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2/8/24 Thursday

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Key Statements From Tucker Carlson' Interview With President Putin

During the interview, Putin said that Ukraine chose to abandon its talks with Russia at the request of the US.

On Thursday, American journalist Tucker Carlson released his interview with Russian President Vladimir Putin. He is the first Western journalist to do so since the special military operation in Ukraine began in February of 2022.

During the 2-hour interview, Putin opened by explaining the centuries-long history of "Ukraine", which he says was a name invented by the Poles, who considered the southern Russian lands, which were part of the Polish-Lithuanian state, a suburb.

"It didn't define it as belonging to any ethnic group," Putin told Carlson.

"What matters is that the war begun and Poland fell prey to the policies it had pursued against Czechoslovakia. This under the well known Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, a part of the territory including western Ukraine was to be given to Russia, thus Russia, which was then named the USSR regained its historical lands," said Putin.

"So this was how this situation developed. In 1922 when the USSR was being established, the Bolsheviks started building the USSR and established the Soviet Ukraine, which had never existed before," he added.

"Romania and Hungary had some of their lands taken away and given to the Soviet Ukraine, and they still remain part of Ukraine. So in this sense, we have every reason to affirm that Ukraine is an artificial state that was shaped at Stalin's will," Putin explained.

Carlson then asked Putin if he had told Prime Minister of Hungary Viktor Orban that he can "have part of Ukraine", to which Putin said, "never". But during the interview, Putin explained what had led to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

"In 2008, the doors of NATO were opened for Ukraine. In 2014, there was a coup. They started persecuting those who did not accept the coup. And it was indeed a coup. They created the threat to Crimea, which we had to take under our protection. They launched the war in Donbas in 2014 with the use of aircraft and artillery against civilians. This is when it all started," said Putin.

"Initially, it was the coup in Ukraine that provoked the conflict," Putin stated. "CIA did its job to complete the coup."

Putin added that he had spoken to the US multiple times about the West militarizing Ukraine, adding that Ukraine had started preparing for military action. The Russian president also explained that he had wanted to negotiate a settlement with the conflict in Ukraine as well.

"We prepared the huge document in Istanbul that was initialed by the head of the Ukrainian delegation. He had fixed his signature to some of the provisions, not to all of it. He put his signature and then he himself said, we were ready to sign it, and the war would have been over

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long ago. 18 months ago. However, Prime Minister Johnson came, talked Ukraine out of it and we missed that chance," said Putin.

"We prepared the huge document in Istanbul that was initialed by the head of the Ukrainian delegation. He had fixed his signature to some of the provisions, not to all of it. He put his signature and then he himself said, we were ready to sign it, and the war would have been over long ago. 18 months ago. However, Prime Minister Johnson came, talked us out of it and we missed that chance," said Putin.

When asked if Russia has achieved its aims, Putin said it hadn't yet because one of its goals is de-nazification, which is the prohibition of all neo-Nazi movements. He added that Ukraine had sought an identity after gaining independence, and based that identity off of those who had collaborated with Adolf Hitler.

The interview often turned to the topic of NATO, with Carlson asking the president if he had felt felt a physical threat form the West in NATO, including a potentially nuclear threat. Carlson also asked if this threat is what made Putin "move" towards Ukraine.

"The former Russian leadership assumed that the Soviet Union had ceased to exist and therefore there were no longer any ideological dividing lines. Russia even agreed voluntarily and proactively to the collapse of the Soviet Union, and believed that this would be understood by the so-called civilized West as an invitation for cooperation and association. That is what Russia was expecting, both from the United States and this so-called collective West as a whole," said Putin.

Putin added that the West had promised Russia that NATO would not expand eastward, and yet it happened five times.

"The promise was that NATO would not expand eastward. But it happened five times. There were five waves of expansion. We tolerated all that. We were trying to persuade them. We were saying, please don't. We are as bourgeois now as you are. We are a market economy and there is no Communist Party power. Let's negotiate," the president explained.

The Russian president added that at the start of his presidency he had asked former President Bill Clinton if it would be possible for Russia to join NATO.

"Well, I became president in 2000. I thought, okay, the Yugoslav issue is over, but we should try to restore relations. Let’s re-open the door that Russia had tried to go through," he explained. "At a meeting here in the Kremlin with the outgoing President Bill Clinton, right here in the next room, I said to him, I asked him: 'Bill, do you think if Russia asked to join NATO, do you think it would happen?' Suddenly he said, 'you know, it's interesting. I think so.' But in the evening, when we met for dinner, he said: 'You know, I've talked to my team, no, it's not possible now.'"

Carlson pressed Putin in asking him if he would have joined NATO had the former US president said, "yes" at the time. Putin answered that it "might have happened", but that he was not "bitter" or resentful that it did not happen.

On China, Putin said that the "West is afraid of strong China" more than it fears a strong Russia, due to the population size of China which is 1.5 billion. He added that China's economy is growing by "leaps and bounds". And when asked if BRICs is in danger of being dominated by the Chinese economy, Putin called them "boogeyman stories".

"It is a boogeyman story. We're neighbors with China. You cannot choose neighbors, just as you cannot choose close relatives. We share a border of 1000km with them. This is number one. Second, we have a centuries long history of coexistence. We're used to it. Third, China's foreign

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policy philosophy is not aggressive. Its idea is to always look for compromise. And we can see that."
When asked who was responsible for blowing up the Nord Stream, Putin simply said the US, "for sure."
"But in this case, we should not only look for someone who is interested, but also for someone who has capabilities, because there may be many people interested, but not all of them are capable of sinking to the bottom of the Baltic Sea and carrying out this explosion. These two components should be connected. Who is interested and who is capable of doing it?"
At the end of the interview, Putin said that the operation in Ukraine will ultimately end in an agreement, and that with time, relations will heal.
"What is happening is, to a certain extent, an element of a civil war. Everyone in the West thinks that the Russian people have been split by hostilities forever, and now they will be reunited. The unity is still there. Why are the Ukrainian authorities dismantling the Ukrainian Orthodox Church? Because it brings together not only the territory. It brings together our souls. No one will be able to separate the soul."
"You know, this probably sounds strange given the current situation. But the relations between the two peoples will be rebuilt anyway. It will take a lot of time, but they will heal," said the Russian president.

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Biden Says His Memory Fine After Special Counsel Report Highlights His Poor Memory

WASHINGTON (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden during a press conference told reporters that his memory is fine after a Special Counsel report on his mishandling of classified documents highlighted that he has a poor memory.
Special counsel Robert K. Hur recently released his 388-page report on the investigation into “unauthorized removal, retention, and disclosure of classified documents discovered at locations including the Penn Biden Center and the Delaware private residence” of President Joe Biden.
While Hur found evidence that Biden had willfully retained and disclosed some sensitive material, he decided that “no criminal charges” were warranted. In the report, Hur said that one of the reasons for choosing not to prosecute Biden included his “poor memory”.
“Based on our direct interactions with and observations of him, he is someone for whom many jurors will want to identify reasonable doubt. It would be difficult to convince a jury that they should convict him-by then a former president well into his eighties-of a serious felony that requires a mental state of willfulness,” Hur added.
“Mr. Biden would likely present himself to a jury, as he did during our interview with him, as a sympathetic, well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory,” Hur wrote in his report.
According to the report, the documents that Biden retained included: documents about military and foreign policy in Afghanistan as well as “handwritten entries about issues of national

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security and foreign policy implicating sensitive intelligence sources and methods" which he kept in an unlocked drawer.
Hur was appointed by Attorney General Merrick Garland in January of 2023 as a special counsel to investigate whether or not Biden had broken any laws in retaining sensitive records.
Hur said that neither Biden nor his staff broke the law in retaining the documents, but said that the evidence "does not establish Biden's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt".
"My memory is fine," Biden said on Thursday in response to the report, adding that he knows what he's doing and that he "put the country back on its feet".
"I'm an old man, and I know what the hell I'm doing," Biden said on Thursday. "I've been president and I put this country back on his feet. I don't need his recommendation."
However, the US president was later caught referring to Egyptian President El-Sisi as the President of Mexico.

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IDF Detains Palestinian-American Woman for Alleged Hamas Support

"They took her out without her hijab, her headscarf," Samaher's son Ibrahim Hamed told an American news outlet. "It's like they didn't even respect her."
A 46-year-old woman, Samaher Esmail, was pulled out of bed in her family's West Bank home and arrested by IDF soldiers on Monday, according to her son who lives in the US state of Louisiana.
The family of the Palestinian-American woman as well as the US government is now seeking information about her case.
The IDF confirmed Esmail's arrest, allegeding her "incitement on social media". She was arrested near the Silwad village, but the IDF did not detail where she was taken, though they said that she had been "transferred to the security forces for further questioning". They added that she was being held by Israeli police, not the military.
But Esmail's son says that her post on social media did not reference Hamas, and that she has only called for "an end to the occupation", not a support for Hamas, specifically.
"A lot of Palestinians don't support Hamas, they want to end the occupation. It's not promoting violence to say, 'We are strong, we're going to go past this occupation,'" Hamed explained.
Hamed also posted a video to social media showing armored vehicles outside the family's home during the arrest. It was also reported that windows were left broken and belongings had appeared to be tossed around a bedroom during the arrest.
Esmail is also a resident of Louisiana, and her congressmember, Troy Carter, said on Monday that he had contacted the US Embassy and the State Department in an effort to secure her release.
Her sister, Sana Esmail, said that she is concerned about her because she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer and needs medication.
Recently, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected a proposal by Hamas for a three-phase ceasefire, in which it was proposed that Hamas would release all Israeli hostages

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in exchange for Palestinian prisoners. Netanyahu rejected the ceasefire and said that the war would continue.
“I would like to emphasize again that there is no solution other than total victory,” the prime minister said.
Health officials say the Israeli attacks since October 7 have brought the Palestinian death toll to nearly 28,000. The UN has also warned that the risk of famine in Gaza is “increasing by the day”.

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Harris to Attend Munich Security Conference From February 15-17 - White House

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) – US Vice President Kamala Harris will travel to Germany from February 15-17 to address the Munich Security Conference, White House spokesperson Kirsten Allen said on Friday.
"Vice President Kamala Harris will travel to Munich, Germany, to attend the 2024 Munich Security Conference from February 15 to February 17," Allen said in a statement.
Harris will deliver a major foreign policy speech, Allen added.
During the visit, Harris plans to meet with foreign leaders in order to advance US priorities, according to the statement. She will discuss situations in Ukraine and in the Middle East, it added.
"Throughout her engagements, the Vice President will underscore the importance of sustaining U.S. leadership, strengthening our alliances and partnerships, and defending international rules and norms," the statement said.
This year, the Munich Security Conference will take place from February 16-18.

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Trump Wins Republican Caucuses in Nevada – Nevada Republican Party

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) – Former US President Donald Trump has won the Republican caucuses in the state of Nevada, the Nevada Republican Party said.
"Total Votes Trump: 37053," the party said on its website.
The only Trump competitor in Thursday's Nevada caucuses, a pastor and businessman Ryan Binkley, received 264 votes.
Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley chose not to compete for Nevada's delegates. Instead, she participated in the Nevada primary on Tuesday, which she lost to "none of these candidates,"
Trump has now won all three Republican contests so far — Nevada, Iowa and New Hampshire.

