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US Set the EU up as 'Casualty' in War Against Russia

In September 2022, the Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 pipelines exploded in what was described as an act of sabotage. Nineteen months later, no guilty party has been fingered by the official investigation, though Pulitzer-prize winning journalist Seymour Hersh reported that the US was behind it.

The United States set up the European Union to be a “casualty” in its war against Russia and EU leaders should have known that, American journalist and RT correspondent, Rachel Blevins told Sputnik’s The Critical Hour on Tuesday.

The United States “knew that Nord Stream 1” was providing cheap gas to Europe, which helped its industry, and started “warning” Germany against opening a second pipeline with Russia, Blevins explained, adding later that the administrations of both former US President Donald Trump and current President Joe Biden had threatened sanctions against Germany and that Biden threatened the pipeline itself.

“It’s fascinating to see that these countries within the EU were not smart enough to kind of see the writing on the wall here and realize that they would end up being casualties of the US and its attempts to try to increase its control,” she reflected. “The political leaders of the EU should [have been] watching that and going, ‘Wait a second, that doesn’t exactly sound like something your friend or close ally would be saying.’”

Earlier, Blevins noted that while Russia’s economy is growing despite Western sanctions, the EU population is struggling with issues that typically aren’t issues for industrialized societies.

“Think of all the reports saying ‘Oh, well you know, last winter wasn’t too bad, but we don’t know what’s going to happen this winter,’” she began. “It is 2024 and you are talking about these countries in the EU. They should not have a question of [being] prepared for the coming winter when it comes to basic energy supplies. And yet they do, and that’s because you have a political class there that has sold their public out.”

Co-host Wilmer Leon described the US posture as “Mafia-esque” a characterization Blevins agreed with, but she added that there seems to be a growing amount of “blowback.”

“It's also interesting where [the blowback in Europe] is coming from because as you’re seeing these farmer protests in Europe, you are seeing a segment of the population that is fed up with their government,” mentioning the green regulations as a major complaint the farmers have, in addition to the aid to Ukraine.

Across the pond, Blevins noted that the Democrats have reduced themselves to promoting a war economy in an attempt to convince voters Ukraine is worth their support.

“They’re literally at the point of saying this will create American jobs because they realize that they have lost the American public in this war effort,” she said.

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‘Havana Syndrome’ More Likely US Homegrown as Western Media Bangs Anti-Russia Drum

On Sunday, a popular US news program ran a feature on the so-called “Havana Syndrome” alleging that Russian spies are utilizing secret energy weapons to damage the brains of US officials. The report came despite a years-long investigation by five US intelligence agencies that determined it was “very unlikely” to have come from a foreign adversary.

The so-called “Havana Syndrome,” a long-debunked theory that has been revived by Western media in recent days is part of the “game” the administration of US President Joe Biden plays of trying to blame “everything on Russia,” Michael Maloof, a former senior security analyst in the office of the US secretary of defense, told Sputnik's Fault Lines.

“Why would ‘60 Minutes’ be resurrecting it? Because somebody put a bug in their ear and they’re trying once again [to] play the game of the Biden administration to blame everything on Russia,” Maloof asserted.

Maloof noted that most of the victims of the supposed Havana Syndrome were in the US, which makes it even less likely that Russia would be involved. “Yet they keep trying to create this narrative, that is they say it long and hard enough, it’s got to be true. But who knows what it is?”

Maloof added that many of the alleged victims likely spent a lot of time in SCIFs (sensitive compartmented information facilities) that are full of specialized electronic equipment which may have contributed to the symptoms.

If there is a real affliction affecting these people, Maloof contends that it is more likely coming from within the US than from Russia. “One of those who got hit was in an area where the president of the United States was, and that was in Western Europe. Why wasn’t [the president] affected? Or anybody around him?”

“The only thing I can conclude is that this is coming from within… They’re saying who it isn’t but not what it is, and that’s strange, which means they don’t know,” he added.

“So, once again, this tortuous approach is basically to put up their own little narrative and then shoot it down, but say it still could be true. And this is supposed to be our basis for fact-finding? I don’t think so,” Maloof said, adding “You cannot mistrust these people enough.”

“If there was a unit of the GRU (General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation) or something like that, and they were traipsing around the world zapping people, I think that would have been noticed,” Maloof explained.

“It could be anything. It’s just mindless,” he concluded.

