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3/11/24 Monday

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Scott Ritter: Pentagon's 'Ukrainian Fantasy' Is Falling Apart

On Friday, French Foreign Minister Stéphane Séjourné met with his Baltic and Ukrainian counterparts in Lithuania on Friday. The visit comes days after French President Emmanuel Macron raised the possibility of French troops being deployed to Ukraine, angering some of his more powerful allies in Europe.

The US Pentagon's fantasy in Ukraine is falling apart, former UN weapons inspector and commentator Scott Ritter told Sputnik's Fault Lines on Monday.

Speaking on reports in US media that said there are growing tensions between Kiev and Washington because Ukraine reportedly did not listen to tactical advice offered by the Pentagon, Ritter said he believes the assertions are not based in reality but instead are designed to shift the blame away from the United States.

"The Pentagon is definitely trying to create political cover for itself because their huge Ukrainian fantasy is falling apart," Ritter asserted, explaining earlier that Ukraine had little choice but to hold Avdeyevka for as long as possible so that defensive lines could be built behind it, noting however, that Russian airpower prevented even that goal from being achieved.

"It's easy to play armchair quarterback and just sit back there and pick apart. But the reality is what other choices [did] Ukrainians have but to try and hold onto the last defensible position they [had]?"

The Kiev regime is "waking up to the reality that their so-called friends and allies are abandoning them and leaving Ukraine to its own fate" Ritter explained earlier while discussing Macron's comments that French troops may be deployed in Ukraine, a hypothetical that Ritter says is only being discussed because of the position Ukraine is in.

"To understand why Macron would be even talking about this, you have to understand how dire the situation is for Ukraine right now. They are facing military collapse, right now as we speak the last reserves of Ukraine are being thrown into the battle outside the village of Orlovka," Ritter explained. "This is to buy time for a miracle to happen and the Ukrainians are hoping the miracle will be the arrival of a French battlegroup."

That possible "miracle" would not change the outlook on the battlefield, Ritter argued, saying that their ability "to deploy a military meaningful force to Ukraine is very slim," with or without the Baltic State allies Macron is reportedly seeking.

Meanwhile, Ritter argues, the election season is forcing the United States to step back from the conflict. "Biden is in a presidential election cycle, we're coming up on the final sprint to November. … Biden will do whatever is necessary to minimize his political exposure."

"We fired [Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs] Victoria Nuland, the architect of [the Ukraine] policy, and we [took] a step back."

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That has left Europe “sitting there, realizing that, frankly speaking, they are nothing without American money. This is a hard pill to swallow and meanwhile, on the battlefield, the Ukrainian army is in absolutely desperate straits.”

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Netanyahu ‘Doesn’t Fear’ Biden With US Elections Looming

On Sunday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told media outlets that he plans to go ahead with an invasion of the southern Gazan city of Rafah, despite US President Joe Biden’s stated opposition to the operation.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu doesn’t fear US President Joe Biden because he knows that Biden is depending on the Zionist vote in the US Presidential election this November, veteran war correspondent Elijah Magnier told Sputnik’s Fault Lines on Monday.

“We have a clear challenge from Israel to President Biden and in particular, Benjamin Netanyahu,” Magnier said, referring to Netanyahu’s comments that Israel will invade Rafah, despite Biden’s protests.

“This challenge comes from a position of strength, where Netanyahu is saying to Biden ‘You’ve lost the support of American Arabs, and if you stand against me, you will lose the support of Zionist [as well.]... are you going to risk this when you have strong opposition represented by [former US President] Donald Trump?... This is why Benjamin Netanyahu doesn’t fear standing up and challenging Joe Biden.”

Magnier noted that without US support, Israel would be unable to keep up its bombardment and invasion of Gaza for long. “So basically, America is saying, ‘I’m happy to be a partner in all the killing because of my election. I’m going to support that and you can do whatever you want, but allow me to go on television and complain about it.”

“When you do this,” Magnier added earlier, “it is a known propaganda strategy to say ‘oh, I feel very sorry. This is drama, this is a tragedy, this is unacceptable’ but then you continue supplying weapons. [This] is a clear contradiction of everything that humanity believes in.”

Despite Biden’s recent protests, Magnier noted that the two leaders agree on two important points. “First, that Biden will not stop supplying the Israelis with weapons … and the second point that [Biden has] agreed on [is] the same narrative that Israel has a right to defend itself,” noting that Netanyahu “is really doing whatever he wants.”

“Why are the Americans complaining, yet are using the veto at the United Nations to stop the ceasefire and to protect Israel and to allow Israel to continue the killing?” Magnier asked.

“Netanyahu said yesterday ‘I am going to go to Rafah’ … he’s basically saying to Joe Biden, ‘Keep your mouth shut. It’s much better [that way] because I am doing what I want. Anything you are saying or planning or putting red lines does not work for us, because at the end of the day, we have our own plan.”

Those plans, Magnier fears, include the elimination of Palestine entirely.“Once [Israel’s campaign in Gaza] is over and when Gaza will be under Israeli military control, the next step is to say to the Palestinians, 'okay, we've given you enough time to play around. Now… forget

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about anything that is called a Palestinian state.' That is the inevitable step that Israel is going to take after Gaza."

The long-promoted two-state solution is dead under the current conditions, Magnier said. "Who is going to implement it? If Benjamin Netanyahu doesn't listen to the United Nations, doesn't abide by international laws, and doesn't listen to the United States– which is the reason for the existence of Israel, then he can do whatever he wants. Therefore, a two-state solution is no longer a viable choice for the Palestinians."

The US Pentagon's fantasy in Ukraine is falling apart, former UN weapons inspector and commentator Scott Ritter told Radio Sputnik on Monday.

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"The Pentagon is definitely trying to create political cover for itself because their huge Ukrainian fantasy is falling apart," Ritter asserted while discussing reported growing tensions between Kiev and Washington regarding military strategy.

The Kiev regime is "waking up to the reality that their so-called friends and allies are abandoning them and leaving Ukraine to its own fate" Ritter explained earlier while discussing French President Emmanuel Macron's speaking about the potential of French troops being deployed in Ukraine, a hypothetical that Ritter says is only being discussed because of the position Ukraine is in.

"To understand why Macron would be even talking about this, you have to understand how dire the situation is for Ukraine right now. They are facing military collapse, right now as we speak the last reserves of Ukraine are being thrown into the battle outside the village of Orlovka," Ritter explained. "This is to buy time for a miracle to happen and the Ukrainians are hoping the miracle will be the arrival of a French battlegroup."

But Europe has started "realizing that, frankly speaking, they are nothing without American money. This is a hard pill to swallow and meanwhile, on the battlefield, the Ukrainian army is in absolutely desperate straits," Ritter concluded.

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Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu doesn't fear US President Joe Biden because he knows that Biden is depending on the Zionist vote in the US Presidential election this November, veteran war correspondent Elijah Magnier told radio Sputnik on Monday.

"We have a clear challenge from Israel to President Biden and in particular, Benjamin Netanyahu," Magnier said, referring to Netanyahu's comments that Israel will invade Rafah,

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despite Biden's protests. "This challenge comes from a position of strength, where Netanyahu is saying to Biden 'You've lost the support of American Arabs, and if you stand against me, you will lose the support of Zionist [as well.]... are you going to risk this when you have strong opposition represented by [former US President] Donald Trump?... This is why Benjamin Netanyahu doesn't fear standing up and challenging Joe Biden."

"He's basically saying to Joe Biden, 'Keep your mouth shut. It's much better [that way] because I am doing what I want. Anything you are saying or planning or putting red lines does not work for us, because at the end of the day, we have our own plan," Magnier added.

