, American jobs, and national security," Craddick

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said. "This is a major mistake."

Craddick said Biden is scaling up his assault on the United States' energy industry to the profit and benefit of countries who are not US allies.

White House spokesperson Ali Zaidi said the United States will remain a reliable supplier of LNG to Europe despite the Biden administration's decision to pause LNG exports.

Texas has become a top state for US LNG exports, especially after the United States expanded its market in Europe following Russia's special military operation in Ukraine.

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Biden Halt of LNG Exports 'Retaliation' Against Texas Over Border Dispute - Regulator

WASHINGTON, February 1 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden's decision to halt liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports is a direct retaliation against the state of Texas for securing its border with Mexico, Christi Craddick, chairman of the industry regulator in Texas told Sputnik.

The Texas government has had disputes with the Biden administration on the latter's lax border policy, which it blames for driving the record levels of illegal immigrants in the United States. Texas recently blocked US federal agents from accessing a zone on the state's portion of the US border with Mexico that was a hot spot for illegal migration.

"We must see these actions for what they are: a deliberate dismantling of America's strength and national security and a direct retaliation against Texas for holding the line at our southern border," Craddick said.

Texas has become a leading US state for LNG exports, especially since the United States expanded its market in Europe after Russia undertook its special military operation in Ukraine in February 2022.

Craddick said the Biden administration wants to cripple the US economy to appease the most extreme and radical-left members of their voter base as Texas deals with an "all-out invasion" at the border that the administration refuses to secure.

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UPDATE - US Rate Cuts Might Not Begin in March As Expected As Inflation Sticky - Powell

(Adds details, comments and context in paragraphs 4-17)

WASHINGTON, February 1 (Sputnik) - US rate cuts might not begin in March as initially thought as inflation proves stickier than anticipated, Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell said.

“Based on the meeting today, I don't think (it is) likely (that) we will have a rate cut in March,” Powell told reporters on Wednesday after the central bank left rates at a range of between 5.25%-5.5% for a fourth month in a row.

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The 5.25%-5.5% range are the highest lending rates the United States has practiced since 2001, records show. The central bank signaled in December that it could reduce rates as many as six times this year.

The Fed chair said it will likely be appropriate for the central bank to begin reducing rates sometime this year.

"Reducing policy restraint too soon or too much could reverse inflation progress," Powell said. "At the same time, reducing the policy rate too late could unduly weaken the economy."

Rates have been unchanged since the Fed last raised them in July, capping 11 upward revisions over nearly 18 months.

Inflation has eased notably over the past year, but remains above the Fed's longer-run goal.

US inflation, as measured by the Fed's favorite price gauge — the so-called Personal Consumption Expenditures Index, or PCE — rose 2.6% over the 12-month ending in December. Excluding the volatile food and energy categories, core PCE prices rose 2.9%.

While that is way below the PCE Index's four-decade high of 6.5% in 2022, it is still far from the Fed's desired 2% long-term target.

Until Wednesday's Fed news conference, money market traders had been widely betting on rate cuts to begin in March.

But the central bank's policy statement released prior to Powell's remarks suggested that the Fed was in no hurry to cut rates.

"I am prepared to maintain the current policy rate for longer if needed," the Fed chair said. "If the economy evolves as expected, we will dial back the policy rate this year."

The Fed, in a policy statement issued earlier Wednesday, said it will "carefully assess incoming data, the evolving outlook, and the balance of risks" in considering any adjustments to the current target range for rates.

"The Committee does not expect it will be appropriate to reduce the target range until it has gained greater confidence that inflation is moving sustainably toward 2 percent," the central bank said, referring to its policy-making Federal Open Market Committee.

Powell, for good measure, added: "Ongoing progress in bringing inflation down is not assured and the path forward is uncertain."

US economic activity, particularly on the employment front, has been resilient, retaining inflationary pressure. While the ADP National Employment report showed that 107,000 jobs were added to private payrolls in January — slightly less than expected — the JOLTS report, or Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey, pointed to an unexpected rise in December job openings.

The economy itself grew by 3.3% in the fourth quarter of last year, according to a second reading of Gross Domestic Product, or GDP, in December. For all of 2023, GDP growth was 6.3%.

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NASA Announces Assignments For Its SpaceX Crew-9 Mission

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WASHINGTON, February 1 (Sputnik) – The American space agency NASA has announced the four members of the SpaceX Crew-9 and their upcoming assignments at the International Space Station (ISS).

"As part of NASA's SpaceX Crew-9 mission, four crew members are preparing to launch to the International Space Station and conduct a wide-ranging set of operational and research activities for the benefit of all," NASA said in a statement on Wednesday.

The crew includes four members: NASA astronauts Commander Zena Cardman, Pilot Nick Hague, Mission Specialist Stephanie Wilson and Roscosmos cosmonaut Mission Specialist Aleksandr Gorbunov.

They will arrive to the ISS towards the end of the SpaceX Crew-8 mission, which includes Roscosmos cosmonaut Alexander Grebenkin.

The Crew-8 mission is set to launch to the ISS at the end of February after it was postponed due to a queue at the launching station.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, February 1 (Sputnik)

US FEDERAL RESERVE DECISION ON INTEREST RATE

* The Federal Reserve announced on Wednesday that it had left US interest rates unchanged at its January policy meeting, the fourth straight time it has done so after 11 prior rate hikes that helped ease inflation from four-decade highs.

HOUTHI ATTACKS

* The US Central Command said that it struck and destroyed a surface-to-air missile ready to launch in a Houthi-controlled area of Yemen that presented an imminent threat to US aircraft.

* Greek Defense Minister Nikos Dendias said that he would propose that Greece take command of the European Union's mission to protect merchant ships from Houthi attacks in the Red Sea at an informal meeting of EU defense ministers in Brussels.

* The cumulative shipping volume through the Suez Canal fell nearly 50% in the first 10 days of 2024 compared to the same period last year due to Houthi attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea, according to a monthly economic outlook update by the International Monetary Fund.

US REACTION TO ATTACK IN JORDAN

* The United States will not pursue an escalatory response to an attack on US forces in Jordan that happened over the weekend, US State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said.

* The United States' response to the deadly attack on US troops in Jordan will be unilateral and will not include the participation of allies, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said.

