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Archeologists Unearth Massive Plague Victim Mass Grave in Nuremberg

While the bubonic plague is best known in Europe for the “Black Death” epidemic in the 13th century and the “Justinian Plague” in the 6th century, the bubonic plague regularly ravaged Europe throughout the centuries. In modern times, an average of seven human bubonic plague cases occur a year worldwide.

Archeologists in Nuremberg, Germany have stumbled on a mass grave that could be the largest mass burial for victims of the plague ever found.

Roughly 1000 human remains have been pulled from the site, which was found during the construction of a retirement home, but experts estimate that more than 1,500 bodies could be buried there.

Precise dating has not yet been performed, but radiocarbon dating pegs the bones as coming from the 15th to 17th centuries, but other hints found at the site put it in the 1630s.

Among the remains, archeologists also found a letter dated 1634 that describes a plague outbreak in the city from 1632 and 1633 and says around 2,000 bodies were buried at the site.

The bodies were put into eight mass burials, which can be broken down into two groups, one slightly more recent than the other, the researchers said.

Plague outbreaks were common in Europe and Nuremberg specifically, with outbreaks occurring roughly every ten years in the city, starting in the 14th century. There is even a plaque to plague victims in St. Rochus cemetery, but most plague victim mass burials were held outside of the city.

"Those people were not interred in a regular cemetery although we have designated plague cemeteries in Nuremberg," Nuremberg Department of Heritage Conservation archaeologist Melanie Langbein told US media. "This means a large number of dead people who needed to be buried in a short time frame without regard to Christian burial practices."

Interestingly, some of the bones have turned green after being buried. Archeologists say this is because the site was used as a waste site for a nearby copper mill. Some coins from the early 20th century were also found amongst the remains.

The site will provide researchers insight into more than just the plague itself, but society at the time as well. Since the plague affected people of all ages and classes, the remains found at the site will give researchers a snapshot of society as a whole, rather than just the lives of individuals.

Researchers also hypothesize that the site may have been necessary because of societal conditions brought on by the Thirty Years War, which ran from 1618 to 1648.

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US Intelligence Agencies Are Targeting ‘Gaming’ Platforms

Last summer, a US Federal Judge issued an injunction on the Biden administration’s contact with social media companies regarding content moderation, writing that it may have “arguably involved the most massive attack against free speech in United States history.”

According to a new government report, the FBI, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and other agencies are working with what it describes as "gaming companies" to combat “domestic violent extremist content.”

The report notes that the DHS regularly meets with companies, which “share information with the [DHS intelligence branch] I&A about online activities promoting domestic violent extremism” and that the FBI regularly holds briefings with the companies about what it perceives as threats.

The companies interviewed in the Government Accountability Office (GAO) report include Roblox Corporation, publisher of the mega-popular online gaming platform Roblox that relies on user-generated content, Discord a social media and chat platform that includes invite-only spaces and was the site of the recent Pentagon leak and Reddit, a social media site with sub-communities, including but not in any way limited to gaming communities.

A video game publisher and social media company were also mentioned in the report but left unnamed. The report, requested by the US House of Representatives Homeland Security Committee notes that the FBI and DHS have “mechanisms for sharing information with, and receiving information from, social media and gaming companies about domestic violent extremism” including using “non-governmental organizations” regular meetings and “field office relationships with local companies.”

In the aforementioned Missouri v Biden case, the Fifth Circuit ruled that the White House, the Surgeon General’s office and the FBI “coerced [social media] platforms to make their moderation decisions by the way of intimidating messages and threats of adverse consequences” and “significantly encouraged the platforms’ decisions by commandeering their decision-making process, both in violation of the First Amendment.”

The practice described in the GAO report, regular meetings and reports with the companies, reflect the tactics used by the Biden administration to limit online speech. However, the report does not mention if the FBI and DHS make moderation requests and notes that both agencies are moving with caution regarding their interactions with the companies due to the Missouri v Biden case.

“I&A officials stated that they are refraining from such activities where necessary, while awaiting a final ruling,” and the FBI “continues to proceed cautiously, adding an additional layer of review and approval by the FBI Office of the General Counsel with respect to certain communications with social media platforms,” the report states.

Last March, Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL) the Senate Judiciary Committee Chair sent letters to several gaming companies, including Valve, Activision, Blizzard, Epic Games, Riot Games, Roblox Corporation and Take-Two Interactive, demanding that they take stronger actions to police gamers and their content. “For years extremists have exploited the community-building aspects of games to spread propaganda, radicalize and recruit users and mobilize for terrorist activities,” Durbin’s letters read, pointing to a survey by the Anti-Defamation League which found that a significant percentage of gamers (29% of adult players of Dota 2, for example) say they have encountered white-supremacist extremism while playing online.

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The GAO report notes that some extremists will use watered-down messages on larger, more heavily censored, platforms to draw in recruits to smaller or private platforms where their true intentions can be spoken about openly. While not mentioned by name during this section, this seems to be a reference to Discord, which typically involves invite-only rooms. The report notes that the DHS and other agencies have more difficulty monitoring these sites, as well as audio-only discussions.

While the GAO report notes that the FBI and DHS have programs meant to counter extremism on gaming platforms, it recommended that the two agencies develop an "overarching strategy" to handle misinformation and extremism on the platforms.

According to a new government report, the FBI, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and other agencies are working with "gaming" companies to combat "domestic violent extremist content."

The report notes that the DHS regularly meets with companies, which "share information with the [DHS intelligence branch] I&A about online activities promoting domestic violent extremism" and that the FBI regularly holds briefings with the companies about what it perceives as threats, including Roblox Corporation, Discord, Reddit, an unnamed video game publisher and an unnamed social media platform.

The practice described in the GAO report, regular meetings and reports with the companies, reflect practices used to limit online speech in the Missouri v. Biden case, but notes the FBI and DHS are taking a cautious approach while that case awaits a final ruling in the Supreme Court.

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Five People in Gaza Killed by Airdrop Package That Failed to Deploy

Adding insult to injury, the pallet of supplies reportedly killed five people in Gaza after a parachute attached to the package failed to deploy. The victims were waiting for food and other supplies when they were killed.

Five more people in Gaza were killed on Friday after a US aid airdrop package failed to deploy its parachute and the parcel fell on them. The victims were in the Al-Shati refugee camp in northern Gaza at the time, according to officials from Gaza's Hamas-run Ministry of Health.

The victims include two boys among the five who were killed and 11 others who were injured, a report on Friday said. The incident occurred at around 11:30 AM local time. A witness from the camp said he and his brother had followed the parachuted aid in hopes of getting a "bag of flour", cites a separate report.

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“Then, all of a sudden, the parachute didn’t open and fell down like a rocket on the roof of one of the houses,” said the witness. “Ten minutes later I saw people transferring three martyrs and others injured, who were staying on the roof of the house where the aid packages fell.”

A video posted to social media shows airdrop packages being dropped without functioning parachutes, but it is not clear when the video was taken.

The US, Jordan, Egypt, France, the Netherlands and Belgium dropped aid into Gaza on Friday, but thus far no government has taken responsibility for the failed airdrop. Both the US and Jordan have openly denied responsibility for the fatalities.

“We are aware of reports of civilians killed as a result of humanitarian airdrops. We express sympathies to the families of those who were killed. Contrary to some reports, this was not the result of U.S. airdrops,” US central command said in a post on X on Friday.

The government media office in Gaza lambasted the “useless” airdrops as “flashy propaganda rather than a humanitarian service”.

“We previously warned it poses a threat to the lives of citizens in the Gaza Strip and this is what happened today when the parcels fell on the citizens’ heads,” it said in a statement.

Palestinians who have been displaced by the war between Hamas and Israel have struggled to access food, water and medicine. When they wait for packages of food, they are either targeted by the Israeli military or killed by a non-functional parachute, a Qatari news channel reported.

Last month, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that at least half a million—or one in four people—in Gaza now face famine. UNRWA says Israeli authorities have not allowed the UN agency to deliver supplies to the north of the strip since January 23. The World Food Programme also said the military forced its first convoy to turn back. They have since paused their deliveries.

Around 31,000 Palestinians have been killed since the start of the war, the Health Ministry said.

On Thursday, President Joe Biden said in his State of the Union address that the US will build a temporary port in Gaza. More than 1,000 US military personnel will be deployed to work on the offshore floating pierwhich will receive commercial vessels with aid. That aid will be offloaded onto the floating pier and then transloaded on Navy support vessels. The vessels will then take it to the floating causeway, which is about 1,800 feet (500 meters) long, and then it will be transported onto land.

Biden has maintained that no American boots will be on Gaza’s ground.

Biden’s administration has continued to support Israel in the war, and has sold hundreds of millions of dollars worth of weapons to Israel. The US has also made “quite” sales as well, the total value of which is unknown. Despite half-baked calls from the administration for Israel to spare civilian lives, the US has continued to restock their supply of weapons, helping to create one of the most intense bombing campaigns in military history.

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Astronomers Discover Exoplanet With a Boiling Ocean

The exoplanet, known as TOI-270 d, was described by NASA as a Neptune-like exoplanet with a mass that is a little over 4.5 Earths. This exoplanet, which was discovered in 2019, takes 11.4 days to complete one orbit around its star and is about 70 light years away.

NASA's James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) has discovered a distant planet that could be entirely covered by water, according to a reportpublished on Friday. The planet was discovered during a quest to identify habitable exoplanets, as Webb's advanced instruments allow it to conduct detailed analysis of exoplanet atmospheres that may present key, life-sustaining molecules.

Through Webb's observations, it found water vapor and chemical signatures of methane and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere of the exoplanet. Based on these findings, astronomers believe this chemical mixture is consistent with a water world in which a boiling hot "ocean" would cover the entire surface.

"The ocean could be upwards of 100 degrees Celsius [212 degrees Fahrenheit] or more," said Professor of Astrophysics and Exoplanetary Science Nikku Madhusudhan of the Institute of Astronomy at the University of Cambridge, who led the analysis. He adds that an ocean this hot could still be liquid due to the high atmospheric pressure, but it isn't clear whether or not the planet would be habitable.

The absence of ammonia is another reason as to why scientists believe his exoplanet may have an ocean on its surface, even though it should naturally occur in a hydrogen-rich atmosphere, based on chemical principles.

Madhusudhan adds that TOI-270 d could be a Hycean planet, which is a particular type of exoplanet that contain hydrogen-rich atmospheres and support large liquid oceans. It was once thought that these Hycean planets could support life, though a recent study suggests that may not be the case, as these planets would suffer from a catastrophic runaway greenhouse effect and could limit their potential to host life.

TOI-270 d is also tidally licked, which means one side faces its star—which is a red dwarf—and the other side is bathed in eternal darkness, creating an extreme temperature difference. The planet would also have an atmosphere with tens or hundreds of times the pressure at the Earth's surface.

"The ocean would be extremely hot on the day side. The night side could potentially host habitable conditions," said Madhusudhan. "We need to be extremely careful about how we communicate findings on this kind of object," he added. "It's easy for the public to jump on to the idea that we're finding life already."

Astronomers also detected carbon disulphide, which has been linked to biological processes on Earth, though it can be produced in other ways.

"We can't tie [carbon disulphide] to biological activity," said Madhusudhan. "In a hydrogen-rich atmosphere, it is relatively easy to make it. But if we're able to measure the unique molecule it's promising that we should be able to measure habitable planets in the future.

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Polarization is the Nature of US Politics: Biden Swaps SOTU Address for Campaign Speech

During the US president's address on Thursday, he attempted to argue as to why his policies are working, and claimed that the state of the country is better under his administration than that of former President Donald Trump's, due to his predecessor's poor handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

On Friday, Sputnik's Fault Lines was joined by TV radio show host Edward Woodson, and John Jackson who is the former chairman of the Dekalb Democratic Party. The hosts and their guests discussed US President Joe Biden's State of the Union Address.

The address was less like the annual state of the nation speech that it is meant to be, as Biden leaned into politics in preparation for this year's presidential election. Without saying his name, Biden derided Trump and those who stormed the Capitol on January 6, as well as criticized conservatives who are unable to see Russia as a threat.

"Well, it wasn't a State of the Union, it was a highly partisan speech. It was a campaign speech, is what it was. So, it wasn't a State of Union. I've never actually seen a State of the Union like that because it was a kickoff to the campaign," said Woodson.

Jackson agreed that over time, the State of the Union speech has become a "partisan affair" but acknowledged that Biden seemed less like his usual "Sleepy Joe" self, and seemed more alert during his speech.

"You know, I think that it was a pretty good State of the Union. He hit all the points he needed to, he came alive. He was not 'Sleepy Joe.' Like, everybody was worried about him being 'Sleepy Joe.' That nickname that Trump has given him, he's lived up to it, but he didn't live up to it last night. The question is, can he be this 'Dark Brandon' through November? The reality is that it's 'Dark Brandon,' until he needs to be to motivate the Democratic base to turn out," Jackson countered.

"If he's not this alive person who can snap back, who can speak coherently, he won't win. So, I think that, honestly, the State of the Union has become a partisan affair, it's not what it used to be. It is very much a partisan affair, is not an objective government speech. It's always going to be politicized no matter who is doing it. It's the nature. It's the polarized America that we're in," he added.

The hosts and their guests then discussed the bipartisan border security bill that Republicans, encouraged by former President Donald Trump, killed. Now a bipartisan group of House lawmakers are calling on House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) to stage a vote on similar legislation in an effort to give Ukraine continued military funding in exchange for funding for the US-Mexico border.

"If Republicans really want immigration reform, they really want that border bill, then don't sink a bill because Trump told you to," said Jackson.

"The president was right, that deal had bipartisan support, and Trump calls members of Congress to tell them to vote it down because he wants this to be his issue," he continued.

"That's stuff you can't pull if you want to be serious. This is why Republicans are going to lose the House, and I think Democrats will retain the Senate. And I will be honest, Joe Biden's a weak candidate, but his only hope of getting reelected is the down ballot success of Democrats puts him over the top."

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But Jackson also maintained that a majority of Americans no longer see the justification for funding a proxy war while inflation, job creation, homelessness, healthcare, and affordable housing are primary concerns for them.

“A lot of people who are employed are struggling to make ends meet because the cost of living is so high. And I think that a lot of people can empathize with Republicans when they block foreign aid, and there's all these people in America in need,” he added.

“Now, the gaslighting of this is that, it’s not like Republicans would send stimulus to Americans or they would cut taxes for the rich – that's the gaslight, but the reality is they are right when questioning the sending of money all over the world where we have people struggling in America.”