Those plans, Magnier fears, include the elimination of Palestine entirely. "Once [Israel's campaign in Gaza] is over and when Gaza will be under Israeli military control, the next step is to say to the Palestinians, 'okay, we've given you enough time to play around. Now… forget about anything that is called a Palestinian state.' That is the inevitable step that Israel is going to take after Gaza."

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US to Provide Additional $200 Million to Multinational Security Mission for Haiti -Blinken

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced $200 million in additional support for the multinational security support mission in Haiti.

"I'm announcing today that the United States Department of Defense is doubling its approved support for the mission from $100 million to $200 million," Blinken said during remarks in Jamaica on Monday. "That brings the total US support to $300 million for this effort."

Blinken met with Caribbean leaders in Jamaica to discuss the worsening political and security crisis in Haiti.

Blinken also said the United States will provide an additional $33 million in humanitarian aid to Haiti.

On February 29, gangs began shooting in the downtown of the capital Port-au-Prince while Prime Minister Ariel Henry was visiting Kenya. Henry conducted the visit to seek an agreement for the deployment of foreign forces in Haiti to fight organized crime.

The gangs said their goal was to prevent Henry from returning to Haiti and they stormed Haiti's largest prison and freed an unconfirmed number of inmates. The Haitian government declared a state of emergency in the capital region.

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Mississippi Official Demands Stop to Biden Order on Illegal Voter Registration - Reports

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WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - Mississippi Secretary of State Michael Watson is demanding that the Justice Department put a stop to an executive order by President Joe Biden that is allegedly been used to register ineligible felons to vote, Fox News reported.

"These efforts are an intrusion into state matters and are a misuse of federal revenue and resources. In addition, it appears that these efforts have led to agencies under your charge attempting to register people to vote, including potentially ineligible felons and to co-opt state and local officials into accomplishing this goal," Watson was quoted as saying in a letter to Attorney General Merrick Garland on Monday.

Watson expressed concern in the letter that illegal immigrants in the Mississippi prison system could potentially be registered to vote, the report said.

Watson also sought documentation from the Justice Department as to which prisons in Mississippi they have been working in, what exactly the federal officers have been doing there and which prisoners they have been talking to, the report said.

The secretary of state emphasized that it is incumbent upon all US states to push back as hard as they can prior to the November elections given the importance of the vote for the future of the United States or "what we have left of it," the report said.

Biden's executive order No. 14019 sought to turn the Justice Department agencies away from law enforcement by redirecting their efforts toward voter registration, the report quoted Watson as saying.

Biden signed the executive order in 2021 and his administration promoted it as an attempt to combat racial injustice and tasked federal agencies with considering ways to expand citizens' opportunities to register to vote, the report added.

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Hamas Must be Declared Terrorist Organization, Face 'Most Heavy' Sanctions-Israel Minister

UNITED NATIONS, March 12 (Sputnik) - Israel wants Hamas to be declared a terrorist organization and face the most heavy sanctions, the Israeli Minister for Foreign Affairs Israel Katz said on Monday.

"Hamas must be declared as a terrorist organization and face the most heavy sanctions possible," Katz said in the UN Security Council meeting on Palestine.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Monday that he rejects the possibility of creating a Palestinian state.

In addition, the Israeli prime minister said that Israel must have full control over all Palestinian territories west of the Jordan River.

Palestinians seek diplomatic recognition of their independent state in the territories of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which is partially occupied by Israel, and the Gaza Strip. The Israeli government refuses to recognize Palestine as an independent political and diplomatic entity and builds settlements in the occupied areas despite objections from the United Nations.

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Lexicon, Lukos to Compete for Parts of $610Mln Army Training Project - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - Lexicon Consulting and Lukos will compete for each order of a $610 million US Army contract to provide services for the Army Training Support Center, the Defense Department announced.

"Lexicon Consulting [of] El Cajon, California and Lukos [of] Tampa, Florida will compete for each order of the $610 million ... contract for mission support services for the Army Training Support Center," the Defense Department said in a press release.

Work on the total contract covering both companies is estimated to last for four and a quarter years with an estimated completion date of July 6, 2028, the release said.

The US Army Contracting Command based in Orlando in the state of Florida will oversee all work on the project, the release added.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) -

BIDEN'S 2025 BUDGET PROPOSAL

* US President Joe Biden has requested a total of $7.26 trillion to fund the fiscal year 2025 budget, according to a document published by the White House on Monday.
* Biden is requesting $850 billion for national defense, marking an increase of $34 billion from the 2023 level, the document said.
* Biden’s budget request includes $19.8 billion for nuclear weapons activities, marking a $4.5 billion increase from the fiscal year 2021 level, the document said.
* The request includes $482 million in funds to support Ukraine and $25 million for a new fund to suppress Russia's alleged influence in Africa, the document said.
* The request includes $5.3 billion to continue the development and procurement of the B-21 strategic bomber program, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said.
* The Defense Department is expected to spend nearly $500 million on its drone-focused replicator program in fiscal year 2025, US Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks said.
* The State Department budget request includes $2 billion to create a new international infrastructure fund to outcompete China and provide alternatives, Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources Richard Verma said.

ISRAEL INVASION OF GAZA

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* UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Monday renewed his call for a cessation of hostilities in Gaza and Israel during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan and also called on Israel to remove all obstacles to delivering humanitarian aid.
* Israel has eliminated the fourth most important commander in the Hamas hierarchy, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said.
* The United States conducted a fifth air drop in Gaza, delivering more than 27,600 meals and 25,900 bottles of water amid a critical humanitarian situation and a risk of mass starvation of Palestinians as Israel continues its military operations, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) said.

RUSSIAN ECONOMY
* Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a law that authorizes the usage of digital financial assets and digital utility rights, as well as digital rights that include both of these instruments simultaneously in international payments, according to according to the relevant document published on the official legal information portal on Monday.
* Putin has has signed a law on the ratification of protocols providing for the postponement until 2028-2040 of Cuba's debt repayments to Russia on four government loans and the transition to servicing this debt in rubles, according to the relevant document published on the official legal information portal.
* The share of Chinese Yuan in Russian exports in January increased to 40.8% and in imports up to 38.5% month-on-month, the Russian Central Bank said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE
* Ukraine has lost more than 430 soldiers in the Avdiivka direction, also known as Avdeyevka, over the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Monday.
* The position of the German government on the supply of Taurus cruise missile to Ukraine has not changed, German government spokesman Steffen Hebestreit said.
* There is an increased activity of drone attack attempts by the Ukrainian armed forces in Russian regions, but Russian military and air defense systems are coping well, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.
* Commanders and fighters of elite units of the Ukrainian armed forces are not satisfied with the reshuffle in the country's military leadership and are discussing toppling Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and new Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian armed forces Oleksandr Syrskyi, a source in the Russian law enforcement agencies told Sputnik.
* No other country in the world can replace the US industrial base in supplying Ukraine with needed military equipment and munitions, a senior US defense official said during a press briefing.

NATO
* Sweden considers it unnecessary to permanently host nuclear weapons on its territory, Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson said after his country's flag was raised earlier at the NATO headquarters in Brussels on Monday.
* NATO has no plans of extending a number of states with deployed nuclear weapons through Sweden, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said.

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WADA DECISION ON RUSSIA

* As many as 250 Russian athletes have been sanctioned as a result of the World Anti-Doping Agency's (WADA) Operation LIMS investigation, WADA said on Monday, adding that another 32 athletes had been charged and 106 were under investigation.

* The WADA Executive Committee expressed concern about the upcoming Friendship Games in Russia, set to take place from September 15-29, because the tournament would not be held under the protection of the World Anti-Doping Code.

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Biden Requests $5.3Bln to Continue Development, Procurement of B-21 Bomber Program-Austin

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration's budget request for fiscal year 2025 includes $5.3 billion to continue the development and procurement of the B-21 strategic bomber program, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said on Monday.