* The National Guard Bureau said that 41 US military personnel were injured in the January 28 attack on a military outpost in Jordan that killed three other guardsmen.

ICJ DECISION ON UKRAINE

* The International Court of Justice rejected Kiev's claim to recognize Russia as an "aggressor

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state" and the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) as "terrorist organizations," the Russian Foreign Ministry said on Wednesday.
* The United Nations is aware of the ruling by the ICJ that dismissed Ukraine's request to recognize Russia as an "aggressor state," UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.
ISRAELI INVASION OF GAZA
* The GDP of the Gaza Strip decreased by 24% in 2023, and the economic recovery of the enclave after the ongoing war will take decades, the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) said in a report.
* UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called on all member states to ensure that the UN Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) could continue its essential humanitarian work amid a funding crisis prompted by allegations of its staff involvement in the October 7 Hamas attack.
CONFLICT IN UKRAINE
* Russian air defense systems on duty have destroyed 17 Ukrainian missiles over the Black Sea and another three over the Crimean Peninsula, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
* Russia has returned 195 soldiers from the Kiev-controlled territory as part of an exchange of prisoners of war, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
* Russia is grateful to the United Arab Emirates for mediating talks with Kiev on the exchange of prisoners of war, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.
* Ukraine seems to want to provoke Russia to take retaliatory actions regarding the downed Il-76 plane, Russian President Vladimir Putin said.
* Russia will not stop exchanges of prisoners of war with Ukraine, Putin said.
RUSSIAN ECONOMY
* The annual inflation in Russia slowed down to 7.24% as of January 29 compared to 7.28% a week earlier, the Russian Economic Development Ministry said.
* Russia's gas production decreased by 7.5% year-on-year in 2023 and totaled 533 billion cubic meters, the Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat) said.
* The production of liquefied natural gas (LNG) in Russia decreased by 2.4% in 2023 year-on-year to 32.9 million tonnes, and increased by 5.6% to 3.2 million tonnes in December, Rosstat said.
* The total amount of revenues to the federal budget from the excess profit tax of large companies exceeded expectations and amounted to 318.8 billion rubles ($3.5 billion), the Russian Finance Ministry said.

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Nuland Says US-Made Small Diameter Bombs on Way to Battlefield in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - US Acting Deputy Secretary of State Victoria Nuland said on Wednesday that US-made small-diameter precision bombs are already on their way to the battlefield in Ukraine following the Pentagon's announcement of their dispatch.
"We continue to provide security support in all categories, including new investments and new weapons systems like the small diameter bomb that is on its way to the front," Nuland told

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reporters in Kiev during her visit to the country.

Politico reported on Tuesday that Ukraine was set to receive the first batch of the Ground-Launched Small Diameter bombs on Wednesday, nearly a year since the United States announced its plans to deliver them to Kiev.

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

Western countries, led by the United States, have been providing military aid to Ukraine since the start of Russia's special military operation in February 2022. The aid evolved from providing artillery munitions and training in 2022 to heavy weapons, including tanks, advanced air-defense systems, prohibited cluster munitions and long-range missiles, later that year and in 2023.

Russia has repeatedly warned against the continued arms deliveries to Ukraine, saying that they only prolong the conflict.

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US Rate Cuts Might Not Begin in March as Inflation Sticky - Powell

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - US rate cuts might not begin in March as initially expected as inflation proves stickier than anticipated, Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell said Wednesday.

"Based on the meeting today, I don't think [it is] likely [that] we will have a rate cut in March," Powell told reporters after the central bank left rates at a range of between 5.25%-5.5% for a fourth month in a row.

Powell said it will likely be appropriate for the Fed to begin reducing rates sometime this year.

"Reducing policy restraint too soon or too much could reverse inflation progress. At the same time, reducing the policy rate too late could unduly weaken the economy. I am prepared to maintain the current policy rate for longer if needed. If the economy evolves as expected, we will dial back the policy rate this year," he said.

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Progress in Bringing US Inflation Down Not Assured, Path Forward Uncertain - Powell

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - The Federal Reserve's progress in bringing inflation to its desired target is not assured and the path forward in price battle looks uncertain, Chairman Jerome Powell said Wednesday.

"Ongoing progress in bringing inflation down is not assured and the path forward is uncertain," Powell told a news conference after the central bank left rates at a range of between 5.25%-5.5% for a fourth month in a row.

Inflation has eased notably over the past year, but remains above the Fed's longer-run goal of

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2%, Powell said. Inflation, as measured by the PCE Index, rose 2.6% for the 12 months ended in December. Excluding the volatile food and energy categories, core PCE prices rose 2.9%.

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Houthi Missile Comes Within One Mile of US Ship Before Being Shot Down – Reports

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) – A Houthi-launched missile came within one mile of a US destroyer ship in the Red Sea before it was able to shoot it down, CNN reported on Wednesday, citing four US officials.

The attack on Tuesday night became the closest call to date in a series of Houthi attempts to hit US warships in the Red Sea amid heightened tensions in the region, the report said.

While the missile downing was successful, the incident became the first time the US warship had to use its Close-In Weapon System (CIWS) since the beginning of the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea late last year, according to the report.

CIWS represents the ship's last line of defense against missile attacks when all other systems fail to repel an attack, the report said.

Earlier on Wednesday, Houthi military spokesman Yahya Saree said during a televised address that the movement delivered a new strike on a US Navy destroyer, the USS Gravely, in the Red Sea.

The Houthis vowed in November to attack any ships associated with Israel until it halts military actions in the Gaza Strip. This led US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin to announce the creation of a multinational operation to secure navigation in the Red Sea. The United States and the United Kingdom later launched major strikes against Houthi positions in a bid to degrade the rebels' ability to target commercial vessels.

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McConnell Says ‘Hopefully’ US Senate Will Add Border Deal to Ukraine, Israel Aid Bill

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - US Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said on Wednesday that lawmakers must quickly pass legislation to aid Ukraine and Israel, which will hopefully include border security measures as well.

"It’s time for us to move something, hopefully including a border agreement, but we need to get help to Israel and to Ukraine quickly," McConnell said during a press conference.

US Senate negotiators are attempting to formulate supplemental funding legislation with Ukraine and Israel aid, to which Republican lawmakers have insisted on the inclusion of more stringent border security measures.

McConnell said he is unsure how the legislation will ultimately be presented to lawmakers.

