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2/27/24 Tuesday

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‘Time is Running Out’ - Big Four Leave Oval Office Without Plan to Avert Shutdown

According to one report, those meeting in the Oval Office with the US president “ganged up” on the house speaker to allow more money for Ukraine, with Biden telling him that history would “judge him harshly” if he did not act on the issue. Meanwhile, Johnson said his first priority is securing the US-Mexico border.

US President Joe Biden summoned four congressional leaders on Tuesday in an effort to avoid a government shutdown that is predicted to occur on March 8, including: Vice President Kamala Harris, House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, and House Speaker Mike Johnson. US legislators must come up with a spending plan that both sides of the aisle can agree on, in order to avoid the shutdown.

At the beginning of the year, the short-term continuing resolution (CR) established a phased, two-step deadline to fund the government, which extended funding through March 1 for about 20% of the federal government that is responsible for military construction, as well as the departments of veterans affairs, agriculture, housing and urban development, transportation and energy. The remaining 80% of the government is funded until March 8.

Aquiles Larrea, the CEO of Larrea Wealth Management, spoke to Sputnik’s The Final Countdown on Tuesday, and sounded hopeful congressional leaders still have enough time to avoid a shutdown, but stressed that time is slipping away.

“I think that the appearance of having to try to do something, getting something done with the congressional leadership is very important at this point, especially since we've gone past a few stopgap measures at this point. But I think, we're not going to have any choice but to put another one in there unless we can get people to agree overnight,” said Larrea.

“Let's just say, in a perfect world, that the Congress agrees overnight, the Senate has to look over the bill over the weekend and hopefully before the March 8th deadline comes to some accord. That way they can get it to the president, but that time is quickly slipping away. So, something the president has probably taken it upon himself, whether it's appearance, whether it be true, whether it be magic to come out and say, 'guys, let's do something, let's figure this out, we have to agree on something,’” he continued. “The only wild card in the bunch right now is the caucus within the House Republican Party.”

Sputnik’s Angie Wong commented on what she views as political posturing by the four congressional leaders and Biden, noting that the US president plans to go to the southern border ahead of the potential shutdown. Former President Donald Trump will also visit the border on Thursday. US Democrats have been fighting for more money to fund Ukraine and Israel, while Republicans have been working to send money to the US-Mexico border, because they believe that will help secure it.

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Wong then asked Larrea why Biden had not issued an executive order to close the US-Mexico border.

“I think he's trying to give Congress a fair chance to come up with some solutions because just the president invoking an executive order seems more tyrannical than anything. You know, 'oh, this guy, he just came in, he did this,'. I think it gives plenty to chew on opponents to say, 'well, he had to do this because it was out of control,' and it won't be a positive thing,” Larrea explained.

“The second thing is that Congress can get together, there's plenty of time. It's running out. Yes, it's starting to run out, but there's still plenty of time. And Congress has been notoriously efficient when it wants to be, they can come up with a solution overnight as well, if they really wanted to,” he continued.

“That would appease both sides. But we are in an election year, there's a lot of posturing going on. There's a lot of [much ado] about nothing that would benefit either side, and that's what I feel we, as constituents, we as the American people, American citizens are caught in the middle. And it's not a fun place to be, but it is the reality of the situation.”

But according to Larrea, the issue for American voters is not about the standstill between two political parties—the issue is the economy.

“I think that people are more concerned with economics right now. We've seen inflation rise up so quickly in a short span of time, but now coming down rather quickly. And nobody's talking about that, we're starting to see home rates going down, car loan rates going down. Even the supermarket pricing is starting to go down. We saw an uptick in January. But, speaking economically, we saw an uptick in January. But what people forget is that every January, corporations set new pricing,” Larrea explained.

"I think that the voters are quite apathetic to what's going on right now in Congress, but they would love to see an agreement hammered out. I think it's confusing to some as to why. But, it makes sense,” he continued.

“We're in an election year, we are seeing two sides that are not doing any push and pull at this moment, and that bodes for a shutdown. That's the reality of it right now. Who benefits each side will argue it's the other side's fault. But then, you put these talking heads together and much ado continues. But I also think the conversation needs to continue. The conversation is important, that they are actually making a concerted effort, but if they don't make that effort, it would be substantially worse.”

According to Wong, Senator Ron Johnson (R-WI) has said that a full year of continuing resolutions (CRs) would be the worst option. She adds that the result of such an event would be like a “free fall” with taxpayer money and that, unfortunately, a “lot of congressional members don’t mind that”.

She then asked Larrea if any seats in Congress might be flipped so that the current issue of a stalemate in Congress does not continue.

“You bring up a very interesting point of congressional seats. It’s more on the Republican side than on the Democrat side. Is this going to cause the caucus to receive more members at this point? That's a very interesting and valid point, but we don't know. And then the same thing could happen with the Democratic side where the moderate has pretty much ruled the day there. But, is it going to turn into a more liberal membership in Congress because of the lack of action?” Larrea explained.

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“You know, when things don't get done, voters get fed up and they vote for somebody else. They toss out incumbents. So, it's going to be very interesting to see how these elections go. I think we have no choice. I don't think we're going to go a year, in my opinion,” he continued.
“I think we have to continue doing what we're doing, and all of us will be talking about this every few months or so. And I think Congress is perfectly happy to do that right now. The president may not like it, but for them, they're like, 'you know what? We are not in the business of pleasing the president.'”
US Republican lawmakers are reportedly preparing for a federal shutdown, even if the shut down is “just for a few days”, according to one unnamed lawmaker. Though, US House Speaker Mike Johnson was quoted last week saying that the House would meet its deadlines.
The US House of Representatives suspended legislative business until February 28 after Johnson said lawmakers would not hold a vote on a $95 billion spending bill that was passed by the US Senate. The bill included money for Ukraine, but did not include money for the US-Mexico border. A bipartisan group of US House lawmakers then unveiled a $66.32 billion spending bill that includes money for Ukraine, Israel, Taiwan and border security measures. A majority of that bill would go towards Ukraine.

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Mainstream Media Ignores Facts: Russia Has Already Won This War

According to White House National Security Communications adviser John Kirby, Ukraine is now destined to lose additional territories in the coming months due to a lack of military support from the US.
On Tuesday, US President Joe Biden stressed an urgent need to provide additional support for Ukraine as congress continues to stalemate over a potential spending bill.
Moscow has warned NATO members that supplying arms to Ukraine would effectively be “playing with fire” and doing so would hinder the possibility of negotiations between Russia and Ukraine. Few corporate media channels in the West have addressed Ukraine’s inevitable defeat to Russian forces, though one reporter found that many Ukrainians were prepared to accept the loss of their territories as a price for peace, adding that the Biden Administration needs to get on board, as well.
On Tuesday, Sputnik’s The Critical Hour spoke to Jack Rasmus, an author who has a PhD in political economy, and a former educator of economics at Saint Mary's College in California. Rasmus, who recently published an article titled, ‘Ukraine War and the Ghost of Clausewitz’, believes there is a “lot of falsification going on in the mainstream media about the war in Ukraine”.
“There's a lot of falsification going on, a lot of ideology falsification going on in the mainstream media about the war in Ukraine and what's really happening,” said Rasmus. “So, what I wanted to do was to explain some of these falsifications—and there's a number of them—and explain why it appears that Russia was winning and then Ukraine was winning, and now there's a big

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offensive going on. Russians are driving Ukrainians back very fast and a bigger offense is coming very soon in the spring here."

"Russia has pretty much won this war already. But they keep covering it up, and I wanted to explain some of this using these principles of war," he continued, "Throughout history, from Julius Caesar all the way to Mao and Giap, very clear principles of war prevail, whatever kind of war it is."

"These principles of war have been followed by Russia and not Ukraine, and that's why Russia is winning. And in the course of it, pretty much debunk some of these falsifications about the war that have been occurring for two years now," Rasmus said.

In his article, Rasmus writes that according to the Principles of War, a decided military advantage lies with the side that is "able to concentrate superior forces and commit that relatively superior force at the opponent's weakest point". Concentration of Force, then, is probably the first principle of war, he writes.

The author and educator also notes in his article that Russian forces have now increased in number along the Ukrainian front while, initially, they had just 190,000 forces covering about 1,500 miles, the Russian Ministry of Defense says it now has more than 600,000 troops. Total deployment in Ukraine could reach about 800,000 this year with continued rotations of trained soldiers. At the same time, Ukraine's forces are estimated to be at 350,000 which includes 100,000 of reserves.

"In the Ukrainian offensive there in the fall of 2022, it was devastating, it was a total defeat. They lost hundreds of thousands, killed and wounded in that failed offensive and from 2022 into 2023 Ukraine is struggling, it's running out of manpower. It has plans for recruiting 500,000 more, which they're never going to be able to get. They're pulling people off the street, kidnapping them and everything, trying to replenish all those losses from that failed offensive a couple of years ago," Rasmus said.

"At the same time Russia has increased its forces. The Russian Ministry of Defense admits 600,000 Russian troops are on the line and maybe 350,000 Ukrainians on the line after their losses of a couple hundred thousand. They can't recruit anymore. At the same time, Russia announced six months ago that it was recruiting through volunteers and training another 420,000 and they haven't even hit the frontlines yet," Rasmus explained.

"The tide has turned here very clearly. And that's why there is desperation going on in the EU and in Washington, DC, and now talk in France and others about, 'oh, we're going to have to send NATO troops into western Ukraine,'" he continued.

French President Emmanual Macron has not ruled out sending ground forces to Ukraine. The president said that "nothing should be excluded" regarding that option during a press conference on Monday. His comments followed a meeting in Paris where members of the European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) discussed new measures to send munitions to Kiev.

NATO allies including the US, Germany, Italy and the UK have ruled out deploying ground troops to Ukraine in a sweeping rejection of Macron's comment on Monday. A White House official has also denied any plans to send either US or NATO troops to Ukraine.

"That's the old neocon strategy. When you're losing, you double down. And if your policies aren't working, you just do it twice as hard. And we're moving into a very dangerous period as Russia pushes the Ukrainians back significantly and retakes the provinces there in the east, the

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neocons in the West are going to overreact and do something very, very stupid. And, we're on the way to an even worse conflict, I think, if they do," said Rasmus.
"The relationship of forces, both manpower and weaponry—and just the internal lines of supply and communication and the ability to concentrate forces at the front—all of these are plain from the very beginning that Russia would win this war, and of course it is unless the West continues to escalate. And I think the neocons' ultimate escalation, which they've got in their back pocket, is to use tactical nukes," the educator said.

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Out of Touch, Much?

The French president did not rule out sending ground troops to Ukraine, an idea that has been overwhelmingly dismissed by other NATO allies. Just a couple days prior, Macron told farmers who are protesting in France to "calm down", adding that their protests were "counterproductive".
French President Emmanuel Macron has not ruled out whether or not he will send ground forces to Ukraine. The president said that "nothing should be excluded" regarding that option during a press conference on Monday. His comments followed a meeting in Paris where members of the European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) discussed new measures to send munitions to Kiev.
"We are convinced that the defeat of Russia is indispensable to security and stability in Europe," Macron told reporters. "There's no consensus today to send in an official, endorsed manner troops on the ground. But in terms of dynamics, nothing can be ruled out."
NATO allies including the US, Germany, Italy and the UK have ruled out deploying ground troops to Ukraine in a sweeping rejection of Macron's comment on Monday. A White House official has also denied any plans to send either US or NATO troops to Ukraine. In a statement, the White House said that US President Joe Biden believes a Ukraine "path to victory" is by providing military aid, adding that the president has been clear that he will not send troops to fight there.
Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov has warned of a direct conflict if NATO troops are deployed there. Peskov also said Macron's suggestion is a "very important new element" adding that it was not in the interests of NATO members.
Meanwhile, Macron has also condemned protests by farmers in France as "counterproductive" after he was greeted with whistles at the Paris International Agricultural Show on Saturday. The protestors, who had broken through a police cordon earlier in the day, chanted, "Macron must resign!"
Farmers in France have been protesting since January as they demand recognition of their labor and oppose cheap agricultural imports, water use restrictions, diesel fuel price increases, as well as general growing costs in the face of environmental policies that affect the finances of their livelihood.