"For example, the budget requests $9.9 billion for the Columbia-class ballistic-missile submarine; $5.3 billion to continue development and procurement of the B-21 strategic bomber program," Austin said in a statement.

In addition, Austin said the proposed budget seeks $3.7 billion to continue funding for the ground-based Sentinel program.

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US Has 'Stronger Hand' to Play in Global Affairs Than Adversaries - CIA Director

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The United States has a stronger hand to play in global affairs than its geopolitical adversaries, CIA Director William Burns said on Monday.

"I think the United States, while we may not have uncontested primacy in the world today, we still have a stronger hand to play than any of our adversaries or rivals," Burns said during a US Senate Intelligence Committee hearing.

The US is capable of continuing to support Ukraine while addressing other issues around the world, Burns said.

Continuing to aid Ukraine helps – not harms – simultaneous efforts to deter China, Burns said.

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US Believes Russia Not Serious About Negotiating End of Ukraine Conflict - CIA Director

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The United States believes that Russia is not serious about engaging in negotiations to resolve the conflict in Ukraine, CIA Director William Burns said on Monday.

"It's our assessment that Russia's not serious about negotiations today," Burns said during a US Senate Intelligence Committee hearing, when asked about negotiations to end the conflict in Ukraine.

Russia has consistently said that it is open to peace talks with Ukraine, on the condition that Kiev recognizes territorial changes made since the launch of Russia's special military operation. Russian and Ukrainian delegations have held several rounds of peace talks, although negotiations ultimately reached an impasse.

Peace talks in the early days of the conflict were "sabotaged," Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said earlier this month. Ukraine's former chief negotiator, David Arakhamia, said that then-UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson convinced Kiev to reject a deal to end the conflict in spring 2022. However, Johnson has denied the allegation.

In February, Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview with US journalist Tucker Carlson that Russia remains open to a negotiated resolution of the conflict in Ukraine.

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Biden's Budget Request Includes $300Mln to Fund Ukraine Security Aid Initiative - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The Defense Department said on Monday that the Biden administration's budget request for fiscal year (FY) 2025 includes $300 million to fund the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI),

"The FY2025 budget request also funds our bedrock commitment to NATO, the indispensable defensive alliance that remains the foundation of transatlantic security, and includes $4.2 billion to support investments, activities, and operations within Europe to deter Russian aggression against our allies and partners," the Defense Department said in a press release on Monday.

The budget request also includes $9.9. billion for the pacific Deterrence Initiative and $2.9 billion for the European Deterrence Initiative, the release said.

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UK Urges Israel to Prevent Sexual Violence Against Detained Palestinians – Minister

UNITED NATIONS, March 11 (Sputnik) – The United Kingdom calls on Israel to prevent conflict-related sexual violence against detained Palestinians, UK Minister of State for the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, and United Nations Tariq Ahmad said on Monday.

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"We call on Israel to take immediate measures to prevent conflict-related sexual violence, to abide by the international humanitarian law," Ahmad said at the United Nations Security Council meeting.

The minister stressed that he was "deeply shocked" over concerning reports about sexual violence perpetrated by the Israeli forces against Palestinian detainees. Ahmad urged Israel to hold an immediate investigation and to hold those responsible to account.

He also pointed out that London insists on the safe and unconditional release of all hostages.

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FBI Director Says Concerned About Terrorist Groups Exploiting Lack of US Border Security

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - FBI Director Christopher Wray said the US intelligence community is concerned about the potential for terrorist groups to exploit a lack of security at the southern border.

"We have concerns that it could be a vulnerability that terrorist organizations could seek to exploit," Wray said during a US Senate Intelligence Committee hearing, when asked about border security.

However, the FBI is not tracking any specific terrorist threats at the border at this time, Wray said.

The US has experienced three consecutive years of record illegal migration at the southern border under the Biden administration, according to US Customs and Border Protection data.

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CIA Chief Says New US Aid Will Allow Ukraine to Strike Crimea, Russian Black Sea Fleet

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - US security assistance for Ukraine will help Kiev conduct strikes in Crimea and against Russia's Black Sea fleet, CIA Director William Burns said in a testimony on Monday.

"It's our assessment that with supplemental assistance... Ukraine can continue to exact costs against Russia, not only with the penetration strikes in Crimea, but also against Russia's Black Sea fleet, continuing the success which has resulted in 15 Russian ships sunk over the course of the last six months," Burns told the US Senate Intelligence Committee.

Last month, Senate Republicans rejected a $118 billion national security supplemental package that includes $60 billion for Ukraine, $14 billion for Israel and border policy reforms. Republicans claim the border security reforms in the bill would not do enough to resolve the border crisis.

The Senate ended up sending a $95 billion foreign aid bill to the House of Representatives, which House Speaker Mike Johnson has been reluctant to take up at the moment while lawmakers prioritize passing full year spending budgets instead of relying on short-term

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spending bills.
Media reported that House Republicans are in the early stages of work on an alternate foreign aid bill that they hope will be ready by April.

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Gaza Conflict Inspiring New Generation of Terrorism - US Intelligence Chief

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The Gaza conflict is inspiring a new generation of terrorism, US Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines said during a congressional hearing on Monday.
"While it is too early to tell, it is likely that the Gaza conflict will have a generational impact on terrorism," Haines told the US Senate Intelligence Committee. "Both al Qaeda and ISIS [both outlawed in Russia] inspired by Hamas have directed supporters to conduct attacks against Israeli and US interests."
Haines also pointed out that the Gaza conflict has inspired individuals to conduct acts of anti-semitic and Islamophobic terror worldwide.
Moreover, Haines said the US intelligence community continues to assess that Hezbollah and Iran do not want to cause an escalation of the conflict that would pull the United States or them into a broader war.
In Afghanistan, the Islamic State terror group [banned in Russia] remains a concern, especially for the Taliban, Haines added.

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Biden's FY25 Budget Includes $625Mln for Continued Deployments to Support NATO – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) – The Biden administration's budget request includes $625 million for continued deployments in Europe to support NATO missions and $2.1 billion to fund the European deterrence initiative to deter Russia, Under Secretary of the Army Gabe Camarillo said during a press briefing on Monday.
"We do have in this particular base budget FY 25 about 625.6 million for continued deployments and support to reassure our NATO partners and allies $2.1 billion in the European deterrence initiative," Camarillo said.

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Ukraine Likely to Lose Territory in 2024 Without Further Western Aid - CIA Director

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - Ukraine is likely to lose significant territory to Russia without further aid from the United States and other Western backers, US Central Intelligence Agency Director William Burns said on Monday.

"Without supplemental assistance, it seems to me lies a much grimmer future. Ukraine is likely to lose ground, and probably significant ground, in 2024," Burns said during a US Senate Intelligence Committee hearing.

However, with further support, Ukraine could make gains and better position itself for negotiations to end the conflict by late 2024 or early 2025, Burns said.

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US Concerned Russia Will Risk Weaponizing Space, Cyber Domains - Intel Chief

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The United States remains concerned that Russia could risk weaponizing the space and cyber domains, US Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines said during a congressional hearing on Monday.

"We remain concerned that Moscow will put at risk long-standing global norms against the use of asymmetric or strategically destabilizing weapons including in space and the cyber domain," Haines told the Senate Intelligence Committee.

The United States is also closely watching growing relations between Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran, Haines added.

Increased collaboration among the four countries through bilateral or trilateral arrangements enhances their capabilities in military, economic, political, and intelligence matters, according to Haines.

Last month, the United States claimed that Russia is developing a space-based anti-satellite weapon that poses a serious US national security threat.