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Pentagon Adds Over Dozen Entities to List of Chinese Firms Allegedly Helping PRC Military

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - The United States has added over a dozen Chinese entities to a list of companies the Pentagon says are helping China's military, the US Department of Defense said on Wednesday.

"Today, the Department of Defense released an update to the names of "Chinese military companies" operating directly or indirectly in the United States in accordance with the statutory requirement of Section 1260H of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021," the statement said.

In total, the list includes over 70 companies involved in aviation, transportation, semiconductor manufacturing, information technologies, electronics, energy and other sectors.

The Pentagon pointed out that updating the list is an important continuing effort in highlighting and countering China's Military-Civil Fusion strategy.

The updated list represents the latest step taken by the US to limit the activity that Washington fears could strengthen the Chinese military. It does not mean imposing immediate restrictions but sends a warning signal to American businesses that could cooperate with the companies listed there.

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Bukele Says 'Honored' That Congressman Omar Requested US-Salvador Relationship Review

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - El Salvador is "honored" by US Congresswoman Ilhan Omar's request for the US State Department to review the relationship with San Salvador ahead of the country's incoming elections, President Nayib Bukele said in an ironic message on Wednesday.

"We are honored to receive your attacks, just days before our election," Bukele said. "I would be very worried if we had your support … Thank you."

Earlier on Wednesday, Omar announced that she was leading members of Congress in directing a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken, urging him to act on alleged threats to democracy in El Salvador ahead of that country's coming elections.

Omar said the State Department must review its relationship with El Salvador, restrict assistance to the country's military and defend democratic values.

Salvadorans deserve free and fair elections without fearing repression, Omar added.

The first round of the Salvadoran presidential election is scheduled for February 4. Bukele enjoys broad popularity in El Salvador and his approval rating exceeds 90% in some polls.

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CISA Director Says US Should Expect Foreign Interference in Upcoming Elections

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - The United States should expect foreign actors to seek to influence and interfere in the upcoming US elections, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) Director Jen Easterly said in a congressional hearing on Wednesday.

"We should absolutely expect that foreign actors will attempt to influence [the US elections] and that they will interfere [in the US elections]," Easterly told the US House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party.

Easterly made the comment in response to Congressman Shontel Brown's question regarding China's interference in US elections via artificial intelligence (AI).

AI will play a tremendous role in the battlefield to come, in the public as well as in the private sectors, Easterly said.

Cyber-threats aimed at influencing elections have been observed as a rising trend around the globe, Easterly added.

China has said that it firmly opposes and combats cyber attacks and cyber theft in all forms.

In addition, the Chinese Foreign Ministry has characterized the United States as being the world's major "hacker empire" and "monitoring nation."

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State Dept. Denies Reports About US Opposing Ukraine's Accession to NATO

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) – US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller on Wednesday denied media reports that Washington is pushing against Ukraine's imminent accession to NATO.

"Those reports are incorrect. You have heard the President [Joe Biden] himself, as well as the Secretary [Antony Blinken], say the number of times that Ukraine will be a member of NATO," Miller said during a press briefing.

The Foreign Policy magazine reported on Tuesday that 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 report said that 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.

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

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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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National Guard Bureau Says 41 US Servicemen Injured in January 28 Drone Attack

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) – The National Guard Bureau said that 41 US military personnel were injured in the January 28 attack on a military outpost in Jordan that killed three other guardsmen.

"The National Guard Bureau confirmed today at least 41Guardsmen were injured in the January 28 unmanned aerial system attack on the US logistics support facility known as Tower 22 in northeast Jordan that killed three Fort Moore, Georgia-based Army Reserve soldiers," the National Guard Bureau said in a press release.

The release noted that to date, 27 injured guardsmen have returned to duty while 14 others are still going through evaluation for follow-up medical care, including one in stable condition whose state requires evacuation from Jordan.

Earlier on Wednesday, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said that the United States' response to the deadly attack on US troops in Jordan will be unilateral and will not include the participation of allies.

The drone attack on a US military outpost in the northeast of Jordan near the border with Syria took place on Sunday. 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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Yellen Says Ukraine Has to Make Essential Reforms for US to Continue Providing Aid

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - Ukraine needs to make key reforms if it wishes to see American aid flowing uninterruptedly to the country, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Wednesday.

"Let me also be clear: US direct budget support to Ukraine benefits from an unprecedented level of robust oversight and transparency - an issue of great importance to Congress and the Administration - and additional support would be conditioned on Ukraine making essential reforms," Yellen said.

The Treasury Secretary made the remarks ahead of a bilateral meeting with EU Executive Vice Presidents Margrethe Vestager and Valdis Dombrovskis.

Yellen emphasized that Ukraine has to play its role where US aid was concerned, as much as Congress did its part in channeling financial assistance to Ukraine.

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"As President [Volodymyr] Zelensky has said, our support is not charity - it is investment in the national security of the United States, in the security of Europe, and in the rules-based international system that benefits all of us," Yellen said. "Congress must act quickly to provide support to Ukraine, including through direct budget assistance. Failure to act would hand a victory to President Putin and have unthinkable consequences not only for Ukraine, but also for our collective security."

Yellen said the United States, together with the European Commission and EU member states, have provided over $54 billion in direct budget support to Ukraine since 2022, with more than half coming from the European Commission and the bloc's member states.

The Biden administration is firmly seeking an additional $11.8 billion in congressional budget support for Ukraine, Yellen added.

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UN Says Aware of ICJ Ruling Against Recognizing Russia as 'Aggressor State'

UNITED NATIONS, January 31 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is aware of the ruling by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) that dismissed Ukraine's request to recognize Russia as an aggressor state, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Wednesday.

"We, of course, are very much aware of the ruling, we take note of it, but we are not there to provide commentary on the ruling of the independent court," Dujarric said during a press briefing.

Earlier on Wednesday, the International Court of Justice rejected Ukraine's request to recognize Russia as an "aggressor state" as well as the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics as "terrorist organizations."

ICJ President Joan Donoghue said the court rejected most of Ukraine's claims against Russia under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in Crimea.

The Russian Foreign Affairs Ministry said Ukraine had hoped to back up its demands for the transfer of Russian assets frozen in the collective West and the introduction of international restrictions against Russia.