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'Rogue Power All Along': US Has Never Strayed From Belief It Can 'Violate Any Agreement'

Last week, the US abstained from a UN resolution calling for a ceasefire in Gaza for the month of Ramadan, allowing a ceasefire resolution to pass for the first time. The US subsequently claimed the resolution was non-binding, even though UN Security Council resolutions are considered international law.

The United States has been a “rogue power” since the end of the Second World War, Dr. Radhika Desai, a professor at the Department of Political Studies at the University of Manitoba and director of the Geopolitical Economy Research Group told Sputnik’s The Critical Hour on Monday.

Desai described the US comments to undercut the power of the ceasefire vote as “typical US behavior,” and that “the US has been a rogue power all along.”

“Remember, the United States actually hates the United Nations. The Security Council itself was something it managed to put together with the cooperation of other major powers as kind of a limit on the recognition of the sovereign equality of all countries,” Desai explained. “The US did not create the post-world war order, the United States essentially used everything in its power … which was not unlimited, to prevent a truly equal world order from coming into being.”

Desai noted the US has always flaunted the rules of the UN system because “the rules were made by a body larger than” the US.

“The United States has always considered itself free to violate any agreement it likes, which is why it is a rogue state. But what I’m saying is that it’s been a rogue state all along,” Desai explained, adding that it has violated the “world order” it helped create after World War II “many times.”

“What the US wanted in the post-world war order was to create a world which would open itself up to the entry of US corporations for their own profit,” Desai said, adding that if it was powerful enough to craft the world without its allies “it would have never needed to violate the rules.”

Desai further pointed out the unipolar world the US claimed after the Soviet Union did not last nearly as long as they expected.

Recalling how economist Jim O’Neill's famous BRICS report was published in 2001 and came only a decade after the fall of the Soviet Union, Desai highlighted how “already within a decade, the US aspiration to be the unipolar leader of the world was essentially gone.”

Instead of leading, the US has been isolated because it is acting as a unipolar leader, while in reality the world is multipolar, Desai explained.

So, instead of following the rules of the UN it helped create, the US “effectively destroys the world order it created after World War II,” she said, referencing the blocking of WTO judges that neutered the organization, as well as the UN Security Council.

“The US has never got its way, and that’s what it can’t stand,” Desai concluded. “But you see, as Einstein said, you keep doing the same thing again and again and expect a different result, that's madness. Well, that madness of the United States is now reaching new heights. If anything is new about the situation, that's what it is.”

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The Soviet Crickets of Cuba - Cartoon

Over the weekend, Western media revived the long debunked conspiracy known as “Havana Syndrome” that Russian agents are using secret energy technology to affect the minds of US officials and agents.
Multiple intelligence agencies investigated the claims for years, all concluding that whatever was the cause of the symptoms in those who claimed to be affected by Havana Syndrome, it was “very unlikely” to be a foreign adversary.
In fact, two of the first US officials who claimed to be affected by it, blamed it on a strange sound they heard in Cuba. While in the country, they recorded the sound and had it analyzed, finding that it exactly matched the sound of a rare cricket native to the Caribbean when accounting for room echos.
But in their attempt to drive more Russophobia, the conspiracy theory has been revived again in Western Media. Maybe soon, someone will blame US President Joe Biden’s “bad memory” on the Russians.
The United States set up the European Union to be a “casualty” in its war against Russia and EU leaders should have known that, American journalist and RT correspondent, Rachel Blevins told Sputnik’s The Critical Hour on Tuesday.

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Noting that the administrations of both former US President Donald Trump and current President Joe Biden had threatened sanctions against Germany and that Biden threatened the pipeline itself, Blevins said the EU should have seen it coming.

“It’s fascinating to see that these countries within the EU were not smart enough to kind of see the writing on the wall here and realize that they would end up being casualties of the US and its attempts to try to increase its control,” she reflected. “The political leaders of the EU should [have been] watching that and going, ‘Wait a second, that doesn’t exactly sound like something your friend or close ally would be saying.’”

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“The only thing I can conclude is that this is coming from within… They’re saying who it isn’t but not what it is, and that’s strange, which means they don’t know,” he added.

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US Wants to Get Back to Peace Process in Yemen - Special Envoy

WASHINGTON, April 3 (Sputnik) - The United States wants to see a return to a peace process in Yemen, but the effort is being hampered by Houthi attacks on commercial navigation in the Red Sea, US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking said on Wednesday.

"My focus is particularly on the ways that we can move beyond the current crisis in the Red Sea and get back to the Yemen peace effort," Lenderking said during a digital press conference.

A very important foundation for this is a roadmap that was agreed to by the Yemeni government and the Houthis in December after more than a year of talks, the envoy stated.