Predicting the outcome of the US election this year is difficult, as pollshave shown a majority of US voters feel a lack of enthusiasm for both Biden and Trump, and a slim margin separates the two in their polls. But the hosts and their guests considered the phenomenon in which American voters will vote for a candidate in an effort to “vote against” the candidate they see as less desirable.

“When you're voting against somebody and you are not necessarily excited about your candidate. You know, there's a lack of enthusiasm and what that is going to be is that people aren't gonna go vote, they're gonna stay home,” said Woodson.

“And that's a big problem for Democrats always, is that 'get out the vote,' right. Democrats are always talking about 'souls to the polls' and all these machinations that they use to get people to the polls. That's the big problem, actually getting people motivated to go out, whereas with Trump, with the Trump base, they're psyched to go out and vote.”

Jackson agreed with his fellow guest, adding that having more exciting Democratic candidates on the ballot— who are running for any statewide office position—matters, as they may be able to draw more enthusiasm for the act of voting.

“I 100% agree,” he said. “Earlier I said it's going to come to the down ballot, and I say that from experience. Biden would not have won Georgia in 2020 without Reverend Raphael Warnock being on the ballot, turning out Black voters in Georgia. Jon Ossoff as well."

"Jon Ossoff did a good job doing that as well. So, I think that we can't underestimate a good US Senate campaign, what that does for President Biden. So, in states where there are good Democratic candidates running for governor or US Senate, or any statewide office, that does give the president a boost.”

During his address on Thursday, Biden also defended his stance on Israel which has lost him the support of voters who are young, Arab American and/or Muslim.

The president maintained that Israel has a right to defend itself, but said that the US military will build a temporary emergency pier that will allow civilians desperate for food and medicine to have access to aid — adding that no US boots will be on the ground. Biden continued to reference his hope for a two-state solution, despite Israeli leaders repeated rebuffs at such an idea.

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Blinken Reportedly Presses Henry to Step Down Amid Haiti Turmoil

Critics of the prime minister say he has no legitimate right to his position and have accused the US and its allies of trying to sustain a corrupt elite. The new surge of unrest is reported to have caused a dramatic increase in the country's humanitarian needs, and has displaced thousands.
Just 700 miles from Florida, Haiti has fallen under a wave of violence as gangs and others urge Prime Minister Ariel Henry to step down. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has also reportedly pressed Henry to announce his resignation and a political transition in a series of "tense" phone calls on Thursday.
This comes a day after State Department spokesman Matthew Miller denied that the US had urged Henry to step down. The prime minister is a 74-year-old unelected physician who was sworn in July 2021 less than two weeks after President Jovenel Moise was assassinated.
"We are not calling on him or pushing him to resign," Miller told reporters on Wednesday. "But we are urging him to expedite the transition to an empowered and an inclusive governance structure that will move with urgency to help the country prepare for a multinational security support mission to address the security situation and pave the way for free and fair elections."
"For more than a year, the United States has encouraged Prime Minister Henry and other key stakeholders in Haiti to reach a compromise that will end the ongoing political stalemate," Miller said in a statement. "In the past week, the political crisis in Haiti, combined with escalating violence and civil unrest, has created an untenable situation which threatens the country's citizens and security."
Thomas Shannon, a former undersecretary of state who was involved in the removal of two previous Haitian leaders, said the US' back-and-forth and lack of certainty over who would replace Henry is fueling the crisis.
"It's really up to the United States and CARICOM to really identify who's got to run that place and then give them the resources to run it and the political muscle to run it," said Shannon. "But what they've done so far is they've kind of left Henry to float, do what he can to manage his relationship with other parts of the state, like the police, and there's been no real willingness to back him. The unwillingness of the United States to participate in any direct peacekeeping operation is just shameful."
The US is now considering deploying a Marine security team to Haiti amid the deteriorating security situation there, defense officials have said. The Marines would be deployed at the request of the State Department, the defense official added.
"Deploying a FAST platoon is one option at the DoD's disposal should the DoS request assistance with security at the U.S. Embassy in Port Au Prince," Maj. Mason Englehart, a spokesman for Marine Corps Forces South, wrote on Friday.
The surge in violence first began last weekend after Henry left for a meeting of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) states in Guyana. He then flew to Kenya for talks on deploying the east African nation's police to Haiti to curb gang violence — despite a high court ruling in Nairobi that the deployment would be unconstitutional.
On February 29 when Jimmy Cherizier, an ex-police officer turned gang leader commonly known as "Barbecue" who leads a syndicate of gangs, vowed to stop Henry returning to Haiti. The government then announced a three-day state of emergency with a night-time curfew on Sunday after the gangs stormed two major prisons and freed 3,800 inmates.

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Henry has been unable to return to Haiti since the violence began. He was returning home on Tuesday when the Dominican Republican, with which Haiti shares the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, denied his plane permission to land. It was reported that he then headed for Puerto Rico, a US territory.

Haiti's new surge of unrest has caused a dramatic increase in the country's humanitarian needs, displacing thousands, leaving many without shelter and without access to food and medical services, The New Humanitarian announced.

But Haiti's problems can be traced back to colonial times, when the nation became the world's first Black republic in 1804 and was forced to pay billions to France in order to secure its freedom. The debt crippled the nation economically, and subsequent political problems and natural disasters have contributed to its turmoil.

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Nanoplastics Linked to an Increase in Heart Attacks And Strokes - Study

Roughly a week ago it was reported that boiling one's water could help reduce the amount of microplastics in it by nearly 90%, as long as that water is hard water. At the time, scientists were still studying the extent to which nanoplastics could cause harm to one's body.

A new study says that people with nanoplastics inside their bodies are 4.5 times more likely to suffer from a heart attack, stroke or die of other health related concerns over the next three years than people without them, scientists say.

The study was published in The New England Journal of Medicine, and explained how micro- and nanoplastics (NMPs) are "emerging" as a potential risk factor when assessing cardiovascular disease. It is the first time that such a connection has been made.

Nanoplastics are tiny bits of plastic that can be as small as one-thousandth of a millimeter in diameter, though the definition applies to any small plastic piece that is less than five millimeters long in length. They are ubiquitous, long-lasting, and often require centuries to break down. But cells responsible for removing waste products can't readily degrade them, so microplastics accumulate in organisms.

These NMPs, about the size of a virus, are the perfect size to adversely affect how human cells function, and are capable of passing through key protective filters in one's body including the intestinal lining and blood brain barrier. They have also been found in our food, breast milk and even the clouds in our skies.

The researchers studied a group of patients who were already scheduled to undergo surgery for a condition known as carotid artery stenosis, which occurs when the carotid arteries—the main blood vessels that carry blood and oxygen to the brain—become narrowed after plaque, or fatty deposits, block normal blood flow. These arteries typically help supply blood to the brain. Face and neck.

The researchers looked at plaque that was removed from 256 patients and tracked their health for an average of 34 months following the surgery. They found plastic particles, many of which were NMPs in the plaque of 150 patients—about 60%. At the follow-up, nonfatal heart attack,

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nonfatal stroke or death from any cause occurred in 20% of those patients and in 7.5% of the patients without detectable plastic particles.
Chemical analyses showed that a majority of the particles were composed of either polyethylene, which is commonly used and is often found in food packaging, shopping bags and medical tubing.
“To date, our study is the first that has associated the plastic contamination with human diseases,” said Raffaele Marfella, lead author of the study.
“Our data must be confirmed by other studies and on larger populations,” said Marfella, professor of internal medicine and director of the department of medical and surgical sciences at the University of Campania Luigi Vanvitelli in Naples, Italy. “However, our study convincingly highlights the presence of plastics and their association with cardiovascular events in a representative population affected by atherosclerosis.”
Researchers are curious as to how 40% of the participants showed no evidence of microplastics in their plaques, given that microplastics are ubiquitous. One of the study's co-authors says it could be that the participants behave differently or have different biological pathways for processing plastics, however, more research is needed.

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Brussels Creates Food Crisis Simulation Amid Farmers’ Protests

Over two days in central Brussels last month, about 60 European Union (EU) and government officials, food security experts, industry representatives and journalists met with each-other to confront the possibility of a food crisis.
The COVID-19 pandemic, Western sanctions against Russia which backfired spectacularly, as well as shipping route disruptions due to geopolitical, and climate related issues have caused prices to skyrocket. Now, unpredictable and destructive climate change caused by humans is exacerbating the issue, prompting Europe to prepare for a full-scale food crisis.
And so at the beginning of February, Project Partners Sciences Po, Prospero & Partners, Chatham House, European Policy Centre and INRA organized a food crisis simulation while distraught farmers protested across Brussel’s roads and streets.
During the first part of the simulation, participants took up roles as "Task Force" members who were entrusted with the task of formulating policy recommendations for EU lawmakers, in order to address the food crisis, a recent report on the simulation said. Participants were split up into different groups: crisis response mechanisms, agriculture & food production, and trade & finance.
In the same city where the workshop was being held, farmers in convoys of tractors were protesting by throwing firecrackers, eggs, and beer bottles at police while urging political leaders to provide relief from rising prices and other bureaucratic restrictions. And a few days prior to the food simulation crisis in Brussels, protestors and demonstrators spilled 160 tons of Ukrainian grain from rail cars at a station in Poland.

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Until now, Europe has been in an enviable position regarding their food security. Western countries are generally the best fed in the world, and are one of the world's biggest suppliers of foodstuffs from grains and dairy to pork and olive oil. In 2021, the EU's average household spending was 14% compared to some 60% in Nigeria and 40% in Egypt.

But weather and climate events are hitting farmers regularly and cost the EU more than €50 billion ($54.3 billion) in economic losses in 2022 as a result of the soaring cost of fertilizers and energy needed to grow crops.

In addition, political decisions made by European bureaucrats contribute to rising food prices. Denmark and Sweden refused to continue investigation into the Nord Stream sabotage reportedly committed by the US which cause a sharp upsurge in energy prices in Europe, subsequently contributing to rising costs for farming and transportation. Having been cut off from the cheap Russian energy and imposed sanctions on any company cooperating with the Russian business or state, European policy makers shot themselves in the leg.

Now, chickens come home to roost as European farmers launch anti-government demonstrations almost on a daily basis demanding decisive actions to ease the situation, refusing to send more money to Ukraine when prices in Europe are constantly going up.

The simulation predicted that this crisis will continue, and that in 2025 thieves will be seen looting supermarkets while police struggle to contain riots in the cities. Meanwhile, those living in Germany won't be able to find fish and meat at their grocery stores.

The simulation reportedly addressed solutions which included: building reserves, food provision for the most food insecure, and a cut on subsidies for livestock farmers as a way to veer away from the EU's overreliance on crop imports like soy. A move that farmers, who are already fed-up with bureaucratic choices like these, probably wouldn't appreciate. A unanimous decision that diets should be pushed away from meat and towards vegetarian options was also introduced.

But a two-day workshop, where participants were reportedly served food and refreshments, will not be enough to address this long-term issue.

"We've been living in crisis for the last three years," said Chris Hegadorn, a retired US diplomat who co-organized the workshop, and an adjunct professor of global food politics in Paris.

"There's a lot more to be done on every level. Crises are only going to come faster and harder."

At the end of January the Food System Economics Commission (FSEC) reported that if the global food system were overhauled, trillions of dollars worth of benefits could be brought back into the global economy.

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V-22 Osprey Returns to the Skies While Cause of Deadly Crash Still Unknown

The complex US aircraft suffered a pair of deadly crashes last year in the Pacific region, where the United States is expanding its military presence with an eye towards China.

A temporary flight ban on the controversial V-22 Osprey aircraft has been lifted by the US military as investigators still work to nail down the causeof last year's deadly crashes.

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“We have high confidence that we understand what component failed and how it failed,” said Col. Brian Taylor of the US Marine Corps, one of three US service branches that operates the complex tilt rotorcraft. “I think what we are still working on is the why, and so that is still in the hands of the investigation.”

Taylor refused to elaborate further, citing security concerns relating to the plane’s unique design.

All Osprey aircraft were grounded by the US Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps in November after a deadly crash off the coast of Japan claimed the lives of eight service members. The incident was the plane’s second mishap in 2023 following another crash in Australia that killed three. The Osprey also suffered a pair of deadly accidents the year before, one of which has been blamed on a problem with the aircraft’s clutch.

The plane has claimed the lives of more than 50 US service members altogether in various crashes since its initial deployment in 2007.

The Osprey’s convoluted design allows it to take off vertically like a helicopter and then rotate its wings to fly at the speed of a prop plane. The difficulty of operating the aircraft has led to a series of accidents attributed to pilot error.

But observers have long blamed material failure as well, with the plane being grounded several times as investigators examine its components. Witnesses of November’s fatal crash say one of the Osprey’s engines caught fire before the aircraft plummeted into the ocean.

Air Force Special Operations Command Lt. Gen. Tony Bauernfeind, who oversaw the eight airmen killed in November’s accident, believes the event was caused by material failure. He hopes revamped training and maintenance protocols can prevent a similar incident in the future. But Bauernfeind notes the Osprey’s hardware will see no changes before returning to service.

The V-22 Osprey is prized within the US armed forces for its ability to ferry troops and supplies to locations lacking traditional runways, such as remote islands in the Pacific. The United States is pursuing a renewed focus on the region amidst concerns over the economic rise of Russia and China.

The US Army announced a major restructuring last week to prepare the force for “large-scale combat” in the Pacific region. The US also sold a $75 million weapons package to authorities in Taiwan recently allowing the island’s armed forces to more easily integrate with weapons systems in the United States, Japan, South Korea, and Australia.

The US has long worked to pursue cooperation among these and other countries in the Pacific to prepare for potential conflict with China. 2023’s two Osprey accidents share the commonality of both taking place in that region, where the United States’ military buildup has caused consternation for Beijing.

"The US military, while professing that it safeguards the region's peace and stability, has behaved unscrupulously under the protection of extraterritoriality,” said Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin last year when asked about the Osprey crash in Japan. “While professing it protects the security of allies, the US has become a source of insecurity for its allies.”

“The Osprey aircraft involved in this accident has experienced multiple severe accidents, leaving many injured, dead or missing,” Wang added. “The US needs to take a serious and responsible attitude, take seriously the concerns of the local people, have a thorough investigation into the accident, give a reasonable explanation to relevant parties, and restore peace and tranquility in the region.”