The Kremlin in response to US claims said the White House is trying to encourage Congress to vote for a bill to allocate money to Ukraine.

Last month, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that claims about Russia attempting to deploy nuclear weapons in space were baseless and were needed only to draw the country into negotiations profitable to the US.

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Ukraine Faces Hard Times Without US Aid Amid Russian Surge in Munition Supply - DNI Chief

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - Ukraine will have a very hard time maintaining advances on the battlefield without US security assistance, as Russia is able to sustain a surge in

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ammunition supply, US Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines said during a congressional hearing on Monday.

"Without that assistance, it is hard to imagine how Ukraine will be able to maintain the extremely hard fought advances it has made against the Russians, especially given the sustained surge in Russian ammunition production and purchases from North Korea and Iran," Haines told the Senate Intelligence Committee when asked about the Biden administration's national security supplemental request.

Last month, Senate Republicans rejected a $118 billion national security supplemental package that includes $60 billion for Ukraine, $14 billion for Israel and border policy reforms. Republicans claim the border security reforms in the bill would not do enough to resolve the border crisis.

The Senate ended up sending a $95 billion foreign aid bill to the House of Representatives, which House Speaker Mike Johnson has been reluctant to take up.

Media reported that House Republicans are in the early stages of work on an alternate foreign aid bill that they hope will be ready by April.

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Russia to Retain Significant Energy Leverage Throughout 2024 – US Intelligence Assessment

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) – Russia will retain a significant energy leverage throughout the year despite Western sanctions and a price cap on Russian oil, the US Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) said in an annual report on Monday.

“Russia will retain significant energy leverage. In the first half of 2023, Russia was still the second-largest supplier of liquefied natural gas to Europe and announced reduction in its crude oil exports as part of its OPEC+ commitment,” the report said.

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US Intelligence Chief Says China Wants Positive Ties With US to Attract Foreign Investment

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - China seeks to maintain a positive relationship with the United States in order to attract foreign investment, US Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines said during a congressional hearing on Monday.

"The PRC seeks to ensure China can maintain positive ties to the United States and will likely continue to do so this year, as they see stability in our relationship is important to their capacity to attract foreign direct investment," Haines told the Senate Intelligence Committee.

However, Chinese President Xi Jinping is increasingly concerned about the United States' ability to interfere with China's technology goals, which are key to spurring economic growth, according to Haines.

Haines claims that China's economy will likely have another difficult year in 2024.

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Chinese Premier Li Qiang said last week that China aims to achieve 5% economic growth this year. However, he acknowledged that achieving this goal would be challenging.

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AI, Biotech Developments Likely to Pose Threats to US Interests - Intelligence Assessment

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) – Rapid developments in the fields of artificial intelligence (AI) and biotechnologies will likely pave the way for asymmetric threats to US interests and economic prosperity, the US Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) said in an annual report on Monday.

"New technologies — particularly in the fields of AI and biotechnology — are being developed and are proliferating at a rate that makes it challenging for companies and governments to shape norms regarding civil liberties, privacy, and ethics. The convergence of these emerging technologies is likely to create breakthroughs, which could lead to the rapid development of asymmetric threats — such as advanced UAVs — to US interests and probably will help shape US economic prosperity," ODNI said in its 2024 Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community.

Among the potential threats is the continued refinement of stealth technologies which have impacted conventional defense elements, the assessment said, noting that the situation has driven efforts in the development of detection systems and guided weapons.

The assessment further pointed out the risks of AI, which can be used as a tool of good as well as for misinformation abd the development of computer viruses and chemical weapons, among others.

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Biden Requests $61.2 Billion for Advanced Fighter Jets in FY2025 – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) – The Biden administration has requested $61.2 billion for procurement of advanced fighter jets in Fiscal Year (FY) 2025, a senior US defense official said during a press briefing.

In 2025, the US Department of Defense will be focusing primarily on F-22, F-25, and F-15EX fighter jets, and the latest B-21 bombers, the official said.

The Biden administration has requested $262.6 billion for the US Air Force in FY2025, according to the official.

Earlier in March, Bloomberg reported that the FY2025 budget request will include less funds for the F-35 program and the purchase of Virginia-class multipurpose nuclear submarines. More specifically, the Pentagon is expected to purchase 70 F-35 fighter jets, instead of 83 as was initially planned. As for the nuclear submarines, contracts will be awarded for the construction of

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six submarines instead of seven.

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Biden Requests Nearly $30Bln for Munitions in FY2025 - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) – The Biden administration has requested $29.8 billion for the Department of Defense in Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 for the production of different kinds of munitions, a senior US defense official said during a press briefing.

The amount also includes $5.9 billion for ammunition and $7.2 billion for strategic missiles, the official said.

Additionally, the FY2025 budget request includes $16 billion for tactical missiles, according to the official.

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Deadlock in Ukraine, Western Aid Uncertainty Benefit Russia - US Intelligence Assessment

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - A deadlock on the battlefield in Ukraine and uncertainty surrounding the future of Western aid for Kiev benefits Russia, the US Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) said on Monday.

"Nonetheless, this deadlock plays to Russia's strategic military advantages and is increasingly shifting the momentum in Moscow's favor," ODNI said in an intelligence assessment.

"Meanwhile, Moscow has made continual incremental battlefield gains since late 2023, and is benefiting from uncertainties about the future of Western military assistance."

Russia's military will undergo a multi-year recovery effort following the special military operation in Ukraine, the assessment said. Russia will rely on nuclear and counterspace capabilities for strategic deterrence while it rebuilds its ground force, the assessment said.

Russia's air and naval forces will continue to provide Moscow with global power projection capabilities, the assessment said.

However, Russia "almost certainly" does not want a direct military conflict with the United States or other NATO member states, the assessment added.

Nevertheless, Russia remains a resilient and capable adversary, according to the assessment.

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Only US Industrial Base Able to Keep Supporting Ukraine on This Level – Senior Official

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) – No other country in the world can replace the US industrial base in supplying Ukraine with needed military equipment and munitions, a senior US defense official said during a press briefing.

"There isn't another industrial base on the planet that can really take our place [to support Ukraine]," the official said.

According to the official, the Biden administration is planning to invest more than $800 million in its critical industrial base, including $369 million for casting and forging, $243 million for critical chemical production, and $193 million for strategic materials as part of the FY2025 defense budget request.

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Biden Requests $1.8Bln for Artificial Intelligence in FY2025, Same as in FY2024 - Official

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) – The US Department of Defense requested $1.8 billion for the development of artificial intelligence (AI) in FY2025, a senior US defense official said during a press briefing.

In the FY2024 budget request, the administration also asked Congress for $1.8 billion to support the delivery and adoption of AI-enabled capabilities.

US President Joe Biden said in his annual State of the Union speech on Thursday that lawmakers should work both to harness the potential of artificial intelligence technology and protect people from its risks.

During the annual Defense Data and Artificial Intelligence Symposium in February, US Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks said that the United States does not seek an artificial intelligence arms race with its adversaries.

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Biden's fy2025 Budget Includes First-Time Request to Support Taiwan Drawdown - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration's defense budget request for Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 includes for the first time a funding request to support a drawdown authority for Taiwan, a senior US defense official said.

The budget request also includes $9.9 billion in critical investment to strengthen deterrence in the Indo-Pacific, the official said during a press briefing.

In February, the US Senate proposed a supplemental bill that includes $2.5 billion to bolster US and allied capabilities in the Indo-Pacific region and to deter China. Of the $2.5 billion, some $1.9 billion would be used to invest in the US industrial base to replenish US weapons provided

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to Taiwan during the next two years.
The new budget request also follows the logic of the 2024 budget, prioritizing China as the preeminent pacing challenge in the Indo-Pacific, the official said.