This gives some hope that this moment can be used to get beyond the current tensions and refocus on ways to end the nine-year conflict, Lenderking said.

Despite Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, the truce is still being observed in Yemen, the diplomat recalled. The de-escalation allowed more humanitarian supplies to reach Yemenis and Yemenis can now travel abroad on their own airline, he added.

The US and the international community are working for a durable ceasefire in Yemen, he said.

It is, however, "very difficult" to use the momentum given the Houthi attacks on international shipping in response to Israel’s war in Gaza, Lenderking said.

He suggested that the Houthis could show "good faith" to the international community by releasing the crew of the Galaxy Leader cargo ship that they hijacked in November.

The Houthis, also known as the Ansar Allah movement, have been striking what they say are Israel-linked ships in the Red Sea since November in response to the war in Gaza. The Houthis said they had handed over the decision about the release of the Galaxy Leader vessel to Hamas.

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Trump Leads Biden in 6 Swing States Amid Concerns Over Capabilities, Economy – Poll

WASHINGTON, April 3 (Sputnik) – Former US President Donald Trump is leading in six of seven swing states ahead of the 2024 election amid deep concerns over Joe Biden's ability to rule and dissatisfaction with the economy, a Wall Street Journal poll showed on Wednesday.

Trump leads Biden in the states of Pennsylvania, Michigan, Arizona, Georgia, Nevada and North Carolina by margins of 2-8 percentage points on test ballots that both include and exclude third party and independent candidates, the poll found.

However, in another key battle ground state, Wisconsin, Biden leads by 3 points on multi-candidate test ballots, but he and Trump are tied when they are the only options on the ballot.

Both candidates nonetheless are running for the presidency with a "tarnished image," the poll found.

When comparing Trump and Biden, the later has the most unfavorable views among voters, in part because he appears unable to hold together his 2020 coalitions amid decreasing support from Hispanic, Black and younger voters.

When asked about the candidates' physical and mental fitness, only 28% of those polled said Biden was in an overall better position to handle the White House, whereas 48% believe Trump is better suited.

Republican Trump and Democrat Biden are facing a rematch in November 5 presidential elections, after a 2020 outcome that favored Biden.

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US Terrorist Designation Has Put Additional Pressure on Houthis - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, April 3 (Sputnik) - The United States believes that its designation of the Houthis as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist group has affected the group's ability to raise funds, US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking said on Wednesday.

"I do think from our point of view that the designation of the Houthis as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist organization in February has put additional pressure on their ability to fundraise. And it was our intent to put this additional pressure on the Houthis as a way of signaling our desire to move their behavior away from the focus on the Red Sea back toward the peace process, and I do think from what I'm seeing that there is this pressure that is being felt," Lenderking said during a digital press conference.

The remarks came in response to a reporter's question on whether there is evidence that the designation and US-led airstrikes have deterred or made the Houthis change their behavior.

Lenderking said that his hope as the special envoy is that diplomatic ways would be found to

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de-escalate the situation and eventually pull back the designation.

The US favors a diplomatic solution and knows there is no military solution to the situation in Yemen, he reiterated.

In this commitment, the US is joined by all permanent members of the UN Security Council, Lenderking said.

"There is a strong consensus in the international community and among key players to support the peace effort going forward," he said.

The Houthis, also known as the Ansar Allah movement, vowed in November to attack any ships associated with Israel until it halts military actions in the Gaza Strip. This led the US and the European Union to announce a multinational operation to secure navigation in the Red Sea. US and UK forces have also launched numerous strikes against Houthi positions in a bid to degrade their ability to target commercial vessels.

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Blinken Drives to Brussels for NATO Meeting After His Plane Grounded in Paris - Reports

WASHINGTON, April 3 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's aircraft was grounded in Paris due to a mechanical issue, forcing his delegation to drive to Brussels for a meeting of NATO foreign ministers, Reuters reported on Wednesday, citing a State Department spokesperson.

The incident marks the second time that Blinken got stranded in Europe due to mechanical issues with his aircraft. In January, Blinken's Boeing 737 was grounded in Davos, Switzerland due to an oxygen leak, forcing him to board an alternate aircraft to return to the United States.

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PREVIEW - Yellen To Try Another Round of 'Intensive Diplomacy' With China In US Interest

WASHINGTON, April 3 (Sputnik) - Janet Yellen’s biggest assignment at the twilight of her career seems to be to get US-China relations more in tune with America’s interests, as the Treasury Secretary prepares to return to a country she visited less than a year ago to fix ties that have been volatile for the better part of a decade.