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'We Have Become Our Own Enemy': Polish Farmers' Remarkable Protest Against Europe's Self-Destruction

Out of touch European leaders are destroying citizens' quality of life as well as their own political legitimacy, claims one expert.

The European system has been under considerable strain for some time. Brexit was perhaps the most notable demonstration of the people's discontent with the direction the continent is headed. But many others have followed.

A remarkable act of protest took place over the weekend when demonstrators spilled 160 tons of Ukrainian grain from rail cars at a station in Poland. Ukraine's Deputy Prime Minister Oleksandr Kubrakov immediately denounced the act and called for arrests, demonstrating the degree to which the country's puppet government feels entitled to dictate European Union policy. But the protest will not be the last as leaders across the continent run roughshod over the needs and wellbeing of European citizens.

"What has been going on is happening everywhere in Europe and it's spreading," noted journalist Elijah Magnier on Sputnik's Fault Lines program on Tuesday. "It is [the] beginning of the tip of the iceberg and all that is due to the wrong European policy that is incompatible with the necessity and the interests of the European people."

"And we can say primarily what's happening in Europe today is the boomerang effect of our leaders' policy towards Ukraine and everything that comes with it."

Magnier recounted the ways Europe's slavish devotion to the Kiev regime is harming European farmers, not only in terms of the resources EU countries are redirecting to Ukraine, but also in the larger economic ramifications of the conflict. Attempts to salvage the Ukrainian economy by allowing the import of untaxed agriculture from the country have created an environment where European farmers cannot compete, he noted.

Inflation is making European goods even less competitive, while EU climate diktats continue to reduce profitability.

EU crop rotation and fertilizer reduction directives are the last straw of many, says Magnier. "We don't have enough money to survive, particularly when the subsidies have been reduced," said the former war correspondent, summarizing the dilemma of European farmers. "They find themselves completely with [their] backs [against the] wall, and this is why, last month, there were 1,300 tractors in the streets of Brussels."

"This discontent among the European farmers is not going to be limited to European farmers, it's going to expand because other people are joining them and they're not farmers," Magnier predicted.

Compounding the broader crisis is a lack of political legitimacy across the continent. The EU has long been criticized for its "democratic deficit" as the bloc's policy is written by elite European Commission appointees disconnected from the struggles of average people. But French President Emmanuel Macron is viewed as particularly illegitimate, even as he makes highly provocative comments about sending European troops to Ukraine.

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"We are going to see more and more [protest]," said Magnier, "particularly with a person like Emmanuel Macron, who is so unpopular in France and who came to power with only 24% of the vote because people didn't want to vote for the right-wing extremist Marine Le Pen."
Frequently, Western political establishments have been able to engineer elections where unpopular liberals like Macron benefit from fear of far-right opponents, as recently happened in the 2020 US presidential election. Eventually, such establishment figures suffer as the reality of their political agenda is made clear. Macron has been met with massive protests throughout his time in office as he attempts to eliminate hardwon labor rights and reduce French citizens' quality of life.
"In England, the health system is collapsing – energy [costs are growing to] at least five to six times more and increasing by 14% since the beginning of the year," Magnier added. "So we are in total chaos and heading toward a catastrophe, and all of that is because of the decision of our leaders [about] what to do in Ukraine, how to fight Russia – but we are fighting our own economy."
"What they're doing is impoverishing Europe," he added.
Magnier concluded that European leaders' decision to demonize Russia was wreaking havoc across the continent, sacrificing its economy as well as the legitimacy of its political system in the name of antagonizing Moscow.
"The governments went 180 degrees and Russia became our enemy. But it is not true because we have become our own enemy," he claimed.
"This is only the beginning," he said of the act of defiance in Poland, predicting that protests would rock Europe for months or years to come.

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'It Never Sinks In': NATO Threatens Russia Despite Military Catastrophe Across the Globe

Security analyst Mark Sleboda predicts that NATO leaders, having provided themselves with no offramp amidst growing tensions with Russia, will eventually send troops to assist Kiev.
Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov reacted to French President Emmanuel Macron's bellicose rhetoric towards Russia Tuesday after the controversial leader raised the prospect of sending NATO troops to assist Ukraine.
"In this case, we have to talk not about the probability, but rather the inevitability" of a conflict between Russia and Ukraine, Peskov warned, adding any such move would be "absolutely against the interests of those nations" and their people.
But Western countries have given in to pressure to up the ante in the past, eventually providing tanks and ever more sophisticated weaponry to Kiev even after previously dismissing the prospect. Still, Russia has maintained the upper hand in the Donbass, leading Sputnik's host of The Critical Hour program Wilmer Leon to bewilderingly ask "is this a de-population campaign?"
"It is clear that the trend of the war is definitely in Russia's favor," agreed security analyst Mark Sleboda, who said the conflict has evolved into "a war of attrition."

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"The regime is suffering extreme manpower problems," the international relations expert added, noting that NATO countries have also struggled to provide Ukraine with sufficient weaponry to sustain combat. He ridiculed President Volodymyr Zelensky's claim the Kiev regime had only lost 31,000 combatants in two years of fighting, claiming "that's about what they have lost per month, at least in the last eight or so months."

"That being said, the Kiev regime's military has not broken yet," said Sleboda. "They are buckling along the frontline."

Russia's resilience has embarrassed Western countries, who envisioned Ukraine's proxy war as a low-risk opportunity to weaken the Eurasian power. The United States repeatedly worked to scuttle peace talks to end the conflict, intervening in at least two separate rounds of negotiations involving British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and former Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett. The strategy has backfired spectacularly, with Western sanctions economically damaging European allies and threatening the global reserve status of the US dollar. Now, a Russian victory threatens to indisputably usher in a multipolar era and signal that Western powers no longer have the ability to dictate policy to the rest of the world.

"This is not the first time we have heard threats and rumors of NATO countries having contingency plans… if their [Ukrainian] regime fails," said Sleboda, noting the significance of the Donbass conflict to the West. "They will feel the need to intervene directly because they fully believe that their US global leadership, that the rules based order, which is to say, US-led Western global hegemony [is threatened]."

Sleboda added that European countries are "falling apart" amidst the economic ramifications of the conflict, while the continent's armed forces are also in a highly compromised state. Meanwhile, he claimed Russia enjoys "the most powerful and advanced air defense system and electronic warfare capability in the world."

As Ukraine remains on the backfoot in the Donbass, French President Emmanuel Macron organized a meeting of European leaders on Monday, during which Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico reported there was no discussion of peace with Russia.

Sleboda predicted that Western leaders' hubris would eventually lead to a war between NATO and Moscow.

"Take a look at events since 2014," said the analyst. "They [Western leaders] are crazy. They are messianic, supremacist, exceptionalist and [demonstrate] no amount of being disabused, whether in Georgia or Syria or now in Ukraine or in Israel or anywhere else in the world, the failure of the US in Afghanistan, the collapse of Iraq, the destruction in Libya, it never, ever sinks in. So, yes, I believe they are crazy."

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US Army National Guard Grounds All Helicopters After Deadly Crash in Mississippi

The helicopter crash is the second in the US Army's National Guard in less than two weeks. The US Army National Guard announced it was taking the extraordinary step of grounding all helicopters across the service after its second crash in less than two weeks.

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The announcement was made Tuesday by National Guard Director Lt. Gen. Jon Jensen after a deadly helicopter crash killed two pilots on a training mission over a rural wooded area near Booneville, Mississippi.

"The director of the Army National Guard has ordered an aviation safety stand down of all Army National Guard helicopter units to review safety policies and procedures following two recent helicopter crashes," read a statement on the National Guard's website. "The stand down went into effect Monday."

"Mississippi Army National Guard pilots Chief Warrant Officer 4 Bryan Andrew Zemek and Chief Warrant Officer 4 Derek Joshua Abbott died in the February 23 crash," the statement continued.

The Army's Combat Readiness Center is investigating the cause of the recent crashes, which has not been publicly commented upon. A separate crash occurred February 12 in Utah, with the two pilots surviving. Both crashes involved Apache helicopters.

The National Guard suffered another pair of crashes in 2023 that involved Black Hawk helicopters. An accident in February of that year claimed the lives of two service members from Tennessee, while another in March killed nine. The March accident, which involved a mid-air collision in Kentucky, was one of the worst in the history of the National Guard.

The announcement comes not long after the US Marine Corps grounded all Osprey aircraft in use by the service late last year. The move was in response to a crash off the coast of Japan that killed eight Air Force Special Operations Command service members. The Osprey, which is able to take off vertically and rotate its propellers to fly like a turboprop aircraft, has had a troubled history, claiming the lives of 50 US troops in various accidents.

"We have become our own enemy": Polish farmers are making headlines with highly-visible acts of defiance as out of touch European leaders destroy citizens' quality of life as well as their own political legitimacy.

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A remarkable act of protest took place over the weekend when demonstrators spilled 160 tons of Ukrainian grain from rail cars at a station in Poland. Ukraine's Deputy Prime Minister immediately denounced the act and called for arrests, demonstrating the degree to which the country's puppet government feels entitled to dictate European Union policy.

But journalist Elijah Magnier predicted such acts of defiance would continue as European leaders enact "policy that is incompatible with the necessity and the interests of the European people."

Magnier recounted the ways EU policy and support for Ukraine are harming farmers and average citizens on Sputnik's Fault Lines program. "We are fighting our own economy," he claimed, adding "what they're doing is impoverishing Europe."

"The governments went 180 degrees and Russia became our enemy. But it is not true because we have become our own enemy," the journalist emphasized.

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‘It never sinks in’: NATO threatens Russia despite track record of Western military catastrophes across the globe

Security analyst Mark Sleboda joined Sputnik’s The Critical Hour program, responding to French President Emmanuel Macron’s bellicose comments threatening to send NATO troops to assist the Kiev regime.

“This is not the first time we have heard threats and rumors of NATO countries having contingency plans… if their [Ukrainian] regime fails,” said the international relations expert, noting the significance of the Donbass conflict to the West. “They will feel the need to intervene directly because they fully believe that their US global leadership, that the rules based order, which is to say, US-led Western global hegemony [is threatened].”

Sleboda predicted that Western leaders’ hubris would eventually lead to a war between NATO and Russia.

“Take a look at events since 2014,” said the analyst. “They [Western leaders] are crazy. They are messianic, supremacist, exceptionalist and [demonstrate] no amount of being disabused, whether in Georgia or Syria or now in Ukraine or in Israel or anywhere else in the world, the failure of the US in Afghanistan, the collapse of Iraq, the destruction in Libya, it never, ever sinks in.”

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The US Army National Guard announced it was grounding all helicopters across the service after a deadly crash in Mississippi claimed the lives of two pilots.

The incident occurred last Friday outside the city of Booneville in a rural wooded area.

The National Guard announced it would be reviewing all safety policies and procedures after the second helicopter crash in less than two weeks. On February 12 a separate crash in Utah also involved an Apache helicopter, although both pilots survived.

The US Army’s National Guard suffered a pair of deadly helicopter accidents last year which together claimed the lives of 11 service members. A crash in March, which involved a mid-air collision between two Black Hawk helicopters in Kentucky, was one of the worst in the history of the service.

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Uncontained Wildfire Now Second-Largest on Record in Texas - Incident Viewer

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - The Smokehouse Creek Fire, which remains uncontained, has become the second-largest wildfire on record in the US state of Texas, data from the Texas A&M Forest Service showed on Wednesday.

As of Wednesday morning, the wildfire has burned 500,000 acres and is currently 0% contained, according to the service.

To date, the largest wildfire recorded was the East Amarillo Complex fire in 2006, which burned more than 900,000 acres, according to Texas A&M.

An area the size of two football fields is burning every second in Texas, CNN reported on Wednesday.

Earlier on Wednesday, Texas Governor Greg Abbott issued a disaster declaration for 60 counties in the state to ensure "critical fire response" and urged residents to limit activities and take precautions amid the wildfire activity. He said additional counties could be added to the list if the situation required it.