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Biden Issues Memo Conditioning US Military Aid on Compliance With International Law

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden has published a national security memorandum that introduces new restrictions on the use of US military aid, requiring that its recipients comply with international humanitarian law as his administration faces criticism for its support of Israel's military operations in Gaza.

"In order to effectively implement certain obligations under United States law, the United States must maintain an appropriate understanding of foreign partners' adherence to international law, including, as applicable, international human rights law and international humanitarian law," Biden said in the memorandum published late on Thursday.

The memorandum requires the Secretary of State to obtain "credible and reliable written assurances" from a foreign country receiving US military aid that it will use it "in accordance with international humanitarian law and, as applicable, other international law."

In addition, the recipient country should provide written assurances that it will "facilitate and not arbitrarily deny, restrict, or otherwise impede, directly or indirectly," the delivery of US humanitarian assistance and US-supported international efforts to provide humanitarian assistance.

The memorandum also requires the Secretaries of State and Defense to provide periodic congressional reports to enable oversight.

If the credibility or reliability of assurances given by the recipient country has been called into question, the secretary of state or the secretary of defense shall report to the president within 45 days of such assessment and outline appropriate next steps to be taken to assess and remediate the situation.

Such remediation could include actions from refreshing the assurances to suspending any further transfers of defense articles or defense services, according to the memorandum.

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Biden Says Mexico's President 'Did Not Open Gate to Let Humanitarian Aid Enter Gaza'

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden, while delivering remarks regarding negotiations for a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas. referred to Egyptian President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi as the leader of Mexico.

"As you know, initially the president of Mexico, Sisi, didn't want to open up the gate to allow humanitarian material to get in," Biden said.

Biden was addressing the public after a Special Counsel report on his mishandling of classified documents highlighted that he has a poor memory.

US Special Counsel Robert Hur said on Thursday in his final report on Biden's mishandling of

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classified documents that Biden suffered from lapses in memory during the course of an investigation into his mishandling of classified documents.

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Biden Says His Memory Fine After Special Counsel Report Highlights His Poor Memory

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden during a press conference told reporters that his memory is fine after a Special Counsel report on his mishandling of classified documents highlighted that he has a poor memory.

"My memory is fine," Biden said on Thursday when asked

US Special Counsel Robert Hur said on Thursday in his final report on Biden's mishandling of classified documents that Biden suffered from lapses in memory during the course of an investigation into his mishandling of classified documents.

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RFK Jr. on Putin-Carlson Interview Says Let Americans Decide What They Want to Watch

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - Independent US presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. in a statement about the Putin-Carlson interview said that Americans can handle thought-provoking conversations, especially those that do not fit the mainstream media.

"Americans can handle thought-provoking conversations," Kennedy said on Thursday. "We can handle dangerous thoughts or contrary ideas that don't fit the MSM narrative. Let us decide for ourselves."

Carlson has been smeared for days, the legacy US media and Democrat establishment are upset at him for simply doing his job, Kennedy added.

The interview between Russian President Vladimir Putin and US journalist Tucker Carlson racked up 11 million views on the social media platform X an hour after it was released.

The two-hour interview was released on Thursday afternoon and covered a range of topics including US-Russia relations, Ukraine, and other relevant issues.

Billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk, who owns X, posted that he watched the interview as well and shared it on his account.

Carlson faced lots of backlash from US media pundits and even faced threats of sanctions from EU officials for conducting the interview with Putin.

However, others like independent presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said efforts to stop Carlson from interviewing Putin would be the same as censorship.

Carlson claims the Biden administration twice prevented him from interviewing Putin on other previous occasions.

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Biden on Special Counsel's Poor Memory Remarks: I Don't Need His Recommendation

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden during a press conference rejected the Special Counsel description of him having poor memory, saying he knows what he's doing and that he 'put the country back on its feet'.

"I'm an old man, and I know what the hell I'm doing," Biden said on Thursday. "I've been president and I put this country back on his feet. I don't need his recommendation."

Earlier in the day, the Justice Department released a report on the federal investigation into Biden's mishandling of classified documents. According to the report, Special Counsel Robert Hur, in the probe investigating Biden's mishandling of classified materials, concluded that Biden willfully retained and disclosed classified materials but recommends no criminal charges against him.

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RECAST - Putin Says Russia Uprooting Neo-Nazism, Other States Fight It But Not Ukraine

(Recasts to erase two extra words; modifies headline)

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said during an interview with US journalist Tucker Carlson that while Russia is uprooting neo-Nazism and nationalism and other states fight them, that is not the case with Ukraine.

"We are constantly told that nationalism and neo-Nazism exists in other countries as well. Yes, they are seedlings, but we uproot them and other countries fight against them. But Ukraine is not the case," Putin said during the interview released on Thursday.

Putin said that despite the fact that German Nazi leader Adolf Hitler died 80 years ago, some continue to support his example, pointing to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the Canadian leaders honoring a 98-year-old Nazi veteran in Canada's Parliament last year.

Putin also said that during the peace negotiations with Ukraine in Istanbul, an agreement was reached in writing that "neo-Nazism would not be cultivated in Ukraine, including that it would be prohibited at the legislative level."

Putin spoke in Russian during the interview and the quotes are an official translation by Carlson's team in English.

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Putin Says Humanity Faces Threats Amid Genetic Research, Possible to Create 'Superhumans'

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview with US journalist Tucker Carlson that humankind is facing numerous threats as advances in genetic research may lead to creating genetically engineered "superhumans."

"Mankind is currently facing many threats due to the genetic research. It is now possible to create this superhuman: a specialized human being, a genetically engineered athlete, scientist, military man," Putin said during the interview released on Thursday.

Putin pointed out that he is familiar with reports about US billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk advocating research on implanting chips into the human brain.

Putin was speaking in Russian during the interview and the quotes are from Carlson's official translation in English.

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Putin-Carlson Interview Gathered 11Mln Views on X One Hour After Release

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - The interview between Russian President Valdimir Putin and US journalist Tucker Carlson marked 11 million views on the social media platform X an hour after it was released.

The two-hour interview was released on Thursday evening and covered a range of topics, including US-Russia relations, Ukraine and other relevant issues.

Billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk, who owns X, posted that he watched the interview as well and shared it on his account.

Carlson faced much backlash from US corporate media pundits and even faced threats of sanctions from EU officials for conducting the interview with Putin.

However, many others, like independent presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr., said efforts to stop Carlson from interviewing Putin would be equivalent to censorship.

Carlson claims the Biden administration twice prevented him from interviewing Putin on previous occasions.

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Putin Says Global War with Russia Defies Common Sense, Risks Humanity's Destruction

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin, during an interview with Tucker Carlson, said that participating in a global war defies common sense and risks pushing humanity to the brink of destruction.

"It goes against common sense to get involved in some kind of a global war, and a global war will bring all humanity to the brink of destruction," Putin said on Thursday.

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Furthermore, Putin, when asked how he assessed the necessity for the US to continue funding the Ukrainian effort or risk having US citizen soldiers involved in the conflict, said "a provocation and a cheap one at that."

"The world would nevertheless change regardless of how the developments in Ukraine end," Putin added.

Putin was speaking in Russian during the interview, the quotes are from Carlson's official translation in English.

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Putin on NATO Opening Doors to Ukraine in 2008: 'We Did Not Agree on That'

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin in an interview with US journalist Tucker Carlson said he had not agreed with the West's move to have NATO open its doors to Ukraine in 2008.

"Ultimately, in 2008, at the summit in Bucharest, they declared that the doors for Ukraine and Georgia to join NATO were open...This is not how we agreed," Putin said in the interview that aired on Thursday.

Putin was speaking in Russian during the interview, the quotes are from Carlson's official translation in English.

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Putin Says Russia Uprooting Neo-Nazism, Nationalism But Not Ukraine

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said during an interview with US journalist Tucker Carlson that while Russia is uprooting neo-Nazism and nationalism but that is not the case with Ukraine.

"We are constantly told that nationalism and neo-Nazism exists in other countries as well. Yes, they are seedlings, but we [Russia] uproot them. And other countries fight against them. But Ukraine is not the case, " Putin said on during the interview released on Thursday.

Putin said that despite the fact that German Nazi leader Adolf Hitler died 80 years ago, some continue to support his ideas, pointing to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the Canadian leaders honoring a 98-year-old Nazi veteran during in Canada's Parliament last year.

Putin also said that during the peace negotiations with Ukraine in Istanbul, an agreement was reached in writing that "neo-Nazism would not be cultivated in Ukraine, including that it would be prohibited at the legislative level."

Putin spoke in Russian during the interview and the quotes are an official translation by

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Carlson's team in English.

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Putin Says Russia Leads World in Development of Hypersonic Systems

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin in an interview with US journalist Tucker Carlson said Russia leads the world in the development of hypersonic weapon systems.

"We created hypersonic systems with intercontinental range, and we continue to develop them," Putin said. "We are now ahead of everyone, the United States and the other countries in terms of the development of hypersonic strike systems. We are improving them every day."

Putin was speaking in Russian during the interview, the quotes are from Carlson's official translation in English.

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Putin Says World Will Begin to Regulate AI, Genetics Once Threat Becomes Apparent

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - The international community will begin to regulate artificial intelligence (AI) and genetics technology once it realizes the threats it can pose, Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview with US journalist Tucker Carlson.

“Once mankind felt an existential threat coming from nuclear weapons, all nuclear nations began to come to terms with one another…as soon as we realize that the threat comes from unbridled and uncontrolled development of AI or genetics or any other field, the time will come to reach an international agreement on how to regulate these things,” Putin said in the interview, released Thursday.

Mankind faces many threats due to genetic research, Putin said. It is impossible to stop AI or genetics research in the same way it was impossible to stop the adoption of gunpowder, Putin said.

It is now possible to create a “superhuman,” such as a genetically engineered athlete, scientist or soldier, Putin said.

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Putin Says Proposed to Bush Creating Joint Russia-US-Europe Missile Defense System

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WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview with US journalist Tucker Carlson that he had proposed to then US President George Bush establishing a joint Russia-US-Europe missile defense system.

"I had a very serious conversation with President Bush and his team. I proposed that the United States, Russia and Europe jointly create the missile defense system," Putin said during the interview that aired on Thursday.

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US Continues to Support Terrorism in North Caucasus Despite Russia Raising Issue - Putin

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview with US journalist Tucker Carlson that he repeatedly raised issues with the United States about Washington's support for terrorism in the North Caucasus, but the support has continued.

"I repeatedly raised the issue that the United States should not support separatism or terrorism in the North Caucasus, but they continue to do it anyway. Political support, information support, financial support, even military support came from the United States and its satellites for terrorist groups in the Caucasus," Putin said in the interview that aired on Thursday.

Putin was speaking in Russian during the interview and the quotes are from Carlson's official translation in English.

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Putin Says NATO Creating 'Imaginary Russian Threat' to Intimidate Their Own Populations

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - NATO is creating an imaginary Russian threat to intimidate their own populations, Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview with US journalist Tucker Carlson.

"They're trying to intimidate their own populations with an imaginary Russian threat. This is an obvious fact," Putin said in the interview, released on Thursday.

Russia has no interest in other countries, including in Poland and Latvia, Putin said.

Russia could only send troops to Poland if Poland first attacked Russia, Putin added.

Putin was speaking in Russian during the interview and the quotes are from Carlson's official translation in English.