Yellen will embark on an April 3-9 tour of China for bilateral meetings in Beijing with Premier Li Qiang, Vice Premier He Lifeng, and Finance Minister Lan Fo’an, as well as engagements in other cities and provinces, the Treasury Department said in a statement.

“Secretary Yellen’s visit to China will build on the intensive diplomacy she has engaged in to responsibly manage the bilateral economic relationship and advance American interests,” said the statement, indicating that she will pick up exactly where she left off last July.

At the heart of thorny Sino-US ties are what the United States sees as the overproduction of

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green technology by its largest trading partner that it worries could be dumped on the global market, undermining such industries outside of China.

While the United States massively encouraged the offshoring of US industries to China three decades ago, the Biden administration now says that Beijing's efforts to boost its factory sector have resulted in a surge of subsidized products such as solar panels and electric vehicles that it can offer for cheap, undercutting the White House's industrial policy investments.

Beijing, meanwhile, bristles at the continued "demonization" of China by the Biden administration after what it perceived as the Trump administration's hostility, and the constant threat that America might one day declare Taiwan as a non-Chinese entity.

Yellen's diplomatic offensive will present the Biden administration with one of its last chances of shaping ties with China before November's presidential elections in the United States. She has yet to indicate whether she will stay in office beyond Biden's current term.

"I am concerned about global spillovers from the excess capacity that we are seeing in China," the treasury secretary said last week. "China's overcapacity distorts global prices and production patterns and hurts American firms and workers, as well as firms and workers around the world."

News portal Axios quoted a senior Treasury official as saying Yellen will be making her trip at a time of better bilateral relations than two years ago, "largely because of improved communication channels between the two nations."

This is despite the US crackdown on other areas of Chinese interest that include trade, investment, and technology, particularly its effort to end Chinese ownership of the popular TikTok social media platform in the United States, Axios noted in its commentary.

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Biden Calls For Swift Probe in Israel Attack on WCK Workers, Says Not Stand-Alone Incident

WASHINGTON, April 3 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden in a statement called for a swift probe into the incident that killed seven humanitarian workers from World Central Kitchen in Gaza.

"Israel has pledged to conduct a thorough investigation into why the aid workers' vehicles were hit by airstrikes. That investigation must be swift, it must bring accountability, and its findings must be made public. Even more tragically, this is not a stand-alone incident. This conflict has been one of the worst in recent memory in terms of how many aid workers have been killed," said Biden in a White House release.

The president added that Israel has not done enough to protect civilians and that the United States will continue its humanitarian efforts in Gaza while urging Israel to do more to facilitate the aid.

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US Navy Shipbuilding Efforts Face Delays Due to Supply Chain, Labor Challenges - Reports

WASHINGTON, April 3 (Sputnik) - US Navy shipbuilding efforts for Columbia-class nuclear-armed submarines and other vessels face delays in excess of a year, US Naval Institute News reported, citing a one-page summary of a US Navy shipbuilding review.

The USS District of Columbia faces a 12 to 16-month delay, the US Navy reportedly said on Tuesday.

The guided-missile frigate USS Constellation faces a delay of up to three years, the Navy said.

The USS Enterprise aircraft carrier also faces an 18 to 26-month delay, the Navy said.

The Navy attributed the delays to factors including design maturation, supply chain challenges and difficulty finding skilled workers.

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Montana Sending National Guard Soldiers to Aid Texas Border Security Operation - Governor

HELENA, MONTANA, April 3 (Sputnik) - The state of Montana is deploying a volunteer group of National Guard soldiers to Texas to assist in border security operations, Montana Governor Greg Gianforte said in a video statement.

"Today, I'm signing a disaster declaration to mobilize Montana resources to help secure our southern border," Gianforte said on Tuesday. "To address the invasion at the southern border, Montana soldiers have volunteered to assist [Texas] Governor Greg Abbott and Operation Lone Star, conducting vehicle maintenance and repair."

The volunteers are expected to arrive in Texas on April 8 and depart on May 12, Gianforte's office said in a statement on the deployment.

In February, Gianforte directed Montana National Guard leadership to work with Texas to identify ways Montana could support the southern state's border security efforts, the statement said.

Texas' Operation Lone Star fills gaps created by the Biden administration's failure to secure the United States' southern border, Abbott's office said in a statement on the initiative. The operation garnered the support of more than a dozen governors across the US.