The US nuclear weapon plant Pantex, located in Texas, temporarily suspended operations late Tuesday due to the massive wildfires, before resuming operations on Wednesday morning.

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Biden Says He Will Get Physical Examination Today

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden announced that he will get his physical examination on Wednesday.

"I'm going to Walter Reed to get my physical," Biden said, as quoted by the White House press pool.

In a separate release, the White House said that following Biden's routine annual physical, it will publicly release its written summary.

Biden, 81, is the oldest US president in American history. There have been concerns about his age in light of his decision to run in the 2024 election.

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Trump's Approval Rating Hits Highest Level Since 2022 – Polls

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WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) – US President Donald Trump's approval rating has hit its highest level since 2022, an aggregate of polls compiled by RealClearPolitics showed on Wednesday.

The aggregate data compiled from more than a dozen different polls showed that 42.1% of potential voters have a favorable view of Trump, compared to only 35.9% as measured in December 2022.

The current rating is Trump's highest since April 22, 2022, when only 45.8% of potential voters viewed him favorably.

At the same time, 54% of voters currently have an “unfavorable” view of Trump, the aggregate data showed.

Republican Trump now has a slight advantage over his major rival in the presidential race, Democrat Joe Biden. Only 39.8% of Americans have a favorable view of Biden, while 55.5% say their view of him is unfavorable, according to the data.

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UPDATE - US Q4 2023 GDP Up 3.2% On The Year - Commerce Dept. 2nd Estimate

(Adds details and context, paragraphs 2-8)

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - US Gross Domestic Product, or GDP, growth for the final quarter of 2023 has come in at an annual rate 3.2%, the Commerce Department said in its second reading for the period.

The number, however, lagged forecasts slightly, with Wall Street’s analyst community targeting an annual growth of 3.3% for the October-December stretch — similar to what was cited in the prior estimate for the fourth quarter. In the third quarter of 2023, annual GDP growth also came in at 3.3%.

The Commerce Department releases three GDP estimates for each quarter.

“Real gross domestic product (GDP) increased at an annual rate of 3.2 percent in the fourth quarter of 2023,” the Bureau of Economic Analysis, a unit of the Commerce Department, said in a news release issued Tuesday.

The bureau explained that the latest reading had “more complete source data" than what was available for the so-called advance, or preliminary, fourth quarter estimate issued last month.

“The update primarily reflected a downward revision to private inventory investment that was partly offset by upward revisions to state and local government spending and consumer spending,” the bureau said. “Compared to the third quarter of 2023, the deceleration in real GDP in the fourth quarter primarily reflected a downturn in private inventory investment and slowdowns in federal government spending, residential fixed investment, and consumer spending. Imports decelerated.”

In the fourth quarter, Increases in consumer spending, exports, state and local government spending, nonresidential fixed investment, federal government spending and residential fixed investment were partly offset by a decrease in private inventory investment, the bureau added.

Imports, a subtraction in the calculation of GDP, increased too, the bureau said.

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Over 100,000 Vote 'Uncommitted' in Michigan Primary Protest Against Biden's Israel Support

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) – More than 100,000 people voted "uncommitted" in the state of Michigan's Democratic primary on Tuesday in protest of US President Joe Biden's ongoing support for Israel's war on Gaza.

Preliminary results on the state's website indicated that 100,237 people or 13.26% of voters had checked "uncommitted" on their Democratic ballots. Biden received 613,237 votes, or 81.14% of the vote.

"Michigan voters are sending Biden a clear message in the February 27 Democratic primary that he can count us out. We are filling out the UNCOMMITTED bubble because we strongly reject Biden's funding war and genocide in Gaza," according to website of the Listen to Michigan anti-war campaign.

It added that "Biden must earn our vote through a dramatic change in policy."

The protest campaign was premised on former US President Donald Trump winning the state of Michigan in 2016 by about 10,000 votes. It called for residents to vote "uncommitted" in the Democratic primary to underscore to Biden that his reelection hinged on support in the state, which includes an Arab American population of more than 200,000 people.

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US Q4 2023 GDP Up 3.2% on The Year - Commerce Dept. 2nd Estimate

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - US GDP growth for the final quarter of 2023 has come in at an annual rate 3.2%, the Commerce Department said in a second reading for the period issued Tuesday.

In the advance estimate, the increase in real GDP was 3.3%.

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Biden Issues Executive Order to Protect US Sensitive Personal Data - White House

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden issued an executive order on Wednesday to protect the sensitive personal data of people in the United States from misuse by foreign countries of concern, the White House said in a fact sheet.

"The Executive Order, which marks the most significant executive action any President has ever taken to protect Americans' data security, authorizes the Attorney General to prevent the

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large-scale transfer of Americans' personal data to countries of concern and provides safeguards around other activities that can give those countries access to Americans' sensitive data," the White House said.
The order focuses on sensitive information, including genomic, biometric, geolocation and financial data, the White House said.

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(Update: adds details in paras 4-7)
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"The Executive Order, which marks the most significant executive action any President has ever taken to protect Americans' data security, authorizes the Attorney General to prevent the large-scale transfer of Americans' personal data to countries of concern and provides safeguards around other activities that can give those countries access to Americans' sensitive data," the White House said.
The order focuses on sensitive information, including genomic, biometric, geolocation and financial data, the White House said.
The order directs the US Justice Department to issue regulations with clear protections for US sensitive personal data from access and exploitation by countries of concern, the White House said.
The Justice Department will also establish regulations to protect sensitive government-related data, including geolocation information on sensitive government sites and information about military service members, the White House said.
The Biden administration will continue engagement with technology companies and other stakeholders to balance privacy, safety, competition, labor and human rights objectives, the White House said.
Moreover, Biden urges the US Congress to pass comprehensive privacy legislation, particularly to protect the safety of children, the White House said.

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US Farmers Face Trade Hardships as Government Caters to China Market - Senate Candidate

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - Farmers in the United States are harmed by US government regulations that are aimed toward catering to the Chinese market, Republican candidate for US Senate John Rust told Sputnik.

Rust's family operates several large chicken farms that produce millions of eggs for consumers in the United States and around the world. According to Rust, chicken farmers in the United States are not allowed to vaccinate their chickens against the bird flu because China will not buy any poultry products that are vaccinated against the virus. However, China vaccinates their own chickens against the bird flu, he added.

"That's unfair trade practices, that's what the American farmer and the American people are up against," Rust said. "The powers that be that are doing this are the large mega corporations, it's not the farmers. The large corporations are so scared about losing whatever markets they have in China, that the American consumer is losing out on it."

Rust said rolling back some regulations on American farms is important to keeping prices low for consumers.

In 2022, Rust recalled, some 50 million chickens had to be killed in the United States because of infections or exposure to the bird flu.

"When that happened, the retail egg price went from about two dollars a dozen to $6 a dozen, and people were just shocked because eggs have always been an economic staple, something that was always inexpensive in the grocery store," Rust said.

US trade policy is very important for American farmers, Rust said, adding that he thinks if former President Donald Trump returns to the White House, he will resolve these sort of trade issues for American farmers.

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Senate Candidate Says No More Ukraine Aid Until Wall Built on Entire US Southern Border

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WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - Republican candidate for US Senate John Rust told Sputnik that the United States should not fund more aid for Ukraine until it has built a wall on the entire US southern border in order to address the years-long border crisis.

"The issue I have with Ukraine is you have to fund our own border first before we go and fund Ukraine's border," Rust said. "I'm not for sending any money to Ukraine until our own southern border wall is built completely and funded completely from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean."

Rust, of the state of Indiana, said he "absolutely, positively" agrees that funding for Ukraine aid and US border security should be tied together in one bill.

Earlier this month, Senate Republicans blocked a $118 billion national security supplemental package that includes $60 billion for Ukraine, $14 billion for Israel and border policy reforms. Republicans claim the reforms in the bill would not do enough to deter illegal immigration on the US southern border.

However, the Senate sent over a $95 billion foreign aid bill that excludes border security reforms to the House of Representatives for consideration, but House Speaker Mike Johnson has been reluctant to take it up for a vote over differences on national security priorities. The supplemental bill includes $60 billion for Ukraine and $14 billion for Israel, among funding for other priorities.

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US Senate Candidate Says Congress Cannot Continue to Approve 'Blanket Debt Increases'

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - The US Congress cannot continue to approve blanket debt ceiling increases that will worsen the national debt, Republican candidate for US Senate John Rust told Sputnik.

"My solution for that is, number one, you cannot just give these blanket debt increases," Rust said. "I have a big problem [with that] ... The Republicans and Congress really work with the Democrats to raise the debt ceiling."

Last June, Congress passed legislation that suspended the debt ceiling until January 2025 in order to avert an unprecedented default on the federal government's obligations.

Rust, who is running for one of Indiana's Senate seats, said he supports fiscal responsibility, adding that lawmakers' should do more to rein in federal spending instead of appeasing the political establishment.

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

However, International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva recently said 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.

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

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contributing to inflation.

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US Real Estate Prices To Keep Going Up, More People to Rent Properties – Realtor

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) Real estate prices in the United States will keep going up in 2024, which would push more people to rent the properties rather than own them, a Washington-based realtor Natalya Rabchevsky told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"Home prices will likely keep rising. This is because there is not a lot of inventory for all the buyers who need/want to buy," Rabchevsly said when asked to comment on possible developments in the markets in the nearest months.

The realtor, who has worked in the US national capital area for many years, said that high prices in the area will push people to rent apartments and homes but not buy them.

"Unfortunately, I see more renters vs [versus] homeowners. Especially in the DC area - most new builds are rentals and not condos. This doesn't help the market at all," she said.

Rabchevsky also expressed concerns that the seller's market, when demand on the market exceeds supply, will continue throughout at least the entire 2024.

"Only owners who have to move are putting their houses on the market. Many owners are keeping their properties and renting them as the rental market also has low inventory," she said.

She also pointed out that lowering interest rates could shape the situation in the market. However, the US Federal Reserve has not made steps yet to make real changes, she added.

The National Association of Realtors said last week that the median existing-home sales price climbed 5.1% in January from the same period in 2023 to $379,100, marking the seventh consecutive month of year-over-year price gains.

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Blinken Talks Gaza With Saudi, Emirati Officials Ahead of Possible Ceasefire - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken held separate telephone calls with his counterparts from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to discuss matters related to Gaza ahead of a potential ceasefire deal expected this coming weekend, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a press release.

On Monday, President Joe Biden told reporters that a temporary ceasefire deal in the Gaza conflict is expected to be reached by March 4, which would allow for the release of additional hostages held by Israel and Hamas.

"Secretary Blinken and the [Saudi Arabian] Foreign Minister pledged to continue close coordination, along with the Palestinians and other regional and international partners, on ways to resolve the conflict in Gaza and prepare for the post-conflict phase," Miller said in the release

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on Tuesday.

Blinken emphasized the United States' commitment to achieving sustained peace through the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with security guarantees for Israel, Miller noted.

Miller in a separate press release said Blinken in his call with UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan also stressed continued US commitment to achieving sustained peace through the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with security guarantees for Israel.

Miller in earlier remarks told reporters that the United States continues to try to finalize a possible ceasefire deal in the Gaza conflict, but is waiting for Hamas to agree to it.

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ANALYSIS - American People Finally Learning Truth About CIA's Secret War on Russia From Ukraine

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - The truth is finally emerging for the American people about Ukraine not only engaging Washington in its games but that the US may itself have been a partner in Kiev's activities, analysts told Sputnik.

Last week, a front-page story from the New York Times, reported that the CIA created a dozen secret spy bases in Ukraine near the border with Russia over the past eight years, with the Eastern European country becoming one of Washington's most important tools for intel operations against Moscow.

STANDARD PROCEDURE

Former CIA senior analyst and Damascus bureau chief Philip Giraldi, founder and Chair of the Council for the National Interest and a founding member of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) confirmed that the CIA had used Ukraine as a base to launch operations against Russia in the post-Maidan era before the current war began in 2022.