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Putin Says Russia Communicating With US About Stopping Arms Supply to Ukraine

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview with US journalist Tucker Carlson that Russia is communicating with the United States about the prospect of ending arms shipments to Ukraine.

"We have contacts through various agencies. I will tell you what we are saying on this matter and what we are conveying to the US leadership: if you really want to stop fighting, you need to stop supplying weapons. It will be over within a few weeks," Putin said in the interview released Thursday.

Putin said that he has not talked to US President Joe Biden since Russia launched its special military operation in Ukraine in February 2022, but that the US and Russia maintain certain contacts.

Putin was speaking in Russian during the interview and the quotes are from Carlson's official translation in English.

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Putin Says in Interview With Carlson US Blew Up Nord Stream 2 Pipelines

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said during an interview with US journalist Tucker Carlson that the United States blew up the Nord Stream 2 pipelines last year.

"Of course you did! [it]" Putin said during the interview released on Thursday in referring to the United States. "You personally may have an alibi, but the CIA has no such alibi... It is clear to the whole world what happened then. Even American analysts talk about it directly. It's true."

Putin was speaking in Russian during the interview and the quotes are from Carlson's official translation in English.

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Putin Says Tried Other Ways to Build Relations With US After Russia Not Welcomed Into NATO

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin in an interview with American journalist Tucker Carlson said that after it became clear that Russia was not welcome to join NATO, he tried to build relations with the United States in other ways.

"We just realized we weren't welcome there, that's all. Okay, fine. But let's build relations in another manner. Let's look for common ground elsewhere," Putin said about the US rejecting the prospects of Russia joining NATO.

Putin was speaking in Russian and the quotes are from Carlson's official translation.

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Putin Says Has Not Spoken to Biden Since February 2022 But Russia, US Maintain Contacts

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview with US journalist Tucker Carlson that he has not talked with US President Joe Biden since Russia launched its special military operation in Ukraine in February 2022.

"No, we haven't spoken," Putin said during the interview, released on Thursday, when asked if has spoken to Biden since February 2022.

However, the United States and Russia maintain "certain contacts," Putin said.

The Russian president also said that he repeatedly warned Biden in past talks that supporting Ukraine and pushing away Russia was a huge mistake.

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Putin Tells Carlson That Russia's Goals Incomplete, Denazification Crucial

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview with Tucker Carlson that Russia's special military operation in Ukraine has not yet attained its objectives, emphasizing the significance of denazification, including a ban on neo-Nazi movements.

"We haven't achieved our aims yet because one of them is denazification. This means the prohibition of all kinds of neo-Nazi movements," Putin said in interview with Tucker Carlson on Thursday.

Putin was speaking in Russian during the interview and the quotes are from Carlson's official translation in English.

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Putin Says NATO Members 'Obediently' Follow US Lead Even if They Disagree

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview with US ournalist Tucker Carlson that NATO members states obediently follow the United States' lead on global matters even if they disagree with Washington.

"The US leadership exerts pressure and all NATO members obediently vote, even if they do not like something," Putin said during the interview that aired on Thursday.

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Putin Tells Carlson Difficult to Defeat US in Propaganda War As They Control World Media

WASHINGTON, January 9 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin told Tucker Carlson during an interview, that it's difficult to defeat the United States in a war of propaganda because of their relative control over all of the world's media, including European media.

"In the war of propaganda, it is very difficult to defeat the United States because the United States controls all the world's media and many European media. The ultimate beneficiary of the biggest European media are American financial institutions. Don't you know that? So it is possible to get involved in this work, but it is cost prohibitive, so to speak. We can simply shine the spotlight on our sources of information and we will not achieve results," said Putin.

Putin was speaking in Russian and the quotes are from Carlson's official translation.

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Putin Says Russia Was Ready to Comply With Minsk Agreements

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview with US journalist Tucker Carlson that Russia was willing to comply with the implementation of the Minsk agreements.

“The current Ukrainian leadership, foreign minister, all other officials and then president himself said that they don't like anything about the Minsk agreements,” Putin said in the interview, released on Thursday. “We addressed the United States and European countries’ leadership to stop these developments immediately, to implement the Minsk agreements. But frankly speaking, I didn't know how we were going to do this. But I was ready to implement them.”

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine was sparked by a CIA-backed coup in 2014, Putin said.

Russia would not have reacted if not for the “bloody developments” of the killing of civilians and law enforcement officers during the so-called Maidan Revolution, Putin said.

Putin was speaking in Russian during the interview and the quotes are from Carlson’s official translation in English.

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Putin Says Ukraine Started War in 2014, Russia’s Goal is to Stop It

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WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said in the interview with US journalist Tucker Carlson that Ukraine started the war in 2014 and Russia's objective is to bring an end to it.

"It was they [Ukraine] who started the war in 2014. Our goal is to stop this war," Putin said during the interview released on Thursday.

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Putin Tells Carlson Says US Needs to Find Agreement With Musk to Formalize AI Advancements

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin in an interview with American journalist Tucker Carlson said that Elon Musk is a smart person and that the U.S. will need to find an agreement with him as AI advancements need to be formalized.

"I think there's no stopping Elon Musk. He will do as he sees fit. Nevertheless, you'll need to find some common ground with him. Search for ways to persuade him. I think he's a smart person. I truly believe he is. So you'll need to reach an agreement with him because this process needs to be formalized and subjected to certain rules," Putin told Carlson.

Putin was speaking in Russian and the quotes are from Carlson's official translation.

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Putin Says Russia Would Have Eventually Joined NATO if Alliance Was Being Genuine

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said in the interview with US journalist Tucker Carlson that Russia would have eventually joined NATO if Moscow had seen a genuine desire by the alliance to partner together.

"If he [then US President Bill Clinton] had said yes, the process of rapprochement would have commenced and eventually it might have happened if we had seen some sincere wish on the side of our partners," Putin said when asked if Russia would have joined NATO if welcomed by Clinton.

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Putin Says Russia Had to Protect Crimea From Threats in 2014

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WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said in the interview with US journalist Tucker Carlson that Russia had to protect Crimea in 2014 due to threats to the peninsula posed by the coup-installed government in Ukraine.

"They started persecuting those who did not accept the coup," Putin said in the interview, released on Thursday. "They created the threat to Crimea, which we had to take under our protection."

The threats posed to Crimea and the Donbass region were a colossal political mistake, Putin said.

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Putin Recalls Clinton Said Russia's Accession to NATO Was Possible, But Changed His Mind

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin in an interview with American journalist Tucker Carlson said that he recalls that former President Bill Clinton previously claimed that Russia's accession to NATO was possible but then changed his mind after talking to his advisors on the matter.

"At a meeting here in the Kremlin with the outgoing President Bill Clinton, right here in the next room, I said to him, I asked him: 'Bill, do you think if Russia asked to join NATO, do you think it would happen?' Suddenly he said, 'you know, it's interesting. I think so.' But in the evening, when we met for dinner, he said: 'You know, I've talked to my team, no, it's not possible now,'" Putin said during an interview that aired on Thursday.

Putin was speaking in Russian during the interview and the quotes are from Carlson's official translation in English.

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Putin Says 2014 Coup in Ukraine Carried Out by Armed Opposition With CIA Backing

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview with US journalist Tucker Carlson that the armed opposition members in Ukraine committed a coup in 2014 with the support of the CIA.

"As the Americans requested, [then Preisdent Viktor] Yanukovych did use neither the armed forces nor the police. Yet, the armed opposition committed a coup in Kiev," Putin said in the interview released on Thursday. "With the backing of CIA, of course, the organization you wanted to join back in the day, as I understand."

The United States achieved its goal of regime change in Ukraine, but it was a "colossal mistake" from a political standpoint, Putin said.

The coup in Ukraine provoked the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, Putin said, when

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asked what triggered the conflict.

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Putin Says West Fears Strong China More Than Strong Russia

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview with US journalist Tucker Carlson that the collective West fears a strong China more than a strong Russia given China's enormous economic potential.

"The West is afraid of a strong China more than it fears a strong Russia," Putin said in the interview that aired on Thursday. "[China's] economy is growing by leaps and bounds. China's potential is enormous. It is the biggest economy in the world today in terms of purchasing power parity and the size of the economy."

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Putin Says Terms Discussed For Gershkovich Release, Believes Agreement Can Be Reached

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview with Tucker Carlson that he believes an agreement can be reached regarding Evan Gershkovich's situation, with ongoing discussions focusing on specific terms.

"We are willing to solve it, but there are certain terms being discussed, via special services channels. I believe an agreement can be reached," Putin said on Thursday.

The remarks were in response to Tucker Carlson's inquiry if Putin would consider releasing Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich.

Last year, on March 29, Gershkovich was arrested in the Russian city of Yekaterinburg on suspicion of attempting to collect classified defense information for the US. He has remained in custody since then. If found guilty, the journalist could face up to 20 years in prison.

Putin was speaking in Russian and the quotes are from Carlson's official translation.

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Putin in Carlson Interview Recalls Mistaking Hungarians in Western Ukraine For Artists

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladmir Putin in an interview with American journalist Tucker Carlson said he recalls how he met Hungarians in western Ukraine and mistook them for artists.

"Somewhere in the early 80s, I went on a road trip in a car from then Leningrad, across the

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Soviet Union through Kiev. Made a stop in Kiev and then went to western Ukraine ... I was driving through some kind of village, and there were men sitting next to their houses, and they were wearing black three piece suits and black cylinder hats. I asked, are they some kind of entertainers? I was told no, they were not entertainers, they were Hungarians," Putin said in the interview that aired on Thursday.

Putin was speaking in Russian and the quotes are from Carlson's official translation.

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Putin in Interview With Carlson Says Russia, Ukraine Will Reach Agreement Sooner or Later

UNITED NATIONS, February 8 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said during the interview with US journalist Tucker Carlson that he believes Russia and Ukraine will reach an agreement.

"This endless mobilization in Ukraine, the hysteria, the domestic problems, sooner or later it will result in an agreement," Putin said.

Putin was speaking in Russian during the interview and the quotes are from Carlson's official translation in English.

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Putin Gives Carlson Documents Related to History of Ukraine

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin provided US journalist Tucker Carlson with documents related to the history of Ukraine, as part of an interview in Moscow released Thursday.

"So that you don't think that I'm inventing things. I'll give you these documents," Putin said, while lecturing Carlson on Russian and Ukrainian history.

The documents include letters from Bohdan Khmelnytsky, who historically controlled areas of what is now Ukraine. Carlson will have to translate the documents from Russian into English, Putin said.

Carlson said that Putin has an "encyclopedic" knowledge of the region.

Putin was speaking in Russian and the quotes are from Carlson's official translation.

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Putin Says He Never Told Hungary They Could Reclaim Some of Ukraine's Territory

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WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - Russian President Putin in an interview with American journalist Tucker Carlson said that he never told Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban that Budapest could reclaim some of Ukraine's territory.

"Never. I have never told him. Not a single time. We have not even had any conversation on that," Putin said when asked if he told Orbán that he can have part of Ukraine.

The Russia President was speaking in Russian, the quotes are from Carlson's official translation.

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Carlson Asks Putin During Interview About Potential for US Surprise Attack on Russia

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - US journalist Tucker Carlson began his interview with Russian President Vladimir Putin by asking about the potential for a surprise attack on Russia by the United States.