Operation Lone Star has led to more than 506,500 illegal immigrant apprehensions and more than 41,200 criminal arrests as of March 29, the statement said. Moreover, Texas law enforcement officials have seized more than 471 million lethal doses of fentanyl in the course of the operation, the statement said.

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US Senator Says Lawmakers Should Pass Ukraine Aid in 'Whatever Form It Takes'

WASHINGTON, April 3 (Sputnik) - US Senator Laphonza Butler said that the upper chamber of the US Congress should pass Ukraine aid legislation regardless of the form it takes, amid proposals to support Ukraine with loans or frozen Russian assets.

"I think in whatever form it comes — whatever form it takes to get the aid to Ukraine, that's the form that we got to go [with]," Butler said on Monday, as quoted by The Hill.

However, Butler said that she believes a supplemental funding bill passed by the US Senate remains the preferable option.

US Senator Mitt Romney also said that he is open to supporting Ukraine through loans, adding that it is unlikely Kiev would ever have to pay the loans back.

Earlier this week, US House Speaker Mike Johnson said that he intends to advance Ukraine aid legislation when the House of Representatives returns to Washington from a district work period. The legislation could include measures to fund Ukraine with loans or seized Russian assets, Johnson said.

The Biden administration and Kiev regime have warned that Ukrainian troops could be forced to retreat without further foreign assistance.

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US Allegedly Warned Russia Crocus City Hall Possible Target of Terrorist Attack – Reports

WASHINGTON, April 3 (Sputnik) – The US warning for Russia about a potential terrorist attack allegedly mentioned Crocus City Hall as a possible target, The Washington Post reported, citing an unnamed US official.

The United States identified Crocus City Hall as a potential target and conveyed this information to the Russian side two weeks before the attack, the report said on Tuesday.

On March 22, several armed men broke into Crocus City Hall, a major concert venue just outside Moscow, and started shooting at people. They also started a fire in one of the auditoriums, which was full of people ahead of a concert. The attack left 695 casualties, including 144 dead, according to the latest data from the Russian Emergencies Ministry.

The four main suspects in the case — all of them citizens of Tajikistan — tried to flee the scene in a car but were detained and charged with terrorism. Russian authorities believe their plan was to flee to Ukraine, where the masterminds of the attack had arranged a safe haven for them. An investigation is underway.

Later in March, The New York Times reported, citing European and US security officials, that the US intelligence agencies did not provide the Russian side with all the information they had about the threat of a terrorist attack at Crocus City Hall in the Moscow Region out of fear that

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Russian authorities might learn about their intelligence sources or methods of work.
Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) Director Alexander Bortnikov also said that the information transmitted by the United States on the preparation of a terrorist attack was of a general nature, and the Russian special services responded to it.

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Blinken, Macron Discuss Importance of Preventing Gaza Conflict From Spreading - State Dept

WASHINGTON, April 3 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and French President Emmanuel Macron have discussed the importance of keeping the Gaza conflict from expanding, State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a readout on Tuesday.
"They also agreed on the importance of preventing the conflict in Gaza from expanding, including avoiding escalation in Lebanon; discussed challenges posed by the People's Republic of China; and discussed efforts to bolster global food security through coordination on the Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils (VACS)," Miller said after the meeting between the two leaders.
Blinken and Macron also vowed to continue their strong support for Ukraine, Miller added.
On October 7, 2023, Palestinian movement Hamas launched a large-scale rocket attack against Israel and breached the border, attacking both civilian neighborhoods and military bases. Nearly 1,200 people in Israel were killed and some 240 others abducted during the attack. Israel launched retaliatory strikes, ordered a complete blockade of Gaza, and started a ground incursion into the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages. Over 32,700 people have been killed so far in the Gaza Strip, according to local authorities.

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AI To Impact Up to 40% of Jobs Worldwide - IMF

WASHINGTON, April 3 (Sputnik) – Artificial intelligence (AI) will impact 40% of jobs worldwide in the coming years, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said.
"Over the next years, on average, 40% of jobs globally would be impacted by AI," Georgieva said at the Center for Global Development in Washington, DC on Tuesday.
In advanced economies, the share of jobs impacted by AI will be as much as 60%, while in low-income countries only 26%, Georgieva added. She explained that the difference is simply due to low-income countries having less jobs. "Risk of growing inequality within countries and across countries is very real," she said.
IMF chief stressed that the impact of AI on the labor market will be massive. It will allow some jobs to improve, but many of them will disappear, she added.