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Russia Not Seeking Direct Conflict With US, NATO - US Intelligence Assessment

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - Russia is not seeking a direct military conflict with the United States or other NATO member states, the US Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) said on Monday.
"Russia almost certainly does not want a direct military conflict with US and NATO forces and will continue asymmetric activity below what it calculates to be the threshold of military conflict globally," ODNI said in an intelligence assessment.
Russia remains a capable and resilient adversary across a wide range of domains, the assessment said.
Russia's increasing economic and defense ties with China, Iran and North Korea are a major challenge for the collective West and its partners, the assessment added.

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Biden Requests $9.8Bln for Mix of Supersonic, Hypersonic - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is requesting $9.8 billion for a mix of hypersonic and long-range subsonic missiles in the Fiscal Year 2025 budget, a senior US defense official said during a press briefing.
The funds will also help increase procurement and improve capability of survivable subsonic weapons, the official said.
In total, the Biden administration is requesting $849.8 billion for the US national defense.

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Biden Requests $849.8Bln for National Defense in FY2025 – Official

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) – The Biden administration has asked Congress to allocate $849.8 billion for national defense in fiscal year 2025 or $7.8 billion more than in 2024, a senior US defense official said during a press briefing.
More specifically, the administration has requested $262.6 billion for the US Air Force, $257.6

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billion for the Navy, $185.5 billion for the Army, and $143.7 billion for other defense spending in 2025, the official said.

To date, Congress has not passed the 2024 US defense budget amid a rift between Democrats and Republicans who are still debating over one of the key financial documents.

According to the official, the US Department of Defense "lost" a total of about five years over the past 15 years due to continuous resolutions.

Compared to the budget request of 2022, the 2025 defense budget request will be nearly $100 billion larger.

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Biden Requests $49.2Bln for Nuclear Enterprise Modernization – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) – The Biden administration is requesting $49.2 billion for nuclear enterprise modernization in Fiscal Year (FY) 2025, a senior US defense official said during a press briefing.

The modernization will include Columbia-class submarines, the production of the newest B-21 bombers as well as the modernization of legacy bombers, the official said.

The administration also plans to spend $28.4 billion on missile defeat and defense, the official added.

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US Army Size to Drop by 1,400 to 442,300 in 2025 – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) – The size of the US Army will decrease in Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 to 442,300 or 1,400 fewer soldiers compared to the level in FY2024, a senior US defense official said during a press briefing.

In the Fiscal Year 2024 budget request, the size of the US Army was set at 443,700 with $185.3 billion in total funding.

The total size of the US Army, including the National Guard and Reserve, is set to decrease by 400 soldiers to 943,100 in FY2025, according to the official.

In February, the US Army announced plans to reduce its troop levels by 24,000 soldiers as part of a multi-year force restructuring strategy, which comes amid recruitment problems in the US military.

In 2023, the US Army failed to reach its 2023 recruitment goal by approximately 10,000 recruits, according to US media reports.

The total size of the US Army, including the National Guard and Reserve, is set to become 943,100 in 2025, a drop of about 400 soldiers, according to the officials.

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US Says Supports Right to Self Defense in Response to Pope Francis Calls for Ukraine Peace

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The United States supports Ukraine's right to self-defense amid calls by Pope Francis to resolve the conflict diplomatically, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

"Obviously, we support Ukraine's right to defend itself. We have said time and time again: nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine," Miller said during a press briefing, when asked about the Pope's comments.

The United States supports Ukraine's "peace formula," which requires Russia to end its special military operation and agree to negotiations, Miller said.

Earlier this month, Pope Francis urged leaders to create the conditions for a diplomatic solution to the conflict. The Pope also said that Ukraine should show the "courage of the white flag."

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said that Ukraine will live and die by its blue and yellow flag,

Pope Francis has repeatedly expressed willingness to support efforts to end the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. In May 2023, the Vatican formed a peacekeeping mission for Ukraine, headed by Cardinal Matteo Zuppi.

In June, the cardinal visited both Ukraine and Russia to meet with officials and discuss the Vatican's humanitarian efforts.

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Pentagon Expects To Spend Around $500 Mln On Drone-Focused Replicator Program In FY2025

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) – The Pentagon is expected to spend nearly $500 million on its drone-focused replicator program in FY2025, US Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks said on Monday.

"The level of effort spending to think about and replicator in FY 24 is around 500 million and in FY 25 is around 500 million," Hicks told reporters.

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Biden, Allies Desperate to Find 'Exit Ramp' From Lost Ukraine War - Ex-US Army Officer

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WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The United States and its allies are desperately trying to escape from their support for Ukraine in its disastrous war against Russia, former US Army officer and political consultant Lieutenant Colonel Earl Rasmussen told Sputnik on Monday.

"There is desperation here and throughout the West," Rasmussen said. "The United States as well as their allies are seeking an exit ramp."

In his State of the Union address on Thursday night, President Joe Biden pointedly avoided all reference to sending more substantial aid to Ukraine.

A more than $60 billion arms and ammunition package was approved by the Senate but is stalled in the House of Representatives.

Rasmussen said the structure and content of Biden's speech made clear that he had already written off Ukraine as a "lost cause" and was now focused instead entirely on just getting reelected to a second four-year term in November.

"The speech was more of a campaign speech rather than a State of the Union. I think President Biden or rather his key support staff see Ukraine as a lost cause, Project Ukraine is coming to an end, at least for now," he said.

However, the State of the Union speech also made clear that Biden was determined to blame the loss of Ukraine and the failure of his policies there on other parties, especially Republican opponents in Congress, Rasmussen observed.

Biden's plan to decouple the United States from its previous support for Kiev "will not publicly appear as one which they can try to point the finger somewhere else without accepting responsibility for destroying yet another country and thrusting the West into a new Cold War, or rather pseudo one," he said.

Nuland's resignation last week was accompanied by the partial leak and publication of the Istanbul draft Peace Agreement between Russia and Ukraine in 2022 and a statement by Chief of Staff of the Army General Randy George about not underestimating the Russians and that Russia had done quite well ramping up their industrial base, Rasmussen recalled.

"There appears to be panic in the West ...Biden is focused on re-election and he should realize that Ukraine is an albatross hanging around his neck. Jettisoning it quickly seems to be what is called for, plus he has Israel that has priority and the Far East," he said.

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Biden's Defense Budget Request Includes $33.7Bln for Vital Space Capabilities – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) – The Biden administration's defense budget requests for FY2025 include $33.7 billion for vital space capabilities, a senior US defense official said during a press briefing.

The Department of Defense budget request also includes $4.7 billion for the development of new Resilient Missile Warning/Missile Tracking architectures and $1.5 billion for the development of the GPS III system, the official said.

Additionally, the administration requested $14.5 for cyberspace activities in FY2025, the official added.

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UN Concerned About Provocations at Holy Sites in Jerusalem- Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, March 11 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is worried about any provocations around the Holy Sites in Jerusalem, reiterating the need for the status quo to be respected, the UN Spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Monday.

"We're always very concerned about any provocation in the Holy Sites in Jerusalem. There is a status quo that needs to be observed and respected," Dujarric said in a briefing.

Earlier today, it was reported by Palestinian media that 275 settlers stormed the Al-Aqsa Mosque on Monday, it being the first day of the holy month of Ramadan in Palestine.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Monday that he rejects the possibility of creating a Palestinian state.

In addition, the Israeli prime minister said that Israel must have full control over all Palestinian territories west of the Jordan River.

Palestinians seek diplomatic recognition of their independent state in the territories of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which is partially occupied by Israel, and the Gaza Strip. The Israeli government refuses to recognize Palestine as an independent political and diplomatic entity and builds settlements in the occupied areas despite objections from the United Nations.