"Tell us why you believe the United States might strike Russia out of the blue," Carlson said at the start of the interview, released on Thursday. "How did you conclude that?"

Putin pushed back on the premise of the question, denying having made such a claim, and proceeded to ask Carlson whether the two were having a "talk show" or a serious conversation.

Carlson affirmed that the interview is a "formidable" conversation after which Putin proceeded to talk about the history of Russia while noting that the journalist has a background in history.

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Oil Prices Up Most in Nearly 3 Months as Israel Vows to Continue Fighting in Gaza

NEW YORK, February 9 (Sputnik) - Oil prices had their biggest one-day gain in nearly three months on Thursday as Israel ruled out a Hamas ceasefire offer, sparking fears of heightened fighting in the Middle East that could impact crude shipments in the region.

Fresh attacks launched by Houthi rebels in the Red Sea amid retaliatory strikes by the United States added to the oil traders' concerns.

Crude prices rallied for a fourth day in a row as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected a ceasefire deal proposed by Hamas, saying that talks with the latter were "not going anywhere." The remarks dealt a blow to hopes of a ceasefire in Gaza and stoked worries that the ongoing violence would continue.

"No one knows what will happen next in Gaza and the oil market is on an overdrive reacting to this," John Kilduff, partner at the New York energy hedge fund Again Capital, said in comments to Sputnik.

At the close of Thursday's trade, the West Texas Intermediate (WTI) benchmark for US crude settled at $76.44 per barrel, up $2.58, or 3.5%. This represents the biggest one-day percentage

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gain since November 17, when it finished up 4.1%.
Brent, the global benchmark for crude, settled at $81.63 per barrel, up $2.42, or 3.1%, on the day. It was the first close above $80 for Brent since January 31.

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US Plans to Supply Javelin Missile Systems to Pristina Violate Intl Law- Russian Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, February 9 (Sputnik) - US giving Pristina anti-tank Javelin missiles would be a violation of the UN Security Council resolution, the Deputy Russian Ambassador to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy said.
"The United States, one of the founding members of the UN and a prominent member of the Security Council, are even publicly unofficially talking about the intent to violate these resolutions. For example, the Pentagon is loudly and clearly saying that it is planning to give Pristina 24 anti-tank Javelin missiles and 246 munitions for it," Polyanskiy told the Security Council members. "This is a provocative step and will be a gross violation of the Security Council resolution…"

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Biden Says He's 'Pleased' About Outcome in Classified Docs Case

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said in a statement on Thursday that he was "pleased" about the outcome of the classified docs case against him after prosecutors declined to pursue criminal charges despite finding that he willfully retained and disclosed classified materials after his vice presidency.
"The Special Counsel released today its findings about its look into my handling of classified documents. I was pleased to see they reached the conclusion I believed all along they would reach," Biden said in a statement on Thursday.
Biden added that the investigation spanned more than 40 years into the past and that he cooperated with investigators.
"In fact, I was so determined to give the Special Counsel what they needed that I went forward with five hours of in-person interviews over two days on October 8th and 9th of last year, even though Israel had just been attacked on October 7th and I was in the middle of handling an international crisis," Biden said.
Earlier on Thursday, Special Counsel Robert Hur released a report concluding that Biden had willfully retained and disclosed classified materials after leaving the vice presidency. Despite the findings, Hur recommended that criminal charges not be sought against the President.

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US Journalist Tucker Carlson Meets With Edward Snowden, Tara Reade in Russia - Reports

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - US journalist Tucker Carlson met in Russia with former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden and former junior Senate aide Tara Reade, Semafor reported.

According to the report on Thursday, Carlson did not interview Snowden for the video program he is producing while visiting Russia.

However, Carlson filmed an interview with Reade, who moved to Russia for fear for her safety after accusing President Joe Biden of sexual assault, the report added.

Carlson arrived in Russia last week to interview President Vladimir Putin. Carlson explained he decided to conduct the interview out of journalistic duty and to inform Americans about the realities of the conflict in Ukraine.

The interview will air Thursday at 6:00 p.m. EST (23:00 GMT).

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US, Japan Military Held Bilateral Command Post Exercise Keen Edge 24 – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) – The United States and Japan held a bilateral command post exercise in the Indo-Pacific this week, Keen Edge 24, to increase interoperability between the two countries' militaries, Pentagon spokesperson Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder said during a press briefing.

"This week, the US military and the Japan Self Defense Force conducted a bilateral command post exercise known as Keen Edge 24 with the participation of the Australian Defense Force," Ryder said on Thursday. "The exercise is the latest in a series of joint multilateral command post exercises designed to increase our integrated joint operational capability, refine command and control procedures, and enhance interoperability of all participants."

The exercise also included greater synchronization with the US Space Command and US Cyber Command expanding the multi-domain collaboration that is incumbent on any large-scale exercise or operation, Ryder said.

During the exercise which kicked off February 1, Japanese, US and Australian headquarters staff employed computer simulations to practice responses in the event of a crisis or contingency, according to the Pacific Command.

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Austin to Testify on February 29 Before US House Committee Over Hospitalization - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin will testify before the US House Armed Services Committee (HSAC) on February 29 over his undisclosed hospitalization, Defense Department spokesperson Pat Ryder said.

In mid-January, Austin was summoned by the US House Armed Services Chairman Mike Rogers to appear before teh panel on February 14 to discuss the lack of transparency of his hospitalization earlier this month.

“Yes, the Secretary will testify to the HCAS on 29th February,” Ryder said during a press briefing on Thursday.

However, Ryder did not disclose whether the testimony will be in an open hearing format, saying Congress would have more to say on the issue.

On January 1, Austin was hospitalized due to complications following a surgical procedure to treat cancer. The US Defense Department failed to communicate Austin’s hospitalization to the White House for several days, prompting a Pentagon Inspector General probe and bipartisan calls for him to resign.

Austin returned to performing his duties at the Defense Department on January 29.

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Trump Says DOJ Must Immediately Dismiss His Classified Records Case After Dropping Biden's

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump said in a statement that the Justice Department needs to immediately dismiss his classified documents case after it decided not to pursue charges against President Joe Biden in connection to his mishandling of classified records.

"This has now proven to be a two-tiered system of justice and unconstitutional selective prosecution," Trump said Thursday. "The Biden Documents Case is 100 times different and more severe than mine. I did nothing wrong, and I cooperated far more. What Biden did is outrageously criminal - He had 50 years of documents, 50 times more than I had, and 'WILLFULLY RETAINED' them. I was covered by the Presidential Records Act, Secret Service was always around, and GSA delivered the documents. Deranged Jack Smith should drop this Case immediately."

Earlier in the day, the Justice Department released a report on the federal investigation into Biden's mishandling of classified documents.

In his report, Special Counsel Robert Hur concluded that Biden willfully retained and disclosed classified materials but recommended no criminal charges against him.

Hur said that no criminal charges were warranted in the matter and indicated that if prosecutors did pursue charges, "at trial, Mr. Biden would likely present himself to a jury, as he did during our interview of him, as a sympathetic, well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory."

The White House said that it 'wholeheartedly agrees' with Hur's decision not to pursue charges.

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Pro-Trump Super PAC Says Biden Unfit to Lead, After Special Counsel Reveals Memory Issues

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden is unfit to lead the United States, pro-Donald Trump political action committee MAGA Inc said in a statement.

"If you're too senile to stand trial, then you're too senile to be president. Joe Biden is unfit to lead this nation," MAGA Inc communications director Alex Pfeiffer said on Thursday.

Earlier on Thursday, Special Counsel Robert Hur released his report on Biden's mishandling of classified documents. The report revealed several instances of Biden experiencing lapses in memory about key points in his life and career.

Biden forgot when he started and ended his term as US Vice President, the report said. Biden also could not recall "within several years" when his son Beau died, the report said.

Biden likely would have presented himself as a well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory if the matter were brought to a jury trial, the report added.

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RPT - White House Believes Carlson's Putin Interview Won't Sway Americans on Ukraine

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) - The White House believes Tucker Carlson's interview with Russian President Vladimir Putin will not alter the opinion of US citizens on the Ukraine conflict, Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said.

"I don't think that the American people are gonna be swayed by one single interview," Kirby said during a press briefing on Thursday.

The remarks were in response to a reporter's question if the White House has any concerns that Carlson's interview with Putin could further erode support for Ukraine.

"We're convinced that there is strong bipartisan support on Capitol Hill for supporting Ukraine," Kirby added.

Carlson arrived in Russia last week to interview President Putin. He explained that he did it as a journalistic duty, as well as to inform Americans about the realities of the conflict in Ukraine.

The interview will air Thursday at 6:00 p.m. EST (23:00 GMT).

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SPUTNIK TOP STOREIS OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, February 9 (Sputnik) -

RUSSIA-CHINA COOPERATION

* Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping discussed financial cooperation between the two countries, Kremlin aide Yury Ushakov said on Thursday, adding that more than 90% of their transactions are conducted in rubles and yuan.
* Putin and Xi expressed readiness to promote joint energy projects despite Western sanctions, Ushakov said.
* Putin and Xi expressed mutual rejection of the US course aimed at interfering in the internal affairs of other countries and exerting political and military pressure, Ushakov said.
* Putin and Xi noted that bilateral trade has exceeded the target level of $200 billion earlier than expected and has reached a record-high of $227.7 billion, the Kremlin said.

US SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING BILL

* The US Senate on Thursday advanced a $95 billion supplemental funding bill with aid for Israel and Ukraine, after lawmakers rejected a version of the legislation with border policy measures.

WESTERN SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

* The United States is banning imports of Russian-origin diamond jewelry and unsorted diamonds effective March 1, the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) announced on Thursday.
* OFAC announced new Russia-related sanctions on four entities and one vessel.
* The recent EU idea of setting aside profits from frozen Russian assets is reminiscent of

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communist legacy and is not something Hungary would want to see, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto told RIA Novosti.

US-RUSSIA RELATIONS

* Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said on Thursday that all US newspapers had rejected his request to publish an article that would explain Russia's position on the issue of biosafety as well as other pressing issues.
* Antonov said that US troops were highly likely part of the Patriot system crew that shot down Russia's IL-76 airplane carrying Ukrainian prisoners of war.
* Antonov said that the Russia relayed in talks with senior US officials President Vladimir Putin's proposal to hold an international investigation of this IL-76 incident.
* Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Director Sergei Naryshkin said he plans to hold contacts with US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director William Burns, but did not specify when.

TUCKER CARLSON INTERVIEW WITH PUTIN

* Claims that US journalist Tucker Carlson was paid for interviewing President Vladimir Putin are nonsense, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said on Thursday.
* Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto told RIA Novosti that Carlson's interview with Putin is an "exciting thing" and suggested waiting for the reactions it will cause.
* There are no discussions in the European Union at present concerning imposing sanctions on Carlson, European Commission foreign affairs and security policy spokesman Peter Stano told RIA Novosti.

NEW GOVERNMENT IN GEORGIA

* The Parliament of Georgia on Thursday approved the appointment of Irakli Kobakhidze as the new prime minister of the country, according to the results of the vote.
* Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili signed a decree on the appointment of Kobakhidze as the country's new prime minister, the presidential administration said.