"Yes, the CIA has had a station and bases in Ukraine since before the war started - all focused on Russia. That is what they do," he said.

DEEP STATE PLOTS

Covert Action Magazine Managing Editor and Intelligence analyst Jeremy Kuzmarov agreed that the New York Times revelations exposed deep-seated and longstanding US Deep State machinations to use Ukraine as a weapon against Russia.

"Yes. These revelations point to a deep CIA involvement in Ukraine that is a violation of the Minsk peace agreements," Kuzmarov said.

Many details were known about the CIA but this provided further information, Kuzmarov added.

"It shows how Ukrainian intelligence services with US backing were involved in the commission of terrorist acts, including assassinating pro-Russian elements in Donetsk and Luhansk and were initiating clandestine sabotage operations into Crimea," he said.

TRUTH BREAKS THROUGH

American University in Moscow President and former nuclear scientist Edward Lozansky

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agreed that the New York Times report was an exposure of the decade of denial and lies regarding secret CIA and related US anti-Russian operations based in Ukraine.

"Truth is slowly breaking through the huge fences of lies built by the collective West under its self-proclaimed leader Washington," he said.

The New York Times story marked a dramatic reversal of its previous policy of refusing to publish any of the hundreds of well-documented reports about such activities, Lozansky noted.

"One can only guess why the discredited New York Times decided to spill the beans about secret CIA bases in Ukraine. Do they finally feel the danger for their families given our non-stop sleepwalking into a nuclear holocaust?" he asked.

Western leaders have continued to ignore the increasingly exposed facts and seemed hellbent on provoking a full-scale war between the West and Russia, Lozansky warned.

"NATO's head Stoltenberg allowed Ukraine to use F-16 for strikes on targets inside Russia. Little Napoleon Macron is planning to send French troops to Ukraine. The pathetic G7 - Group of Seven major industrialized nations - and the European Union keep throwing sanctions and stealing Russian money [so] no one can sleep peacefully," he said.

CONSPIRACY REVEALED

Former US Army Lieutenant Colonel Earl Rasmussen, a military analyst and former vice president of the Eurasia Foundation said the New York Times story served to confirm many previous reliable reports that had wrongly been discredited.

"The revelation does not really surprise many who are attuned to the real situation, I for one was not. Hence, another conspiracy theory proves to be correct. So yes, the CIA has been involved with deep infiltration into Ukraine for many years, I would say even before 2013 where it was instrumental in nurturing the [2014] Maidan coup."

The New York Times story also further confirmed that the Minsk Accords were never meant by the United States and its allies to be used to end the terrorist attacks from Ukraine into the secessionist Russian-speaking provinces of Lugansk and Donetsk that cost 14,000 lives from 2014 to 2022.

"We now know that the Minsk Accords were meant as a ruse to deceive Russia and to enable the buildup and training of the Ukrainian military. We now see that the CIA/MI6 were instrumental in the targeting of Lugansk and Donetsk," he said.

Rasmussen said the emerging evidence also strongly suggested that Western intelligence organizations had been involved in terrorist attacks within Russia itself.

"I think it is also, 'highly likely' that intelligence organizations were involved in the planning, organizing, and execution of terrorist attacks within the Russian Federation," he said.

The current US-Ukraine intelligence partnership was established a decade ago after the 2014 Maidan coup in Kiev and has transformed Ukraine into one of Washington's most important intelligence partners against the Kremlin today, the New York Times story said.

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US Navy Orders $74Mln More in Tech Support For SM-2, SM-6 Missile Force - Pentagon

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WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - Raytheon has received an almost $74 million contract extension from the US Navy to continue providing engineering and technical support for its force of Standard Missiles Two (SM-2) and Six (SM-6) air defense and anti-missile interceptors, as well for those sold to Australia, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"Raytheon Company [of] Tucson, Arizona is awarded a $73,919,678 ...modification ...contract to exercise options for Standard Missiles Two and Six engineering and technical support," the release stated on Tuesday.

The contract extension also involves Foreign Military Sales (FMS) to Australia, the Defense Department said.

Most of the work on the contract will be performed in Tucson, Arizona (95%) over the coming 18 months and is expected to be completed by September 2025, the Defense Department said.

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Yougov Poll Reveals 58% Support for Peaceful Secession of California - Reports

SAN FRANCISCO, February 28 (Sputnik) - An Independent California poll conducted by YouGov said that 58% of adults in California believe the state would be happier if it peacefully seceded and maintained a relationship with the US, Newsweekly reported.

However, 60% of the 500 random adults chosen for this survey recognized the impossibility of California becoming an independent country, due to the post-Civil War decision in Texas v. White of 1869, wherein the US Supreme Court deemed unilateral secession by a state illegal, according to the report.

Academics caution against assuming immediate widespread support for a secession vote despite the high number of Californians indicating support in the poll, citing the potential influence of outspoken citizens on survey responses, the report added.

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US Army Orders $210Mln in Spare Parts For Stryker Vehicle Combat Force - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - General Dynamics Land Systems was awarded a more than $210 million US Army contract to provide spare parts to support the Stryker Brigade Combat Team, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"General Dynamics Land Systems [of] Sterling Heights, Michigan was awarded a $210,343,447 ...contract for the purchase ...of parts to support the Stryker Brigade Combat Team," the release stated on Tuesday.

The contract will also cover warehousing, repair, issue, shipment, disposal, obsolescence management, and configuration management, the Defense Department added.

Work on the contract is scheduled to take six years with an estimated completion date of

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February 28, 2030, the Defense Department said.

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US Border Crisis Unsustainable, Transforming Country - Senate Candidate

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - The years-long crisis on the US southern border is unsustainable and currently transforming the United States, Republican candidate for US Senate John Rust told Sputnik.

"I want to make sure we actually get the border wall built, it's national security," Rust said. "Eight million illegal immigrants have crossed over the border [under President Joe Biden], it is unsustainable. It's crazy what's happening, our country is being transformed by this."

Rust, of the state of Indiana, said that the border crisis is the number one reason he decided to run for a seat in the US Senate.

"My position is you have to build a full border wall from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean," Rust said. "All this talk of border security and adding agents and barbed wire does not cut it, in my opinion, you actually have to build the full border wall."

Earlier this month, Senate Republicans blocked a $118 billion national security supplemental package that includes $60 billion for Ukraine, $14 billion for Israel, and border policy reforms. Republicans claim the reforms in the bill would not do enough to deter illegal immigration on the US southern border.

Illegal immigration is a top issue for US voters this upcoming presidential election in November, according to national polls.

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

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Biden Admin. Seeks Israeli Written Assurances by Mid-March on Using US Weapons - Reports

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has imposed mid-March as the deadline for Israel to sign a commitment letter that it will adhere to international law when using US-supplied weapons and munitions in the Gaza Strip, Axios reported.

The assurance is a requirement under a memorandum issued earlier this month by President Joe Biden, who acted in response to Democratic members of the US Senate. Numerous Democrats have expressed concerns about Israel's indiscriminate bombardments of and military campaign in Gaza that has resulted in the killing of some 30,000 Palestinians and the

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displacement of some 2 million others.

Without agreeing to the request for assurances by the set deadline, US weapon transfers to the Israel will be paused, the report said on Tuesday.

Earlier in February, the Biden administration published a national security memorandum that introduces new restrictions on the use of US military aid. The administration requires recipients of US military aid to comply with international humanitarian law in the conduct of war.

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Youth in US Support Hamas More Than They Support Hunter Biden - Poll

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - Support for the Palestinian movement Hamas among people aged 18 to 24 in the United States is greater that for the son of President Joe Biden, Hunter, a new Harris Poll revealed.

A release on the poll said on Tuesday that Hamas received 27% support while Hunter Biden received 19% in the category for a favorable view of a person or group.

In a different category in which participants were asked to express their unfavorable opinions about various people and groups, 45% of respondents said they had an unfavorable view of Hamas, whereas Hunter Biden was viewed unfavorably by 59% of respondents.

The poll was conducted online within the United States from February 21-22 and involved 2,022 registered voters.

Hunter Biden is facing charges over his alleged illegal purchase of a firearm and his involvement in allegedly corrupt activities that have involved his father and other members of his family.

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US Bears Responsibility For Nearly 30,000 Deaths in Gaza As Result of UNSC Veto - Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, February 28 (Sputnik) - The US bears full responsibility for the high number of deaths in Gaza as a result of its vetoes used in the UN Security Council meetings, Russian Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said on Tuesday.

“Washington bears full responsibility for the unprecedented number of civilian victims of this escalation. Their number is now near 30,000. And that is the cost of the American veto in the Security Council on Gaza,” Nebenzia said in a meeting of the UN Security Council on Food Security.

Nebenzia also called on the UN Council members not to adopt the newly drafted US resolution on Gaza, as it is yet "another license to kill" being given to Israel.

Earlier today, UN Humanitarian Coordinator Martin Griffiths said that widespread famine is almost inevitable.

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On October 7, 2023, Palestinian movement Hamas launched a large-scale rocket attack against Israel from Gaza and breached the border, killing 1,200 people and abducting around 240 others. Israel launched retaliatory strikes, ordered a complete blockade of Gaza, and started a ground incursion into the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages. At least 29,700 people have been killed so far in the Gaza Strip, local authorities said.

On November 24, Qatar mediated a deal between Israel and Hamas on a temporary truce and the exchange of some of the prisoners and hostages, as well as the delivery of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip. The ceasefire was extended several times and expired on December 1. More than 100 hostages are still believed to be held by Hamas in Gaza.

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US Urges Israel to Keep Border Crossings to Gaza Open for Humanitarian Aid - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, February 28 (Sputnik) - The United States is urging Israel to keep the border crossings open for humanitarian aid deliveries to the Gaza Strip, US Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Robert Wood said.

"We urge Israel to keep border crossings open for humanitarian aid to enter Gaza, to facilitate the opening of additional crossings, to meet humanitarian needs at scale," Wood said during a meeting of the UN Security Council on Tuesday.

Wood also said that Israel must do more with respect to the flow of humanitarian aid into the Palestinian enclave.

Earlier on Tuesday, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths said that widespread famine in Gaza is almost inevitable amid blockades of and attacks on humanitarian aid convoys by Israeli officials and settlers.

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Carlson Says US Government Misusing Zelenskyy for Own Ends

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is being misused by the US government for its own ends, journalist Tucker Carlson said in an interview with podcaster Lex Fridman.

“I think Zelenskyy’s been completely misused by the State Department, by [US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs] Victoria Nuland, by our Secretary of State, by the policymakers in the US who have used Ukraine as a vessel for their ambitions,” Carlson said on Tuesday.

US businesses have also used Ukraine to “fleece” taxpayers in the United States, Carlson said.

There is no Ukrainian government separate from the US government, Carlson added.

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Carlson said he wants to interview Zelenskyy, after having interviewed Russian President Vladimir Putin, but Ukraine has put him on a kill list and denied interview requests.

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US UNSC Draft on Gaza is Yet 'Another License to Kill' For Israel - Russian Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, February 28 (Sputnik) - The latest US-drafted resolution on Gaza should be rejected by UN Security Council members, as it fails to call for a ceasefire and constitutes yet another license to kill given to Israel, Russian Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said.

"The alternative American draft resolution in the Security Council on Gaza does not contain an appeal for a ceasefire and is aimed at broadening the UN umbrella to the acts of Israel," Nebenzia said during a Security Council meeting on Tuesday. "This is not an alternative. This is yet another license to kill, which the United States wants to give to Israel but this time to have a Security Council signature on it. I call on members of the council not to support this destructive initiative."

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US Must Realize Consequences of Its Allies Sending Troops to Ukraine - Antonov

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) – The United States has to realize the consequences should US allies move forward with sending troops to Ukraine, Russian Ambassador Anatoly Antonov told reporters.

"It is obvious that in the context of the hybrid war unleashed by the West against us, the provocative statements of the US Army can lead to the most negative consequences. This is further confirmed by Washington's unbridled European satellites, who are talking out loud about the previously unthinkable - sending their own armed forces to Ukraine. American curators cannot help but realize what such a development of the events is fraught with," Antonov said on Tuesday commenting on a US army report where Russia was called an "enemy" of the United States.