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China has not been involved in a major military conflict since the short-lived Sino-Vietnamese War in 1979.
The United States' longtime military presence of 54,000 troops in neighboring Japan has been opposed by many locals of the island nation. US service members in Okinawa, which hosts most of the soldiers, have been implicated in over 6,000 criminal acts there, including rape and sexual assault.
Japanese officials expressed concern over the continued operation of the V-22 Osprey aircraft last year, sounding the alarm "about the fact that the Osprey has been flying without sufficient explanation of flight safety confirmation, despite repeated requests by the Government of Japan," per the country's defense minister Minoru Kihara.
"We have concerns about what is going on," said Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno in December.
Meanwhile, China has unveiled its own version of the V-22 Osprey's tilt rotorcraft design. Chinese officials claim their take on the technology addresses various efficiency and ease-of-use issues of the Osprey. The Chinese aircraft features a four-propeller design, reportedly allowing it to continue to operate even in the event that one of its rotors fails.

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Is Biden's Idea to Establish Port in Gaza What It Seems?

Critics have ridiculed Biden's proposal to establish a temporary pier in Gaza to deliver humanitarian aid. Some have even suggested it could be a front for espionage or military aggression.
After months of sharp criticism from Arab Americans and pro-Palestine activists, US President Joe Biden finally responded to calls to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza Thursday with a new proposal during the State of the Union address.
"More than 30,000 Palestinians have been killed, most of whom are not Hamas," admitted Biden, appearing to endorse a death toll from Gaza's local health ministry he had previously discredited. "This war has taken a greater toll on innocent civilians than all previous wars in Gaza combined."
Biden's solution: a US-built pier on Gaza's coast allowing Palestinians in the enclave to accept maritime aid shipments from Cyprus and other countries.
The proposal was greeted with skepticism from various quarters.
"We need to live normally like other people in the whole world. Establishing a port in Gaza will not change the reality," said Bader Al-Saif, a professor of history at Kuwait University. "How long is it going to take to build a port? The aid was needed yesterday."
"A temporary pier that could take weeks to construct or airdrops are not a solution," read a statement from the International Rescue Committee. The US must use its influence to ensure that Israel lifts its siege of Gaza… and allows the safe and unimpeded movement of humanitarian workers and aid – including fuel, food, and medical supplies."

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Israel also raised the prospect it could continue to delay and obstruct aid sent to the temporary port, with foreign ministry spokesman Lior Haiat insisting the shipments would be subject to "security checks" in a post on the X social media platform (formerly Twitter). Israel has used the pretense of security inspections to slow the movement of aid by land into Gaza to a trickle.

The logistical complexity of the scheme – necessitated by Israel's continued blockade of road crossings – has led many to dismiss it as merely a PR stunt. Former US State Department counterterrorism analyst Scott Bennett offered another criticism of the proposal in an interview with Sputnik Friday.

"In an amazing display of theft or irony, President Joe Biden has taken the very idea which I, Scott Bennett, put forth two and a half months ago on various international TV platforms," said Bennett, "which specifically laid out a plan to build a navy flotilla of ships from the BRICS nations – plus Iran, Turkiye, and Saudi Arabia – to sail to Gaza and deliver humanitarian aid and build piers… that they lease from the Palestinian government in an effort to re-develop that area for long-term projects."

"This speaks volumes, and among other things, tells me that Joe Biden and his CIA and his NSA and Israeli Mossad are actively listening and reading Sputnik, RT, Press TV, and other international channels that provide an alternative view that the mainstream American media does not dare discuss," he speculated.

Bennett agreed the proposal was "a political survivability maneuver by Biden," also calling it "a potential deception operation in which a pier can give a firm permanent foothold in the area and give [the United States] a listening post, if not a control capability of Palestine, which the Israelis will then exploit."

He speculated the pier could be used as an entrypoint for spies or US troops and compared the idea to Former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's 2019 "humanitarian convoy" stunt in Venezuela, noting "this is routinely done by the United States in color revolutions."

The former psychological warfare officer also insisted the plan was a response to the public backlash against Israel's deadly Western-backed Gaza campaign, which has manifested in the election of George Galloway in the UK and the campaign by Democratic Party activists to vote "uncommitted" in the party's presidential primaries.

Almost 31,000 Gazans have died amidst Israel's military operation in the besieged enclave, according to the latest figures from the local health ministry. The number includes several deaths by starvation as Israel has bombed food production facilities in Gaza and prevented food shipments from entering.

Fundamentally, Bennett said the idea is an act of "political posturing" on the part of the Biden administration to distract from the "demonic violence, bloodlust and genetic hatred" demonstrated by the Israeli assault on Gaza. Meanwhile, he noted that US "secret supplies of weapons given to the Israeli government are kept off the books to avoid public scrutiny."

"It's an act of treason and theft against the American people by stealing from their treasury and secretly depositing it in Israel's treasury," he claimed, noting that the United States has sent over 100 secret arms packages to the country since October. Only two of the shipments have been publicly reported.

Bennett called the US' covert military action since 9/11 a "lethal wound which killed the American Republican form of democracy, where government was a servant of a people not its tyrannical jailer, abuser or a pathological liar."

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Although Al-Saif questioned the effectiveness of Biden's temporary pier gambit, he said the idea was quite revealing about the US response to the latest escalation of the Palestine-Israel conflict.

"It sends a very bad signal on US leadership," said the academic. "It reinforces what many Arabs think: that Israel is running the show, and the US follows."

"Our problem is not aid," said Wissam Thabet, a 40-year-old Palestinian refugee interviewed by The Washington Post. "We need a ceasefire. We need to end the suffering completely."

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Europe's Arms Industry Decades Behind – Dassault CEO

Many years of strategic investment would be required to build weapons capable of challenging Russia and other world powers, according to the manufacturing chief.

EU leaders have floated plans to rebuild the continent's defense industry in recent weeks, but the head of one major aircraft manufacturer says decades of investment are required if Brussels hopes to develop technology on par with Russia and others.

"Europe believes all of a sudden that working on defense is a good thing," said Dassault CEO Éric Trappier in an interviewwith British media. "I'm delighted that realization is there. Between that realization and the reality of building a European defense industry it's going to take many years and even many decades."

At stake is the Western-backed Ukraine proxy war against Russia. EU leaders fear the potential return of former US President Donald Trump to the White House will force Europe to shoulder the responsibility of arming Kiev. Such a scenario would require US weapons, if not US funding, but Europe hopes to eventually build its own capacity to produce arms for the Maidan regime.

It would be no easy task. European defense budgets have been shrinking for years, with leaders becoming increasingly dependent on the United States as NATO has expanded across the continent. And the recent spate of protests across the EU would suggest citizens are far more interested in social services than military investment as Europe's economic outlook sours.

Observers also question whether the European Union has the expertise to build a competitive arms industry. The EU focuses on fine tuning trade directives and overseeing markets; there's little to suggest Brussels is capable of building an entire industry almost from scratch in the way Beijing does.

"If you look at war economies, you make weapons, not regulations, and you have an economy that puts defense at the heart of all its preoccupations," said Trappier. "There too, we're not quite there yet."

The prospect of an EU-led revitalization of the European defense industry is already drawing criticism. "We would not accept a power grab by the [European] commission," said one anonymous top EU diplomat.

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"The commission doesn't have to incentivise this… There's no need for this style of planned economy," they added, calling a plan favored by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen "pure fantasy."

The EU has long been criticized for an alleged "democratic deficit," with critics saying too much power is centralized in the hands of European Commission leaders. The argument played a major part in UK voters' decision to ditch the EU in 2016. Giving leaders in Brussels power to oversee defense policy as well would likely prove highly controversial, perhaps leading more countries to leave the bloc behind.

A ramp up in arms production also faces economic hurdles.

COVID lockdowns damaged supply chains throughout Europe, as has decades of neoliberal trade policy. A few countries such as the UK have retained lucrative weapons production capabilities in some specialized areas. But manufacturers are deeply dependent on global sourcing. High energy costs are also a major challenge as sanctions on Russian gas continue to batter European industry.

If Europe does begin to rebuild its defense capabilities it's not a given it will ever make up for its late start, as even Western observers admitRussia's weaponry is best in class.

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Western Media Takes Notice of Starvation in Gaza as Millions Face Famine

"The use of starvation of the civilian population as a method of warfare is prohibited," according to rule 53 of the International Committee of the Red Cross's Humanitarian Law Database.

After unprecedented criticism, The New York Times was forced to admitlast week an article parroting Israeli atrocity propaganda of mass rape on October 7 lacked evidence.

Now, amidst claims of a racist witchhunt targeting Arab writers, the controversial newspaper has inched closer towards acknowledging Israel's use of mass starvation against the residents of Gaza. One Palestinian family's story appeared Saturday on the Times' website.

"It is all too easy to trace the skull beneath the Gazan boy's face," began the article, written with the assistance of Bilal Shbair, a Gaza resident the newspaper has worked with over the last few days after months of criticism of its coverage. "In one of a series of news photographs of the boy, Yazan Kafarneh, taken with his family's permission as he struggled for his life, his long-lashed eyes stare out, unfocused."

"By Monday, Yazan was dead."

"The pictures of Yazan circulating on social media have quickly made him the face of starvation in Gaza," acknowledged the Times, recognizing a phenomenon that's gradually forced major news outlets to respond to the inadequacy of their reporting.

A similar dynamic occurred when US Airman Aaron Bushnell self-immolated in front of the Israeli embassy in Washington last month in a dramatic act of political protest. Video of the shocking incident went viral, forcing mainstream media to pick up the story even though a similar protest last year in Atlanta drew little attention.

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State broadcaster NPR spent a little over a minute covering the incident before pivoting to generalized discussion of political protest by US veterans, invoking the liberal hobgoblin of the January 6 riots and clarifying “the Jewish state… claims self-defense.”

Just under 31,000 Palestinian lives have been lost amidst Israel's "self defense" according to the most recent estimates. At least 300,000 are at risk of dying within days like Yazan did.

Widespread knowledge of that, too, is made possible in part by the existence of the Internet. In 1977, journalist Carl Bernstein shocked the world with revelations of large-scale efforts by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to shape journalism in the United States. More than 400 reporters had secretly worked with the agency, according to Bernstein, as part of an effort that secured the cooperation of “America’s most powerful news media.”

Chief executives at newspapers like the Miami Herald, broadcast outlets like ABC and NBC, and wire services like AP, UPI, and Scripps-Howard all lent their support. “By far the most valuable of these associations, according to CIA officials, have been with The New York Times, CBS and Time Inc,” wrote Bernstein.

The efforts were part of a program known as Operation Mockingbird.

US allies presided over their own attempts to bend global media to their will. Perhaps one of the most significant only came to light in 2020, when declassified documents revealed that for decades Reuters had been funded by an anti-Soviet propaganda unit linked to British intelligence.

The existence of social media makes certain stories more difficult to ignore, as much as Western countries try to mold public opinion there, too. When all else fails, the blunt instrument of legislative action remains a final option.

The full extent of intelligence agencies’ infiltration of the media now, as then, remains unknown. But unlike the Soviet Union, the United States makes no effort to challenge the prevailing economic and social system. Arthur Sulzberger was never asked to do anything that conflicted with his own self-interest, nor are any of the other sons and daughters of privilege who fill most important positions within an industry that’s more insular and consolidated than ever.

The Times’ article includes the obligatory statement from Israel on the matter. “On Friday, the Israeli agency known as COGAT, which regulates aid to Palestinians, said, ‘Israel is also exerting a constant and significant effort to find solutions that will bring aid more smoothly into the Gaza Strip, and into its northern area in particular,” the story reads.

It’s an obvious lie. But one can’t expect The New York Times to hold Israeli officials accountable. “Like all Times journalists, I am committed to upholding the standards of integrity outlined in our Ethical Journalism Handbook,” the article’s co-author Vivian Yee helpfully explains in her online bio. “Because I often report in authoritarian countries, I work hard to scrutinize government statements for spin, propaganda and misinformation.”

The failure to probe the Israeli statement suggests Yee doesn’t apply such standards to Israel. Only US adversaries are “authoritarian,” after all. Being the global hegemon means never having your war crimes acknowledged.

US’ V-22 Osprey aircraft returns to the skies while the cause of deadly crash is still unknown

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A temporary flight ban on the controversial V-22 Osprey aircraft has been lifted by the US military, but investigators are still working to nail down the cause of last year's deadly crashes.

"We have high confidence that we understand what component failed and how it failed," said Col. Brian Taylor of the US Marine Corps, one of three US service branches that operates the complex tilt rotorcraft. "I think what we are still working on is the why, and so that is still in the hands of the investigation."

US officials hope revamped training and maintenance protocols can prevent a similar incident in the future, but clarified the plane will see no hardware changes before being returned to service. More than 50 US troops have been killed in accidents involving the V-22 Osprey since its initial deployment in 2007, including eight in the November crash off the coast of Japan that led to the most recent grounding.

Another deadly Osprey crash, also in the Pacific region, took place last year in Australia.

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Is Biden's idea to establish a temporary port in Gaza all that it seems?

Critics have ridiculed US President Joe Biden's proposal to establish a temporary pier in the Gaza Strip to deliver humanitarian aid by sea.

In an interview with Sputnik, former US State Department counterterrorism analyst Scott Bennett called the idea "a potential deception operation in which a pier can give a firm permanent foothold in the area and give [the United States] a listening post, if not a control capability of Palestine, which the Israelis will then exploit."

Fundamentally, Bennett said the proposal is an act of "political posturing" on the part of the Biden administration to distract from the "demonic violence, bloodlust and genetic hatred" demonstrated by the Israeli assault on Gaza. Meanwhile, he noted that US "secret supplies of weapons given to the Israeli government are kept off the books to avoid public scrutiny."

"It's an active treason and theft against the American people by stealing from their treasury and secretly depositing it in Israel's treasury," he claimed, noting that the United States has sent over 100 secret arms packages to the country since October. Only two of the shipments have been publicly reported.

Bader Al-Saif, a professor of history at Kuwait University, said Biden's plan "sends a very bad signal on US leadership. It reinforces what many Arabs think: that Israel is running the show, and the US follows."

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Europe's defense industry decades behind competitors, according to Dassault chief

EU leaders have floated plans to rebuild the continent's defense industry in recent weeks, but the head of one major European aircraft manufacturer says decades of investment are required if Brussels hopes to develop technology on par with Russia and others.

"Europe believes all of a sudden that working on defense is a good thing," said Dassault CEO Éric Trappier in an interview with British media. "I'm delighted that realization is there. Between that realization and the reality of building a European defense industry it's going to take many years and even many decades."

At stake is the Western-backed Ukraine proxy war against Russia. EU leaders fear the potential return of former US President Donald Trump to the White House will force Europe to shoulder the responsibility of arming Kiev.

But proposals to rebuild Europe's defense industry would face political as well as economic hurdles. Many throughout Europe already resent the centralization of power within the European Commission, a sentiment on vivid display when UK voters opted to ditch the bloc in 2016.