ISRAEL INVASION OF GAZA

* Israel's destruction of buildings in the Gaza Strip along the border equal military crimes, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk said on Thursday.
* The United States would not support a poorly planned Israeli operation in Rafah in the Gaza Strip because such a development would be a disaster, US State Department deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel said.
* Israel has released 71 Palestinians arrested during the operation in the Gaza Strip, including 19 women, the main directorate of crossings and borders in the enclave said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* Russia has returned 100 prisoners of war from the territory under Kiev's control, following negotiations, while Kiev also received 100 prisoners in exchange, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Thursday.
* Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that he appointed Oleksand Syrsky as the new

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commander-in-chief of the country's armed forces.
* Zelenskyy said that he discussed the renewal of the Ukrainian armed forces with its current Commander-in-Chief Valerii Zaluzhnyi, and proposed to him to "remain a part of the team."
* Ukraine has lost up to 310 soldiers in the Donetsk direction over the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

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Biden Suffered Memory Issues About Career During Classified Docs Probe - Special Counsel

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden suffered from lapses in memory during the course of an investigation into his mishandling of classified documents, US Special Counsel Robert Hur said on Thursday in his final report on Biden's mishandling of classified documents.
"In his interview with our office, Mr. Biden's memory was worse. He did not remember when he was vice president, forgetting on the first day of the interview when his term ended," the report said.
Biden also forgot when his term as vice president began, the report said.
Moreover, Biden could not remember "within several years" when his son Beau died, the report said.
Biden likely would have presented himself as a well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory if the matter were brought to a jury trial, the report said.
Biden said in a statement on the report that he cooperated with the probe, which he characterized as exhaustive.

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Special Counsel Concludes Biden Willfully Retained, Disclosed Classified Materials

(Updates in para 4)
WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - Special Counsel Robert Hur, in the probe investigating US President Joe Biden's mishandling of classified materials, concluded that Biden willfully retained and disclosed classified materials but recommends no criminal charges against him, a Justice Department report released on Thursday said.
"Our investigation uncovered evidence that President Biden willfully retained and disclosed classified materials after his vice presidency when he was a private citizen," wrote Hur in the report.
Hur also added that no criminal charges were warranted in the matter.
The White House, in an attached response, said that it 'wholeheartedly agrees' with Hur's decision not to pursue charges.

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US to Buy Up to 3Mln Barrels for Oil Reserve Under July 2024 Delivery - Dept of Energy

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is buying up to 3 million barrels of crude oil for the US oil reserve for July delivery, the Department of Energy announced on Thursday as stable oil prices encourage the government to refill the heavily-drawn facility.

"Today, the US Department of Energy's (DOE) Office of Petroleum Reserves announced a solicitation for approximately 3 million barrels of oil for delivery to the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) in July 2024," the statement on the purchase said.

The Biden administration has announced various installments of crude purchases in recent months, aimed at refilling the SPR, which saw outflows totaling more than 200 million barrels over the past two years.

Concerns of oversupply have brought US crude prices sharply lower in recent months from the highs of 2023. The DOE said this has been beneficial to the administration's plans to refill the reserve.

Since the DOE began refilling the SPR, a total of 20.13 million barrels of oil has been purchased at an average price of $76.12 per barrel, the agency said.

The DOE, which has a separate use-and-return policy for companies leasing oil from the SPR, said it has also accelerated nearly 4 million barrels in returns.

The agency added that it will continue to monitor market conditions, issuing bids for any available capacity that will deliver a good deal for taxpayers.

"This is a continuation of DOE's strategy of consistent solicitations aimed at purchasing oil when it can purchase at a good deal for taxpayers: a price of $79 dollars per barrel or below, far less than the average of about $95 per barrel DOE received for 2022 emergency SPR sales," the DOE said.

The Biden administration leaned heavily on the SPR between late 2021 and early this year to offset tight crude supplies that had raised fuel costs for Americans. As of last month, the SPR's crude balance was at its lowest since November 1983 after the release of about 200 million barrels or more over the past 18 months.

The administration's use of the SPR has, however, been a highly-charged matter for oil bulls and Biden's political opponents. Both sides accuse him of indiscriminately releasing hundreds of millions of barrels from the stockpile to subdue crude prices and shore up his political standing with American voters - when the reserve is meant for emergency use, in times of critically short oil supply.

Biden and the Democrats are up for reelection in November 2024.

Biden, in his defense, had said he was only acting to reduce record high pump prices of fuel, which stood at above $5 per gallon in June 2022 and have stabilized since at around $3.50. The administration had also blamed last year's high crude oil prices for US inflation getting to four-decade highs of above 9% in June 2020.

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US in Close Contact With Ukraine on 2024 Military Objectives - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The United States is in close contact with Ukraine regarding the latter's military objectives for 2024, US Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Celeste Wallander said on Thursday.

"We're in close consultations with the Ukrainians about their objectives for 2024. In order to be able to shape our security assistance … We will shape that security assistance to resource the operations, to meet the objectives which are going to be politically defined by the political leadership in Ukraine," Wallander said in a virtual fireside chat with the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

Wallander said that she would not go into details about what operations would look like in 2024 for security reasons and also because the US can only give advice to the Ukrainian leadership.

The US official stated that the US believes in the capabilities of the Ukrainians and the possibility for them to turn the tides of the "war of attrition."

Russia has consistently warned against the continued arms deliveries to Ukraine, saying that they only prolong the conflict. Moscow also sees the Ukraine conflict as a hybrid war led by the United States.

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Pentagon Says Austin Will Attend NATO Ministerial in Brussels Next Week

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin will travel to Brussels next week to participate in a NATO ministerial and Ukraine aid coalition meeting, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said on Thursday.

"While in Brussels, Secretary Austin will also participate in the NATO Defense Ministerial February 15 at NATO headquarters," Ryder said during a press briefing.

Austin and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Charles Brown will first travel to Brussels for a meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group on February 14, Ryder said.

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US Special Counsel Recommends No Criminal Charges Against Biden in Classified Docs Case

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - Special Counsel in the probe investigating US President Joe Biden's mishandling of classified materials, Robert Hur, concluded that Biden willfully

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retained and disclosed classified materials but recommended no criminal charges against him, a Justice Department report released on Thursday shows.

"Our investigation uncovered evidence that President Biden willfully retained and disclosed classified materials after his vice presidency when he was a private citizen," Hur wrote in the report.

Hur added that no criminal charges were warranted in the matter.

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Ex-Debt Relief Services Company Head Pleads Guilty to Committing Wire Fraud - Statement

NEW YORK, February 8 (Sputnik) - Marat Lerner, former president of a debt relief services company, has pleaded guilty in a US federal court in Brooklyn to conspiracy to commit wire fraud and committing wire fraud, the US Justice Department said on Thursday.

"Lerner admitted that he lied to his victims and that he stole money that the victims had intended to use to pay off their home mortgages," the Justice department said in a statement.

Lerner operated his company Lerner Group between August 2016 and January 2021 during which time he exploited and defrauded immigrant clients in the Russian community in Brooklyn burdened by mortgage debt, the statement said.

"Lerner used his access to his clients' banking information to create checks that appeared to be monthly mortgage payments to a purported escrow agent called Testoni and Villa and to his clients' mortgage banks," the statement said.

Lerner, controlling Testoni and Villa, diverted funds meant for mortgage payments to his personal account, using over $550,000 for personal expenses like luxury items and lavish meals, the statement added.

Lerner is facing a maximum prison sentence of 50 years and has agreed to pay $2.5 million in restitution, according to the statement.

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US Bans Imports of Russian-Origin Diamond Jewelry, Unsorted Diamonds - Treasury Dept.

(Updates with details in paras 4,5)

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The United States is banning imports of Russian-origin diamond jewelry and unsorted diamonds effective March 1, the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) announced on Thursday.

"I hereby determine that the prohibitions in section 1(a)(i)(A) of EO [Executive Order] 14068 shall apply to the following products of Russian Federation origin: diamond jewelry and unsorted diamonds... This determination shall take effect on March 1, 2024," OFAC Deputy Director Lisa Palluconi said in a notice.

OFAC also announced a ban on imports of Russian non-industrial diamonds, specifically those

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with the weight of 1 carat or greater starting March 1 and a ban on others with the weight of 0.5 carats effective September 1.

The Treasury Department said in a separate press release that US imports of non-industrial diamonds mined or extracted in Russia will be prohibited regardless of whether they have been substantially transformed in a third country,

These bans are intended to implement the December 2023 Group of Seven (G7) commitments to impose phased restrictions on the importation of diamonds mined or extracted in Russia, the release said, adding that guidance on these new restrictions will be available soon.

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US Pastor Says He Will Continue Housing Homeless in Church Despite Court Charges

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) – US pastor Christopher Avell from Ohio told Sputnik that he will continue housing homeless people in his church despite court charges imposed against him.

Local media reported earlier that last March, Avell decided to help a homeless shelter in his town and allowed its habitants to stay in his church overnight.

Since that time, the pastor said he has helped about 100 people.

According to the Pastor's lawyers, local authorities informed Avell that he must cease housing the homeless as it is in violation of residential usage of properties in the business district of the city of Bryan, where the church is located.

However, local media said he denied this request even after the police served him a packet of charges. Violations can carry a fine of up to $1,000 per day, it added.

Avell pleaded not guilty at the arraignment, and an additional hearing will be scheduled in the next several weeks, according to reports.

When asked if he thinks it is a good idea to change the law in order to assist those in need, Avell answered: "That is the law: to help those in need."

He also pointed out that the idea to provide shelter for the homeless came to him from his love for Christ.

"I love Jesus. He saved me and made me new. And I learned that by loving others, even people who are disregarded," the pastor said.

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Kirby Says No Indication That IDF Planning Ground Operations in Rafah

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The United States has not seen any indication suggesting that the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) are preparing for imminent ground operations in Rafah, White House Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Thursday.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 02/09/2024 11:38:39 AM

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"We've seen no indications that there's operational planning or at least planning at the level of specificity that tells us a major ground operation around Rafah is imminent. We just haven't seen a plan for it," said Kirby during a press briefing.

Kirby added that any kind of military operation on behalf of Israeli Defense Forces in Rafah without a plan to limit civilian casualties and quality of life would not be supported by the United States.

"And as I said, given the circumstances and the conditions there that we see right now, we think a military operation at this time would be a disaster for most people," Kirby added.

On Wednesday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected Hamas demands for a Gaza ceasefire and said Israeli forces will push further into Rafah. The United States has maintained that Israel must take steps to protect Palestinian civilians as it goes forward with its military operations.

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US Targets 4 Entities, 1 Vessel With Russia-Related Sanctions - Treasury

(Updates with more details in paras 4, 5)

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) announced on Thursday new Russia-related sanctions on four entities and one vessel.

The Treasury Department said in a notice that it sanctioned NS Leader Shipping Incorporated; Talassa Shipping; Zeenit Supply and Trading; and Oil Tankers SCF Mgmt.

The sanctioned vessel is the crude oil tanker NS LEADER, the notice said.

The Treasury Department said in a separate press release that the four entities and the vessel were sanctioned for violating the price cap imposed on Russian oil by the Group of Seven (G7) countries.

The network of these entities and the vessel were involved in a price cap violation scheme in late 2023, the release added.

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Claims Carlson Got Money for Putin Interview 'Nonsense' - Antonov

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - Claims that American journalist Tucker Carlson was paid for interviewing President Vladimir Putin are nonsense, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said on Thursday.