On Monday, the US Army published a new report about Russian ground forces and tactical operations, which the US Army Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate posted to the social media platform X (formerly known as Twitter) with the question: "Do you know your enemy?"

After a Paris-hosted conference on Ukraine on Monday, French President Emmanuel Macron said Western leaders had discussed the possibility of sending troops to Ukraine and no consensus had been reached, but nothing could be ruled out, and they would do everything to prevent Russia from winning.

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Russia, US Bear Responsibility for Global Strategic Stability – Ambassador Antonov

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) – The United States and Russia share a special responsibility for global strategic stability and need to return to the principle of indivisible security in international relations, Russian Ambassador Anatoly Antonov told reporters.

"The Pentagon should have remembered the basics of international politics, given the special responsibility Russia and the United States bear for strategic stability. A return to the principle of indivisibility of security is the only way to prevent conflicts.," Antonov said on Tuesday, commenting on a US Army report that called Russia an "enemy" of the United States.

On Monday, the US Army published a new report about Russian ground forces and tactical operations, which the US Army Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate posted to the social media platform X (formerly known as Twitter) with the question: "Do you know your enemy?"

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US B-52 Bomber Conducts Emergency Landing Due to Single-Engine Fire - Air Force

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - A US B-52 bomber had to conduct an emergency landing in the state of North Dakota due to a single-engine fire, a Minot Air Force Base spokesperson said in a statement to Sputnik.

"A United States B-52H Stratofortress bomber from Minot Air Force Base, North Dakota performed an emergency landing at approximately 12:52 a.m. February 23, 2024, at Minot AFB, North Dakota due to a single engine fire," the spokesperson said on Tuesday.

According to the base, none of the crewmembers of the aircraft were injured and the Minot Air Force Base fire department arrived on the scene to extinguish the engine fire.

The incident is currently under investigation, the spokesperson noted.

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Senator Murphy Says Congress Must Authorize Military Action in Red Sea

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - Senator Chris Murphy said during a hearing on Yemen and Red Sea security issues, that Congress must authorize military action, adding that it is a constitutional duty.

"The Constitution requires Congress to authorize acts of war...We swore an oath to follow the Constitution. If we believe this is a just military action, and I do, then we should authorize it," Murphy said on Tuesday.

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Murphy added that it was crucial that the US recognize the significant risk of escalation in the Red Sea, particularly with Iran's support for the Houthi actions.

"The administration should be seeking our authority. It's our responsibility to respond to it," Senator Ben Cardin said during the hearing.

Last month, a bipartisan group of 24 House lawmakers, led by Reps. Ro Khanna and Warren Davidson, announced plans to demand President Biden seek Congress' approval for future strikes against Yemen's Houthis, citing constitutional concerns and the lack of a "national emergency."

However, the White House maintains that the strikes against Houthi positions in Yemen, which have been conducted since January 11, are "self-defense" operations and thus do not require Congress' permission.

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

Yemen's Ansar Allah movement, also known as the Houthis, vowed in November 2023 to attack any ships associated with Israel until it halts military actions in the Gaza Strip. This led the United States to announce the creation of a multinational operation to secure navigation in the Red Sea. Forces of the US and the United Kingdom later launched major strikes against Houthi positions in a bid to degrade the rebels' ability to target commercial vessels.

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Carlson Says US Sanctions on Russia Will 'Forever Change' US Standard of Living

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - The United States' sanctions on Russia will forever change its standard of living and government operations, US journalist Tucker Carlson said in an interview with podcaster Lex Fridman.

"It's not even the war, it's the sanctions that will forever change the United States, our standard of living, the way our government operates. That, more than any single thing in my lifetime, screwed the United States. Levying those sanctions in the way that we did was crazy," Carlson said on Tuesday.

Earlier this month, Carlson interviewed Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow. Carlson said his lawyers warned him that he could face prosecution for sanctions violations for interviewing Putin.

The US has imposed numerous sanctions on Russian people and entities in response to Russia's special military operation in Ukraine.

International Monetary Fund (IMF) spokesperson Julie Kozack said earlier this month that Russia's economy has surprised spectators in terms of strength and growth, despite sanctions efforts. However, the IMF expects sanctions and human capital issues to impact the Russian economy in the medium term, Kozack said.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) –
MACRON'S STATEMENT ON SENDING TROOPS TO UKRAINE
* The United Nations urges all parties to avoid inflammatory rhetoric on Ukraine, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday when asked about French President Macron's remarks on sending Western troops to Ukraine.
* The United States has no intention of deploying US soldiers to fight in Ukraine amid the ongoing conflict with Russia, Defense Department spokesperson Pat Ryder said.
* German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius ruled out sending German troops to Ukraine, adding that no one supported this idea when Macron mentioned it.
* The Kremlin has paid attention to Macron's statement about Europe discussing sending troops to Ukraine, spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.
ISRAELI INVASION IN GAZA
* The United States continues to try to finalize a possible ceasefire deal in the Gaza conflict, but needs Hamas to agree to it, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.
* US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that the United States has to replenish Israel's air defense and ensure that the country does not face threats in the region, including from Iran.
* The Hamas movement has not officially received any new draft proposals on the terms of a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, Basem Naim, the head of international relations for Hamas in the Palestinian exclave, told Sputnik.
* The World Food Programme is ready to quickly expand and scale up its operations if a ceasefire deal is reached, UN World Food Programme Deputy Executive Director Carl Skau said.
RUSSIAN ECONOMY
* The Bank of Russia excepts the annual inflation at the level of 7.6% and the GDP growth at 4.3% in annual terms by the end of the first quarter, the regulator said on Tuesday.
* The majority of the members of the Board of Directors of the Bank of Russia expect that the conditions for lowering the key rate will develop in the second half of the year, but some participants do not rule out an earlier reduction, the Central Bank said.
SEIZURE OF RUSSIAN ASSETS
* US Treasury Secretary claimed on Tuesday that there is a "strong international law, economic, and moral case" for unlocking the value of frozen Russian assets.
* The problems concerning the US's proposal to transfer the frozen Russian assets to Ukraine require a solution, not an escalation of the situation, Russian Finance Minister Anton Siluanov said.
* Canada and the United States are in full alignment on the need to unlock the economic value of frozen Russian assets and use them for Ukraine's needs, Canadian Minister of Finance Chrystia Freeland said.
* US President Joe Biden requires legal authority from Congress to take action on frozen Russian assets, White House National Security Communications adviser John Kirby said.
CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

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* Ukraine's terrorist group Aidar battalion has been included in the list of terrorists and extremists, the Russian Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) said.
* Ukraine has lost up to 485 soldiers in the Avdiivka (Avdeyevka), over the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
* The creation of a "missile coalition" by European countries to provide Ukraine with long-range weapons for attacking deep inside Russia would be a 'suicidal' step, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.
* Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) said on Tuesday that it thwarted a terrorist attack with the use of an analogue of the BZ chemical warfare agent in the Zaporizhzhia region, adding that three citizens of Ukraine were detained.

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Gaza Witnesses Worst Level of Child Malnutrition in World - WFP Official

UNITED NATIONS, February 27 (Sputnik) - Gaza is witnessing the highest level of malnutrition in the world with one child in every six under the age of two malnourished, UN World Food Programme Deputy Executive Director Carl Skau said on Tuesday.
"Gaza is seeing the worst level of child malnutrition anywhere in the world. One child in every six under the age of two is acutely malnourished," Skau said in a meeting of the UN Security Council on Food Security.
WFP is ready to scale up its operations if a ceasefire is reached, he added.
"If nothing is done, we fear widespread famine in Gaza is almost inevitable, and the conflict, which since October has claimed the lives of almost 30,000 people, and injured more than 70,000, according to the Ministry of Health in Gaza, will have many more victims," Ramesh Rajasingham read on behalf of OCHA and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Martin Griffiths, also mentioned in the same meeting.
On October 7, 2023, Palestinian movement Hamas launched a large-scale rocket attack against Israel from Gaza and breached the border, killing 1,200 people and abducting around 240 others. Israel launched retaliatory strikes, ordered a complete blockade of Gaza, and started a ground incursion into the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages. At least 29,700 people have been killed so far in the Gaza Strip, local authorities said.
On November 24, Qatar mediated a deal between Israel and Hamas on a temporary truce and the exchange of some of the prisoners and hostages, as well as the delivery of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip. The ceasefire was extended several times and expired on December 1. More than 100 hostages are still believed to be held by Hamas in Gaza.

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Carlson Says Lawyers Warned Him of Risk of US Government Prosecution for Putin Interview

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - US journalist Tucker Carlson said on Tuesday that his lawyers warned him that the United States could arrest him on sanctions violations for conducting an interview with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow.

"My lawyers, before I left … said you're going to get arrested if you do this by the US government on sanctions violations," Carlson said in an interview with podcaster Lex Fridman.

Carlson said he was happy to face such a risk and rejected the premise of such charges.

One lawyer told Carlson that his risk of prosecution depended on the sort of questions he asked Putin, the journalist said. Carlson said that such a situation is indicative of a "fascist" country.

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WFP Says Needs Port of Ashdod, Karni Crossing to Be Open to Avoid Famine in Northern Gaza

UNITED NATIONS, February 27 (Sputnik) - The World Food Programme needs the port of Ashdod and the Karni crossing to be open in order to supply food to northern Gaza and avoid famine there, WFP Deputy Executive Director Carl Skau said on Tuesday.

"But for this to happen, we need a safe and functioning operating environment for humanitarian staff. And we need the port of Ashdod and the Karni crossing to be open, so we can import food and other essential supplies swiftly and at scale," Skau said at a UN Security Council meeting on food security. "In addition, we need a working humanitarian notification system, and a stable communications network to keep humanitarian staff safe. If nothing changes, a famine is imminent in northern Gaza."

As a result of the dangerous situation on the ground, WFP has been forced to again pause deliveries of food to the north until the conditions are safe for distribution, he added.

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US Defense Official Says Houthi Attacks Drive Up Prices, Delay Humanitarian Aid

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - Houthis attacks in the Red Sea are driving up prices, delaying humanitarian aid and damaging the environment in the surrounding region, US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for the Middle East Daniel Shapiro told lawmakers on Tuesday.

"The Houthi attacks are also driving up prices and causing delivery delays on critical humanitarian items, such as food and medicine in places where they're needed most," Shapiro said during a congressional hearing. "This is adversely affecting those in need of assistance around the world, including in Sudan, Ethiopia, and indeed in Yemen itself."

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Shapiro further told members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that Egypt has seen Suez Canal transit fees decline by some $100 million per month, depriving it of a critical source of foreign currency.

These attacks, Shapiro said, have prompted more than a dozen major shipping operators to suspend transits of the Red Sea, causing a spike in insurance rates for vessels in the region.

Moreover, a Houthi attack on a commercial vessel on February 22 put the ship at risk of sinking, forcing the crew to abandon ship, and causing an 18-mile oil slick in the Red Sea, Shapiro noted.

Since November 19, the Houthis have conducted at least 48 attacks against commercial shipping and naval vessels in the Red Sea, where 15% of all global trade flows, according to Shapiro.

Yemen's Ansar Allah movement, also known as the Houthis, vowed in November 2023 to attack any ships associated with Israel until it halts military actions in the Gaza Strip. This led the United States to announce the creation of a multinational operation to secure navigation in the Red Sea. Forces of the US and the United Kingdom later launched major strikes against Houthi positions in a bid to degrade the rebels' ability to target commercial vessels.

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WFP Ready to Swiftly Expand, Scale Up Gaza Operations if Ceasefire Deal Reached - Official

UNITED NATIONS, February 27 (Sputnik) - The World Food Programme is ready to quickly expand and scale up its operations if a ceasefire deal is reached, UN World Food Programme Deputy Executive Director Carl Skau said on Tuesday.