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Russia to Provide UNSC With Draft Condemning Israeli Strike on Iranian Embassy - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, April 2 (Sputnik) - Russia is preparing a UN Security Council draft paper condemning the Israeli attacks on the Iranian diplomatic premises in Damascus, the Russian Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said on Tuesday.
"I think we ll provide a paper, condemning the attack. And let's see how the Council will react," Nebenzia told journalists on his way out of the Council.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, April 3 (Sputnik) –
ISRAELI ATTACKS ON SYRIA
* Moscow condemns Israel's ongoing raids on Syrian territory and believes that these actions further fuel the conflict in the Middle East, Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said on Tuesday.
* Russia calls on the international community to denounce Israel's actions at the Iranian Consulate in Damascus, Nebenzia said.
* The United States has conveyed to Iran through private channels that it was not responsible for the recent strike against the Iranian consulate in Damascus, Pentagon spokesperson Sabrina Singh said.
* Syrian President Bashar Assad has offered condolences to Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi after the Israeli air force attack on the Iranian consulate in Damascus killed several military advisers, the Syrian presidency said.
* The United States was not notified by the Israelis about their strike or the intended target if their strike in Damascus, Syria that killed several senior Iranian military personnel, Singh said.
ATTACK ON WORLD CENTRAL KITCHEN IN GAZA
* Israeli President Isaac Herzog on Tuesday held a phone conversation with World Central Kitchen (WCK) founder Chef Jose Andres to express sincere apologies over the death of WCK workers in the Gaza Strip on Monday, the president's office said.
* The United States was "outraged" to learn that an IDF strike in Gaza had killed civilian humanitarian workers from the WCK, White House National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby said.
* One of those killed in an Israeli strike on World Central Kitchen aid workers in Gaza was a dual national US citizen, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said.
BIDEN-XI TALKS

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* US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping have mutually agreed to maintain open lines of communication for any necessary discussions, White House National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby said on Tuesday.
* Xi Jinping and Biden discussed the conflict in Ukraine during a phone conversation on Tuesday, the state-run China Central Television (CCTV) broadcaster reported.
* Xi Jinping told Biden during a phone conversation on Tuesday that the issue of Taiwan is a red line for the bilateral relations.
* The relations between China and the United States have stabilized in recent months, and citizens of both countries welcomed this fact, Xi Jinping told Biden.
* Biden during his phone call with Xi Jinping raised concerns over Beijing's "unfair trade policies and non-market economic practices," the White House said.

MIDDLE EAST

* The Biden administration is aware of potential military threats in the Gaza Strip and will not deploy US troops on the ground in the Palestinian enclave, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Tuesday.
* The World Bank and the United Nations said on Tuesday that if reconstruction in Gaza starts after 2024, the economic contraction in the region will worsen this year, exceeding 50%.
* The World Bank and the United Nations said that the estimated cost of the damage to critical infrastructure in Gaza is around $18.5 billion, which is equivalent to about 97% of the GDP of Gaza and the West Bank combined.

RUSSIA-IRAN SECURITY CHIEFS TALKS

* Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev and his Iranian counterpart, Ali Akbar Ahmadian, discussed issues of regional security during a meeting in Astana on Tuesday, the council said.
* Patrushev condemned the Israeli attack on the Iranian consulate in Syria, and mentioned that such acts can lead to uncontrollable escalation of tensions, the council said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* The United Nations in response to the Ukrainian drone strikes in Russia's Tatarstan condemns all attacks against civilian infrastructure and calls for a halt to such incidents, UN Spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday.
* Ukraine is acting in self-defense when it comes to attacks on Russian oil refineries, French Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne said.
* Russian forces have taken better positions in the Donetsk direction in the past 24 hours and repelled two attacks, while Ukrainian troops have lost over 250 servicepeople and two tanks, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
* The Russian armed forces carried out 192 missile and drone strikes on energy and military facilities in Ukraine in march in response to terrorist attacks by Kiev, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said.

CROCUS CITY TERRORIST ATTACK

* Russia's FSB has received certain data regarding a possible terrorist attack in the Crocus City Hall, but the information was too general, Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Director Sergei Naryshkin said on Tuesday.
* Russia will find all the perpetrators, beneficiaries and links connected to the Crocus terrorist

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attack, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Tuesday.

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US Hopes Consensus on Next NATO Head Will Be Reached Soon, Timetable Unknown - Envoy

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - The United States is hopeful that the NATO members will come to an agreement on the next secretary general of the alliance before the upcoming summit in Washington, but there is no timetable for this, US Permanent Representative to NATO Julianne Smith said on Tuesday.