"Some insults are being made against Carlson alleging that he is almost an agent, that he might have received some kind of fee or salary. This is such nonsense," Antonov told reporters.

The embassy has been receiving inquiries if Carlson visited them before traveling to Russia,

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 02/09/2024 11:38:39 AM

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Antonov said.
Carlson did not visit the embassy, but Antonov said he would be glad to welcome him at the mission for a cup of tea or coffee.
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US Provided Ukraine With Longer Range Drone Capabilities - Wallander

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The United States provided Ukraine with longer-range unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) capabilities, US Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Celeste Wallander said on Thursday
"We have provided Ukraine with longer strike capabilities, including — I can't get into it too much — some UAV capabilities, some modified longer-range strike from air-to-ground capabilities," Wallander said during remarks at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.
The capabilities have enabled Ukraine to strike targets in locations such as Crimea, Wallander said.
The US has provided Ukraine with longer-range capabilities that they did not consider possible to deliver earlier in the conflict, Wallander said.
The US is looking at ways to support its defense industrial base to produce more and better longer-range capabilities to provide them to Ukraine, Wallander said.

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Guterres Says UN Will Act If Israel Presents Allegation of Hamas Infiltration in System

UNITED NATIONS, February 8 (Sputnik) - United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Thursday if Israel presents any allegations regarding the existence of Hamas within the UN system, it will be immediately investigated.
"One thing that can be absolutely sure: any allegation that is presented to us by the government of Israel in relation to any other infiltration of Hamas in the UN, at whatever level, we will act immediately," Guterres said during his press conference in a UN press briefing room.
The United Nations is now preoccupied with its internal case over Israeli accusations that staff members of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) participated in Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel, Guterres said.
The United Nations is also focusing much of its attention on the current war in the Gaza Strip, with many of its agencies trying to elevate the dire humanitarian situation in the Palestinian enclave as a result of the Israeli blockade and military operations. More than 27,700 Palestinians have been killed and some 70,000 others have been wounded since October 7.

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US Defense Official Says Participated in Past Discussions About Russia Joining NATO

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - US Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Celeste Wallander said on Thursday that she was involved in previous discussions about the possibility of Russia joining NATO.

"Russia agreed to have a cooperative relationship with NATO, to recognize that NATO membership was open. At the time, there was even discussion of would Russia ever qualify for NATO membership," Wallander said during remarks at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

Wallander said that she was involved in discussions in the early 2000s with Putin's administration about Russia joining NATO. NATO enlargement was not directed against Russia, but rather, executed with the understanding that Russia had to be part of European security structures, Wallander said.

Putin has said that he and former US President Bill Clinton discussed the option of Russia joining NATO. Putin recounts that Clinton was open to the idea but the rest of the US delegation was hesitant.

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Antonov Says US Media Rejected Request for Article on Russia's Position on Biosafety

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WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said on Thursday that all US newspapers had rejected his request to publish an article that would explain Russia's position on the issue of biosafety as well as other pressing issues.
"I have tried several times to outline the Russian position on many pressing issues. For example, on biosafety issues. All American newspapers rejected my request to publish the Russian position on this issue," Antonov said.

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US Targets 4 Entities, One Vessel With Russia-Related Sanctions - Treasury

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The Treasury in a notice said it sanctioned the entities NS Leader Shipping Incorporated, Talassa Shipping, Zeenit Supply and Trading, and Oil Tankers SCF Mgmt.
The sanctioned vessel is the NS LEADER crude oil tanker, according to the notice.

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Kiev Regime Uses US Weapons Against Civilians, Necessary to Condemn Such Actions - Antonov

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - Russian ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said the Kiev regime has been using the US-supplied weapons to target civilians and such actions must be condemned.
Antonov made the remark in commenting the most recent Ukrainian strike on the city of Lyshychansk.
"Actions of the Ukrainian military are very similar to what happened with the IL-76 [plane downing]. Western weapons were used against the Russian Federation. US, Western weapons are used not only on the battlefield now, but against civilians, as well," Antonov said.
The Russian ambassador emphasized that such actions can neither be recognized nor approved, but should certainly be condemned.
Antonov also pointed out that during the recent diplomatic contacts, US officials confirmed that they are not ready to take into account Moscow's concerns and intend to "throw all efforts and resources" into supplying additional weapons to Ukraine.
The talks showed the principled difference in the United States' and Russia's approaches, Antonov added.

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

State Dept. Says Zaluzhnyi's Dismissal A Sovereign Decision, Declines to Comment

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - State Department deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel on Thursday declined to comment on the Ukrainian government's decision to dismiss Valerii Zaluzhnyi from his commander-in-chief post, but added that it is a sovereign decision.
"That is a sovereign decision for the government of Ukraine to make and I will defer to them to speak to that right," Patel said during a press briefing.
Earlier in the day, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he appointed Oleksand Syrsky as the new commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

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Washington, Baghdad Resume Talks On Presence Of US-Led Coalition In Iraq - US Commander

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) – Iraq and the United States will be resuming the Higher Military Commission Working Groups on American presence in the country on February 11, Commander of the Combined Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve Major Gen. JB Vowell said on Thursday.
"Combined Joint Task Force – operation Inherent Resolve will resume the Higher Military Commission Working Groups with the Iraqi Armed forces in Baghdad, Iraq, Sunday, Feb.11. We look forward to continuing military-to-military conversations with our partners on Sunday afternoon as we assess our progress in our shared mission to defeat ISIS [Islamic State terror group, banned in Russia], as well as discuss the future transition of our mission," Vowell said in a statement via X.
In January, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said that Washington and Baghdad would begin working group meetings related to the future of US military presence in the country.
The Department of Defense however noted that launching the Commission did not mean the start of negotiations between the two countries about the withdrawal of the US forces from Iraq.

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US Assistant Secretary of State Nominee Says Egypt Record on Human Rights 'Unacceptable'

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The Egyptian government's record on human rights remains unacceptable and shows no sign of improving, Dana Hochman Rand, President Joe Biden's nominee to be the next Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, said during her confirmation hearing on Thursday.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 02/09/2024 11:38:39 AM

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"Fundamentally the situation hasn't improved at all. The human rights situation is unacceptable," Rand told the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Rand said that if confirmed, she would press at all department and interagency meetings to prioritize pressuring the Egyptian government of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to improve its record on human rights.

However, Rand cautioned that she might not often be successful in her efforts to do so.

"You have my word, senator, that I will be the voice at the table to make sure we comply with the law regarding adhesion to human rights," she said. "I can't guarantee I will always win."

Some of the senators, like Chris Murphy, repeated pleas that US economic aid to Egypt be released only after Cairo improved its human rights record.

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Trump Says Observed Supreme Court's 'Beautiful' Process Amid Ballot Access Challenge

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump on Thursday said he observed the Supreme Court's proceedings as a beautiful process as the court tackled the case challenging his ballot access.

"We've been watching the Supreme Court today, I thought it was a very, very beautiful process," Trump said during a press briefing.

Trump added that immunity holds paramount importance for a presidency, emphasizing the necessity for presidents to make decisions freely without constantly worrying about potential legal consequences once their term concludes.

Earlier today, the US Supreme Court held oral arguments in a case concerning the state of Colorado's ability to restrict former US President Donald Trump's ballot access under the 14th Amendment of the US Constitution.

Trump is challenging a ruling by the Colorado Supreme Court, which disqualified Trump from running for office due to his connection to the breach of the US Capitol on January 6, 2021.

Section Three of the 14th Amendment bans people who "engaged in insurrection" from holding public office. Trump has denied accusations of insurrection and pointed to his calls to peacefully protest on January 6.

However, the Colorado Secretary of State said that Trump will be included on ballots in the state unless the US Supreme Court affirms the Colorado Supreme Court's ruling.

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US Will Not Support Poorly Planned Israeli Operation in Rafah - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The United States would not support a poorly planned Israeli operation in Rafah in the Gaza Strip because such a development would be a disaster,

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US State Department deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Thursday.
"To conduct such an operation right now with no planning and little thought in an area where there is a sheltering of a million people would be a disaster," Patel said during a press briefing. "We would not support the undertaking of something like this without serious credible planning."
Patel also said hat the United States has not seen evidence of serious planning regarding Israel's proposed military operation in Rafah.

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US Aware of Reports of Americans Detained in Gaza and Israel, Seeking Info - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The United States is aware of reports of several US citizens detained in Gaza and Israel, and is seeking additional information on this matter, State Department Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Thursday.
"We are aware of these reports and we are currently seeking additional information," Patel said during a press briefing about reports two Americans detained in Gaza.
Patel further said the State Department is aware of reports that a US citizen from the West Bank is detained in Israel.
The State Department is in direct contact with the family and Israeli authorities and providing all appropriate consular assistance, Patel added.

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Antonov Says 'Highly Likely' US Troops Part of Patriot Missile Crew That Shot Down Il-76

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - Russian Ambassador to the US Anatoly Antonov said on Thursday that American troops were "highly likely" part of the Patriot missile crew that shot down Russia's Il-76 plane with Ukrainian prisoners of war on board.
"Given the professional skills that are necessary to maintain the Patriot - I will use the excellent words of Western propagandists and say - it is highly likely that US troops were part of the crew of the missile system," Antonov told reporters.
He added that US officials "certainly have denied it."

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US Senate Advances $95Bln Ukraine, Israel Aid Bill

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 02/09/2024 11:38:39 AM

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(Updates to add details, background in paras 2, 5-9)

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The US Senate on Thursday advanced a $95 billion supplemental funding bill with aid for Israel, Ukraine and Taiwan after lawmakers rejected a version of the legislation with border and immigration policy measures.

Senators passed a motion to invoke cloture on a motion to proceed to the legislative vehicle for the bill in a vote of 67-32, with 60 votes required to advance the bill.

On Wednesday, the Senate blocked a larger $118 billion supplemental funding bill, which included border and immigration policy measures alongside foreign aid and national security funding.

The $95 billion version advanced on Thursday includes more than $60 billion for Ukraine and $14 billion for Israel.

US Senator Rand Paul voted against advancing the bill and called on lawmakers to address domestic security first.

“It’s a terrible idea to put forward and pass a bill that tries to secure other countries’ borders before we secure our own,” Paul said on Thursday via social media platform X. “This bill sends the message to Americans that their elected officials don’t care about them.”

US Senator Lindsey Graham also voted against advancing the bill, citing concerns about US border security, but reiterated his support for Ukraine and Israel in a statement to X. The Senate should not rush the legislative process, the statement said.

US House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Wednesday that House lawmakers will insist on beginning national security with border security.

US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said that he hopes to reach a deal with Republicans on an amendment process for the bill. Senators will continue working on the legislation until the “job is done,” Schumer said after advancing the bill.

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Russia During Talks With US Officials on IL-76 Highlighted Putin’s Proposal on Int’l Probe

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) – Russian Ambassador to the US Anatoly Antonov said on Thursday that the Russian side, during talks with US officials on the downing of IL-76 in the Belgorod Region, highlighted the proposal of President Vladimir Putin to hold an international investigation of this incident.

"We drew the attention of our counterparts to Vladimir Putin's proposal to organize an international investigation of the situation so that no one accuses us that this was some type of distorted information," Antonov told reporters.

Russian diplomats reminded US officials that Putin was surprised that not a single international organization is going to conduct such a probe, he added.