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Biden Admin Requests $7.65Bln for Key Partners in Middle East - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The Biden Administration has requested $7.65 billion to support key partners in the MIddle East and North Africa against "extremists" and Iran-linked actors, Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources Richard Verma said on Monday.

"Advancing peace and security in the Middle East remains a top priority for us, including working with our partners to end the conflict between Israel and Hamas and deliver life saving assistance to Palestinians. The President's request of $7.6 billion maintains our long standing investments to support key partners in the Middle East and North Africa, and their security against growing violence by extremists and Iran linked malign actors," Verma said during a briefing.

Earlier on Monday, the White House released Biden's Fiscal Year 2025 budget proposal, which includes approximately $7.3 trillion in spending.

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State Dept. Says Requests $2Bln to Create Int'l Infrastructure Fund to Outcompete China

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) – The US State Department's budget request for FY2025 includes $2 billion to create a new international infrastructure fund to outcompete China and provide an alternative to PRC options, Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources Richard Verma said on Monday.

"We must employ all the tools at our disposal to outcompete China wherever possible," Verma said during a press briefing. "We are requesting $2 billion to create a new international Infrastructure Fund, which will outcompete China by providing a credible, reliable alternative to PRC options."

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Biden Says 'Grateful' for Outgoing HUD Secretary Fudge, Following Departure Announcement

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Monday that he is grateful for the service of US Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Marcia Judge, after she announced her impending departure from the cabinet position.

"I'm grateful for all of her contributions toward a housing system that works for all Americans, and I wish her well in her next chapter," Biden said in a statement.

Fudge has worked hard to lower housing costs and increase supply, the statement said. There are more housing units under construction in the United States now than at any time in the last 50 years, the statement said.

Earlier on Monday, Fudge announced that she will step down as HUD secretary on March 22. Fudge said in an interview with USA Today that she has done nearly everything she could at HUD.

Prior to her role in the Biden administration, Fudge served in the US House of Representatives from 2008 to 2021.

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Biden's FY25 Budget Includes $10.3Bln in Aid for Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan - US State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden's Fiscal Year 2025 budget proposal includes $10.3 billion in humanitarian aid for people in Ukraine, the Gaza Strip and Sudan, the US State Department said on Monday.

"Within the President's FY 2025 budget, we have requested… $10.3 billion to deliver lifesaving humanitarian assistance to millions of people who have been impacted or displaced by conflicts

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like those in Ukraine, Gaza, and Sudan," the US State Department said in a statement.
The funding would also enable the US State Department and the US Agency for International Development to address human suffering and displacement compounded by droughts, food insecurity and climate-induced disasters, the statement said.
The funds will be used to support more than 330 million people around the world who face acute food insecurity, the statement said.
Earlier on Monday, the White House released Biden's FY25 budget proposal, which includes approximately $7.3 trillion in spending.

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US Oil Output Tops 6th Year in Row, Almost 3Mln b/d More Than Russia, Saudi Arabia - EIA

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The United States topped world oil production for a sixth year in a row in 2023, averaging 12.9 million barrels per day (b/d), or nearly 3 million b/d more than Russia and largest crude exporter Saudi Arabia, the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) said Monday.
"The crude oil production record in the United States in 2023 is unlikely to be broken in any other country in the near term because no other country has reached production capacity of 13 million b/d," the EIA said.
A chart accompanying the blog showed Russia's production at 10.1 million b/d and Saudi output at 9.7 million b/d.
The 12.9-million-barrel US daily average in 2023 also broke the previous global record of 12.3 million b/d set by the United States in 2019, the EIA said.
Average monthly US output reached an all-time high in December with more than 13.3 million b/d.
US oil production has been on a rebound for nearly 15 years thanks to fracking (hydraulic fracturing) technology. That, combined with horizontal drilling - versus the previous vertical method of oil extraction - has led to prodigious volumes of crude flowing from sedimentary rocks, also known as shale.
After peaking at 9.6 million barrels per day in 1970, annual US production flattened and declined to a low of 5 million daily in 2008 before mostly surging from 2009 onward, helped by the fracking and shale boom.
The EIA said the only exception to US production growth was in 2020 and 2021, when demand and prices decreased because of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic measures.
Shale production in the Permian Basin in western Texas and eastern New Mexico had led the rebound since, the EIA said.
While Russia led world production in 2017 with 10.8 million b/d, or 1.4 million more than US output, it has lagged the United States the past six years, the EIA said.
"More recently, Russia was among the OPEC+ countries that announced production cuts in November 2022, and in February 2023, it separately announced additional voluntary cuts of 500,000 b/d," the EIA said.

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OPEC+ groups the 13-member Saudi-led OPEC nations with ten independent oil producers steered by Russia.

In the case of Saudi Arabia, average annual production peaked in 2022 at 10.6 million b/d, or 1.3 million less than in the United States that year, the EIA said.

"In 2023, crude oil production in Saudi Arabia declined by about 900,000 b/d because of OPEC+ cuts and further voluntary cuts Saudi Arabia made to offset weaker demand growth," the EIA said.

The EIA pointed out that Saudi Arabia's state-owned oil firm Aramco has scrapped plans to increase its production capacity to 13 million b/d by 2027, further eliminating any competition to US output.

"Production in Saudi Arabia could not exceed the 2023 production volume in the United States because state-owned Saudi Aramco's stated production capacity is 12.0 million b/d, with about 300,000 b/d of additional capacity from its share of the Neutral Zone area shared with Kuwait," the EIA added.

The United States, Russia and Saudi Arabia together accounted for 32.8 million b/d, or 40%, of world oil production, according to the EIA.

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Biden Requests $7.26 Trillion Budget for Fiscal Year 2025 - White House

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden requests a total of $7.266 trillion to fund the FY2025 budget, according to a document published by the White House on Monday.

The $7.266 trillion includes $900 billion for national defense, over $4.3 trillion for a range of programs, including Social Security, Medicaid, and Medicare, and $965 billion to pay the interest on the national debt.

On Saturday, Biden signed a $460 billion spending bill into law to finance several government departments and agencies to avoid a shutdown due to insufficient funding. The law regulates appropriations for the departments of agriculture, commerce, justice, and others, amounting to approximately 30% of the total federal budget for FY2024.

To date, Congress has not passed the 2024 US defense budget amid a rift between Democrats and Republicans, who are still debating over one of the key financial documents.

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Biden's Budget Proposal Demonstrates Fiscal Irresponsibility - US House Republican Leaders

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - US House Republican leadership said on Monday that President Joe Biden's Fiscal Year 2025 budget request demonstrates Democrats' disregard for fiscal responsibility.

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Earlier on Monday, the White House released Biden's FY25 budget, which includes $7.3 trillion in spending.

"The price tag of President Biden's proposed budget is yet another glaring reminder of this Administration's insatiable appetite for reckless spending and the Democrats' disregard for fiscal responsibility," US House Republican leadership said in a statement.

The statement was issued by House Speaker Mike Johnson, Majority Leader Steve Scalise, Majority Whip Tom Emmer and Republican Conference Chair Elise Stefanik.

Biden's proposed budget would increase economic pressures on people in the United States in order to spend trillions more dollars on his administration's "left-wing" agenda, the statement said.

Biden's budget includes $5.5 trillion in tax revenue to offset the $7.3 trillion in spending, leaving a deficit of some $1.8 trillion.

House Republicans reject Biden's budget proposal and have taken action to steer the United States back to a path of "fiscal sanity," the statement said.

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Biden's FY2025 Budget Requests $19.8Bln for Nuclear Deterrence – Document

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden's FY2025 budget request includes $19.8 billion for nuclear weapons activities, a $4.5 billion increase from the FY2021 level, according to a document published by the White House on Monday.