"The World Food Programme is ready to swiftly expand and scale up our operations if there is a ceasefire agreement," Skau said at a UN Security Council meeting on food insecurity.

The risk of famine in Gaza is being fueled by the inability to bring critical food supplies into Gaza in sufficient quantities, and the almost impossible operating conditions faced by WFP staff on the ground, he added.

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Ukraine Set to Lose More Territory in 1-2 Months Without US Support – White House

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) – Ukraine is on track to lose additional territories in the coming months due to a lack of military support from the US, White House National Security Communications adviser John Kirby said on Tuesday.

“If they continue to get no support from the US, in a month or two, it is very likely that the Russians will achieve more territorial gains and have more success against Ukrainian frontlines in terms of just territory gain,” Kirby told reporters.

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He pointed out that such a situation could happen in eastern Ukraine, but also potentially in the south of the country.

Kirby stressed that the situation on the ground is dire.

US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that the need to provide additional support to Ukraine is urgent.

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US Approves $281Mln Sale of Radio Equipment to Germany - Defense Security Agency

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - The US State Department has approved a possible $281 million sale of radio equipment to Germany, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said in a release on Tuesday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Germany of High-Frequency, Very-High Frequency, and Ultra-High Frequency Radios and related equipment for an estimated cost of $281 million," the release said.

The requested equipment includes AN/PRC-117 radios, AN/PRC-160 radios, support test, and diagnostic equipment, personnel training, and training equipment, the release also said.

The contract will be fulfilled by one principal contractor, L3Harris Global Communications, Inc., Rochester from the US state of New York, the release added.

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Oil Rallies 2nd Day in Row on Talk of OPEC+ Output Cuts

NEW YORK, February 27 (Sputnik) - Crude prices rose for a second day in a row on Tuesday on rising market talk that oil producing alliance OPEC+ might resort to supply cuts in the second quarter of 2024 amid concerns about waning fuel demand.

West Texas Intermediate (WTI), the benchmark for US crude, settled up $1.29, or 1.7%, at $78.87 per barrel for the contract slated for delivery in April. The WTI benchmark has risen 3.1% since the start of this week, after closing last week down 3.4% on demand worries.

The London-traded Brent, the global benchmark for crude, closed up $1.12, or 1.4%, at $83.65 for April delivery. Brent is up just over 2% week-to-date, after conceding as much last week.

Oil industry watchers and analysts are betting on the 23-nation OPEC+ extending its oil production cuts beyond the first quarter of 2024 into the next quarter, OilPrice.com said in a report published late last week.

OPEC+ groups 13 members of the Saudi-led Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries with 10 independent oil producing countries steered by Russia.

Oil prices have been volatile since the start of this year as supply disruptions related to the

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Israel-Hamas war and worries about weakening fuel demand have both pulled the market either way.

WTI tumbled 7.4% in the first week of February before recovering 6.3% in the next. For the month thus far, WTI is still in the positive, with a gain of almost 4% after January's advance of around 6%.

Brent is up nearly 3% for February after January's rise of almost 5%.

Analysts said OPEC+ wants to secure the market for the second quarter to avoid gains thus far into the year.

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Biden Needs Legal Authority From Congress to Act on Russian Assets - White House

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden requires legal authority from Congress to take action on frozen Russian assets, White House National Security Communications adviser John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"I want to make a couple of things clear. Number one, we still need more legislative authorities from Congress for the President to be able to act on that [unlocking assets]," Kirby said during a press briefing.

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said earlier in the day that the Group of Seven countries should work together to explore different approaches to utilizing frozen Russian assets, including seizing and using them as collateral to borrow on global markets.

Russia said it would view any move to seize or use its frozen assets as an "escalation of economic aggression" and would respond harshly.

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US House Panels Subpoena AG Garland for Records on Biden's Mishandling of Documents

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) – The chairmen of the House Judiciary Committee and Oversight Committee on Tuesday issued a subpoena demanding that US Attorney General Merrick Garland provide all documents on Special Counsel Robert Hur's investigation of President Joe Biden's "willful" mishandling of classified information.

According to the cover letter accompanying the subpoena and signed by Congressmen James Comer and Jim Jordan respectively, the US Justice Department to date has not provided either records related to Hur's investigation or a deadline when it expects to produce all of the requested material.

The initial request to provide the documents was made on February 12, according to the letter.

The Judiciary and Oversight Committees are leading an investigation into business dealings and other activities of the Biden family to determine whether there are sufficient grounds to draft

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articles of impeachment against Biden.

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McConnell Says Supports Mayorkas Impeachment Trial in US Senate

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - US Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said on Tuesday that he supports holding an impeachment trial against Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas.

"I think that would be the best way to go forward," McConnell said during a press conference, when asked whether he supports an impeachment trial against Mayorkas in the Senate.

Earlier this month, the US House of Representatives passed a resolution to impeach Mayorkas for allegedly failing to secure the United States' borders from illegal immigration.

The Senate is tasked with holding an impeachment trial on the recommendation of House lawmakers, although Democrats hold a majority in the upper chamber of the US Congress. The US Senate could dismiss the impeachment articles with a simple majority.

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State Dept. After Macron Statement Says Biden Will Not Send US Troops to Fight in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden is not planning to send US troops to fight in Ukraine, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.

On Monday, French President Emmanuel Macron said Western leaders had discussed the possibility of sending troops to Ukraine and had neither reached a consensus on the matter or ruled out the possibility.

"President Biden has made clear ... that he will not send US soldiers to fight in Ukraine," Miller said during a press briefing in light of Macron's statement.

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Pentagon Says Projects F-16s Will Be Delivered to Ukraine This Year

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department expects F-16 fighter jets to be delivered to Ukraine sometime this year, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.

"I don't have any timelines to provide," Ryder said during a press briefing, when asked about the delivery of F-16s to Ukraine. "We do project that F-16s will be delivered this year, but I don't

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have any further details to provide at this stage."

Earlier this month, a US Air Force spokesperson told Sputnik that the United States is set to train a dozen Ukrainian pilots to fly F-16s this year. The pilots are expected to graduate from training between May and August, the spokesperson said.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that the delivery of F-16s to Ukraine would lead to a further escalation in the conflict, due to a modification to the aircraft that makes them nuclear-capable, which represents a direct threat to Russia.

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US Supports Sending Western Troops to Ukraine, Europe Studying Idea for Weeks – Reports

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) – The United States supports the idea of sending troops to Ukraine, and its European allies have been studying it for several weeks, the AFP said on Tuesday, citing European military sources.

The European partners are looking into this plan, and the US is supporting it, the report said.

French President Emmanuel Macron said on Monday that he does not rule out the dispatch of Western troops to Ukraine. While he did not provide details, the French Defense Ministry pointed out that Paris is not currently considering sending its military to a direct fight with Russia, the report added.

At the same time, many experts found a verbal escalation in Macron's remarks.

"This undoubtedly represents a verbal escalation. But in this arm wrestling match with Russia, you can't stop at anything, this is a poker game," French military historian Michel Goya said.

Former NATO official Camille Grand pointed out that by making such a statement, the French leader sent a "major political signal," according to the report. He expressed confidence that Macron's remarks have to reassure Ukraine of Western support, warn Russia that this situation is important to Europe, and explain to the public that Europe cannot rule out the possibility of direct conflict.

On Tuesday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Moscow has paid attention to Macron's statement about Europe discussing sending troops to Ukraine, adding that some countries that participated in a meeting held in Paris on Ukraine held a quite "wise assessment of potential dangers" of being involved in the conflict.

In addition, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that discussions of the possibility of sending military personnel to Ukraine were due to the absence of any visible results in increasing assistance in the form of supplies of ammunition and weapons to Kiev.

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US Has No Plans to Send Servicemembers to Fight in Ukraine - Pentagon

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(Updates with more details and background in paras 5, 6)

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - The United States has no intention of deploying US soldiers to fight in Ukraine amid the ongoing conflict with Russia, Defense Department spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.

Macron said on Monday that Western leaders had discussed the possibility of sending troops to Ukraine and had neither reached a consensus on the matter nor ruled out the possibility.

Several NATO states, including Germany, Italy, Poland, Finland and Hungary, have since distanced themselves from Macron's comment, emphasizing that they have no intention of deploying troops on the ground in Ukraine.

"Just to be clear. We have no plans to send US servicemembers to fight in Ukraine. The president [Joe Biden] has been pretty clear on that and that continues to be our position," Ryder said during a press briefing.

Earlier on Tuesday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Russia has paid due attention to Macron's statement about European countries discussing possibly sending troops to Ukraine, adding that some countries that participated in the meeting on Ukraine held in Paris held a quite "wise assessment of potential dangers" of being involved in the conflict.

In addition, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said the discussions of possibly sending military personnel to Ukraine were due to the absence of any visible results in increasing assistance in the form of supplies of weapons and ammunition to the Kiev regime.

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Yellen Admits Risks to Financial Stability if West Moves to Unlock Value of Russian Assets

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen acknowledged on Tuesday that the West unlocking the economic value of frozen Russian assets could threaten financial stability, but downplayed that risk.

"There are risks, the financial stability issue is a risk, and we're working to evaluate these risks and outline possible options for consideration," Yellen told reporters in Brazil ahead of the G20 ministerial meeting.

The official was asked about legal concerns related to any actions on immobilized Russian assets and about the impact they would have on financial stability and the role of the euro and the dollar.

She, however, downplayed the potential fallout.

"With respect to financial stability, I suppose a risk would arise if there were a massive shift away from currencies. But I think that is extremely unlikely, especially given the uniqueness of this situation," Yellen said.

She also added that the global economy has no real alternatives to the dollar-euro-yen financial architecture.

Yellen stressed that the G7 should work together to explore different approaches to Russian assets. That includes seizing assets and other ideas, such as using them as collateral to borrow on global markets, she added.

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After the start of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Western and EU countries imposed comprehensive sanctions against Russia, including the freezing of nearly half of the country's foreign currency reserves. Russia has maintained that any attempt to confiscate its frozen assets would violate international law.

Moscow would view any EU plans to seize or use frozen Russian central bank assets as an "escalation of economic aggression" and would respond harshly, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova warned in January.

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US Does Not Want to See Israel, Hezbollah Escalate Conflict in North – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) – The United States does not want to see either Israel or the Hezbollah movement escalate the conflict on the Israeli-Lebanese border and will continue to pursue diplomacy to find a solution for it, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.

"We do not want to see either side [Israel or Hezbollah] escalate the conflict in the north, and in fact, we are going to continue to pursue a diplomatic resolution of that conflict," Miller said during a press briefing.

Earlier this week, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said that Tel Aviv is planning to increase its strikes on Hezbollah even during a potential ceasefire in the Gaza Strip after a hostage deal with Hamas is reached.

Israel and Hezbollah have been exchanging airstrikes in areas along the Israeli-Lebanese border since last October, which pushed some 80,000 Israelis in the country's north from their homes.

A poll earlier in February showed that more than 70% of Israelis believe that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) should launch a full-scale operation in southern Lebanon to push the Hezbollah movement back from Israel's northern border.

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US Has No Plans to Send Servicemembers to Fight in Ukraine - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) – The United States has no intention of deploying US soldiers to fight in Ukraine amid the ongoing conflict with Russia, Defense Department spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.

Macron said on Monday Western leaders had discussed the possibility of sending troops to Ukraine and had neither reached a consensus on the matter nor ruled out the possibility.

Several NATO states, including Germany, Italy, Poland, Finland, and Hungary among others, have since distanced themselves from Macron’s comment, stressing they have no intention of

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deploying troops on the ground in Ukraine.
"Just to be clear. We have no plans to send US servicemembers to fight in Ukraine. The President [Biden] has been pretty clear on that, and that continues to be our position," Ryder said during a press briefing.