Supply chains have also been weakened throughout the continent, and manufacturers are deeply dependent on global sourcing. High energy costs remain a major challenge as sanctions on Russian gas continue to batter European industry.

If Europe does begin to rebuild its defense capabilities it's not a given it will ever make up for its late start, as even Western observers admit Russia's weaponry is best in class.

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With US backing, Israel is starving 2.2 million Palestinians in Gaza

"The use of starvation of the civilian population as a method of warfare is prohibited," according to rule 53 of the Geneva Conventions.

On Saturday, after months of criticism of its Israel coverage, The New York Times published an article on the plight of Palestinian civilians suffering from famine in Gaza.

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"It is all too easy to trace the skull beneath the Gazan boy's face," began the article. "In one of a series of news photographs of the boy, Yazan Kafarneh, taken with his family's permission as he struggled for his life, his long-lashed eyes stare out, unfocused… By Monday, Yazan was dead."

Hundreds of thousands in Gaza face the same fate, but The New York Times was compelled to consider the case of 10-year-old Yazan Kafarneh only after his photo went viral online. The story demonstrates how social media has obliged Western news outlets to cover stories they normally would not as the Times treads perilously close to acknowledging that Israel is carrying out a textbook war crime.

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Guterres Calls For Honoring Spirit of Ramadan by Silencing Guns in Israel-Gaza War

UNITED NATIONS, March 11 (Sputnik) - United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Monday renewed his call for cessation of hostilities in Israel and Gaza during Ramadan and called for removing all obstacles to the delivery of humanitarian aid.

"My strongest appeal today is to honor the spirit of Ramadan by silencing the guns – and removing all obstacles to ensure the delivery of lifesaving aid at the speed and massive scale required," Guterres told journalists at the UN.

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Trump Calls TikTok Security Threat, Facebook Enemy of People

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump on Monday said he believes TikTok represents a national security threat to the United States but does not want to ban the app because this would benefit Facebook (banned in Russia for extremism), which he called the "enemy of the people."

"I do believe that," Trump said during an interview with CNBC when asked whether TikTok is a national security threat.

He stressed the importance of protecting the privacy and data rights of the American people.

However, Trump said banning TikTok would give Facebook an advantage, a development he would consider dangerous.

"The thing I don't like is that without TikTok, you can make Facebook bigger, and I consider Facebook to be an enemy of the people, along with a lot of the media," he said.

Trump also pointed out that many young Americans use TikTok, and they would be disappointed if it were banned.

The US House Committee on Energy and Commerce on Thursday unanimously approved a bill that could potentially ban TikTok in the United States if its Chinese parent company ByteDance

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does not divest from the video app within six months.
In response, TikTok said the US government was trying to deprive 170 million Americans of their Constitutional right to free expression.
The bill is expected to be taken up on the House floor sometime this week.

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Only 37% of Americans Say Foreign Leaders Respect Biden – Poll

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - Only 37% of Americans think US President Joe Biden is respected by foreign leaders, while almost two-thirds expressed the opposite view, a new Gallup poll revealed on Monday.
"A stable 37% of Americans believe Biden is respected by leaders of other countries, and 58% say he is not. While this is the second consecutive 37% reading for Biden on this measure, it is well below the 58% recorded in February 2021 shortly after his inauguration," Gallup said in a summary of the poll's findings.
A previous poll four years ago found that the US public had similar views on Biden's predecessor, Donald Trump.
"The current reading is on par with Biden's latest overall job approval rating of 38%. It is also identical to the 37% of Americans who thought Trump was respected by world leaders in 2020, which was the highest of his presidency," Gallup said.
Meanwhile 51% of US adults believed Barack Obama was respected by world leaders in 2012, the comparable point to today in his presidency, while 39% said the same of Bush in 2004, it added.
Overall, only 33% of Americans are satisfied with the nation's position in the world, the lowest percentage since 2017. "This marks a slight decline from 37% readings each of the prior three years. Meanwhile, 65% of U.S. adults are dissatisfied with the nation's global position," Gallup said.
The poll was conducted on February 1-20, 2024, among 1,016 adults in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia.

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Blinken to Attend High-Level Caribbean Meeting on Haiti Transition – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will travel to Jamaica on Monday for a meeting with Caribbean heads of government to discuss how to expedite a political transition in Haiti, the State Department said in a release on Monday.
"Secretary Antony J. Blinken will travel to Kingston, Jamaica today to attend the High-Level Meeting on Haiti convened by the Conference of the Heads of Government of the Caribbean

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Community (CARICOM)," the release stated.

Blinken will discuss a proposal developed with CARICOM and Haiti stakeholders to expedite a political transition in Haiti. It involves creating an independent presidential college and deploying a multi-national security force to regain control of the country beset by armed gangs after its president was assassinated nearly two years ago.

Blinken will also meet with Jamaican Prime Minister Andrew Holness to discuss bilateral and regional issues.

The US Embassy in Haiti has evacuated all non-essential personnel from Port-au-Prince over the weekend at the request of the State Department, US Southern Command said in a statement quoted by several media outlets.

In a statement on Sunday, the US Embassy that it "remains open" despite the evacuation, which was prompted by "heightened gang violence."

Gang violence erupted in Port-au-Prince on February 29 during Prime Minister Ariel Henry's visit to Kenya for talks on deploying armed forces to fight organized crime. Gangs declared their aim was to prevent Henry from returning to Haiti. The Haitian government declared a state of emergency in the capital region.

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Russia Requested UNSC Meeting on Ukraine on March 22 - Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, March 9 (Sputnik) - Russia has requested a UN Security Council meeting on Ukraine on March 22, the First Deputy Permanent Representative of Russia to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy said.

"All of these unseemly issues for our Western colleagues will be addressed in detail at the separate Security Council meeting that we requested for the 22nd of March," Polyanskiy said on Friday during the Security Council Chamber during a meeting on Ukraine.

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ANALYSIS - Trump Just Trying to Score Points Against Biden With Ukraine, NATO Comments - Experts

WASHINGTON, March 9 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump did not really turn hostile against Russia and its leader President Vladimir Putin in his social media comments during President Joe Biden's State of the Union address to Congress on Thursday night, but he was positioning himself to discredit Biden and increase his own chances of winning the November presidential election, experts on US foreign policy told Sputnik.

Trump made a running commentary on the Truth Social media platform as Biden delivered his speech, in which he accused the US president of giving Russia "everything, including Ukraine."

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Trump also said Biden had served as a puppet for Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

However, Independent Institute Center on Peace and Liberty Director Ivan Eland said that Trump's comments did not express any long-term policy shift against Russia but appear to have been motivated only by his priority obsession with discrediting Biden, his successor in the White House, in the run up to the November presidential election.

"Trump will do almost anything to not lose the election, so given his past behavior, he is likely posturing for the campaign," Eland said.

Trump's credibility and charismatic standing with his supporters was so widespread and strong that his base had continued to stay loyal to him through all these shifts, which would free him to make many more, Eland said.

"But he seems to get away with saying one thing one day and another on another day," Eland added.

American University in Moscow President Edward Lozansky acknowledged that Trump had emphasized his support for a strong NATO and even supported sending more military aid to Ukraine in his comments.

"In his response to Biden's address, Trump repeated the earlier lines that 'Putin only invaded Ukraine because he has no respect for Biden.'" He also supported a strong NATO and suggested continuing funding Ukraine, albeit in the form of "loans to be repaid later," he said.

However, Trump had already issued a list of individuals he favored as his vice-presidential running mate and it included at least one vocal critic of US support for Ukraine, Lozansky pointed out.

"At the same time, Trump's short list of vice presidents, which includes Senator J D Vance - a strong opponent of funding this war - leaves some hope that is a typical Washington maneuvering to attract voters on each side," he said.

Trump's political maneuvers and apparent policy reversals were so common and confusing that his real intentions if elected president would only become clear if and when he took office, Lozanskly said.

"We will find out about his real stand only after victory," Lozansky said.

Nevertheless, opponents of US support for Ukraine's war against Russia and those who wanted to see a reduction in the dangerous tensions between the United States and Russia still needed to support Trump because no other credible option was available to them, he said.

"There are no other options now," Lozansky added.

Trump has maintained a steady lead over Biden in opinion polling as questions remain about the octogenarian head of state's ability to serve a second term, and on Tuesday Trump swept almost all the Super Tuesday Republican primaries, virtually guaranteeing his nomination as the Republican party's presidential candidate.

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US Senate Passes $460Bln Government Funding Bill Ahead of Shutdown Deadline

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WASHINGTON, March 9 (Sputnik) - The US Senate passed legislation with approximately $460 billion in spending to fund a portion of the federal government before a partial shutdown deadline at the end of the day Friday, sending the bill to US President Joe Biden for finalization.
Senators passed the bill on Friday evening in a vote of 75 in favor and 22 opposed. The US House of Representatives passed the legislation earlier this week.
The legislation funds six appropriations areas for which funding was set to expire on March 8, covering some 30% of the overall budget for the year, estimated at $1.6 trillion. The US Congress must pass funding for six other appropriations areas by March 22.
The bill also features $12.6 billion in earmarks, including 170 earmarks by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer. Some Republican lawmakers criticized the bill, including US Senator Mike Lee, who said that any senator vying to replace outgoing Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell should oppose the legislation.

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Pentagon Confirms Three Deaths in US National Guard Helicopter Crash in Texas

EL PASO, March 9 (Sputnik) - The Pentagon has confirmed three deaths in a US National Guard helicopter crash near the Texas-Mexico border.
"A UH-72 Lakota helicopter assigned to the federal Southwest border support mission crashed at approximately 2:50 p.m. MST today while conducting aviation operations near Rio Grande City, Texas. Two soldiers and one U.S. Border Patrol agent were killed. One soldier was injured," the statement released on behalf of Joint Task Force North said.
It added the cause of the accident was under investigation.
Earlier, sources told Sputnik that three individuals were killed when a National Guard helicopter crashed near the Texas-Mexico border Friday afternoon.

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Three Dead in US National Guard Helicopter Crash Near Texas-Mexico Border - Sources

EL PASO, March 9 (Sputnik) - Three individuals were killed when a National Guard helicopter crashed near the Texas-Mexico border Friday afternoon, a source familiar with the matter confirmed to Sputnik.
A Texas official told Sputnik the helicopter went down in La Grulla, Texas, but did not have additional information to provide.

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UPDATE-Biden Says 'Working Like Hell' to Unite NATO, Support Ukraine Against Russia

(additional info in paras 4-6)
WASHINGTON, March 9 (Sputnik) -US President Joe Biden said in a campaign speech in Philadelphia that he has been "working like hell" to unite the NATO alliance and support Ukraine in its conflict with Russia.
"I've been working like hell to unite Europe, NATO, and to make sure Ukraine doesn't get crushed by this dictator in Russia," Biden said on Friday.
On Thursday, Biden delivered his annual State of the Union speech to US lawmakers, in which he vowed not to walk away from supporting Ukraine. Biden also said that he is determined to keep US soldiers from operating on the ground in Ukraine.
In September last year, Biden already tried to insult Russia's President Vladimir Putin by calling him a 'dictator.'
Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, when commenting on Biden's remarks back then stated that Putin would never resort to personal insults.

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Biden Criticizes Trump for Orban Meeting, Says Hungarian Leader Desires Dictatorship

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WASHINGTON, March 9 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden criticized former officeholder Donald Trump for meeting with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, alleging that the Hungarian leader seeks a dictatorship.

"You know who [Trump's] meeting with today, down in Mar-a-Lago? Orban of Hungary, who stated flatly he doesn't think democracy works. He's looking for dictatorship. Only member of NATO, that's who he's meeting with [sic]," Biden said on Friday, during a campaign speech in Philadelphia.

Earlier in the day, Biden said people should be concerned about the Trump-Orban meeting, when asked by reporters about the event.

Biden said he is "working like hell" to unite the NATO alliance and support Ukraine in its conflict with Russia.

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Biden Says 'Working Like Hell' to Unite NATO, Support Ukraine Against Russia

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"I've been working like hell to unite Europe, NATO, and to make sure Ukraine doesn't get crushed by this dictator in Russia," Biden said on Friday.

On Thursday, Biden delivered his annual State of the Union speech to US lawmakers, in which he vowed not to walk away from supporting Ukraine. Biden also said that he is determined to keep US soldiers from operating on the ground in Ukraine.

The Biden administration has warned that Ukraine could face further setbacks on the battlefield without further aid from the US Congress.

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UNSC Adopts Resolution Extending Panel of Experts on Sudan For Another Year-Correspondent

UNITED NATIONS, March 9 (Sputnik) - The United Nations Security Council members adopted a resolution extending the mandate of the Panel of Experts helping the Sudan Sanctions Committee for another year, Correspondent reported on Friday.

The Council members adopted the extension with 13 votes in favor and one abstention, while one of the abstaining was Russia.

The Deputy Russian Permanent Representative Anna Evstigneeva said Russia abstained due to the excessive human rights aspects and overlapping content of another resolution on Sudan

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which we adopted earlier today, calling for a ceasefire during the Ramadan holiday. She also added that some points of the resolution might seem like the power of the panel has been extended but it is not the case.

The UN Panel of Experts on Sudan was created by the UN Security Council in 2005 and its main task is to monitor the Arms Embargo in Darfur.

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ANALYSIS - Trump Just Trying to Score Points Against Biden With Ukraine, NATO Comments - Experts

WASHINGTON, March 9 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump did not really turn hostile against Russia and its leader President Vladimir Putin in his social media comments during President Joe Biden's State of the Union address to Congress on Thursday night, but he was positioning himself to discredit Biden and increase his own chances of winning the November presidential election, experts on US foreign policy told Sputnik.

Trump made a running commentary on the Truth Social media platform as Biden delivered his speech, in which he accused the US president of giving Russia "everything, including Ukraine." Trump also said Biden had served as a puppet for Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

However, Independent Institute Center on Peace and Liberty Director Ivan Eland said that Trump's comments did not express any long-term policy shift against Russia but appear to have been motivated only by his priority obsession with discrediting Biden, his successor in the White House, in the run up to the November presidential election.

"Trump will do almost anything to not lose the election, so given his past behavior, he is likely posturing for the campaign," Eland said.

Trump's credibility and charismatic standing with his supporters was so widespread and strong that his base had continued to stay loyal to him through all these shifts, which would free him to make many more, Eland said.

"But he seems to get away with saying one thing one day and another on another day," Eland added.

American University in Moscow President Edward Lozansky acknowledged that Trump had emphasized his support for a strong NATO and even supported sending more military aid to Ukraine in his comments.