"We don't know what the exact timing will be," Smith said during a press briefing. "Certainly, we want to reach some resolution on this sooner rather than later. I think at the latest we'd like to see this settled by the Washington Summit."

Smith noted that current NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg is expected to leave the post in early October, and there are now two official candidates to take up his position - Mark Rutte from the Netherlands and President Iohannis from Romania.

"There is ongoing debate across the Alliance on the qualifications of both of these very impressive leaders, and we will continue to debate the pros and cons of those two individuals until we reach consensus on one of them, hopefully, in the weeks ahead," the envoy said.

She also noted that the US fully backs Rutte's candidacy, though Washington has the "deepest respect" for Iohannis.

Stoltenberg's term as NATO secretary general was due to expire in October 2022 but was extended for another year after the Ukraine crisis broke out. In July, the alliance again extended his term for another year, until October 2024. He is the second-longest serving NATO chief after former Dutch Foreign Minister Joseph Luns, who held the post from 1971 to 1984.

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US Sees No Imminent Threat of Direct Conflict Between Russia, NATO - Envoy

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - The United States does not see an imminent threat of a direct confrontation between Russian and NATO countries, Julianne Smith, US Permanent Representative to NATO said on Tuesday.

"What I want to say to our friends in the Baltic states is we do not see an imminent threat to NATO territory, either in the Baltic region or really, frankly, in any region. But it remains a top concern," Smith said during the online briefing.

Smith noted that NATO countries have taken many measures over the last two years to boost deterrence and defense as well as put new regional plans in place.

"So NATO is not sitting on its hands; it's not waiting for any possible contingency. Instead, it's preparing for all contingencies," the official added. "But I don't want to give our friends in the

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Baltic states the impression that somehow war is coming to NATO territory overnight. We take it seriously, but we do not see this to be an imminent threat."

Earlier, NATO Military Committee Chair Adm. Rob Bauer said that NATO has no troops in Ukraine and does not plan to send any. He said any member state mulling deploying troops in Ukraine should realize that it will concern the rest of the alliance.

Following a Paris-hosted conference on Ukraine in late February, French President Emmanuel Macron said that Western leaders had discussed the possibility of sending troops to Ukraine and, although no consensus had been reached in this regard, nothing could be ruled out.

Other EU countries rushed to dismiss such plans with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz saying that NATO had no intention of sending its troops to Ukraine.

The Kremlin in response to Macron's comments said that a deployment of NATO troops to Ukraine would make a direct conflict between the alliance and Russia inevitable.

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Yellen to Meet Li Qiang, Other China Officials in Visit Beginning April 3 - Tresaury Dept.

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen will embark on a week-long China visit beginning Wednesday to meet Premier Li Qiang and other officials in an initiative of "intensive diplomacy" aimed at advancing American interests, the Treasury Department announced on Tuesday.

Yellen's April 3-9 tour of China will include bilateral meetings in Beijing with Premier Li, Vice Premier He Lifeng and Finance Minister Lan Fo'an, as well engagements in other cities and provinces, the Treasury said in a statement.

"Secretary Yellen's visit to China will build on the intensive diplomacy she has engaged in to responsibly manage the bilateral economic relationship and advance American interests," the statement added.

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UPDATE - Wall Street Tumbles as Inflation Worry Returns, Dimming Rate Cut Hopes

(Changes lede, updates indexes to close in paragraphs 3-5)

NEW YORK, April 2 (Sputnik) - US stocks suffered their sharpest loss in nearly a month on Tuesday as investors reacted to the likelihood of the Federal Reserve delaying interest rate cuts beyond June as employment data due later in the week could show little retreat in inflation, especially with oil prices surging.

A plunge in the shares of Tesla — the electric car maker and world's most valuable car company with a market capitalization of $566 billion — also pulled Wall Street down, as investors awaited the release of US employment numbers due on Friday.

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The New York Stock Exchange's S&P 500 index, which tracks stocks of the top 500 US companies, closed down 36 points, or 0.7%, at 5,208. It marked the blue chip indicator's worst day since March 5, when it finished down 1%.

The technology-laden Nasdaq Composite Index, which comprises Tesla along with top tech stocks, slid 156 points, or 1.%, to 16,240. It was Nasdaq's worst performance since March 8, when it lost 1.2%. Tesla itself closed down 6% after the electric vehicle manufacturer reported first-quarter car delivery numbers that fell well short of expectations.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average, Wall Street's broadest equities indicator that tracks the stocks of 30 large US corporations, settled at 39,172, down 395 points, or 1%. It was the Dow's sharpest loss since March 5, when it fell 1%.