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UPDATE- UN on Macron's Ukraine Remarks: We Call for Avoiding Inflammatory Rhetoric

(updates paras 3-7)
UNITED NATIONS, February 27 (Sputnik) - The United Nations urges all parties to avoid inflammatory rhetoric on Ukraine, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday when asked about French President Emmanuel Macron's remarks on sending Western troops to Ukraine.
"Since the start of this conflict, we have seen a lot of rhetoric that has the potential of inflaming what is already a deadly conflict. And our call, which has been very consistent since the beginning, would be to avoid such rhetoric, and this is what we've been saying since the beginning," Dujarric said in a briefing.
The spokesman also said that Macron had not discussed with the UN the possibility of sending troops to Ukraine.
"It has not been discussed with us," Dujarric said in the briefing. "We've just seen press reports as you have. We continue to hope to see an end to the conflict in Ukraine, in line with international law, General Assembly resolutions, and the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine."
Macron on Monday said Western leaders had discussed the possibility of sending troops to Ukraine and had neither reached a consensus on the matter nor ruled out the possibility.
On Tuesday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Moscow has paid attention to Macron's statement about Europe discussing sending troops to Ukraine, adding that some countries that participated in a meeting held in Paris on Ukraine held a quite "wise assessment of potential dangers" of being involved in the conflict.
In addition, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that discussions of the possibility of sending military personnel to Ukraine were due to the absence of any visible results in increasing assistance in the form of supplies of ammunition and weapons to Kiev.
Western countries, including member states of the European Union, have been providing military and financial aid to Kiev since the start of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine in February 2022. The Kremlin has consistently warned against continued arms deliveries to Kiev, saying it would lead to further escalation of the conflict.

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State Dept. After Macron Statement Says Biden Will Not Send US Troops to Fight in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden is not planning to send US troops to fight in Ukraine, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.

On Monday, French President Emmanuel Macron said Western leaders had discussed the possibility of sending troops to Ukraine and had neither reached a consensus on the matter or ruled out the possibility.

"President Biden has made clear...that he will not send US soldiers to fight in Ukraine," Miller said during a press briefing in light of Macron's statement.

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US Trying to Push Ceasefire Deal Over 'Finish Line,' Needs Hamas to Agree - State Dept

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - The United States continues to try to finalize a possible ceasefire deal in the Gaza conflict, but needs Hamas to agree to it, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.

On Monday, President Joe Biden told reporters that a temporary ceasefire deal in the Gaza conflict is expected to be reached by March 4, which would allow for the release of additional hostages held by Israel and Hamas.

"We are trying to push this deal over the finish line. We do think it's possible ... ultimately, we would need Hamas to say 'yes,'" Miller said during a press briefing.

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Johnson Says US House Lawmakers Exploring Options to Address Ukraine, Israel Aid Bill

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives is exploring options to address a supplemental spending request with billions of dollars in aid for Ukraine and Israel, House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Tuesday.

“You also heard, I’m sure, that there was discussion about the supplemental spending package,” Johnson said during a press conference, after meeting with US President Joe Biden and other congressional leaders at the White House. “I was very clear with the president and all those in the room that the House is actively pursuing and investigating all the various options on that.”

Lawmakers in the House of Representatives will address the supplemental spending bill in a timely manner, Johnson said.

However, border security remains the top priority of House Republicans, Johnson added.

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UN on Macron's Ukraine Remarks: We Call for Avoiding Inflammatory Rhetoric

UNITED NATIONS, February 27 (Sputnik) - The United Nations urges all parties to avoid inflammatory rhetoric on Ukraine, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday when asked about French President Macron's remarks on sending Western troops to Ukraine.

"Since the start of this conflict, we have seen a lot of rhetoric that has the potential of inflaming what is already a deadly conflict. And our call, which has been very consistent since the beginning, would be to avoid such rhetoric, and this is what we've been saying since the beginning," Dujarric said in a briefing.

Macron on Monday said Western leaders had discussed the possibility of sending troops to Ukraine and had neither reached a consensus on the matter nor ruled out the possibility.

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Lawmakers Demand Information From Biden on Illegal Migrant Who Killed Laken Riley - Letter

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - Republican lawmakers Jim Jordan and Tom Mcclintok in a letter to the Biden administration on Tuesday demanded answers regarding the release of an illegal migrant who allegedly killed 22-year-old Laken Riley in the state of Georgia.

Jose Antonio Ibarra, 26, an illegal migrant from Venezuela, is accused of killing Riley last week on the University of Georgia campus, where she was a nursing student.

"The Biden administration's border and immigration policies only increase the likelihood that criminal aliens will successfully enter and remain in the United States," the letter said. "Pursuant to the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee on the Judiciary is authorized to conduct oversight of federal immigration policy and procedures."

The lawmakers requested that the Department of Homeland Security provide information regarding Ibarra's release from US government custody.

According to Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Biden administration released Ibarra into the United States in 2022 after he entered the country illegally from Venezuela, the lawmakers said.

Ibarra has been arrested and charged with malice murder, felony murder, aggravated battery, aggravated assault, false imprisonment, kidnapping and concealing the death of another.

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Schumer Says White House Meeting With Lawmakers on Shutdown Productive, Intense

WASHINGTON, February 26 (Sputnik) - US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said on Tuesday that a meeting between congressional leaders and President Joe Biden about avoiding a government shutdown and providing aid to Ukraine was productive and intense.

"It was both a productive and an intense meeting," Schumer said during a press conference after the meeting at the White House. "We are making good progress."

Schumer met with Biden, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, House Speaker Mike Johnson and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries to discuss government funding and foreign aid efforts.

The US Congress will need to pass continuing resolutions to fund the government before the March 1 and March 8 shutdown deadlines, Schumer said.

Discussions about continuing aid to Ukraine were some of the most intense in Schumer's career, the senator said. The consensus in the room was that Ukraine will lose the conflict against Russia if the US Congress does not provide more aid soon, Schumer said.

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UN Says Tensions in Mideast Must Be Urgently De-Escalated Starting With Ceasefire in Gaza

UNITED NATIONS, February 27 (Sputnik) - Tensions in the Middle East region must urgently de-escalate with the first immediate step being a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, UN Special Envoy on Syria Geir Pedersen said on Tuesday.

"The tension in the region needs to be urgently de-escalating, starting with the immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza as the Secretary General has called for," Pedersen said during a meeting of the UN Security Council.

Pedersen also said there is a need to establish a ceasefire inside Syria, building on the existing ceasefires.

After more than a month of initial fighting between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, Qatar mediated a deal on November 24 for a temporary truce and the exchange of some of the prisoners and hostages, as well as the delivery of humanitarian aid in the Palestinian enclave.

The ceasefire was extended several times and expired on December 1. More than 100 hostages are still believed to be held by Hamas in Gaza and several thousand Palestinians to be imprisoned by Israel.

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Biden Says Need for US to Provide Additional Support to Ukraine 'Urgent'

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WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that the need to provide additional support to Ukraine is urgent.

"Ukraine, I think the need is urgent," Biden told reporters ahead of a meeting with congressional leaders at the White House.

Biden said he hoped progress would be made during the discussions on the issue.

"I think the consequences of inaction in Ukraine every day are dire," Biden added.

In addition, Biden pointed out that he had discussed the issue with the Group of Seven (G7) countries and they expressed concern about the United States possibly failing to provide additional support.

The Senate sent more than a $95 billion foreign aid bill to the House of Representatives for consideration, but House Speaker Mike Johnson said he has been reluctant to take it up for a vote over differences in national security priorities.

The supplemental bill includes $60 billion for Ukraine and $14 billion for Israel, among funding for other priorities.

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UN Says Proposed Nairobi as Venue for Syrian Constitutional Committee Talks, No Consensus

UNITED NATIONS, February 27 (Sputnik) - The United Nations has proposed Nairobi as a venue for negotiations of the Syrian Constitutional Committee, but there is still no agreement on the matter, UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen said on Tuesday.

"I myself have recently proposed a further option that … a session could be convened in the UN Office at Nairobi," Pedersen said at a UN Security Council meeting on Syria. "I appreciate my UN colleagues in Nairobi being ready to do all that was required to help … However, I regret to say that consensus among the Syrian parties was not found on either venue."

Therefore, at this time, the only way forward is to reconvene in Geneva, he added.

Syria has been in a state of internal conflict since 2011. In January 2018, the Russian city of Sochi hosted the Syrian National Dialogue Congress, the first attempt since the start of the Syrian conflict to gather an inclusive pool of Syrian political forces. The main outcome of the congress was the decision to create a constitutional committee tasked with negotiating a constitutional reform in Syria. The committee met for negotiations in Geneva, but no talks have taken place since mid-2022.

In June 2022, Russia suggested that a new venue should be chosen for meetings of the committee, expressing concern that Switzerland had lost its impartiality and neutral status.

Russia expects the next session of the Syrian Constitutional Committee to take place in March or April, and that the issue with the meeting's venue will be resolved soon, Russia's special presidential envoy for Syria, Alexander Lavrentiev, told Sputnik in January.

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US Army Says Reducing Troop Levels by 24,000 in Multi-Year Restructuring Strategy

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - The US Army said on Tuesday that it will reduce troop levels by 24,000 soldiers as part of a multi-year force restructuring strategy, which comes amid recruitment problems in the US military.

The US Army conducted a Total Army Analysis (TAA) over the past year to assess its force structure, the Army said in a statement. The Army is moving forward with a significant force structure transformation to build on recent modernization and organizational shifts, the statement said.

"TAA decisions will bring down 'authorized' troop levels to approximately 470,000 soldiers by FY2029. Guided by the results of the TAA process, the Army will shrink excess, largely unmanned 'hollow' force structure and build new formations equipped with new capabilities needed for large scale combat operations," the statement said.

The Army's current force structure is designed to accommodate 494,000 soldiers, and active duty end strength is set by law at 445,000, according to the statement. The structural changes will narrow the gap between the authorized and active duty troop levels, the statement said.

The Army seeks to have at least 470,000 soldiers in active duty by fiscal year 2029, which is approximately 20,000 above the current end strength but a reduction of some 24,000 authorizations compared to the currently planned force structure, the statement said.

The reductions are to authorized positions and individual soldiers, the statement said, adding that the Army will not ask any soldiers to leave their roles.

The force restructuring comes amid recruitment challenges in the US military. The Army failed to reach its 2023 recruitment goal by approximately 10,000 recruits, US media reported in January, citing internal Defense Department data.

The Army is working to professionalize and reform its recruiting workforce and processes, the statement said. The force structure and recruitment changes will not "happen overnight" but are underway, the statement said.

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Biden Says Before Meeting With Congressional Leaders US Must Replenish Israel Air Defenses

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that the United States has to replenish Israel's air defense and ensure that country does not face threats in the region, including from Iran.

"We have to replenish the air defenses for Israel, and we have to work on making sure they don't face a threat from … what's going on in the Middle East, not just from Hamas, but from Iran," Biden told reporters before a meeting with congressional leaders.

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US House Threatens Blinken With Contempt for Withholding Afghanistan Documents –Letter

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) – US House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul threatened to hold US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in contempt of Congress on Monday for withholding documents related to a State Department review of the US withdrawal of Afghanistan.

"Tonight, House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul sent a letter to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken threatening to hold him in contempt of Congress if the department continues to withhold interview documents relied on to draft their After-Action Review (AAR) of the Biden administration's deadly and chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021," the release stated.

The AAR refers to the State Department's internal analysis of the withdrawal and was based in part on more than 150 interviews.

McCaul argued that the State Department could not use "executive branch confidentiality interests' to obstruct Congress from reviewing the interview documents. He said the committee had sought to obtain the notes "in good faith and with every effort to compromise" but the State Department had refused to respond in good faith and ignored a July 2023 subpoena.

McCaul warned that the committee would pursue holding Blinken in contempt of Congress if he did not produce the AAR team's interview notes by March 6.

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Biden to Join Teamsters Union's Presidential Roundtable Discussion on March 12 - Statement

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - The International Brotherhood of Teamsters said in a statement on Tuesday that it will host a roundtable discussion with President Joe Biden on March 12.

"The International Brotherhood of Teamsters will host a rank-and-file presidential roundtable with President Joe Biden on Tuesday, March 12, at the union's headquarters in Washington, DC," the statement said.