"In his response to Biden’s address, Trump repeated the earlier lines that 'Putin only invaded Ukraine because he has no respect for Biden.'" He also supported a strong NATO and suggested continuing funding Ukraine, albeit in the form of "loans to be repaid later," he said.

However, Trump had already issued a list of individuals he favored as his vice-presidential running mate and it included at least one vocal critic of US support for Ukraine, Lozansky pointed out.

"At the same time, Trump's short list of vice presidents, which includes Senator J D Vance - a strong opponent of funding this war - leaves some hope that is a typical Washington maneuvering to attract voters on each side," he said.

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Trump's political maneuvers and apparent policy reversals were so common and confusing that his real intentions if elected president would only become clear if and when he took office, Lozanskly said.

"We will find out about his real stand only after victory," Lozansky said.

Nevertheless, opponents of US support for Ukraine's war against Russia and those who wanted to see a reduction in the dangerous tensions between the United States and Russia still needed to support Trump because no other credible option was available to them, he said.

"There are no other options now," Lozansky added.

Trump has maintained a steady lead over Biden in opinion polling as questions remain about the octogenarian head of state's ability to serve a second term, and on Tuesday Trump swept almost all the Super Tuesday Republican primaries, virtually guaranteeing his nomination as the Republican party's presidential candidate.

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Russia Has No Plans to Get Rid of Ukraine's Zelenskyy - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, March 9 (Sputnik) - Russia has no plans to get rid of Ukrainian President Zelenskyy, to the disappointment of the collective West, First Deputy Permanent Representative of Russia to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy said.

"If any of you are hoping in your hearts to get rid of the leader of the Kiev regime, that way, I am going to disappoint you," Polyanskiy said during a UN Security Council meeting on Ukraine on Friday. "We have no such plans."

Polyanskiy also said had Russia wanted to hit Zelenskyy's motorcade, it would have done so.

In addition, Polyanskiy said that Russia requested a meeting on Ukraine to be held on March 22.

On Wednesday, Western media reported that a Russian missile strike appeared to target Zelenskyy, ending up near his motorcade in the city of Odessa, where he was meeting with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis.

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Schumer Says US Senate Reached Deal to Fund US Government Before Shutdown Deadline

WASHINGTON, March 9 (Sputnik) - US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said that lawmakers reached a deal to pass a government funding bill before a partial shutdown deadline at the end of the day Friday.

"Tonight, the Senate has reached an agreement avoiding a shutdown on the first six funding bills," Schumer said on Friday, during remarks on the Senate floor.

Earlier on Friday, the US Senate closed debate on a $460 billion spending bill, which covers six appropriations areas for which funding was set to expire at the end of the day. The US House of Representatives passed the legislation earlier this week.

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The US Congress must also pass funding for six other appropriations areas by March 22.

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Russia Regrets That France's UN Statement Omits Discussion on World War III Risks - Envoy

NITED NATIONS, March 9 (Sputnik) - Russia expressed regret that France's statement during the UN Security Council meeting did not address proposals potentially leading to a Third World War, First Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Dmitriy Polyanskiy said.

"It's a shame that we didn't hear anything about these ideas that threaten the beginning of a third world war in the statement by the representative of France," Polyanskiy said on Friday.

Polyanskiy added that the stance of French President Emmanuel Macron on deploying forces to Ukraine, ostensibly to prevent the collapse of the Kiev regime, can hardly be interpreted in any other manner.

Earlier on Friday, Macron seemingly sought to tone down his earlier statement that Western troops could possibly be deployed in Ukraine, saying that not ruling something out does not mean doing it.

On Thursday, Macron said that there were no limits and no red lines in France's support for Ukraine.

Last month, Macron said Western leaders discussed the possibility of sending troops to Ukraine and said nothing could be ruled out despite not reaching a consensus. At the same time, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Defense Minister Boris Pistorius said Berlin would not send its forces to Ukraine and NATO had no such intention either.

Macron's statement also made him a target of criticism from the French opposition, with different political parties on accusing him of trying to drag France into an armed conflict. Macron said in response that his every word about sending troops to Ukraine was "weighted, thought through and measured."

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China Says International Community Should Create Conditions For Ukraine Settlement- Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, March 9 (Sputnik) - The international community should help Russia and Ukraine and create a conducive environment for a settlement, the First Deputy Permanent Representative of China to the UN Geng Shuang said on Friday.

“The international community should also increase diplomatic efforts to facilitate the de-escalation of the situation and create conditions for a political settlement,” Shuang said in the Security Council Chamber during a meeting on Ukraine.

He also added that a special Representative of the Chinese Government on Eurasian Affairs is conducting mediation visits to Russia and Ukraine and other European countries to seek a

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political settlement.

During the meeting, the Russian First Deputy Permanent Representative Dmitry Polyanskiy said that Russia has requested a meeting on Ukraine to be held on March 22.

The frequency of the meetings on Ukraine has decreased ever since the Gaza war began. The whole United Nations system is devoting a lot of attention to the Gaza region and trying to prevent its spillover into neighboring countries.

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Ex-US Official Says Biden Was 'Fired Up' About Ukraine, Not US in State of Union Address

WASHINGTON, March 9 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden was energized about Ukraine's sovereignty instead of the United States during his State of the Union address, former acting US Customs and Border Protection deputy commissioner Ronald Vitiello told Sputnik.

"It was the big lie. He was fired up about Ukraine's sovereignty, not ours," Vitiello, who is running for US Senate in Virginia, said on Friday.

Biden began his State of the Union address on Thursday calling for more Ukraine aid funding to fight Russia while putting aside hot domestic issues like the crisis on the US southern border.

Vitiello added that Biden during his remarks disrespected the family of Laken Riley, a 22-year-old college student who was recently killed by an illegal migrant from Venezuela while she was out for a run at the University of Georgia campus.

Republican Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene interrupted Biden in the middle of his speech to press him on Riley's death at the hands of an illegal migrant, which Biden responded to by saying that thousands of people are killed by "legals" in the United States.

Moreover, Biden said Riley's name incorrectly during the address, calling her 'Lincoln' instead of 'Laken'. In response, Riley's mother, in a social media post, blasted the President for saying her daughter's name wrong.

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Biden Tries to Blame Republicans for Coming Loss of Ukraine - Ex-State Dept. Diplomat

WASHINGTON, March 9 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden used his fourth State of the Union speech to blame the Republicans if Russia wins the war in Ukraine in the next several months, by claiming Kiev could have won or survived if the latest $61 billion arms package had not been blocked in Congress, former State Department official and consultant on US-Russia relations James Carden said.

"The way I heard the speech was Biden setting the ground to blame the Republicans for losing the war should they block further tranches of funding," Carden told Sputnik.

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But Biden was still committed to his confrontational and warmaking policies in Ukraine, the Middle East and elsewhere around the world and showed no sign of wanting to change them, he said.

"I think he's a true believer and actually believes that his status as Warlord-in-Chief helps him politically," Carden said.

Biden's indirect admission that the planned next enormous military aid package for President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's increasingly discredited regime in Kiev was blocked on Capitol Hill did not stem from any fundamental reassessment of US policy on backing Ukraine's war against Russia, he said.

Instead, Biden's comments reflected his always primary concern with domestic politics and his obsession with getting reelected to a second term in November even though he is already 82 years old, Carden said.

"The results coming out of Michigan, however, disprove his thesis," Carden said.

Uncommitted voters in the US state of Michigan on Super Tuesday this week registered a protest against Biden and his policies, especially on foreign affairs, security and the invasion of Gaza. Some 100,000 voters, or 20% of those who participated in the Democratic primary alone, cast their ballots as "Uncommitted," expressing a massive lack of support for the president in his own party with no other serious candidate to choose from.

The $61 billion package is being blocked by Republicans in the House of Representatives until Biden changes his policies on illegal immigration and agrees to crack down on it. But because the president is determined not to change course on that, he will not get more aid approved for Kiev, his opponents have said.

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Russia Requested UNSC Meeting on Ukraine on March 22 - Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, March 9 (Sputnik) - Russia has requested a UN Security Council meeting on Ukraine on March 22, the First Deputy Permanent Representative of Russia to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy said.

“All of these unseemly issues for our Western colleagues will be addressed in detail at the separate Security Council meeting that we requested for the 22nd of March,” Polyanskiy said on Friday during the Security Council Chamber during a meeting on Ukraine.

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China Supports International Peace Conference on Ukraine With Equal Participation - Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, March 9 (Sputnik) - China supports holding an international peace conference that ensures equal participation of both, Russia and Ukraine, along with fair

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discussions by all parties, Chinese Ambassador to the United Nations Geng Shuang said.
"China supports the holding in due course of an international peace conference that is recognized by both, Russia and Ukraine, and ensures the equal participation of all parties and fair discussions," Geng said during a UN Security Council meeting on Friday.

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US Stocks Tumble, Snapping 2-Week Gain, Despite Record Highs

NEW YORK, March 9 (Sputnik) - Wall Street hit record highs Friday before finishing down to snap two weeks of gains as investors took profit on a rally inspired by expectations of Federal Reserve rate cuts, which remained uncertain after stronger-than-expected US jobs gains for February.
The New York Stock Exchange's S&P 500 index, which tracks stocks of the top 500 US companies, hit an all-time high of 5,162 before closing at 5,133, down 0.7% on the day. For the week, the index fell 0.1%, after gains of 1% last week and 1.7% the week prior.
The technology-laden Nasdaq Composite Index, which comprises marquee tech names such as Google, Amazon, Apple, Facebook(META banned in Russia), and Netflix, also hit record highs at 16,450 before closing at 16,085 — down 1.2% on the day as well as on the week. The Nasdaq gained 1.5% last week and 0.6% the prior week.
The Dow Jones Industrial Average, which serves as Wall Street's broadest equities indicator by tracking the stocks of 30 large US corporations, closed at 38,723 — down 0.2% on the day and almost 1% lower on the week. The Dow slid 0.1% last week after rising 1.3% the week prior.
Since the year began, both the S&P and Nasdaq have repeatedly hit record highs, powered by expectations of rate cuts that fuel easier credit for business and a mania over artificial intelligence stocks.
Both indexes ran up this week on heightened expectations of rate cuts after Fed Chairman Jerome Powell said the central bank could cut rates if inflation continued to moderate without damaging the economy.
Even so, Friday's rally in stocks came to a premature halt after the Labor Department reported that the United States added 275,000 jobs in February, or 40% above forecasts — an outcome that would likely keep in place the hurdle on rate cuts.

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US Filmmaker Says Film About Alaska Shows Russian Monks Brought Orthodoxy to Local Tribes

WASHINGTON, March 9 (Sputnik) - "Sacred Alaska," the new US documentary about Orthodox Christianity in Alaska, features Russian monks who evangelized the local tribes in the 18th and

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19th centuries and brought the Orthodox Christian way of life there, the author and filmmaker Simon Scionka, told Sputnik.

"There are more saints in Alaska, but we mostly talk about three of them - St. Herman, St Innocent and St. Yakov. They were not there to simply impose the Russian way of doing things but, obviously, the Orthodox way of doing things," Scionka said.

Native Alaskans embraced Russian Orthodox Christianity with all their heart and soul and it was very helpful that they were able to serve liturgies and read prayers in their own language and their own cultural settings, Scionka said.

The filmmaker pointed out that St. Yakov was of Russian and Aleut descent and became the first local who went to study in Russia and then returned to Alaska. Also of help was the fact that the church translated the services into local languages to help people understand the Orthodox Christian messages.

"No one was forcing the locals to learn the Church Slavonic language to pray. Until now, they maintain a lot of singing in their native language, which is quite beautiful to hear. We include some of them in the film when the prayers are in the local Yupik language," he said.

Scionka emphasized that Russian monks exhibited patience with the local tribes, showed respect for their culture, traditions and language, and served them accordingly.

"Even before they really began preaching and converting people to Orthodoxy, they wanted to learn and to be respectful of who these people are, to understand them. And then, also find ways that they could make connections to tell the Christian story, to tell the story of Christ to these people, who have never heard about Jesus Christ before, and tell it to them in a way that made sense," Scionka said.

Alaska remains a sacred place because people there were able to maintain Orthodox Christianity from generation to generation, Scionka said.

Despite the fact that Alaska has not been a part of Russia for more than 150 years, it has kept many of the Russian traditions and the churches there look like those in Russia with the characteristic crosses on top of domes, he said.

"We even drew this parallel: St. Herman came from the Russian island of Valaam, lived on Spruce Island and there are some similarities in the trees, rocks and the nature overall. Even in the tundra, some of the culture, going into the forests to pick berries, is very similar to Russian culture," Scionka said.

The native people in Alaska continue to live very spiritual lives connected to nature, to each other and to their understanding of God, he added.

Russian traders began to explore Alaska, also known as Russian America, in the 18th century. The Russian church sent missionaries to bring Orthodoxy to the local people. Many of those ascetics are canonized now, including St. Herman, St. Innocence of Moscow, and St. Yakov, who are venerated as heavenly patrons of America. Russia sold Alaska to the United States in 1867.

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Special Counsel Hur to Testify on Biden Documents Probe March 12 - Judiciary Committee

WASHINGTON, March 9 (Sputnik) - The US House Judiciary Committee said in a statement that Special Counsel Robert Hur is scheduled to testify before the panel on March 12 regarding his investigation into President Biden's mishandling of classified documents.

"The House Judiciary Committee will hold a hearing on Tuesday, March 12, 2024...The hearing on the Report of Special Counsel Robert K. Hur will examine Special Counsel Hur's findings in his investigation of the possible unauthorized removal and retention of classified documents or other records discovered in President Biden's personal possession," the statement said on Friday.

Last month, the Judiciary Committee issued a subpoena demanding that US Attorney General Merrick Garland provide all documents on Hur's investigation of Biden's alleged willful mishandling of classified information.

According to the cover letter accompanying the subpoena and signed by Congressmen James Comer and Jim Jordan, the US Justice Department has not provided either records related to Hur's investigation or a deadline. The initial request was made on February 12.

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US Approves Likely $111 Mln Sale Of Joint Light Tactical Vehicles to North Macedonia

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) – The United States approved a potential sale of Joint Light Tactical Vehicles worth $111 million to North Macedonia, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Friday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of North Macedonia of Joint Light Tactical Vehicles and related elements of logistics and program support for an estimated cost of $111 million," the statement said.

The Pentagon delivered the required certification to Congress, it added.

North Macedonia has requested to buy eighteen M1278A1/A2 Joint Light Tactical Vehicle (JLTV) Heavy Gun Carriers and seven M1280A1/A2 Joint Light Tactical Vehicle (JLTV) General Purpose. The deal also included different equipment, according to the statement.