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Federal Reserve Keeps US Interest Rates Unchanged During January Policy Meeting

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - The Federal Reserve announced on Wednesday that it had left US interest rates unchanged at its January policy meeting, the fourth straight time it has done so after 11 prior rate hikes that helped ease inflation from four-decade highs.

"In support of its goals, the Committee decided to maintain the target range for the federal

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funds rate at 5.25% to 5.5%," the Fed said in a statement, referring to its policy-making Federal Open Market Committee.

In considering any adjustments to the target range for the federal funds rate, FOMC will carefully assess incoming data, the evolving outlook and the balance of risks, the statement said.

"The Committee does not expect it will be appropriate to reduce the target range until it has gained greater confidence that inflation is moving sustainably toward 2%," the statement added.

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CENTCOM Says US Forces Destroyed Houthi Surface-to-Air Missile in Yemen

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) – The US Central Command (CENTCOM) said on Wednesday that it struck and destroyed a surface-to-air missile ready to launch in a Houthi-controlled area of Yemen that presented an imminent threat to US aircraft.

"Jan. 31 at approximately 3:30 p.m. (Sanaa time) [12:30 GMT], USCENTCOM forces struck and destroyed a Houthi surface-to-air missile prepared to launch. U.S. forces identified the missile in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen and determined that it presented an imminent threat to U.S. aircraft," CENTCOM wrote on X.

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US Response to Attack in Jordan Will Be Unilateral - White House

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - The United States' response to the deadly attack on US troops in Jordan will be unilateral and will not include the participation of allies, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Wednesday.

"That's our expectation," Kirby said during a press briefing when asked if the United States' response will be unilateral or a joint effort with US allies.

The United States will respond at a time and manner of its choosing, Kirby added.

Media reported earlier, citing US officials, that the United States will target Iranian assets outside of Iran as part of a campaign that will include strikes and cyber operations over a period of several weeks.

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Blinken Expected to Visit Middle East Again in Future - US State Department

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WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is expected to visit the Middle East again in the future, amid heightened tensions in the region, US State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Wednesday.

"You can certainly expect him to make future visits," Miller said during a press briefing, when asked about Blinken's travel schedule to the Middle East.

However, there are no specific travel plans to announce at this time, Miller said.

Blinken has made four trips to the Middle East since October 7, when Hamas launched a large-scale attack on Israel, Miller said.

Israeli media reported on Tuesday that Blinken is expected to visit Israel this week amid reports of progress on a potential agreement with Hamas to release remaining hostages in Gaza.

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Potentially Dangerous Asteroid to Pass Within 2Mln Miles From Earth on Friday - NASA

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - A potentially dangerous asteroid almost as long as three football fields will pass less than two million miles from the Earth on Friday, NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory Asteroid Watch reported on Wednesday.

The object is known as Asteroid 2008 OS7 and it will approach 1,770,000 miles or 2.884 million kilometers of Earth at 9:41 am Eastern Standard Time (EST) on Friday morning, Asteroid Watch said.

NASA defines as potentially hazardous any body more than 460 feet, or 140 meters in diameter that passes within 4.6 million miles (7.5 million kilometers) of Earth's orbit around the Sun. Asteroid 2008 OS7 is 890m feet in diameter. But there is no risk of a collision, Asteroid Watch said.

There are millions of asteroids in the solar system, of which 2,350 asteroids have been classified as potentially hazardous, Asteroid Watch added.

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Yellen Says Ukraine Has to Make Essential Reforms for US to Continue Providing Aid

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - Ukraine needs to make key reforms if it wishes to see American aid flowing uninterruptedly to the country, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Wednesday.

"Let me also be clear: US direct budget support to Ukraine benefits from an unprecedented level of robust oversight and transparency - an issue of great importance to Congress and the Administration - and additional support would be conditioned on Ukraine making essential reforms," Yellen said.

The Treasury Secretary made the remarks ahead of a bilateral meeting with EU Executive Vice

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Presidents Margrethe Vestager and Valdis Dombrovskis.

Yellen emphasized that Ukraine has to play its role where US aid was concerned, as much as Congress did its part in channeling financial assistance to Ukraine.

"As President [Volodymyr] Zelensky has said, our support is not charity - it is investment in the national security of the United States, in the security of Europe, and in the rules-based international system that benefits all of us," Yellen said. "Congress must act quickly to provide support to Ukraine, including through direct budget assistance. Failure to act would hand a victory to President Putin and have unthinkable consequences not only for Ukraine, but also for our collective security."

Yellen said the United States, together with the European Commission and EU member states, have provided over $54 billion in direct budget support to Ukraine since 2022, with more than half coming from the European Commission and the bloc's member states.

The Biden administration is firmly seeking an additional $11.8 billion in congressional budget support for Ukraine, Yellen added.

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US Response to Jordan Attack to Include Strikes on Iranian Targets, Cyber Ops - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - The United States' response to the deadly attack on US forces in Jordan will target Iranian assets outside of Iran as part of a campaign that will include US strikes and cyber operations, NBC News reported on Wednesday citing US officials.

The report said the US retaliatory attacks will be a campaign that could last several weeks.

The White House and Pentagon did not immediately respond to Sputnik's request for comment on this matter.

On Sunday, a drone attack on a military outpost in Jordan killed three US service members. The Biden administration has pinned responsibility on an unspecified Iran-backed militia group.

Iran has denied it was involved in the drone attack. Tehran says that resistance groups in the Middle East do not receive any instructions from Iran.

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US Charges 4 Chinese Citizens for Trying to Evade Sanctions on Iran - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - US federal prosecutors have charged four Chinese nationals with plotting to defy US sanctions against Iran by exporting electronic parts to Tehran, the Justice Department announced on Wednesday.

"Four Chinese nationals are charged in an indictment in the District of Columbia with various federal crimes related to a years-long conspiracy to unlawfully export and smuggle US-origin electronic components from the United States to Iran," the Justice Department said in a press

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release.

According to court documents, Baoxia Liu, also known as Emily Liu; Yiu Wa Yung, also known as Stephen Yung; Yongxin Li, also known as Emma Lee; and Yanlai Zhong, also known as Sydney Chung, unlawfully exported and smuggled US export controlled items through China and Hong Kong, the release said.