Antonov also pointed out that officials in the White House and State Department expressed their condolences over the crash.

"It is necessary to acknowledge that our counterparts expressed condolences over what happened. They also showed interest in exploring the Russian proposal to organize this

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investigation," the ambassador said.
However, US officials definitely said that they were talking not about bilateral cooperation but about work within the UN, he added.

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Antonov Says Held 'Serious Meetings' With NSC, State Dept. Officials Over Il-76 Downing

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said on Thursday that he held "serious meetings" with senior NatioNal Security Council (NSC) and State Department officials over the downing of the Russian IL-76 transport plane carrying 65 Ukrainian prisoners of war.
"Two days ago, we were able to hold serious meetings with senior officials of the National Security Council as well as the State Department," Antonov said.
Antonov explained that Russian diplomats asked to hold these meetings in order to determine the United States' position toward this terrorist act perpetrated by Ukraine.
"We clearly, firmly and categorically raised the question of the unacceptability of the current US policy of pumping up the Ukrainian armed forces and the Zelensky regime with weapons when the United States is essentially pouring kerosene on the fire so that it flares up even more on Russian soil," Antonov said.

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US Senate Advances $95Bln Ukraine, Israel Aid Bill

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The US Senate on Thursday advanced a $95 billion supplemental funding bill with aid for Israel and Ukraine, after lawmakers rejected a version of the legislation with border policy measures.
More than 60 senators have voted in favor of motion to invoke cloture on a motion to proceed to the legislative vehicle for the bill, although voting continues.
On Wednesday, the Senate blocked a larger $118 billion supplemental funding bill, which included border policy measures alongside foreign aid and national security funding.
The $95 billion version advanced on Thursday includes more than $60 billion for Ukraine and $14 billion for Israel.

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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 02/09/2024 11:38:39 AM

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Multipolarity Creates Opportunities for Justice, Balance in Global Relations - UN Chief

UNITED NATIONS, February 8 (Sputnik) - United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Thursday that we no longer live in a bipolar world dominated by two superpowers, but rather a multipolar world which creates better opportunities for justice.

"We are no longer in a world of two superpowers or in a unipolar world. Multipolarity creates opportunities for justice and balance in global relations," Guterres said in a press briefing at the UN.

However, the absence of inclusive and effective mechanisms to govern the multipolar world, the risks are multiplied, he added.

Guterres' press conference follows his briefing on his priorities for 2024 to the UN General Assembly on Wednesday.

The United Nations is now preoccupied with its internal case over Israeli accusations that staff members of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) participated in Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel, Guterres said.

The United Nations is also focusing much of its attention on the current war in the Gaza Strip, with many of its agencies trying to elevate the dire humanitarian situation in the Palestinian enclave as a result of the Israeli blockade and military operations. More than 27,700 Palestinians have been killed and some 70,000 others have been wounded since October 7.

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IMF Chief Tells US to Be More Disciplined With Spending as Dollar Feeds Global Inflation

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The United States can show more discipline with respect to public spending as the strength of the US dollar and post-pandemic excesses in government expenditures are feeding into global inflation, International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Thursday.

"The change in [the strength of] the dollar puts the United States in a privileged position," Georgieva said in a live-streamed discussion on the global economy hosted by the Washington Post. "In addition to that, the United States has very deep capital markets. That makes it very attractive for others to bring their money here. This being the case, it is important for the US as well to be fiscally disciplined."

The Dollar Index, which tracks the strength of the US dollar against a basket of six major currencies, hit 20-year highs late last year and is on an uptrend again since the start of 2024. Economists say a strong dollar often depresses global trade growth, making the rest of the world poorer and less able to engage in trade.

As the world reserve currency and one with the most purchasing power, an appreciating dollar makes countries that have dollar-denominated debt less creditworthy, complicating their purchase of the US currency to manage their debts, Chicago Mercantile Exchange Director of Research Hannah Baldwin said.

IMF research shows that in emerging market economies, a 10% appreciation in the dollar

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 02/09/2024 11:38:39 AM

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decreases economic output by 1.9%, and the drag lingers for two and a half years. In contrast, the negative effects in advanced economies are considerably smaller in size, peaking at 0.6% after one quarter and largely gone in a year.

Georgieva said intensified expenditure approved by Washington in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic measures not only helped recovery of the US economy but the world too.

"I must say when the US spent money over the last years to boost growth and demand … it helped not only itself; it helped the rest of the world which was badly in need of more growth," Georgieva said. "But like everywhere, when we look at US public spending [now], we think that there is space in the US to eliminate some of the loopholes … there is space for the US to think about how public spending can be done with more discipline."

US public spending as of the third quarter of 2023 stood at $10 trillion, or 36% of gross domestic product, data by the government's Bureau of Economic Analysis showed.

Public spending is among the major talking points in presidential elections due in November, with polls suggesting that voters increasingly believed higher federal spending was directly contributing to inflation.

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Texas Sheriff Says Border Crisis Overwhelming Local Law Enforcement, Economy

EL PASO, February 8 (Sputnik) - The crisis on the US southern border overwhelms already-stretched local law enforcement resources and disrupts the local economy, Maverick County Sheriff Tom Schmerber told Sputnik.

Schmerber is the head of local law enforcement in Eagle Pass, Texas, a hotspot for illegal crossings into the United States under the Biden administration.

"It does [impact the community] because they close the international bridges, so it affected the economy, either in Mexico or here in Eagle Pass, it affected a lot," Schmerber said.

Schmerber further said that the border crisis distracts sheriff deputies from serving the local community.

"My priority is the security of the county and by having to do immigration work these days ... it's taking manpower for the security of the county," Schmerber said. "It's putting a lot of strain on me."

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

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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 02/09/2024 11:38:39 AM

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Schumer Says Hopeful US Senate Will Advance $95Bln Ukraine, Israel Aid Bill

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said on Thursday he is hopeful that lawmakers will advance a $95 billion supplemental funding bill with aid for Ukraine and Israel, from which immigration reforms were detached.

“I’m hopeful we can move forward on this bill,” Schumer said on the Senate floor.

The Senate subsequently started a vote on a motion to invoke cloture on the motion to proceed to the legislative vehicle for the bill. The measure requires 60 votes in favor to advance.

On Wednesday, the Senate blocked a $118 billion supplemental funding bill, which included immigration reform measures alongside foreign aid and national security funding.

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Congressional Dysfunction on Border Crisis Caused by Parties' Interests - Texas Sheriff

EL PASO, February 8 (Sputnik) - The inability of Congress to reach a consensus on solving the crisis on the United States' border with Mexico is a result of Republicans and Democrats prioritizing their self-interests instead of the greater good, Maverick County Sheriff Tom Schmerber told Sputnik.

Schmerber is the head of local law enforcement in Eagle Pass, Texas, a frequent hotspot for record illegal immigration into the United States under the Biden administration.

"It's all self-interests. Self-interests between the two parties," Schmerber said. "I don't see it like they're really looking at this national problem for the benefit of the United States."

On Wednesday, Senate Republicans blocked a $118 billion national security supplemental package that includes $60 billion for Ukraine, $14 billion for Israel and as well as funding for border policy reforms. Republicans claim the reforms in the bill would not do enough to deter the record levels of illegal immigration to the United States.

US House Speaker Mike Johnson also said the bill would be "dead on arrival" if it ever reaches the lower chamber of Congress. According to media reports, Johnson wants to hold separate votes on aid for Ukraine and on US border security.

US media reported that President Joe Biden is considering using executive authority to deter illegal immigration as it seems that Congress will not be able to agree on a border security reform bill anytime soon.

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

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Houthi Attacks on Red Sea Shipping Won't Derail Growth Projections of World Economy - IMF

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping vessels has implications, but not enough to derail the projected growth of the world economy, International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Thursday.

"This has implications but not of the magnitude that would significantly derail growth projections for the world economy," Georgieva said. "The impact is more localized...it adds a bit of pressure on prices. Not yet to a point that I would say our projection for inflation globally are going to be corrected upwards."

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Texas Sheriff Says Biden-Abbott Feud 'Personal,' Hopes They Can Cooperate on Border Crisis

EL PASO, February 8 (Sputnik) - Maverick County Sheriff Tom Schmerber told Sputnik the feud between President Joe Biden and Texas Governor Greg Abbott seems personal, but hopes the two can eventually cooperate on addressing the crisis on the US-Mexico border.

Schmerber is the head of local law enforcement in Eagle Pass, Texas, a frequent hotspot for record illegal immigration into the United States under the Biden administration.

"They don't like each other, and now it's like personal. I was hoping that maybe they could sit at the table and discuss a solution to the problem," Schmerber said regarding the standoff.

Law enforcement agencies are caught in the middle of the mess, sometimes making their work very challenging, Schmerber added.

"For example, in December, when we had a whole bunch of immigrants coming through here - thousands, thousands, and thousands - we were very busy and we don't have the manpower or the technology to work with that amount of people," Schmerber said.

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

Biden and Abbott should really consider getting together to discuss a solution to the crisis, the sheriff reemphasized.

Last month, the US Supreme Court ruled that federal agents can cut the razor wire fencing Texas installed on the US-Mexico border, but it does not require the state to remove it.

The Biden administration also recently asked the Supreme Court to prevent the Texas National Guard from blocking federal Border Patrol agents from accessing a stretch of land along the US southern border town Eagle Pass, Texas.

The Texas Military Department explained that its action to block off federal agents was to "prepare for future illegal immigrant surges and to restrict access to organizations that perpetuate illegal immigrant crossings in the park and greater Eagle Pass area."

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 02/09/2024 11:38:39 AM

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Abbott has vowed to defy federal efforts that prevent Texas from securing its border with Mexico.

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Arms Trafficking From US to Mexico Present 'Large Problem' - Official

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) – Arms trafficking from the United States to Mexico constitutes a big problem that is regularly discussed by both sides, a senior US administration official said on Thursday.

"Obviously, this is a large problem," the official told reporters.

A US interagency delegation discussed the issue with Mexican partners during a visit to Mexico earlier this week, the official said.

The two countries also focused on the trafficking of military weapons from the US to Mexico. However, they do not see evidence of such a flow, the official added.

The US delegation was led by Homeland Security Advisor Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall. It also included Deputy Attorney General Liza Monaco, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Verma, Acting Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security Kristie Canegallo, and other officials.

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Europe's Gas Demand to Continue Decline, China's to Increase 65% by 2030 - US Energy Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - Europe's demand for natural gas is expected to decline 20% by 2026 but China's demand will continue to grow and is expected to increase 65% by 2030, US Deputy Secretary of Energy David Turk said in a congressional testimony on Thursday.

"Europe's natural gas demand is forecasted to actually decline from 2021 to 2026 by 20%. LNG [liquefied natural gas] demand has already peaked in Japan, and is expected to peak in South Korea by 2030. On the other hand, China's demand for LNG is expected to increase a further 65% by 2030," Turk told the US Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

Turk pointed out that the United States continues to dramatically increase LNG exports and will double them by 2030.

In January, President Joe Biden paused the approval of new LNG exports, citing a need to better assess climate, health and economic considerations of pending licenses, prompting criticism from US industry.

Commenting on the Biden administration's decision to pause new exports, Turk said the move will not impact the United States' ability to supply its allies and partners under the existing

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contracts and authorizations.