The proposed sale will support the foreign policy and national security of the United States by improving the security of a NATO ally, the statement said. The deal will also enhance North Macedonia's capacity to meet current and future threats, it added.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, March 9 (Sputnik) –

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director-General Rafael Grossi, during his

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discussions with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Sochi, has once again called for "maximum military restraint" around the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (ZNPP), the IAEA said on Friday.
* Two people were killed and another one was injured as a result of an attack by a Ukrainian drone on the village of Rozhdestvenka in Russia's Belgorod Region, Vyacheslav Gladkov, the regional governor, said.
* Ukraine has lost more than 2,860 soldiers in the Avdiivka direction, also known as Avdeyevka, over the past week, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
* Long-range Taurus missiles will not be decisive for the conflict in Ukraine and will only help in certain areas, but Germany does not intend to cross this line, German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius said.

SITUATION IN MOLDOVA

* Russia is not Moldova's enemy, the countries need to be friends in all directions, Yevgenia Gutsul, the head of Moldova's autonomous region of Gagauzia, told Sputnik on Friday.
* Gutsul has returned to Moldova after her working visit to Russia and left the airport unhindered, without being detained, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

CRISIS IN GAZA

* The European Union, the United States, the United Arab Emirates, and Cyprus will jointly launch the Cyprus Maritime Corridor to deliver humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on Friday.
* Turkey is studying reports about US President Joe Biden's initiative to create a port for humanitarian aid delivery to the Gaza Strip and advocates breaking the blockade, a diplomatic source in Ankara told Sputnik.
* The US Defense Department's plan to construct a temporary aid port for the Gaza Strip will require more than 1,000 US military personnel, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said.
* The United States is in the process of preparing to deploy forces for the Gaza pier mission to increase the flow of humanitarian aid to the Palestinian enclave, Ryder said.
* The Canadian Government has decided to lift its temporary pause in funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Canada's foreign ministry said.

PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

* The Republican National Committee (RNC) on Friday elected former President Donald Trump's daughter-in-law, Lara Trump, as RNC co-chair.
* US President Joe Biden said that his participation in a presidential debate against Trump will depend on his predecessor's behavior.

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Canadian Town of Oakville Not Involved in Removal of Ukrainian Nazi Monument - Official

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) – The leadership of Oakville cannot comment on the dismantlement of a monument built to honor Ukraine's 14th Waffen SS Grenadier Division as it is not involved in the cemetery's management, the town's communications advisor told Sputnik

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on Friday.

"We have had a few inquiries related to a cenotaph in Oakville. Given that St. Volodymyr Ukrainian Cemetery is located on private property, the town is not involved in its management or operations," the advisor said.

Despite several attempts, Sputnik was unable to obtain a comment from St. Volodymyr Cemetery, also known as West Oak Memorial Gardens, where the monument was located.

The memorial, which was known was "Monument to the Glory of the UPA" (extremist organization banned in Russia) was built in 1988 in the St. Volodymyr Ukrainian Cemetery. Shortly after the monument's construction, a cenotaph displaying the emblem of the 14th Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS and bearing an inscription that reads "For Those Who Died For the Freedom of Ukraine," was erected alongside it.

Journalists, activists and Jewish organizations such as B'nai Brith Canada and Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center, among others, had long called for the monument's dismantlement due to its controversial nature. Such calls were echoed by Mayor Rob Burton who had expressed his disgust with the memorial's existence but said his hands were tied by provincial legislation prohibiting its demolition.

Calls for its removal were renewed following the major scandal that occurred in September 2023 at the Canadian House of Commons when the entirety of the country's federal legislature gave two standing ovations to 98-year-old Ukrainian Nazi SS veteran Yaroslav Hunka, who fought for the 1st Galician. Hunka had been invited to attend Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's address at the Parliament.

Canada has had a long and controversial history of granting safe haven to former Nazi veteran, oftentimes including those convicted of crimes in the Soviet Union. In the mid-1980s, the Canadian government launched the Commission of Inquiry on War Criminals, also known as the Deschenes Commission, to investigate the immigration of individuals with a Nazi-background into the country.

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UPDATE - Canada to Lift Pause on UNRWA Funding, Continue to Seek Accountability – Ministry

(Adds details in paras 4-6, Background in paras 7-8)

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) – The Canadian Government has decided to lift its temporary pause in funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Canada's foreign ministry said on Friday.

"Today, the Honourable Ahmed Hussen, Minister of International Development, announced that Canada will be lifting its temporary pause on funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)," Global Affairs Canada (GAC) said.

Canada believes UNRWA plays a vital role in the provision of humanitarian assistance to the over two million inhabitants of Gaza and more than four million other individuals in the region, GAC added.

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Ottawa remains fully committed to ensuring full accountability, decisive action, and the implementation of reforms within UNRWA, GAC said. Canada expects from the humanitarian organization that it will meet its obligations and uphold the UN's value of neutrality, it added.

Moreover, in support of Jordanian airdropping operations over the Palestinian enclave, Canada will be contributing C$100,000 to the Jordan Hashemite Charity Organisation for the purchase of supplies, GAC said.

The Canadian Armed Forces will also be providing nearly 300 cargo parachutes to the Royal Jordanian Air Force to support airdrops of critical supplies in Gaza.

Previously, alongside the United States, Australia, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Finland, Estonia, Japan, Austria, Romania, and the United Kingdom, Canada had suspended its donations to UNRWA following Israel's accusations that some of the agency's staff participated in the Hamas attacks on the Jewish state on October 7.

Some 31,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's military operations and more than 76,000 have been wounded, according to the local authorities. More than 1.9 million Palestinians out of 2.3 million in Gaza have been displaced and more than half are facing hunger and starvation as a result of Israel's blockade.

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Biden Says Would Sign Bill to Ban TikTok if Congress Passes It

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Friday that he would sign a bill that could ban TikTok if Congress passes the legislation.

"If they pass it, I'll sign it," Biden told reporters as he was departing Joint Base Andrews for Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

The US House Committee on Energy and Commerce on Thursday unanimously approved a bill that could potentially ban TikTok in the United States if its Chinese parent company ByteDance does not divest from the video app within six months.

In response, TikTok said the US government was trying to deprive 170 million Americans of their Constitutional right to free expression.

The bill is expected to be taken up on the House floor sometime next week.

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DOJ Fails to Submit Biden Interview Records by Subpoena Deadline - Reports

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The US Justice Department (DOJ) has not submitted transcripts of Special Counsel Robert Hur's interview with President Biden by the subpoena's March 7 deadline, Fox News reported on Friday.

Last month, the chairmen of the House Judiciary Committee and Oversight Committee on

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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 articles of impeachment against Biden.

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US State Dept. Approves $350Mln Sale of Helicopter Engines to South Korea - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The US State Department approved a potential $350 million sale of multi-mission military helicopter engines to South Korea, the US Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Friday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Republic of Korea of Engines and Sustainment for MH-60R Multi-Mission Helicopters and related elements of logistics and program support for an estimated cost of $350 million," DSCA said in a statement.

South Korea requested to buy six engines for the aircraft, as well as spare and repair parts, ferry support, personnel training and training equipment, the statement said.

The sale would support the United States' foreign policy and national security goals by improving the security of a major ally in the Indo-Pacific region, the statement said. The sale bolsters South Korea's anti-surface and anti-submarine warfare capabilities, the statement said.

The sale would neither alter the basic military balance of the region nor adversely impact US defense readiness, the statement said.

General Electric Company would serve as the principal contractor for the sale, the statement said.

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Biden Says He Will Participate in Debates Depending on Trump's Behavior

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden said on Friday that his participation in a presidential against former President Donald Trump will depend on his predecessor's behavior.

"It depends on his behavior," Biden told reporters when asked whether he would join a debate

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with Trump.

Biden's remarks come after Trump on Wednesday called on Biden to take part in a debate for the good of the country, saying he was ready to take part in one "anytime, anywhere, anyplace."

Trump made the remarks after he clinched the Republican nomination following a wave of victories in the so-called Super Tuesday elections and the withdrawal of his only remaining opponent, Nikki Haley, from the race.

Trump and Biden previously faced off in two debates during the 2020 election.

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Ex-Honduras President Convicted in US Court for Cocaine Smuggling - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - A US federal court has convicted the former president of Honduras for smuggling cocaine and operating his country as a narco-state, the Justice Department announced on Friday.

"A federal jury convicted Juan Orlando Hernandez, also known as JOH, 55, of Honduras, on all three counts in the indictment, which included cocaine-importation and weapons offenses," the Justice Department said in a release. "Hernandez is scheduled to be sentenced on June 26."

Hernandez abused his position as president to operate the country as a narco-state, where violent drug traffickers were allowed to operate with virtual impunity and the people of Honduras and the United States were forced to suffer the consequences, the release said.

From 2004 to 2022, Hernandez was at the center of one of the largest and most violent drug-trafficking conspiracies in the world and facilitated the importation of tons of cocaine into the United States in return for millions of dollars in drug money, the release added.

Hernandez and the leader of the Sinaloa cartel worked hand-in-hand to send deadly drugs into US communities, according to the release.

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Pentagon Says Gaza Aid Port Plan Will Require 1,000 Troops to Participate

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department’s plan to construct a temporary aid port for the Gaza Strip will require more than 1,000 US military personnel, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said on Friday.

“We anticipate that it’ll take over 1,000 US forces to participate in building this capability,” Ryder said during a press briefing.

The effort is expected to take several weeks, likely up to 60 days, Ryder said.

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UNSC Calls for Cessation of Hostilities in Sudan During Ramadan - Correspondent

UNITED NATIONS, March 8 (Sputnik) - The United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution on Sudan calling for a cessation of hostilities during the holy month of Ramadan, a Sputnik Correspondent reported on Friday.

The resolution “calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities during the month of Ramadan, and for all parties to the conflict to seek a sustainable resolution to the conflict through dialogue.”

The resolution also calls on all parties to remove any obstructions to the delivery of humanitarian aid and to comply with their obligations under international law, including by protecting civilians.

Since April 15 last year, fierce fighting has been going on in Sudan between the Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) under the command of Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo and the regular army. The parties are exchanging contradictory statements regarding successes in combat operations and control over facilities, launching a large-scale information war in the media and social networks.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said months of fighting in the country could lead to disease outbreaks and a collapse of the health system. According to the UN International Organization for Migration (IOM), the number of internally displaced people in Sudan has exceeded 7 million. This year, Ramadan begins at sunset on March 10 and ends on April 9.

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Canada to Lift Pause on UNRWA Funding, Continue to Seek Accountability – Ministry

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) – The Canadian government has decided to lift its temporary pause in funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Canada’s foreign ministry said on Friday.

"Today, the Honourable Ahmed Hussen, Minister of International Development, announced that Canada will be lifting its temporary pause on funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)," Global Affairs Canada (GAC) said.

Canada believes UNRWA plays a vital role in the provision of humanitarian assistance to the over two million inhabitants of Gaza and more than four million in the region, GAC added.

Ottawa remains fully committed to ensuring full accountability, decisive action and the implementation of reforms within UNRWA, GAC continued.

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

UPDATE - Crude Prices Down More Than 2% on Week as Fresh Volatility Hits Oil Rally

(Updates with new information on prices and more background in paras 3, 4, 11, 12; modifies headline)

NEW YORK, March 8 (Sputnik) - A fresh bout of volatility hit the oil market after last week's spectacular gains, raising uncertainty about the 2024 rally supported by OPEC+ cuts and other production outages but challenged by China's dismal economy.

Worries about the potential for another US banking crisis - similar to 2023 - and the likelihood of the Federal Reserve dragging its feet on interest rate cuts were also acting as red flags in oil traders' minds, said sector analysts.

US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude for April delivery settled Friday's trade down 92 cents, or 1.2%, at $78.01 per barrel. The WTI benchmark slid 2.5% on the week. Last week, it rose 4.6% last week after the prior week's 3.4% drop.

London-traded Brent crude settled down 88 cents, or 1.1%, at $82.08 per barrel. The global crude benchmark slid 1.8% on the week. Last week, Brent rose 2.4% after the prior week's tumble of 2.2%.

For the year, WTI remains up 8.8% and Brent 6.5%.

The annual gains could be more if not for nagging worries about the demand for oil, reinforced by the build in US crude stockpiles, which rose for a sixth week in a row last week, gaining almost 30 million barrels since late January.

Overall, oil has been "caught between support from the prolonged output cuts by OPEC+ and some questions on global demands, driven both by the Chinese setting their growth at 5% and fears of the U.S. still not being able to control inflation," Gary Cunningham, director of market research at Tradition Energy, said in comments carried by MarketWatch.

OPEC+, an alliance forged between the 13-member Saudi-led Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and 10 other oil producers steered by Russia, has committed to extend production cuts into the second quarter. The alliance intends to maintain its current run of 2.2 million barrels per day supply cuts until the end of June.

In China's case, it has set a gross domestic product target of 5% for 2024, the same as the prior year. The target and other economic proposals were both unveiled in an official report released during the annual meeting of the country's National People's Congress.

While Beijing outlined more economic changes to help shore up growth, the government's messaging was largely unchanged from its previous signals, providing investors with little cause for optimism over what has been a sluggish economic rebound in China.

China's private purchasing managers' index also came in on the weaker side of expectations on Tuesday, further weighing on the sentiment for oil.

On the banking front, Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell predicted on Thursday more failures among small and medium-sized US lenders this year, extending a crisis from last year.

On the employment front, the United States added 275,000 jobs in February, the Labor Department reported Friday, publishing a number almost 40% above Wall Street expectations

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and keeping in place an immediate hurdle for the Fed to cut interest rates.

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US Gaza Pier Mission to Not Involve Military Personnel Going Ashore - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) – The US Gaza pier mission will involve US military personnel being on military vessels offshore, and not on the shore in Gaza, Pentagon spokesperson Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder said on Friday.

"[The Pentagon] maintains the ability to provide unique capabilities from offshore without a US military presence within Gaza," Ryder said during a press briefing. "The concept that is being planned involves the presence of US military personnel on military vessels offshore, but does not require US military personnel to go ashore."

According to Ryder, the mission will involve an offshore floating pier that will be able to receive commercial vessels with aid that will be offloaded onto the floating pier and then transloaded onto Navy support vessels. Those vessels will then take it to the floating causeway, which is approximately 1,800 feet or 500 meters long, and then transported onto land and then distributed into Gaza.

"Among other places, Cyprus has been highlighted as a place where aid can be loaded onto ships, and then taken to the floating pier, transloaded onto these logistics support vessels, transported over to the causeway and then again transported into Gaza," Ryder added.