The components were sent "ultimately for the benefit of entities affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics (MODAFL), which supervises Iran's development and production of missiles, weapons, and military aerial equipment to include unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs)," the release said.

According to the indictment, beginning in May 2007 and continuing to July 2020, the defendants utilized front companies in China to funnel dual-use US-origin items to Iran, the release added.

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Nuland Vows US 'Enduring Support' During Ukraine Visit - State Department

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - US Acting Deputy Secretary of State Victoria Nuland reaffirmed her country's support for Kiev as she traveled to Ukraine on Wednesday, the State Department said.

"While there, she met with senior Ukrainian government officials to reiterate the United States' enduring support for Ukraine's democracy, sovereignty, and territorial integrity in the face of Putin's brutal war," the press release said.

During her travel, Nuland also visited a USAID-funded wounded veteran rehabilitation center, according to the release.

In October, the Biden administration requested from Congress more than $100 billion in supplemental funding, including more than $60 billion for Ukraine. However, Republican lawmakers refused to approve the request without including substantive measures to strengthen US border security and address the record levels of illegal immigration.

The countries of the collective West, led by the United States, have been providing military aid to Ukraine since the start of Russia's special military operation in February 2022. The aid evolved from providing artillery munitions and training in 2022 to heavy weapons, including tanks, advanced air-defense systems, prohibited cluster munitions and long-range missiles, later that year and in 2023.

Russia has repeatedly warned against the continued arms deliveries to Ukraine, saying that they only prolong the conflict.

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US Will Not Pursue Escalatory Response to Attack on Troops in Jordan - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - The United States will not pursue an escalatory response to an attack on US forces in Jordan over the weekend, US State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Wednesday.

"The United States' response will not be escalatory," Miller said during a press briefing.

On Sunday, a drone attack on a military outpost in Jordan killed three US service members. The Biden administration has pinned responsibility on an unspecified Iran-backed militia group.

The US does not seek a war with Iran or broader conflict in the Middle East, the White House said earlier this week.

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US Looking at Wide Range of Options to Establish Palestinian State – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) – The United States is looking at a wide range of options to establish an independent Palestinian state and is discussing the issue with partners in the region, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Wednesday.

"We look at a wide range of options and we discuss those with partners in the region, as well as other partners inside the United States government," Miller said during a press briefing when asked to confirm reports about US plans to recognize a Palestinian state.

Miller added that the United States has "ongoing policy planning processes" about how best to advance the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

Earlier on Wednesday, Axios reported that Secretary of State Antony Blinken tasked his department with conducting a review of policy options on possible US and international recognition of a post-war Palestinian state.

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Biden's Approval Rating Drops to 38% Amid Concerns Over Immigration, Economy - Poll

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden's national approval rating dropped to 38% in January as Americans worry about the crisis at the southern border and the economy, according to a new Reuters/Ipsos poll released on Wednesday.

The current rating is two points down from the 40% Biden had in December, the poll said.

The president's national approval rating has not broken through the 50% barrier in almost two and half years, since August 2021, the pollsters noted.

An earlier Reuters/Ipsos poll in January showed Biden's likely challenger in the November presidential election, former President Donald Trump, leading him by 6% - a figure clear of the margin of error among US voters.

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Some 17% of those polled said immigration was the issue they were most concerned about, a sharp rise from the 11% who expressed that opinion in December, Reuters/Ipsos said.
However, the handling of the economy continued to be top issue among voters, with 22% expressing their concern. More than two-thirds of those polled said the country was on the wrong track under Biden's leadership.

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US Senate Ukraine-Border Bill Lacks Transformational Border Policy Changes - House Speaker

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Wednesday that the Ukraine aid-border security bill being negotiated by the Senate does not include any meaningful border and immigration policy changes.
"Last Friday, President Biden came out in support of the Senate's deal, which we haven't seen yet, there's no text yet, but from what we've heard this so-called deal does not include, from what we've heard, these transformational policy changes that are needed to actually stop the border catastrophe," Johnson said during remarks on the House floor.
Johnson said he opposes a reported proposal to include a new presidential authority in the bill that would allow the US president to shut down the southern border once daily crossings exceed 5,000 a day. Media also reported that the deal may include a new authority to suspend asylum for migrants who enter the United States between ports of entry.
White House and Senate negotiators have been in discussions for weeks on a border deal that would include President Joe Biden's supplemental request that earmarks more than $60 billion for Ukraine. Republican senators have refused to support Biden's request unless he commits to backing meaningful changes to US border policy in order to mitigate the crisis on the southern border.

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House Speaker Johnson Says Lawmakers to Move Swiftly on Mayorkas' Articles of Impeachment

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Wednesday that lawmakers will move swiftly on the Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas' articles of impeachment.
"We will be moving forward swiftly on those articles. It's long overdue," Johnson said.
Earlier on Wednesday, House Republicans on the Homeland Security Committee successfully voted to impeach Mayorkas for a willful and systemic refusal to comply with the law and for breach of public trust in his handling of the illegal immigrant crisis at the United States border with Mexico.

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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.

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 drug cartels.

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Biden Sexual Abuse Accuser Seeking $10Mln for Violation of Rights - Statement

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden sexual abuse accuser Tara Reade is seeking $10 million in damages for alleged violations of rights and other harms linked to the US federal government's response to her accusations against him, attorney Jonathan Levy said on Wednesday.

Reade accuses US President Joe Biden of sexually victimizing her while working in his US Senate office in 1993. However, Biden has denied the allegations.

"Tara Reade… has filed a tort complaint with the United States Department of Justice seeking $10 million in damages for invasion of privacy, emotional distress and violation of state and federal constitutional rights," the statement said.

Congressional investigators suppressed Reade's case to protect then-Senator Biden, the statement said. The FBI launched an operation to "revictimize" Reade after she again came forward with her allegations against Biden in 2019, the statement said.

Last month, Reade requested the Justice Department investigate violations of her civil rights by the FBI and turn over and expunge her file, the statement said. However, the Justice Department has yet to reply and the FBI has not handed over Reade's file, the statement added.

In September, Reade received temporary asylum in Russia after expressing interest in Russian citizenship.

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UPDATE - Tech Companies Have Blood on Their Hands for Child Exploitation on Platforms - US Senator

(Adds details in paras 6-7)

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - Tech companies such as TikTok and X are responsible for the consequences of child exploitation occurring on their platforms, US Sen. Lindsey

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Graham said on Wednesday.