"The Budget provides $19.8 billion for Weapons Activities, $4.5 billion above the 2021 enacted level, to prioritize implementation of the 2022 National Defense Strategy and Nuclear Posture Review by modernizing the Nation's nuclear deterrent to keep the American people safe," the budget request reads.

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Biden's 2025 Budget Requests $25Mln for New Fund to 'Suppress' Russia in Africa - Document

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden's Fiscal Year 2025 budget proposal requests $25 million for a new fund to suppress Russia's influence in Africa, the White House said in a document on Monday.

"In addition, the Budget provides $25 million for a new Countering Russian Malign Actors in Africa Fund to suppress Russian or other malign actors in the region," the White House said in the budget proposal.

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Biden's 2025 Budget Request Includes $482Mln for Ukraine - US State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden's budget request for fiscal year 2025 includes $482 million in funds to support Ukraine, the State Department said on Monday.

"The $482 million requested for Ukraine, along with the National Security Supplemental Request, will assist with Ukraine's economic recovery, bolster Ukraine's resilience and ability to defend itself against Russia's full-scale invasion, and ensure progress toward reforms needed for Ukraine's EU accession," the State Department said in a press release.

The Ukraine funding also includes $250 million for economic and development assistance, $95 million in security assistance, $71 million for health programs, and $66 million for other security activities, the release said.

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Biden's 2025 Budget Proposal Includes $25Bln for NASA - White House

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - President Joe Bdien's fiscal year 2025 budget proposal includes $25 billion for NASA to help build progress on planned moon missions, supporting a transition to commercially-led space stations, among other priorities, the White House said on Monday.

"The budget requests $25.4 billion in discretionary budget authority for 2025, a 9.1% increase since the start of the Administration, to advance space exploration, improve understanding of the Earth and space, develop and test new aviation and space technologies, and to do this all with increased efficiency, including through the use of tools such as artificial intelligence," the White House said in the budget proposal.

NASA's priority goals include exploring the moon with US and international partner astronauts and transitioning from a government-led to commercially-led space stations, according to the budget proposal.

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Biden Requests $4Bln for Indo-Pacific Deterrence, $100Mln for Taiwan Military Aid–Document

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden requests $4 billion for Indo-Pacific deterrence, or $600 million above the 2023 level, and $100 million for military assistance for Taiwan, according to a budget request published by the White House on Monday.

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"The Budget provides over $4 billion to realize a more free, open, secure and connected Indo-Pacific that bolsters U.S. alliances and partnerships, which is nearly $600 million above the 2023 level. This includes $2.1 billion in bilateral and regional foreign assistance, including $100 million for a standalone request for Taiwan military assistance, and $20 million for the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework," the document reads.

The Indo-Pacific Strategy total also includes $2 billion to support diplomatic presence and programs in the region, including new and planned US diplomatic posts in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, the document said.

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Biden Seeks $7.8Bln for Artemis Program, New Systems for Moon Missions in 2025 Budget

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden is seeking $7.8 billion for the Artemis moon exploration program, which includes new investment in capabilities to deliver cargo to the surface of the moon, the White House said in its 2025 budget proposal released on Monday.

"The Budget includes $7.8 billion for the Artemis program," the budget proposal said. "The Budget invests in new systems to assist lunar surface science and exploration activities, including a small lunar rover and a large cargo lander that would be used to deliver larger rovers and habitats to the surface in the 2030s."

The Artemis program is currently under pressure to find a way to survive after the NASA Inspector General found that the program was on a financially unsustainable path.

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Biden's 2025 Budget Request Does Not Address Support to Ukraine - Document

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden's fiscal year 2025 budget request does not address critical support for Ukraine as Congress continues to debate the national security supplemental bill submitted by the Biden administration in October.

Biden's fiscal year 2025 budget reiterates the administration's call on US lawmakers to pass the $92 billion supplemental bill that includes additional funding for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan, according to the budget request published by the White House on Monday.

"Absent congressional action on this emergency request, the United States would not be able to provide the necessary support to Ukraine, provide urgently needed military support to allies and partners, make critical DIB investments, or sustain lifesaving assistance and development in some of the world's most vulnerable areas," the document said.

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Biden Requests $850Bln for Defense in 2025, $34Bln Increase From 2023 Level - White House

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden is requesting $850 billion for national defense in fiscal year 2025, marking an increase of $34 billion from the 2023 level, according to a budget request published by the White House on Monday.

"The Budget includes $850 billion in discretionary budget authority for 2025, a $34 billion or 4.1-percent increase from the 2023 enacted level. This growth is in alignment with levels agreed to in the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023 and enables DOD [Department of Defense] to make the investments necessary to execute the administration's 2022 National Security Strategy and 2022 National Defense Strategy," the document said.

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Majority of Liberal US Voters Want Democrats to Refuse to Certify Trump 2024 Win - Poll

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - A majority of self-identified liberal voters in the United States want Democratic members of the US Congress to refuse to certify 2024 presidential election results if leading Republican candidate Donald Trump wins the race, according to a Rasmussen Results poll released Monday.

A majority of liberal US voters, 57%, want Democrats to refuse to certify a Trump electoral victory, the poll report said.

Overall, more than one-third of likely US voters, 35%, support refusing to certify election results in favor of Trump, the poll report said. However, a majority of voters, 55%, oppose such a move, including 44% who strongly oppose it, the poll report said.

More than 1,000 people have faced criminal charges for breaching the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, as part of a purported effort to halt the certification of 2020 US presidential election results in favor of Joe Biden.

The poll surveyed 912 likely US voters from March 5-7. The poll maintains a margin of error of plus-or-minus three percentage points with a 95% confidence level.

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Dragon 2 Spacecraft With 4 Astronauts Undocks From ISS, Starts Return to Earth - NASA

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The SpaceX Dragon 2 Endurance spacecraft undocked from the International Space Station at 11:20 a.m. EDT on Monday to start its flight back to

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Earth with the Crew-7 team on board, NASA reported.

"The SpaceX Dragon spacecraft ... undocked from the forward-facing port of the International Space Station's Harmony module at 11:20 am EDT to complete a nearly six-month science mission," NASA said.

The Dragon 2 is carrying back to Earth the Crew-7 team of NASA astronaut Jasmin Moghbeli, European Space Agency astronaut Andreas Morgensen, Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency astronaut Satoshi Furukawa and Roscosmos cosmonaut Konstantin Borisov, NASA said.

The Dragon is scheduled to splash down in the Atlantic Ocean around 5:50 a.m. EDT on Tuesday off the coast of Florida, NASA added.

The SpaceX Crew-7 mission was launched on August 26, 2023, on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

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US Court Orders Ex-Trump Adviser Navarro to Start Prison Sentence by March 19 - Reports

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - A US court ordered Peter Navarro, an ex-White House adviser under former US President Donald Trump, to begin serving a four-month prison sentence for contempt of Congress by March 19, Politico reported on Monday.

Earlier this year, a US court sentenced Navarro to four months in prison for not complying with a congressional subpoena issued by the so-called January 6 committee.

"Dr. Navarro has now been ordered to report to the custody of the Bureau of Prisons, FCI [Federal Correctional Institution] Miami, on or before 2:00 p.m. EDT on March 19, 2024," Navarro's lawyer reportedly said in a court document on Sunday.

Navarro's attorney also requested an administrative stay of the sentence, including a stay for the US Supreme Court to review the lower court's decision if it denies the request for an administrative stay.

Navarro has said that he had "an honest belief" that Trump invoked executive privilege, which he contends justified his decision not to comply with the congressional subpoena.

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Biden to Welcome Czech PM Petr Fiala April 15 for Bilateral Meeting – White House

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden will welcome Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala for a bilateral meeting to discuss a host of issues, including the conflict in Ukraine and their commitment to NATO, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Monday.