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Ottawa remains fully committed to ensuring full accountability, decisive action and the implementation of reforms within UNRWA, GAC continued.

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

US in Process of Preparing Forces to Deploy in Gaza Pier Mission - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The United States is in the process of preparing to deploy forces for the Gaza pier mission to increase the flow of humanitarian aid to the Palestinian enclave, Defense Department spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Friday.

"The department is moving quickly to deploy its joint logistics, over-the-shore capability to provide the expeditionary pier to enable the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Gaza," Ryder said during a press briefing. "We are in the process of identifying, sourcing, and, in some cases, preparing forces to deploy [to Gaza]."

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US Sanctions 2 Entities Allegedly Linked to Russia's Activities in Africa - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The United States has sanctioned two entities allegedly linked to Russia's activities in Africa, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Friday.

"The United States is designating today one Russia-based entity and one Central African Republic-based entity for their efforts in advancing malign activities of the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group in Africa," Miller said in a statement.

The entities played an important role in supporting Russia by seeking monetary gain from illicit resource extraction, the statement said.

They also provided logistical support to elements of the Wagner Group for their commercial endeavors, the statement added.

The US Treasury Department clarified in a separate statement that sanctions were imposed against Bois Rouge SARLU and Limited Liability Company Broker Expert. Washington linked both companies to the late Wagner group founder Yevgeny Prigozhin, according to the statement.

The United States also imposed nonproliferation measures against the private military company Wagner Group earlier this week.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said earlier that the Wagner Group de facto does not exist so any media reports about alleged actions by the group are groundless.

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Canada to Probe Alleged Wire Rod Dumping from China, Vietnam, Egypt – Border Agency

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WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) – The Canada Border Service Agency (CBSA) announced on Friday that Ottawa would launch an investigation into alleged wire rod dumping practices by China, Vietnam, and Egypt.

"The CBSA announced today that it is launching an investigation to determine whether certain wire rods from China, Egypt, and Vietnam are being sold at unfair prices in Canada," CBSA said in a statement.

The probe was launched over a complaint made by Ivaco Rolling Mills 2004 LP, alleging that their business has "suffered material injury" in the forms of lost market shares, lost sales, price undercutting, price depression, price suppression, as well as a negative impact on employment, capacity utilization, and financial performance, CBSA said.

The border agency further noted that the investigation would be jointly carried out with the Canadian International Trade Tribunal. The latter will begin a preliminary inquiry to determine whether said imports are harming Canadian producers and is set to deliver a determination by May 7.

CBSA on the other hand will investigate whether the Chinese, Vietnamese, and Egyptian wire rods are being dumped into the Canadian markets and will issue a preliminary decision by June 6.

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UN Would Like to See Pier Distributing Gaza Aid Working 'Smoothly as Possible' -Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, March 8 (Sputnik) - The United Nations would like to see the pier meant to distribute aid to Gaza working as efficiently as possible, the UN Spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Friday.

"We would want this to work as smoothly as possible," Dujarric said in a briefing.

The inspections for the distribution are supposed to be happening in Cyprus.

"We have our UN Envoy Sigrid Kaag working with her technical team in Cyprus working with the partners organizing this," he added.

Thursday night, US President Joe Biden said during his State of the Union Address that he is directing the US military to lead the mission that will establish a temporary pier that will bring humanitarian aid into Gaza and that the project will be completed without the presence of US troops on the ground.

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Crude Prices Down on Week as Fresh Volatility Drags on Oil Rally

NEW YORK, March 8 (Sputnik) - A fresh bout of volatility hit the oil market after last week's

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spectacular gains, raising uncertainty about the 2024 rally supported by OPEC+ cuts and other production outages but challenged by China's dismal economy.

Worries about the potential for another US banking crisis - similar to 2023 - and the likelihood of the Federal Reserve dragging its feet on interest rate cuts were also acting as red flags in oil traders minds, analysts said.

With an hour to Friday's settlement, US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude for April delivery was down $1.09, or 1.4%, to $77.84 per barrel. The WTI benchmark slid 2.5% on the week. Last week, it rose 4.6% last week after the prior week's 3.4% drop.

London-traded Brent crude was down $1.04, or 1.3%, to $81.92 per barrel. The global crude benchmark slid 2% on the week. Last week, Brent rose 2.4% after the prior week's tumble of 2.2%.

For the year, WTI remains up 8.8% and Brent 6.5%.

The annual gains could be more if not for nagging worries about the demand for oil, reinforced by the build in US crude stockpiles, which rose for a sixth week in a row last week, gaining almost 30 million barrels since late January.

Overall, oil has been "caught between support from the prolonged output cuts by OPEC+ and some questions on global demands, driven both by the Chinese setting their growth at 5% and fears of the U.S. still not being able to control inflation," Gary Cunningham, director of market research at Tradition Energy, said in comments carried by MarketWatch.

OPEC+, an alliance forged between the 13-member Saudi-led Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and 10 other oil producers steered by Russia, has committed to extend production cuts into the second quarter. The alliance intends to maintain its current run of 2.2 million barrels per day supply cuts until the end of June.

In China's case, it has set a GDP target of 5% for 2024, the same as the prior year. The target and other economic proposals were both unveiled in an official report released during the annual meeting of the country's National People's Congress.

While Beijing outlined more economic changes to help shore up growth, the government's messaging was largely unchanged from its previous signals, providing investors with little cause for optimism over what has been a sluggish economic rebound in China.

China's private purchasing managers' index also came in on the weaker side of expectations on Tuesday, further weighing on the sentiment for oil.

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Biden Says Told Netanyahu They Will Hold 'Come to Jesus' Meeting

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said following his State of the Union speech that he told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu they will hold a "come to Jesus" meeting.

Biden was caught on hot mic making the comment to US lawmakers and other government officials after his speech on Thursday evening at the US Capitol.

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"I told him, 'Bibi' [Netanyahu] - don't repeat this - I said, 'You and I are going to have a come to Jesus meeting.' I'm on a hot mic here. Good. That was good," Biden said.

The phrase is used colloquially to reference a sudden realization or change of opinion, although Biden's use of the term comes in the context of him as a Roman Catholic Christian and Netanyahu as a Jew.

However, Biden's comment prompted a laugh from US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who is also Jewish.

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Reports of Injuries in Gaza From US-Airdropped Aid Box Are False - Pentagon to Sputnik

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - Reports claiming that a US airdrop of aid in Gaza resulted in deaths or injuries are false, the Defense Department told Sputnik on Friday.

"Reports of injuries in Gaza from a US airdropped aid box are false," Pentagon said.

Several media outlets reported earlier on Friday that at least five people were killed and several others injured in Gaza during an airdrop of aid after parachutes failed to open.

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Haiti Has Not Requested UN Peacekeepers Before International Force Deployment -Official

UNITED NATIONS, March 8 (Sputnik) - The office of Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry has not requested UN peacekeepers within the last two weeks before the international force is deployed, the Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix said on Friday.

"The answer is no," Lacroix said in a briefing to a journalist, who asked if, within the last two weeks, the Haitian Prime Minister or any Haiti officials had requested UN peacekeepers in the interim while the country waits for the international force to be deployed.

The State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Friday that the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry to discuss the ongoing crisis in the country and urged him to reach a compromise to end the political stalemate.

The US is also working with its international partners to expedite security assistance to the Haitian National Police, and to accelerate the deployment of the UN Security-Council mandated multinational security support mission headed by Kenya.

Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry, who is currently stranded in Puerto Rico, has been running the island nation since July 2021 when then-President Jovenel Moise was murdered in his home.

Henry has been reportedly under pressure from the United States to resign and bring forward the elections, although a White House spokeswoman denied on Wednesday that Washington

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was pushing him to quit.

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US Assistant Attorney General Claims China, Russia Aim to Acquire Americans' Personal Data

SAN FRANCISCO, March 8 (Sputnik) - US Assistant Attorney General Matthew Olsen said on Friday that countries like China and Russia are attempting to acquire sensitive personal data of Americans.

"Countries like Russia and China seek to obtain the sensitive personal data of Americans," Olsen said during an event at the the American Bar Association.

Olsen said the data that such countries try to obtain is specific and includes geolocation and financial health information.

Some of the ways such data is obtained is by buying it from brokers or accessing it through strategic investments in US companies and commercial relationships, Olsen added.

Last month, US President Joe Biden issued an executive order to protect Americans' sensitive personal data from misuse by foreign countries of concern. The order focuses on sensitive information, including genomic, biometric, geolocation and financial data.

The order directs the US Justice Department to issue regulations with clear protections from access and exploitation by the countries of concern as well as by establishing regulations to protect sensitive government-related data.

The Biden administration has urged Congress to pass comprehensive privacy legislation, particularly to protect the safety of children.

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US Senate Advances $460Bln Government Funding Bill Ahead of Shutdown Deadline

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The US Senate advanced legislation with approximately $460 billion in spending to fund a part of the federal government before a partial shutdown deadline at the end of the day Friday, setting up a vote to pass the bill and send it to US President Joe Biden for finalization.

Senators voted to end debate on the bill with 63 in favor and 35 opposed. The US House of Representatives passed the legislation earlier this week.

The legislation funds six appropriations areas for which funding was set to expire on March 8, covering some 30% of the overall budget for the year, estimated at $1.6 trillion. The US Congress must pass funding for six other appropriations areas by March 22.

The bill also features $12.6 billion in earmarks, including 170 earmarks by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer. Some Republican lawmakers criticized the bill, including US Senator

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Mike Lee, who said that any senator vying to replace outgoing Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell should oppose the legislation.

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Georgieva Says Willing to Continue Work as IMF Managing Director

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Friday that she would be willing to continue serving in the leadership role if approved by other members.

"If the broader membership agrees, I would be honored to continue to serve as the IMF Managing Director," Georgieva said in a statement via social media platform X.

Georgieva said that she has received words of support for the work of the IMF from many members in recent weeks.

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US Congressman Says Not Running for Reelection After Death Threat, 'Defamatory Rumors'

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Matt Rosendale said on Friday that he will not seek reelection to the US House of Representatives, due to a death threat against his family and rumors about an affair with a staffer.

In February, Rosendale ended his US Senate bid and instead filed for reelection to his current House seat.

"Since that announcement, I have been forced to have law enforcement visit my children because of a death threat against me and false and defamatory rumors against me and my family," Rosendale said in a statement. "So, in the best interest of my family and the community, I am withdrawing from the House race and will not be seeking office."

Last month, former US Senator Heidi Heitkamp alleged that Rosendale ended his Senate bid because he impregnated a 20-year-old staffer. Rosendale denied the rumor and threatened legal action against Heitkamp.

Rosendale said that he ended his Senate bid due to former US President Donald Trump endorsing fellow Republican candidate Tim Sheehy for the seat.

The death threat and rumors have taken a "serious toll" on Rosendale and his family, the lawmaker's statement said. Attacks on Rosendale have made it impossible for the lawmaker to focus on his work and serve constituents, the statement said.

The situation also seriously disrupted the House race, the statement said.

The US political system is broken and requires reforms, the statement said. However, there is immense pressure from those who benefit from the current structure to maintain the status quo, the statement said.

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People who attempt to reform the system are subject to “severe retribution,” the statement added.

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Authorities Investigate Possible Oil Spill Off Huntington Beach in California - Supervisor

SAN FRANCISCO, March 8 (Sputnik) - Orange County Board of Supervisors member Katrina Foley said on Friday that she has been informed about an oil spill off Huntington Beach (HB) in southern California.

"I just was informed by our emergency response team of an oil spill off HB. Early thoughts are that it’s from a platform. Our county teams and Coast Guard are heading out now to investigate," Foley said.

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Republican National Committee Elects Trump’s Daughter-in-Law as Co-Chair

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The Republican National Committee (RNC) on Friday elected former President Donald Trump’s daughter-in-law, Lara Trump, as RNC co-chair.

The RNC elected Lara Trump by voice vote at a meeting in Houston, Texas, following Ronna McDaniel’s departure from the leadership role.

Last month, McDaniel announced her intention to step down at the RNC spring meeting, ahead of the 2024 US presidential election in November, in which Donald Trump is the presumptive Republican nominee.

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Jury Selection in Case of Russian National Konoshchenok to Start on November 18 - US Judge

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The jury selection in the case of Russian national Vadim Konoshchenok, suspected by the United States of transporting US-origin export-controlled items from Estonia to Russia, will start on November 18, US district judge Hector Gonzalez said on Friday.

"Jury selection process will start on November 18th," Gonzalez said during the hearing in an attempt to inquire whether there were any objections to the proposed date.

Konoshchenok's legal defense team answered that they have no objections to the proposed

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date.
The Estonian authorities extradited Konoshchenok to the United States in July 2023.
The US government accused Konoshchenok of conspiring to circumvent sanctions, illegally purchasing items for the Russian defense sector and of related financial fraud.

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Blinken Says Maintaining, Enhancing Gaza Land Crossings for Aid is Critical

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Friday underscored the critical need to not only maintain but also enhance land crossings into Gaza for aid delivery.
"It is absolutely essential not only to maintain but to expand the land crossings into Gaza," Blinken said during a meeting with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan.
Blinken added that land crossings serve as the main method for delivering necessary assistance, alongside airdrops.
On October 7, 2023, Palestinian movement Hamas attacked Israel from the Gaza Strip and in the ensuing fighting killed 1,100 Israelis, both military and civilians, and abducted some 240 others. Israel launched massive strikes on Gaza, fully blockaded the Palestinian enclave, and then invaded it with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas and rescuing the hostages.
Some 31,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's military operations and more than 76,000 have been wounded, according to the local authorities. More than 1.9 million Palestinians out of 2.3 million in Gaza have been displaced and more than half are facing hunger and starvation as a result of Israel's blockade.
On November 24, Qatar mediated a deal between Israel and Hamas on a temporary truce and the exchange of some of the Palestinians imprisoned by Israel and hostages taken by Hamas, 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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Blinken Speaks with Haitian PM to Urge Compromise to End Political Stalemate – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry to discuss the ongoing crisis in the country and urged him to reach a compromise to end the political stalemate, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Friday.
"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke with Haitian Prime Minister Dr. Ariel Henry on March 7 to discuss the ongoing political, security, and humanitarian crisis in Haiti," Miller said in a press release. "The Secretary urged Henry to support this proposal [developed in partnership

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with CARICOM and Haitian stakeholders] in the interest of restoring peace and stability to Haiti so the Haitian people can resume their daily lives free from violence and despair."

According to Blinken, the proposal will expedite a political transition through the creation of a broad-based, independent presidential college to steer the country toward the deployment of a Multinational Security Support mission and free and fair elections, the release added.