The US Senate Judiciary Committee held a hearing with executives from TikTok, X, Snap, Discord and Meta (banned in Russia) to discuss online child sexual exploitation and related legislative efforts to address the issue.

"You and the companies before us, I know you don't mean it to be so, but you have blood on your hands. You have a product that's killing people," Graham said during opening remarks at the hearing.

Graham and other lawmakers cited instances of children committing suicide as a result of the actions of online sexual extortion rings.

Graham encouraged reforms to US telecommunications laws that protect online services from liability for third-party content generated by their users.

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg personally addressed victims' parents in the audience, on the suggestion of US Sen. Josh Hawley.

The company will continue to pursue "industry-leading" measures to address child sexual exploitation on its platforms, Zuckerberg said.

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US Special Envoy Warns of 'Russian Disinformation' in Upcoming European Elections

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - US Special Envoy and Coordinator for the State Department's Global Engagement Center James Rubin claimed on Wednesday that Russia would seek to "undermine" upcoming European elections through information warfare in order to erode European support for Ukraine.

"I have no doubt that in the coming series of elections throughout Europe that the Kremlin will seek to use information warfare to undermine our democracies, to build up those who would do less defending and supporting [of] Ukraine, and try to undermine the remarkable degree of unity that has developed between European countries, the United States, and many countries around the world," Rubin said at a briefing.

Labeling Russia and China as the key sources of disinformation, Rubin stated that the US was working on establishing a new diplomatic framework with European countries to fight information manipulation. He said Germany, Bulgaria, and Moldova had signed the MOU and hoped that the coalition would be more robust by next year.

In 2024, there are European presidential and/or parliamentary elections scheduled in Finland, Belarus, Portugal, Ukraine, Slovakia, Lithuania, Iceland, Belgium, Croatia, Austria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, and the UK. There will also be a European Parliament election.

Russia has consistently rejected the accusations by the United States and other countries in the collective West that it meddles in elections.

As Russia and Belarus enter an election year, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said earlier this month that the two countries would jointly take measures to prevent external interference in their elections.

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US Crude Oil Stocks Up 1st Time in 3 Weeks, Gasoline Holdings Up Too - Energy Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - Stockpiles of crude oil in the United States rose for the first time in two weeks along with a climb in holdings of gasoline, the main motor oil, the government's energy data provider said on Wednesday.

Inventories of distillates - a diesel-based fuel that powers large commercial vehicles and machinery, bucked the rising trend, falling for a second straight week after builds in six prior weeks, the Energy Information Administration (EIA), a unit of the US Energy Department, said.

The EIA's Weekly Petroleum Status Report for the week ended January 26 showed crude inventories at 1.234 million barrels versus declines of 9.233 million and 2.492 million in two prior weeks.

Gasoline stockpiles rose by 1.157 million barrels after total declines of around 27 million over four prior weeks. Gasoline is the primary motor fuel in the United States and makes up the largest component of the country's energy mix.

Distillate stockpiles fell by 2.541 million last week, after cumulative builds of around 23 million in six weeks before that. Distillates are primarily processed into the diesel required by trucks, buses and ships, and also go into making airline fuel.

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FBI Chief Claims Chinese Hacking Group Breached Hundreds of Routers in US

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - FBI Director Christpoher Wray on Wednesday claimed that the US government recently discovered that a Chinese hacking group breached hundreds of internet routers in the United States.

"Just this morning we announced an operation where we and our partners identified hundreds of routers that had been taken over by the PRC state-sponsored hacking group known as Volt-Typhoon," Wray said during a congressional hearing on China and cybersecurity.

The Justice Department in a press release said it was able to disrupt a botnet of hundreds of US-based small office and home office routers breached by the hacking group.

The cybercriminal group's hacking activities were part of a campaign targeting critical infrastructure organizations in the United States and elsewhere, according to the Justice Department,

Most of the infected routers were Cisco and NetGear routers that were vulnerable because they had reached "end of life" status, meaning they were no longer supported through their manufacturer's security patches or other software updates, the release said.

The court-authorized operation deleted the KV Botnet malware from the routers and took additional steps to sever their connection to the botnet, such as blocking communications with

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other devices used to control the botnet, the release added.
China says it firmly opposes and combats cyber attacks and cyber theft in all forms. Moreover, the Chinese Foreign Ministry once called the US the world's major "hacker empire" and "monitoring nation."

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US Lifts Sanctions Imposed on Russian National Alexey Fisun - Treasury

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - The United States has lifted the sanctions it had imposed on Russian national Alexey Fisun, US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) said in a statement on Wednesday.
"The following deletions have been made to OFAC's SDN [Specially Designated Nationals] List: Fisun, Aleksey Leonidovich," the statement said.
The United States made the notification about excluding Fisun in two references related to SOVCOMBANK Open Joint Stock Company, the statement added.
The US government designated Fisun on March 24, 2022, as one of the leaders of SOVCOMBANK, which it considers to part of the "elites" that are close to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

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UN Awaits Official Communication From Russia on Downing of IL-76 Airplane - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, January 31 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is awaiting official information from Russia on the downing of the IL-76 military transport airplane a week ago, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Wednesday.
"As far as the Secretary-General's office is concerned, we have yet to receive any official communication from the Russian Federation on this issue," Dujarric said during a press briefing.
Six Russian crew members, three Russian servicemen and 65 Ukrainian prisoners of war aboard the airplane were killed after a Ukrainian surface-to-air missile hit the IL-76 airplane over the Belgorod region last Wednesday. The aircraft was en route for a planned prisoner exchange that was subsequently canceled.
Russian President Vladimir Putin has said the IL-76 aircraft was targeted by a US-made - and supplied - Patriot air defense system, citing the findings of Russian investigators.
Putin accused the Kiev regime of trying to provoke Russia into a retaliatory response, but emphasized that Moscow would not stop prisoner exchanges in spite of the deadly provocation.