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US FAA to Investigate Tarmac Collision Between Two JetBlue Planes - Statement

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - Two JetBlue planes collided on the de-icing pad at Boston Logan International Airport, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said in a statement on Thursday.

"JetBlue Flight 777, an Airbus A321neo's left winglet struck the right horizontal stabilizer of JetBlue Flight 551, an Airbus A321, around 6:40 am, local time on Thursday, February 8, while on the deicing pad at Boston Logan International Airport," the statement said.

The statement said that the incident occurred within an area of the tarmac controlled by the airline, and the FAA will conduct an investigation.

The statement added that a preliminary report from the FAA would be available on the following day.

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Canada Amends Special Economic Measures on Russia, Removes 4 Persons From Sanctions List

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - Four Russian individuals with ties to the banking and gas sectors have been removed from Ottawa's list of sanctioned persons, amendments to Canada's Special Economic Measures (Russia) Regulations show on Thursday.

In mid-November, Russian billionaire Oleg Boyko was delisted after taking the Canadian Foreign Ministry to court to protest being included in the list of persons sanctioned over Russia's special military operation in Ukraine.

The amendments, dated February 2 and published separately on the Global Affairs Canada (GAC) website, state that Items 799, 816, 819 and 1068 of Part 1 to the Special Economic Measures (Russia) have been repealed.

The numbers refer to Olga Ayziman, Sergey Aleksandrovich Maltsev, Alexandra Yurievna Buriko and Aleksandr Pavlovich Dushko.

Ayziman is the former wife of Mikhail Fridman, founder and one of the main shareholders of Alfa Group, which includes Russia's Alfa Bank. Maltsev and Buriko were former Deputy chairmen of the SberBank management board and dismissed in May 2022.

Duskho is the current Deputy Head-Financial and Economic Department at Gazprom PJSC.

The Canadian government began to sanction Russian citizens and entities in 2014, following Crimea's reunification with Russia by means of referendum. The list has surpassed 2,800 names since the onset of Russia's special military operation in February 2022 and includes

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 02/09/2024 11:38:39 AM

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alleged "enablers" in Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova.
Russian Ambassador to Canada Oleg Stepanov has said Ottawa's unfriendly gestures are merely symbolic for the sanctioned persons and have hurt Canadian companies the most.

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US Supreme Court Holds Oral Arguments in Trump Colorado Ballot Access Case

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court on Thursday held oral arguments in a case concerning the state of Colorado's ability to restrict former US President Donald Trump's ballot access under the 14th Amendment of the US Constitution.
Justices began by hearing from Trump's lawyers, who argued that the court should prevent Colorado from blocking Trump from ballots in the 2024 presidential race.
Trump is challenging a ruling by the Colorado Supreme Court, which disqualified Trump from running for office due to his connection to the breach of the US Capitol on January 6, 2021.
Section Three of the 14th Amendment bans people who "engaged in insurrection" from holding public office. Trump has denied accusations of insurrection and pointed to his calls to peacefully protest on January 6.
Other states have also taken up cases challenging Trump's ballot access under Section Three of the 14th Amendment. The Maine Superior Court is waiting on the US Supreme Court's ruling before deciding how to move forward.
The Colorado Secretary of State said that Trump will be included on ballots in the state unless the US Supreme Court affirms the Colorado Supreme Court's ruling.

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US, Mexico Discuss Cooperation on Addressing Migration, Drugs Trafficking - Official

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - A high-level US interagency delegation visited Mexico on February 6-7 to discuss bilateral cooperation on managing migration, countering drugs and weapons trafficking among other pressing issues, a senior Biden administration official said on Thursday.
"The focus of our bilateral meetings was to continue what has been a consistent, constructive dialogue between our two countries and strengthen cooperation with Mexican partners on a range of topics, including managing migration, countering trafficking of illicit drugs and weapons, as well as regional coordination efforts," the official told reporters.
The delegation was led by Homeland Security Advisor Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall, who was accompanied by Deputy Attorney General Liza Monaco, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Verma, Acting Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security Kristie Canegallo, Deputy Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy Adam Cohen and other officials.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 02/09/2024 11:38:39 AM

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During the visit, Sherwood-Randall met with Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador and Foreign Secretary Alicia Barcena.

"It was a long intensive discussion on a range of topics, and incredibly productive and constructive, from our perspective," the official said.

The delegation met with counterparts from the Mexican security cabinet and they agreed to increase information data sharing and to facilitate actions against criminal organizations responsible for trafficking people, guns and illicit drugs, including fentanyl, the official said.

The death rate from synthetic drugs in the United States remains high and the two countries have a lot to do to solve the issue, the official added.

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EU Plan to Use Profits From Frozen Russian Assets Reminiscent of Communism - Szijjarto

NEW YORK CITY, February 8 (Sputnik) - The recent EU idea of setting aside profits from frozen Russian assets is reminiscent of "communist" legacy and is not something Hungary would want to see, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto told RIA Novosti.

The EU's move is seen as a potential first step toward handing over billions of euros to Ukraine.

"It's very, very complicated issue because I still remember when the communists have confiscated assets in Hungary from people who have worked lifelong for what they had. So these kinds of measures usually turn on the alarm light in our mindset that such a communist heritage is not something that we would like to see to be revitalized in these years," Szijjarto said.

Hungary so far has not seen a concrete proposal on the matter, he added.

Russia will respond to any attempts by Western countries to seize its assets, the Russian Foreign Ministry has warned. Moscow views these illegal actions as "outright theft," the ministry said.

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US Officials Privately Confirm Patriot Missile Shot Down Russian Il-76 Plane - Reports

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) – US officials privately confirm the accuracy of media reports that Ukraine used a US-made Patriot system to shoot down the Russian Il-76 plane with 65 Ukrainian prisoners of war in the Belgorod region, The New York Times reported on Thursday.

While US officials are still not planning to publicly say what downed the plane, they confirm on the condition of anonymity that initial reports that a Patriot missile was used by Ukraine were accurate, the report said.

Ukraine used a Patriot interceptor provided by one of its European partners to down the

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Russian cargo plane on January 24, which was initially claimed by Moscow following the incident, the report said.

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Swedish Prime Minister Should Visit Hungary If NATO Membership Important - Szijjarto

NEW YORK CITY, February 8 (Sputnik) - Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson should visit Hungary for talks on his country's NATO bid if the membership of the alliance is indeed important for them, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto told RIA Novosti.

"We have invited the Swedish Prime Minister to come to Hungary as soon as possible. And I do believe that if the membership of them is really important for themselves, then the Prime Minister should come," Szijjarto said.

In late January, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban invited his Swedish counterpart to visit Hungary and discuss Sweden's NATO membership application. Szijjarto said that it would be fair if Kristersson visited Budapest before the ratification, just as the Swedish leader had also gone to Turkey before Ankara's ratification.

Orban previously said that his cabinet supports the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, but Hungarian lawmakers are "not entirely enthusiastic" about it due to the governments of the two nations spreading "lies" about Hungary.

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US Announces $10 Million Reward for Information on Hive Ransomware Leaders – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) – The US State Department's Transitional Organized Crime Rewards Program announced on Thursday a reward of up to $10 million for information leading to the identification and/or location of a leader of the Hive ransomware group, according to a release.

"Today, the Department of State is announcing a reward offer of up to $10,000,000 for information leading to the identification and/or location of any individual(s) who hold a key leadership position in the Hive ransomware variant transnational organized crime group. In addition, we are also announcing a reward of up to $5,000,000 for information leading to the arrest and/or conviction of any individual in any country conspiring to participate in or attempting to participate in Hive ransomware activity," the release stated.

The Hive ransomware has targeted victims in over 80 countries, including the US.

The Department of Justice revealed last month that starting in July 2022, the FBI had penetrated Hive's computer networks, obtained its decryption keys, and offered them to victims worldwide, preventing them from having to pay up to $130 million in ransom.

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Democrats Alarmed by Third-Party Candidates Challenging Biden's Presidential Bid - Reports

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - Democrats are worried by what they see as threats posed by third-party candidates and their challenge to reelecting President Joe Biden in the upcoming November election, the Washington Post reported on Thursday.

Candidates such as Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Cornel West and Jill Stein are getting the support of an increasing numbers of voters, prompting the Democratic National Committee to hire a new communications adviser while the Biden campaign mulls creating an organization to coordinate actions about the wider range of the so-called threats.

Democratic party strategists not only worry about the alternative candidates increasing their share of votes but also about the possibility for the so-called less-likely voters to remain home on Election day given the significant number of Americans who are unhappy with Biden and his primary challenger, former President Donald Trump, being presidential nominees for the two major political parties in the United States, the report said.

The situation has pushed the Democrat-aligned American Bridge research group to relocate some of its staff to focus on third-party candidates whereas Third Way has launched a significant efforts to dissuade support for "No Labels," the report said.

Democrats are also concerned about the impact third party candidates could have on young and Black voters in swing states, the report said.

Biden secured 87% of the Black vote in the 2020 election, but Kennedy and West are now both polling at 13% among Blacks, the report added.

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Biden Admin. Pause on New LNG Exports Will Not Impact Supply of Allies - Energy Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) – The pause on new LNG exports introduced by the Biden administration will not impact the US ability to supply its allies and partners, US Deputy Secretary of Energy David Turk said on Thursday.

"Put simply, this temporary pause to update our analyses will not impact our ability to supply our allies with LNG. This pause on additional approvals does not interfere with current exports nor other projects already authorized or under construction," Turk said in prepared-for-delivery remarks at a Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources hearing.

In January, US President Joe Biden temporarily paused the approval of new LNG exports, citing a need to better assess climate, health, and economic considerations of pending licenses.

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Bell Canada to Reduce Workforce by 9%, Cut Expenditures by $742Mln Over 2 Years

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - Bell Canada Enterprises (BCE) said on Thursday that it would reduce its workforce by 9%, or 4,800 positions, and will reduce expenditures by C$1 billion (US$741.7 million) over the next two years.

The measures are taken amid, among others, increasingly "unsupportive" policies and regulatory decisions by the federal government, higher interest rates and continued inflation, BCE said in a statement.

"We intend to reduce capital expenditures by over $1 billion over the next two years, including a minimum $500 million year-over-year decrease in 2024 alone. In addition, we are undertaking a significant workforce restructuring initiative - our largest in nearly 30 years - reducing approximately 4,800 positions, or 9% of all BCE employees," the statement said.

The announced changes are difficult for the impacted individuals but they are a necessary step to take to respond to external influences, accelerate the company's transformation and ensure its longevity, the statement added.

BCE is the Canada's largest telecommunications company by revenue, generating C$24.67 billion (US18.31 billion) worth of operating revenues 2023.

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Clinton Says No Surprise If Tucker Carlson Clinches Contract With Russian News Outlet

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - Former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton quipped that she would not be surprised if American journalist Tucker Carlson gets a contract with Russian media after he interviewed President Vladimir Putin.

"After having been fired from so many outlets in the United States, I would not be surprised if he emerges with a contract with a Russian outlet," Clinton told MSNBC on Wednesday.

She also called Carlson a "useful idiot" and a "puppy dog," claiming that Russian media "make fun" of him.

Carlson arrived in Russia last week to interview President Putin. He explained that he did it as a journalistic duty, as well as to inform Americans about the realities of the conflict in Ukraine.

The interview will air Thursday at 6:00 p.m. EST (23:00 GMT).

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