Henry, who is currently stranded in Puerto Rico, has been running the island nation since July 2021 when then-President Jovenel Moise was murdered in his home.

Henry has been reportedly under pressure from the United States to resign and bring forward the elections, although a White House spokeswoman denied on Wednesday that Washington was pushing him to quit.

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Zimbabwe Deports USAID Officials, Contractors - US State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The government of Zimbabwe detained and deported last month US Agency for International Development (USAID) officials and contractors, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Friday.

“Last month, Zimbabwean officials abruptly detained and deported USAID officials and contractors, who were conducting an assessment of the development and governance context in Zimbabwe,” Miller said in a statement.

MIller also alleged that the US officials were subject to aggressive handling, prolonged interrogation and intimidation.

The US government conveyed to the Zimbabwean authorities that such an approach is “unjustified and unacceptable,” Miller said.

Such actions by Zimbabwe undermine the country's declared efforts to maintain democratic reforms, Miller added.

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Canada Invest C$850Mln in CFB Trenton Facilities to Host New CC-330 Husky Fleet

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) – Canada is making C$850 million (US$631.8 million) in upgrading the facilities at the Canadian Forces Bases (CFB) Trenton so that it can host a new fleet of CC-330 Husky aircraft, National Defense said on Friday.

CFB Trenton is an airbase located in the province of Ontario. It is operated by the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and is a hub for transport operations in the country and abroad. It is home to the 8 Wing unit.

“Minister Blair announced an investment of $850 million to upgrade CFB Trenton so that it can

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host Canada's new fleet of CC-330 Husky Strategic Tanker Transport Aircraft," National Defense said in a statement.

Accordingly, the investment will allow for the development and construction of a two-bay hangar, an upgraded apron and runway, and taxiways, among other supporting infrastructure.

Since 2022, Canada has increasingly sought to modernize its armed forces both for its security but also in line with its defense commitments to NATO and has deployed important financial means to support new acquisitions.

Notably, the Department of National Defense has announced the purchase of 88 F-35 fighter jets, 9 CC-330 Husky strategic tanker and transport aircraft, 11 Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems, and up to 16 P-8A Poseidon multi-mission aircraft, among others.

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Microsoft Says Enhances Security Measures to Combat Alleged Russia-Backed Group Nobelium

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - Microsoft announced on Friday that it has intensified security measures to combat the alleged Russian-sponsored cyber actor Midnight Blizzard, also known as Nobelium, vowing ongoing security enhancements and vigilant monitoring.

"We have increased our security investments, cross-enterprise coordination and mobilization, and have enhanced our ability to defend ourselves and secure and harden our environment against this advanced persistent threat. We have and will continue to put in place additional enhanced security controls, detections and monitoring," Microsoft said in a statement.

The company's active investigations of Midnight Blizzard activities are ongoing and the findings will continue to evolve, the statement said.

Recent evidence shows Midnight Blizzard exploiting information from Microsoft's corporate emails to try accessing the company's source code repositories and internal systems, though there's no sign of compromised customer-facing systems, the statement also said.

"It is apparent that Midnight Blizzard is attempting to use secrets of different types it has found. Some of these secrets were shared between customers and Microsoft in email, and as we discover them in our exfiltrated email, we have been and are reaching out to these customers to assist them in taking mitigating measures," the statement added.

Last month, Microsoft said that it identified the threat actor as Midnight Blizzard. The group allegedly used a password spray attack to gain access to a small percentage of Microsoft corporate email accounts, including members of the senior leadership team.

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United Airlines' Boeing Rolls Onto Grass After Landing at Houston Airport – FAA

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WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) – A United Airlines' Boeing aircraft rolled onto the grass after landing at an airport in Houston, but all passengers were safely brought to the terminal, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said on Friday.

"After landing at George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston, United Airlines Flight 2477 rolled onto the grass when exiting onto the taxiway around 8 a.m. local time on Friday, March 8. The passengers deplaned on the taxiway and were bused to the terminal," the FAA said in a statement provided to Sputnik.

The Boeing 737 aircraft had departed earlier from Memphis, it added.

United Airlines clarified in a separate statement that there were 160 passengers and 6 crew members on board. "No passenger or crew injuries have been reported. Our teams will move the aircraft from the taxiway as soon as we are able to do so," the company said.

Specialists will move the aircraft from the taxiway as soon as possible, it added.

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UPDATE - Bitcoin Hits New Record High, With CME Futures Above $71,000

(Adds details and context, paragraphs 3-6)

NEW YORK, March 8 (Sputnik) - Bitcoin hit new record highs near $70,000 on Friday, with its futures crossing above $71,000 in US trade amid an investor mania fueled by the launch of extra-traded fund (ETF) products for the leading cryptocurrency.

Bitcoin futures on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange hovered at $69,000 by 10:42 am Eastern Standard Time in the United States (15:52 Greenwich Mean Time), after reaching an all-time high of $71,042.50 earlier in the day.

The inaugural launch of spot Bitcoin ETFs on February 14 has enabled money managers such as BlackRock, Fidelity and ARK Invest to craft investment products giving easy access to the cryptocurrency. Bitcoin, trading just below $44,000 a month prior to the launch, has rallied 60% since.

Some experts say Bitcoin may return to its old price after a process called "halving" that is set to occur sometime in April. Under this, rewards for mining new Bitcoin will be cut in half.

Business publication Barrons cites such experts as arguing that the anticipation of the looming halving event, combined with the new Bitcoin ETFs, is what led to the enormous price surge in Bitcoin this year.

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Pentagon Says UAP Office Found No Proof of Alien Technology, Reverse-Engineering Projects

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department's All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO) has yet to find evidence of an extraterrestrial connection to

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unidentified anomalous phenomena (UAP) or efforts to reverse-engineer alien UAP technology, spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Friday.

Last week, the Defense Department sent a copy of AARO's initial historical review of UAP incidents to Congress, Ryder said in a statement, adding that AARO reviewed all official US government investigatory efforts related to UAP since 1945, as well as conducted interviews and archival research.

"To date, AARO has found no verifiable evidence for claims that the US government and private companies have access to or have been reverse-engineering extraterrestrial technology. Also, AARO has found no evidence that any US government investigation, academic-sponsored research, or official review panel has confirmed that any sighting of a UAP represented extraterrestrial technology," the statement said.

In 2023, former Defense Department intelligence official David Grusch alleged that the United States is engaged in efforts to retrieve and reverse-engineer UAP and has targeted people who speak out about the matter.

AARO assesses that the alleged programs either do not exist, were misidentified, are unrelated to UAP or linked to a disestablished effort, the statement said.

AARO is committed to reaching conclusions based on "verifiable evidence" and will follow such evidence wherever it leads, the statement added.

AARO intends to publish a second historical review volume with information acquired after November 1, 2023, according to the statement.

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Trump Posts $91.6 Ml Bond As He Appeals Judgment Against Him In Defamation Case-Court Doc.

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump has posted a $91.6 million bond with the Federal Insurance Company as part of his appeal in the defamation case filed by E. Jean Carroll, the US Court said in a document on Friday.

"Defendant Donald J. Trump and Federal Insurance Company, a corporation duly authorized to transact surety business in the State of New York, as surety ("Surety"), are held and firmly bound unto Plaintiff, E. Jean Carroll, as Obligee ("Plaintiff" or "Obligee"), in the maximum total amount of Ninety One Million Six Hundred Thirty Thousand and 00/100 US Dollars for the payment of which, well and truly to be made, we bind ourselves and our respective heirs, executors, administrators, successors, and assigns, jointly and severally, as set forth below (the 'Bond')," the court document said.

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Johnson Says Discouraging Discharge Petition for Ukraine, Israel Aid in US House

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Friday that he is discouraging an effort to discharge legislation with aid for Ukraine and Israel from consideration by a committee, which would bring the bill directly to the floor of the US House of Representatives.

US House lawmakers have been working on a discharge petition for a foreign aid package, which could fast track the legislation with the support of a majority of the chamber.

"I'm certainly discouraging a discharge. I don't think that's a norm that we want to break in the institution. And I'm working actively against that," Johnson said, as quoted by Punchbowl News.

Moreover, Johnson said that he is not guaranteeing consideration on the House floor of a new foreign aid bill crafted by several committee chairmen.

Johnson said that he has been focused on passing appropriations bills ahead of government shutdown deadlines and has not "given one minute of time" to any foreign aid package.

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Canada Imposes Iran-Related Sanctions on 2 Individuals Over Repressing Women - Ministry

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - Canada has imposed sanctions on two Iranian individuals over their involvement in alleged violent repression of women and girls in the country, the Canadian Foreign Ministry said on Friday.

"The Honorable Melanie Joly, Minister of Foreign Affairs, today announced that Canada is imposing new sanctions under the Special Economic Measures (Iran) Regulations," Global Affairs Canada said. "Today's sanctions are being imposed in response to the Iranian regime's ongoing gross and systematic human rights violations, particularly against women and girls, and continued actions to destabilize regional peace and security."

The Canadian government has sanctioned the Tehran metro system chief executive Masoud Dorost due to his enforcement of the mandatory hijab law on public transit and senior Iranian parliamentarian at the Islamic Consultative Assembly "Majslis" Zohreh Elahian was listed over his support to the death penalty for protesters who took part in the "Women, Life, Freedom" movement.

Canada has so far imposed 17 packages of sanctions on Iran since the death of Mahsa Amini, a young Iranian woman who died in Tehran on September 16, 2022 after being detained by police for not wearing properly her headscarf.

Amini's death sparked protests, with some suggesting that law enforcement officers hit her on the head. An examination of the body and video footage revealed no signs of violence, according to the authorities.

Iran has said the protests were orchestrated by Western countries, including the United Kingdom, France and Norway, and has given a note of protest to the respective diplomats of

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these countries.

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Bitcoin Hits New Record High, With CME Futures Above $71,000

NEW YORK, March 8 (Sputnik) - Bitcoin hit new record highs on Friday, with its futures crossing above $71,000 in US trade amid an investor mania fueled by the launch of extra-traded products for the leading cryptocurrency.

Bitcoin futures on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange hovered at $69,000 by 10:42 am Eastern Standard Time in the United States (15:52 Greenwich Mean Time), after an all-time high of $71,042.50 earlier in the session.

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Pro-Palestine Protest Group Vandalizes Painting of Late UK Statesman Balfour - Statement

MOSCOW, March 8 (Sputnik) - A protester associated with the activist group Palestine Action vandalized a painting of the late UK Prime Minister and statesman Arthur Balfour at the University of Cambridge's Trinity College, the organization said on Friday.

"Palestine Action ruined a 1914 painting by Philip Alexius de Laszlo inside Trinity College, University of Cambridge of Lord Arthur James Balfour - the colonial administrator and signatory of the Balfour Declaration," the activist group said in a statement.

The group also shared video footage of the incident, in which a woman sprayed red paint on the artwork and then slashed it.

The 1917 Balfour Declaration declared the United Kingdom's support for forming of a Jewish state in the then-Ottoman region of Palestine.

Balfour "gave away" the Palestinian homeland without the right to do so and the United Kingdom's support for the colonization of Palestine has not wavered since 1917, the statement said.

Israeli arms supplier Elbit Systems uses the United Kingdom as a manufacturing outpost and Palestine Action vows to wage a direct campaign until Elbit is shut down and UK complicity with the situation in Palestine ends, the statement added.

The protest comes amid a conflict between Israel and the Palestinian group Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Israel launched a military operation in the Palestinian enclave in response to a surprise attack by Hamas on October 7, in which some 1,100 Israelis - military personnel and civilians - were killed and 240 others abducted.

More than 30,000 Palestinians have been killed in the Gaza Strip as a result of Israel's military actions and more than 76,000 have been wounded, according to the local authorities.

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Biden Proclaims March 9 as US Hostage and Wrongful Detainee Day

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden on Friday declared March 9 a Hostage and Wrongful Detainee Day to commemorate those Americans who have been wrongfully detained abroad.

" [I] do hereby proclaim March 9, 2024, as US Hostage and Wrongful Detainee Day," Biden said in a proclamation.

Biden urged Americans to observe this day with relevant programs and ceremonies while the special flag flies at the White House.

Biden emphasized that releasing hostages hold abroad is one of his top priorities and noted that more than more than 60 people have been brought from different countries, including from Russia, as a result of his administration's efforts.

However, Biden acknowledged that much more work still has to be done on this issue.

"Too many Americans remain illegally and wrongfully detained, fearing for their lives and not knowing what tomorrow will bring," Biden said.

The United States imposed last year the first-ever set of sanctions against persons, including in Russia and Iran, whom the United States have accused of assisting in detaining Americans and also endorsed the Declaration Against Arbitrary Detention.

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Canadian City Dismantles Monument Honoring Ukrainian Nazi Paramilitary Force

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) – The city of Oakville in Canada's province of Ontario dismantled on Friday a monument built to honor a Ukrainian Nazi paramilitary force, the 14th Waffen SS Grenadier Division also known as "1st Galician."

The memorial, which was known was "Monument to the Glory of the UPA" – a nationalist paramilitary force formed in Ukraine to fight the Soviet Union during the Second World War – was built in 1988 in the St. Volodymyr Ukrainian Cemetery.

Shortly after the monument's construction, a cenotaph displaying the emblem of the 14th Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS was erected beside alongside it. The cenotaph bears an inscription that reads, "For Those Who Died For the Freedom of Ukraine."

The monument's existence was first brought to public attention by the Russian Embassy in Ottawa in 2017, when it shared via X, which was then known as Twitter, images of the memorial and a bust of SS Roman Shukhevych, a commander of Ukrainian Nightingale Battalion and the UPA, in Alberta's Edmonton.

Journalists, activists and Jewish organizations such as B'nai Brith Canada and Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center, among others, had long called for the monument's dismantlement

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due to its controversial nature. Such calls were echoed by Mayor Rob Burton who had expressed his disgust with the memorial's existence but said his hands were tied by provincial legislation prohibiting its demolition.

Calls for its removal were renewed following the major scandal that occurred in September 2023 at the Canadian House of Commons when the entirety of the country's federal legislature gave two standing ovations to 98-year-old Ukrainian Nazi SS veteran Yaroslav Hunka, an individual who fought for the 1st Galician. Hunka had been invited to attend Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's address at the Parliament.

Canada has had a long and controversial history of granting safe haven to former Nazi veteran, oftentimes including those convicted of crimes in the Soviet Union. In the mid-1980s, the Canadian government launched the Commission of Inquiry on War Criminals, also known as the Deschenes Commission, to investigate the immigration of individuals with a Nazi-background into the country.

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