"President Biden will welcome Prime Minister Petr Fiala of Czechia to the White House on April 15 to further strengthen the U.S.-Czech relationship. The leaders will reaffirm their resolute

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support for Ukraine as it defends against Russia's war of aggression. Czechia is a stalwart NATO Ally celebrating a quarter century in the Alliance this year, and the leaders will underscore their ironclad commitment to NATO, which makes us all safer," Jean-Pierre said in a statement.

The two leaders will also discuss coordination on a range of priorities, including security, and economic opportunities, the statement added.

Earlier in the day, Euractiv reported that Czech President Petr Pavel spoke out in support of sending NATO troops to Ukraine in response to French President Emmanuel Macron's suggestion to do so amid Russia's major advancements on the battlefield.

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UN Security Council Reiterates 'Deep Concern' About Crisis in Haiti - Statement

UNITED NATIONS, March 11 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council on Monday issued a statement in which it reiterated its "deep concern" about the crisis in Haiti.

"The members of the Security Council reiterated their deep concern over the security and humanitarian situation and stressed the need to address the multidimensional crisis in Haiti," the statement said.

The Security Council called on the government of Haiti and all relevant parties there to protect the safety of civilians and the United Nations staff there, the statement said.

On February 29, gangs began shooting in the downtown of the capital Port-au-Prince while Prime Minister Ariel Henry was visiting Kenya. Henry conducted the visit to seek an agreement for the deployment of foreign forces in Haiti to fight organized crime.

The gangs said their goal was to prevent Henry from returning to Haiti and they stormed Haiti's largest prison and freed an unconfirmed number of inmates. The Haitian government declared a state of emergency in the capital region.

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US Sanctions 16 Entities, Individuals Linked to Al-Shabaab Terror Group - Treasury

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The United States has designated 16 entities and individuals linked to the money laundering network of the Al-Shabaab terror group (banned in Russia), the US Department of the Treasury said in a statement on Monday.

"Today, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) imposed sanctions on 16 entities and individuals who compose an expansive business network spanning the Horn of Africa, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Cyprus that raises and launders funds for al-Shabaab," the statement said.

The US sanctioned what it called influential businesspeople in the region that lend financial backing to al-Shabaab, which is responsible for terrorist attacks in East Africa, the statement

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said.

Al-Shabaab's network is responsible for raising and laundering millions of dollars through various businesses in the United Arab Emirates, Somalia, Kenya, Uganda, and Cyprus, the statement said.

"A notable part of this network is active in Uganda. Specifically, Abdulkadir Omar Abdullahi (Abdullahi), is associated with Haleel Group's Uganda branch as its director, along with Omar Sheikh Ali Hilowle (Hilowle) and Hayder. In his role, Abdullahi has managed and transferred funds for al-Shabaab," the statement said.

Imposing sanctions prohibits US persons from maintaining transactions with designated people and entities. It also requires freezing their assets, which remain under US control, the statement added.

Al-Shabaab is a Somalia-based Islamist organization linked to the al-Qaeda terrorist network and wages armed resistance against the Somali government.

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US Senator Menendez Pleads Not Guilty to New Charges in Bribery, Fraud Case

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - US Senator Bob Menendez pleaded not guilty Monday to new charges filed as part of a criminal case against him for alleged foreign bribery and fraud.

"Once again, not guilty, your honor," Menendez said during an arraignment hearing in New York, as quoted by Courthouse News.

Last week, prosecutors filed a superseding indictment in the case against Menendez, in which he faces 16 criminal charges, including bribery, wire fraud, acting as a foreign agent and obstruction of justice.

Prosecutors allege that Menendez received bribes in exchange for using his authority to assist the government of Qatar and benefit Egypt. Menendez and his wife allegedly engaged in a scheme to return the bribe money under the guise of loan repayment.

Prosecutors accuse Menendez of using the scheme to knowingly interfere with the federal investigation into the alleged bribery.

In January, Menendez's lawyers sought to dismiss the criminal case against the lawmaker, characterizing the accusations against him as an "outrageously false" distortion of reality.

The judge overseeing the arraignment hearing on Monday said that a May 6 trial date for the case still stands, although an appeals court could impose a stay.

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US Conducts Fifth Airdrop of Humanitarian Aid in Gaza - CENTCOM

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WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The United States conducted a fifth air drop in the Gaza Strip, delivering more than 27,600 meals and 25,900 bottles of water amid a critical humanitarian situation and risk of mass famine as Israel continues its military operations against Hamas, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) said on Monday.

"US Central Command conducted a humanitarian assistance airdrop into Northern Gaza on March 11, 2024, at 2:17 p.m. (Gaza time)," CENTCOM said via X. "US C-130s dropped over 27,600 US meal equivalents and 25,900 bottles of water into Northern Gaza, an area of great need, allowing for civilian access to the critical aid."

The airdrops of humanitarian aid in Gaza, which began on March 7, became an attempt by the United States to bypass the Israeli blockade of the ground crossings into the Palestinian enclave, which threatens catastrophic consequences for the civilian population there.

Over the weekend, CENTCOM said that the United States had sent the first ship with equipment to establish a sea corridor for the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza.

On October 7, 2023, Palestinian movement Hamas attacked Israel from Gaza during which more than 1,100 Israelis - both, military and civilians - were killed and 240 others abducted. Israel imposed a complete blockade of Gaza, began massive bombardments and then invaded the Palestinian enclave. Well over 31,000 Palestinians have been killed so far in the Israeli operations and more than 76,000 wounded, according to the local authorities.

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

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US Imposes Visa Restrictions on Migrant Air Charter Company Executives – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) – The US State Department has imposed visa restrictions on air charter company executives for enabling migration into the US through flights to Nicaragua, according to a release on Monday.

“The United States has taken steps to impose visa restrictions on air charter company executives for facilitating irregular migration to the United States. These actions respond to the growing trend of charter airlines offering flights into Nicaragua designed primarily for irregular migrants and are the first restrictions imposed under the expansion of our visa restriction policy last month,” the release stated.

The US first announced in November that it would impose visa restrictions on individuals running charter flights into Nicaragua for US-bound migrants.

It expanded the sanctions to owners, executive and senior officials of charter transport companies last month.

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Trump Says Maintained Friendly Ties With Elon Musk for Years

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump said on Monday that he has maintained friendly ties with billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk for years, despite the businessman's reluctance to formally back his 2024 reelection campaign.

"I've been friendly with him over the years," Trump said in an interview with CNBC. "When I was president, I helped him. I've liked him."

However, Trump and Musk have opposing views on electric vehicle policy, Trump said.

Earlier this month, US media reported that Trump and Musk met during an event for potential donors in New York. Trump intends to hold a one-on-one meeting with Musk soon, the report said.

In response to the report, Musk said that he is not donating money to any US presidential candidate.

Trump said that he does not know if he will ultimately earn Musk's support, whether verbal or monetary.

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Trump Says Will Not Crack Down on Bitcoin, Other Cryptocurrencies if Reelected

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump said on Monday that he would not crack down on the use of Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies if reelected in November.

"I have seen there has been a lot of use of that [cryptocurrencies]," Trump told the CNBC news channel. "And I'm not sure that I'd want to take it away at this point."

However, Trump also described himself as being a traditionalist who prefers one currency.

"I want one currency, I want the dollar. I don't want people leaving the dollar," Trump said.

Trump said he would not allow countries to go off the US dollar and emphasized that the dollar losing its status as world reserve currency would be tantamount to the United States losing a war.

Trump pointed out that he never bought Bitcoin. but added that people should have an opportunity to use cryptocurrencies.

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

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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 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

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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 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

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emergency in the capital region.

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