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UPDATE - US Imposes Sanctions on Three Companies, Owner Linked to Iran, Hezbollah – Treasury

(Updates headline, lede, rewrites body with new details)
WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) – The US Treasury launched new sanctions on Wednesday on three companies and the owner of one of them for their alleged links to Iran or Hezbollah, according to a release.
"Today, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned three entities and one individual located in Lebanon and Turkiye for providing critical financial support to an Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force (IRGC-QF) and Hizballah financial network," the release stated.
The companies include Lebanon's Hydro Company for Drilling Equipment S.A.L., which is allegedly linked to the IRCG-QF, and Turkiye's Mira Ihracat Ithalat Petrol Urunleri Sanayi Ticaret Limited Sirketi and Lebanon's Yara S.A.L. Offshore Company, which are both allegedly linked to Hezbollah.
The Treasury alleged that the companies have generated hundreds of millions of dollars from selling Iranian commodities, including to the Syrian government, providing a key source of funding for the IRGC-QF and Hezbollah's activities.
It also sanctioned Ibrahim Talal al-Uwayr, a.k.a. Ibrahim Agaoglu, the CEO and owner of Mira who allegedly works with sanctioned Hezbollah financial officials Muhammad Qasir and Muhammad Amir Alchwiki to direct Mira's trading activities.

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Biden Administration Opposes Rollback of Key SEC Cybersecurity Rule - White House

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is threatening to veto a proposed resolution that would undo a US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) rule requiring companies to be transparent about cybersecurity incidents, the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) said on Wednesday.
"The Administration strongly opposes passage of S.J. Res. 50, a joint resolution to disapprove of the SEC rule relating to informing investors about cybersecurity incidents and establishing uniform standards for corporate disclosures for oversight and governance of cyber risks," the statement said.
The proposed resolution would undo the SEC's requirement that public companies disclose any cybersecurity incidents, risks or breaches.
The White House statement said it opposes any move to undo the rule because companies' lack of transparency on cyber incidents has fueled an increase in cyberattacks. It also argued that the SEC's transparency rule would boost corporate investment in cybersecurity.
"The Administration believes these SEC disclosure requirements provide needed transparency

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to protect investors and incentivize cybersecurity investment," the statement said.
The statement added that the president would veto the resolution if if passes Congress.

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US Sanctions 4 Persons, 2 Entities on Third Anniversary of Coup in Myanmar - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - The United States has sanctioned four individuals and two entities on the third anniversary of the military coup in Myanmar, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Wednesday.
"We are taking this action to target the regime's sources of revenue which support military activities against civilians," Miller said. "The action also targets those who provide material and support for the production of arms in Burma [Myanmar]."
Miller said the military government in Myanmar has continued with its campaign of violence against the people, resulting in heavy casualties.
"The military has conducted airstrikes that have killed hundreds of civilians," Miller said. "The regime forces have burned tens of thousands of homes across the country and displaced almost 2.6 million people."
Miller also said that many political figures remain imprisoned and people across the country lack access to physical security, medical care and education,
Earlier on Wednesday, the Myanmar authorities extended the country's state of emergency for six months, citing ongoing terrorist attacks and drug trafficking.
The extension of the state of emergency is the fifth one since the coup in February 2021, when the country's military seized power by using a constitutional mechanism of transferring powers in emergency situations.

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US House Oversight Panel Says Will Interview James Biden on February 21

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - The US House Oversight Committee said on Wednesday that lawmakers will interview James Biden on February 21 as part of a probe into alleged criminal activity linked to his brother, US President Joe Biden.
"James Biden will appear for a transcribed interview on February 21, 2024. We look forward to his testimony," the panel said in a statement via social media platform X.
In November, House Republicans subpoenaed James Biden and Hunter Biden to appear for a deposition with lawmakers. The House of Representatives is investigating the Biden family for alleged criminal activity, including foreign influence peddling and bribery.
The oversight panel also subpoenaed James and Hunter Biden in September to obtain personal and business records.

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Hunter Biden will appear for a closed-door deposition in Congress on February 28.

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Tech Companies Have Blood on Their Hands for Child Exploitation on Platforms - US Senator

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - Tech companies such as TikTok and X are responsible for the consequences of child exploitation occurring on their platforms, US Senator Lindsey Graham said on Wednesday.

The US Senate Judiciary Committee held a hearing with executives from TikTok, X, Snap, Discord and Meta (banned in Russia) to discuss online child sexual exploitation and related legislative efforts to address the issue.

“You and the companies before us, I know you don’t mean it to be so, but you have blood on your hands. You have a product that’s killing people,” Graham said during opening remarks at the hearing.

Graham and other lawmakers cited instances of children committing suicide as a result of the actions of online sexual extortion rings.

Graham encouraged reforms to US telecommunications laws that protect online services from liability for third-party content generated by their users.

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Pennsylvania Man Decapitates Father, Shows Head in YouTube Rant Against Biden Admin

HARRISBURG, Pennsylvania, January 31 (Sputnik) - A Pennsylvania man decapitated his father and displayed the severed head during a 14-minute video on YouTube condemning the federal government and the Biden administration, officials said on Wednesday.

"Middletown Township Police were dispatched at 7 p.m. Tuesday to a home in the 100 block of Upper Orchard Drive for a report of a deceased male. The call to emergency dispatchers came from the victim’s wife," the local prosecutor's office said in a statement.

According to media reports, the suspect, Justin Mohn, posted a 14-minute clip on YouTube that showed him holding his father's severed head in a bloodied plastic bag. The video reportedly remained on YouTube for six hours before it was removed.

When police arrived to the scene, they discovered a large kitchen knife and machete in the bathtub, with the severed head located in a plastic bag in a cooking pot in a bedroom, officials and court documents said.

Mohn is currently in custody in Pennsylvania, and the incident remains under investigation.

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US Sanctions 3 Entities in Sudan for 'Contributing' to Ongoing Conflict - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed sanctions on three Sudanese entities over their help in financing and securing materiel for the Sudanese armed forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), the State Department said on Wednesday.

"Zadna International Co for Development Ltd is a major component of the SAF's commercial empire and is used by SAF to launder funds," spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a statement. "Al-Fakher Advanced Works Co. Ltd. is a holding company for the RSF's gold export business, helping generate millions of dollars for the RSF's war effort. Al Khaleej Bank Company, Ltd has played a central role in funding RSF's operations."

The sanctioned entities have undermined the peace, security, and stability of Sudan, the statement said.