Biden has committed to meet with the union's executive board and members, including with President Sean O'Brien and General Secretary-Treasurer Fred Zuckerman, the statement said.

In December, the union extended invitations to all US presidential candidates for roundtable talks about matters critical to the union members and their families.

"President Biden will have the same opportunity as other candidates to discuss how, in a second presidential term, he and the Teamsters can work together to empower and protect workers, promote high labor standards, and strengthen the American economy while expanding the middle class," the statement said.

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The topics of discussion will include the issue of improving workers' wages, addressing wealth inequality, reforming corporate bankruptcy laws, enhancing antitrust enforcement in the logistics sector and making union formation quicker and safer, the statement added.

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Freeland Avoids Answering Question on Canada's Readiness to Send CAF to Ukraine

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) – Canada's Minister of Finance Chrystia Freeland avoided on Tuesday to properly address a question on whether Ottawa stood ready to deploy the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) on the ground in Ukraine.

Freeland was asked to address the remarks made by French President Emmanuel Macron who on Monday said that despite the current lack of consensus among NATO members at a Paris-hosted conference on Ukraine, sending troops to the country could not be ruled out.

Several NATO states, including Germany, Italy, Poland, Finland, and Hungary among others, have since distanced themselves from Macron's comment, stressing they have no intention to deploy troops on the ground in Ukraine.

"I want to highlight three things. On Saturday, Canada was there, and the Prime Minister was there [in Ukraine] … Secondly, Canada was there with support, with C$3 billion in financial and military assistance. Thirdly, I want to highlight that Canada is a leader regarding direct military support for Ukrainian soldiers," Freeland said in French, without addressing the matter at hand on the prospects of deploying the CAF to Ukraine.

Freeland said there was a "special depth" to Canada's direct military support to Ukraine, and noted that the CAF has trained over 40,000 Ukrainian servicemen in Poland since the onset of Operation Unifier in 2015.

Accordingly, the Minister said that Canadian soldiers were "already there", providing their direct support to Ukrainian soldiers through the training mission in Poland.

Western countries, including member states of the European Union, have been providing military and financial aid to Kiev since the start of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine in February 2022. The Kremlin has consistently warned against continued arms deliveries to Kiev, saying it would lead to further escalation of the conflict.

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US House Speaker Johnson Says Lawmakers Will Prevent Government Shutdown'

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - US House of Representatives Speaker Mike Johnson said on Tuesday that lawmakers will prevent a looming government shutdown as soon as this week.

"We are going to prevent the shutdown, we are working on that," Johnson told reporters.

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The US government will initiate a partial shutdown if lawmakers fail to pass a funding agreement by Friday at midnight. A full shutdown will begin if lawmakers do not reach a deal on the funding of government by March 8.

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US Increases Chinese Flights to 50 Per Week Starting March 31 - Transportation Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - The United States is increasing the number of weekly round-trip flights allowed from China to 50, a US Department of Transportation spokesperson told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"Yesterday, the US Department of Transportation (USDOT) issued an order that will allow airlines of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to increase scheduled passenger flights to and from the United States to, in aggregate, fifty weekly round-trip flights, effective March 31, 2024," the spokesperson said.

The Chinese government will also allow US airline carriers to make 50 weekly round-trip flights, the spokesperson added.

The number of weekly round-trip flights for each country is currently 35.

The spokesperson noted that the progress toward continuing to open up more flights between the United States and China stems from the bilateral meeting between presidents Xi Jinping and Joe Biden last November, when the two leaders reiterated the importance of maintaining ties between the people of both countries. Xi and Biden also committed to working toward a significant increase in scheduled passenger flights.

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Significantly More Americans Name Immigration as 'Most Important Problem' Facing US - Poll

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - A significantly greater number of Americans now compared to last month consider immigration to be the "most important problem" facing the United Sates, a new Gallup poll revealed on Tuesday.

"Significantly more Americans name immigration as the most important problem facing the United States (28%) than did a month ago (20%)," a release on the poll said.

Immigration has ranked ahead of all other issues as the most important problem before, having last done so five years ago when there was a surge of attempted border crossings by Central American migrants, the release said.

"Immigration also ranked as the No. 1 problem in July and November 2018 and July 2014," the release said.

A vast majority of Republicans (90%) and more than half of Independents (54%) say they consider immigration to be the most critical threat that the United States faces, but only 29% of

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Democrats share this view, the release added.
The poll was conducted February 1-20 among 1,016 adults in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia.

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Recent US Attacks on Iraq, Yemen Constitute Threat to International Peace - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, February 27 (Sputnik) - Recent US airstrikes in Yemen and Iraq are a threat to international peace and security, Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said on Tuesday.
"We have no doubt that the recent incessant American attacks on facilities in Iraq and Yemen - no matter how Washington might try to justify them - constitute a direct threat to international peace and security and undermine the world order based on the supremacy of universal international law and the central role of the United Nations," Nebenzia said at a UN Security Council meeting on Syria.
Russia is also particularly concerned about the intensification of the so called retaliatory strikes across the region by the US Air Force and Israel's ongoing airstrikes on its Arab neighbors, including from the occupied Syrian Golan and the Blue Line, Nebenzia stated.

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UPDATE - Canada, US Fully Agree on Need to Unlock Value of Frozen Russian Assets - Freeland

(Updates with more details in para 5)
WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - Canada and the United States are in full alignment on the need to unlock the economic value of the frozen Russian assets and use them to satisfy Ukraine's needs, Canadian Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland said on Tuesday.
US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said earlier in the day that the Group of Seven (G7) countries should work together to explore different approaches to utilizing the frozen Russian assets, including seizing and using them as collateral to borrow on global markets.
"Canada was very strongly involved in the initial decision to freeze the assets of the Russian Central Bank, and we have been centrally involved in the work being done to take the next step and confiscate those assets. So, I have been working closely with Secretary Yellen, she and I agree 100%," Freeland said.
Freeland was asked whether she agreed with or had concerns about comments made by Yellen about the need to unlock the economic value of frozen Russian assets.
Freeland also said she believes Russia should be the one paying the bills for Ukraine’s post-war needs and all of Kiev’s allies and partners are of the opinion that Russian assets

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should be confiscated for said purpose.
However, Russia said it would view any move to seize or use its frozen assets as an "escalation of economic aggression" and would respond harshly.

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Schumer Says Hopes US Congress Negotiates Deal to Avoid Government Shutdown

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said on Tuesday that he hopes House Republicans will negotiate with Democratic lawmakers to avert a government shutdown, which will begin if the US Congress does not take action by the end of Friday.
"I hope that in the coming days, serious-minded House Republicans can work with Democrats to find a path out of the shutdown threat," Schumer said during remarks on the Senate floor.
The US government will initiate a partial shutdown if lawmakers fail to pass a funding agreement by Friday at midnight. A full shutdown will begin if lawmakers do not reach a deal by March 8.
Later on Tuesday, Schumer will meet with US President Joe Biden, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, House Speaker Mike Johnson and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries at the White House to discuss efforts to avoid a government shutdown.
Schumer said he will also advocate for passage of supplemental funding legislation with aid for Ukraine and Israel at the meeting.
Congressional leaders should include significant policy changes that reduce spending as part of their government funding talks, lest the effort prove a "waste of time," US Congressman Paul Gosar told Sputnik on Monday.
Last week, US Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo said that he expects lawmakers to reach a deal to avoid a government shutdown.

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Canada to Provide Ten-Year $89Mln Loan to Guyana - Foreign Ministry

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) – Canada will provide a C$120 million ($89 million) loan to the Guyanese government through the Inter-American Development Bank, the Canadian foreign ministry said on Tuesday.
"Minister Hussen also announced $120 million in funding to the Government of Guyana, which will be provided over 10 years through a policy-based loan with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)," Global Affairs Canada (GAC) said in a press release.
The loan will help strengthen the protection of Guyana's marginalized populations by enhancing the country's Ministry of Social Services and Social Security and its ability to provide social

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programs, according to the release.

The loan will also include a climate-resilience debt clause, which will allow for immediate debt deference in the event of a climate incident, natural disaster, pandemic or epidemic in Guyana, GAC further said.

In addition, the loan will be supported by C$4.5 million in funding for technical assistance over four years, GAC said. Canada will also contribute up to C$9.5 million to the One Guyana Digital Skills Development Programme.

Canada also pledged C$39.2 million in funding for four new international assistance projects for Haiti, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Suriname, among others.

The announcement was made by Canadian Minister of International Development Ahmed Hussen as he represented Ottawa at the 46th Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

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Canada, US Fully Agree on Need to Unlock Value of Frozen Russian Assets - Freeland

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) – Canada and the United States are in full alignment on the need to unlock the economic value of frozen Russian assets and use them for Ukraine's needs, Canadian Minister of Finance Chrystia Freeland said on Tuesday.

"Canada was very strongly involved in the initial decision to freeze the assets of the Russian Central Bank, and we have been centrally involved in the work being done to take the next step and confiscate those assets. So, I have been working closely with Secretary [Janet] Yellen, she and I agree 100%," Freeland told reporters.

Freeland was asked whether she agreed with or had concerns about comments made by Yellen about the need to unlock the economic value of frozen Russian assets.

Yellen said earlier in the day that the G7 should work together to explore different approaches to Russian assets. That includes seizing assets and using them as collateral to borrow on global markets, she stated.

Moscow would view any moves to seize or use frozen Russian central bank assets as an "escalation of economic aggression" and would respond harshly, the Russian Foreign Ministry has warned.

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UPDATE - US, UK Sanction Iran Quds Force Leader, Houthi-Affiliated Supporters – Treasury Dept.

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(Update: adds details in paras 3-4)

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) – The United States and United Kingdom on Tuesday imposed coordinated sanctions on a deputy commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force (IRGC-QF), a member of the Houthis, and the owner-operator of a vessel used to facilitate financing for both groups, the Treasury Department said in a press release.

"Today, the Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), in coordination with the United Kingdom, is taking action against the Deputy Commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF), Mohammad Reza Falahzadeh, as well as a Houthi group member. OFAC is also designating the owner and operator of a vessel used to ship Iranian commodities that were sold to support both the Houthis and the IRGC-QF," the release stated.

The vessel in question is the Artura, owned and operated by Hong Kong-based Cap Tees Shipping Co. It has allegedly transported Iranian commodities for the network of Sa'id al-Jamal. The Houthi group member is Ibrahim al-Nashiri.

Separately, OFAC sanctioned two companies registered in Hong Kong and the Marshall Islands that own and operate the Panama-flagged vessel Kohana, which has allegedly shipped over $100 million in Iranian commodities to businesses in China on behalf of Iran's Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics (MODAFL)

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Yellen Admits Risks to Financial Stability if West Moves to Unlock Value of Russian Assets

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen acknowledged on Tuesday that the West unlocking the economic value of frozen Russian assets could threaten financial stability, but downplayed that risk.

"There are risks, the financial stability issue is a risk, and we're working to evaluate these risks and outline possible options for consideration," Yellen told reporters in Brazil ahead of the G20 ministerial meeting.

The official was asked about legal concerns related to any actions on immobilized Russian assets and about the impact they would have on financial stability and the role of the euro and the dollar.

She, however, downplayed the potential fallout.

"With respect to financial stability, I suppose a risk would arise if there were a massive shift away from currencies. But I think that is extremely unlikely, especially given the uniqueness of this situation," Yellen said.

She also added that the global economy has no real alternatives to the dollar-euro-yen financial architecture.

Yellen stressed that the G7 should work together to explore different approaches to Russian assets. That includes seizing assets and other ideas, such as using them as collateral to borrow on global markets, she added.

After the start of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Western

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and EU countries imposed comprehensive sanctions against Russia, including the freezing of nearly half of the country's foreign currency reserves. Russia has maintained that any attempt to confiscate its frozen assets would violate international law.

Moscow would view any EU plans to seize or use frozen Russian central bank assets as an "escalation of economic aggression" and would respond harshly, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova warned in January.

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US, UK Sanction Iran Quds Force Leader, Houthi-Affiliated Supporters – Treasury Dept.

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