"Rather than adhere to their commitments and obligations to protect civilians and implement a ceasefire, the SAF and the RSF have continued to fuel the conflict, commit atrocities, and obstruct humanitarian aid deliveries," the State Department said. "The United States will continue to use the tools at our disposal to end this devastating war, promote accountability, and help the Sudanese people realize their demands for freedom, peace, and justice."

In April, violent clashes broke out between the Sudanese army and the RSF. The parties to the conflict have since introduced a number of temporary nationwide ceasefires, but none has helped settle the conflict. In late October, the parties resumed negotiations, mediated by Saudi Arabia in Jeddah, but hostilities in the country are ongoing.

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Biden Response to Jordan Attack Threatens 'Unholy Catastrophe' in Mideast - Peace Activist

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - The United States' potential retaliation for a deadly drone attack on its military outpost in Jordan risks plunging the Middle East into a more disastrous conflict, global peace activist Helen Caldicott told Sputnik.

On Sunday, three US soldiers were killed and more than 40 were injured in a drone attack on a US military outpost in Jordan near the border with Syria. While the Pentagon is still assessing what happened, President Joe Biden said Tuesday he has decided how to respond to the attack, but reiterated that the US is not seeking a wider war in the region. Biden said he holds Iran partly responsible due to its alleged supply of weapons to a militia that perpetrated the attack. Iran has denied playing any role in it.

"Biden's response, unless extremely limited, could trigger an unholy catastrophe in the Middle East, if Iran responds militarily, and the world awaits such interventions," Caldicott said.

The retaliation could further exacerbate the already "complex" and "tenuous" situation in the

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region, she said.

Caldicott recalled that the United States has "hundreds of military bases" in over 80 countries around the world.

"Intrusive to say the least and extremely provocative, and it's inevitable that they are sometimes targeted for attacks," she observed.

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, Pentagon deputy spokesperson Sabrina Singh said on Monday.

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

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Schumer Says Survival of Ukraine, Israel 'On the Line' Amid US Senate Talks on More Funds

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - The US Senate must overcome party politics and approve more funds as requested by the Biden administration because the survival of Ukraine and Israel is "on the line" as is the security of the UNited States' southern border, Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said on Wednesday.

"In the Senate, our responsibility is clear - we need to put needs of our country above the interests of party politics because the security of our southern border is on the line, the security of Israel is on the line, the health and safety of innocent Gaza civilians are on the line, the stability of the Indo-Pacific region is on the line," Schumer said. "Finally, as every senator on both sides of the isle knows, the survival of Ukraine is on the line."

Schumer emphasized in his remarks that many lawmakers want to "get this done" and remain committed to bipartisanship in Congress.

In October, the Biden administration requested from Congress more than $100 billion in supplemental funding, including more than $60 billion for Ukraine. However, Republican lawmakers refused to approve the request without including substantive measures to strengthen US border security and address the record levels of illegal immigration into the United States numbering in the millions.

The countries of the collective West, led by the United States, have been providing military aid to Ukraine since the start of Russia's special military operation in February 2022 in the amount of hundreds of billions of dollars. The aid evolved from providing artillery munitions and training in 2022 to heavy weapons, including tanks, advanced air-defense systems, prohibited cluster munitions and missiles, later that year and in 2023. Russia has repeatedly warned against the continued arms deliveries to Ukraine.

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

US Imposes Sanctions on 3 Entities Linked to Iran, Hezbollah - Treasury

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed sanctions on three entities allegedly linked to Iran and Hezbollah, the Treasury Department said in a registry notice on Wednesday.

The entities include Lebanon's Hydro Company for Drilling Equipment S.A.L., which is allegedly linked to the Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force; Turkey's Mira Ihracat Ithalat Petrol Urunleri Sanayi Ticaret Limited Sirketi; and Lebanon's Yara S.A.L. Offshore Company, which are both allegedly linked to Hezbollah.

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Air Travel Demand in 2023 Nearly Reached Pre-COVID-19 Pandemic Levels - IATA

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - Demand in the air travel sector in 2023 almost reached the pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) said on Wednesday.

"Globally, full year 2023 traffic was at 94.1% of pre-pandemic (2019) levels. December 2023 total traffic rose 25.3% compared to December 2022 and reached 97.5% of the December 2019 level," IATA said in a statement.

Total traffic in 2023, measured in revenue passenger kilometers (RPKs), increased 36.9% compared to 2022; traffic in the fourth quarter of 2023 reached 98.2% of that in 2019, the statement said.

International traffic increased 41.6% last year versus 2022 and reached 88.6% of the 2019 levels, the statement said.

At the same time. domestic traffic for 2023 increased 30.4% compared to that of the year before, the statement also said.

The Asia-Pacific airlines showed the most significant growth in international traffic, which exceeded 126% in comparison to that of 2022, the statement added.

European and North American air carriers reported less than 30% in annual traffic rise in 2023, according to the statement.

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Guterres Appeals to Member States to Guarantee Continuity of UNRWA's Life-Saving Work

UNITED NATIONS, January 31 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Wednesday called on all member states to ensure that the UN Agency for Palestine Refugees

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(UNRWA) could continue its essential humanitarian work amid a funding crisis prompted by allegations of its staff involvement in the October Hamas 7 attack.

"I appeal to all Member States to guarantee the continuity of UNRWA's life-saving work," Guterres implored member states at the UN.

Guterres is trying to ensure UNRWA's funding past February, when it is projected that the agency runs out of funds.

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Biden Extends Condolences Over Passing of Broadway Star Chita Rivera

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden expressed condolences on Wednesday over the death of famous American actress and singer Chita Rivera.

"Chita Rivera was an all-time-great of American musical theater, a pioneer and perfectionist whose magnetic performances in scores of Broadway productions brought joy to millions and captured the grit and grace of America," Biden said in a statement.

Rivera, a Tony Award winner, passed away on Tuesday at the age of 91.

Biden stressed that Rivera, whose full name was Dolores Conchita Figueroa del Rivero Anderson, built a dazzling career and starred in the West Side Story, Bye Bye, Birdie, Chicago, Kiss of the Spider Woman, and other famous musicals.

Biden called Rivera a "mesmerizing dancer, singer, and actor," adding that her work was more than just entertainment.

"It reflects part of who we are as Americans and as human beings, and it has helped shape how we see each other and our world," he said.

Rivera's daughter, Lisa Mordente, said on Tuesday that the Broadway star died in New York after a brief illness.

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