Strong US manufacturing activity data on Monday saw investors push back on expectations of the Fed agreeing by June to its first rate cut since the 2020 coronavirus outbreak.

There is more economic data due later in the week though the main focus will be the US payrolls report for March scheduled on Friday. The economy is expected to have added 205,000 jobs last month, slowing from the 275,000 gained in February. A growth below 200,000 could prompt the Fed into a quicker policy pivot though economists feel the labor will perform better than that.

Amid all these, oil prices reached five-month highs Tuesday, nearing $90 a barrel, adding to inflation worries.

There is no real threat of a recession in the United States and inflation isn't far from the Fed's call. But the central bank still needs to see more price moderation before embarking on interest rate cuts, Fed Chairman Jerome Powell said last week.

"The 5.25% to 5.5% range has been in place since July last year.

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Restoring Safety in the United States Begins by Voting Out 'Crooked Biden' – Trump

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) – The first step American voters must take to restore the feeling of safety in the United States is to "fire crooked Biden", former US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday.

"The first step to restoring safety in America is to fire crooked Joe Biden, get him out November 5, and we're going to get him out. We're going to have more people voting, I think, than anybody can even imagine," Trump said at his Grand Rapids, Michigan rally, where he addressed what he characterized as Biden's "border bloodbath".

The former president further added that Biden has "no clue" of what he is doing, arguing that his inability to put two sentences together is proof of it.

"This guy has no clue, he can't put two sentences together and he's dealing with [Vladimir] Putin, and he's dealing with President Xi [Jinping], and he's dealing with Kim Jong Un, all people I know very well," Trump said.

The US was under no threats prior to Biden's arrival to the presidency, Trump said, further noting that now there's regular talks of using nuclear weapons.

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The “bloodbath” reference relates to a speech where Trump commented on the automotive industry and his plan to place tariffs on foreign-made vehicles. The former president said that it was “going to be a bloodbath” for the United States and its automotive industry if he is not re-elected as president in 2024.

However, Trump’s comment sparked criticism from some Democratic lawmakers and media figures, who focused on his use of the term “bloodbath” to describe a scenario in which he is not reelected.

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White House Says No Evidence at This Hour IDF Deliberately Struck Aid Workers in Gaza

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - There is no evidence at the moment to suggest that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) strike on staff of the World Central Kitchen (WCK) was intentional, White House National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"Your question presumes, at this very early hour, that it was a deliberate strike that they [IDF] knew exactly what they were hitting, that they were hitting aid workers and did it on purpose, and there's no evidence of that," Kirby said during a White House press briefing.

The remarks were made in response to a reporter's question about whether firing a missile at WCK staff delivering food, resulting in deaths, constitutes a violation of international humanitarian law.

Kirby added that the US expects Israel to carry out a comprehensive and prompt investigation into the incident, hoping the results will be publicly disclosed and that there will be suitable accountability.

On Monday, WCK staff were traveling "in a deconflicted zone" in two armored cars branded with the organization's logo, and a soft skin vehicle, the NGO said. The humanitarian convoy was attacked as it left the Deir al Balah warehouse, where the team had unloaded more than 100 tonnes of food aid brought to Gaza by sea. The organization said that its convoy had coordinated its movements with the IDF.

The Israeli strike against the staff of the WCK killed seven employees from Australia, Poland, the United Kingdom, and Palestine, as well as a dual citizen of the United States and Canada. The organization suspended its operations in the Gaza Strip after the deadly incident.

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Russia ‘Decisively’ Condemns Israeli Raids in Syria, Believes they Fuel Conflict - Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, April 2 (Sputnik) - Moscow condemns Israel's ongoing raids on Syrian territory and believes that these actions further fuel the conflict in the Middle East, Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said on Tuesday.

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"The Russian Federation decisively condemns the ongoing raids on the sovereign territory of Syria and views them as a flagrant violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of that state," Nebenzia told the Security Council members during a meeting on the Israeli attack against the consular section of the Iranian Embassy in Damascus. "We're of the view that such aggressive actions by Israel are designed to further fuel the conflict."

Russia also urges Israel to abandon the provocative acts of force on Syrian territory and neighboring countries, he added.

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US Told Iran Via Private Channels It Is Not Responsible for Strike in Damascus – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) – The United States has conveyed to Iran through private channels that it was not responsible for the recent strike against the Iranian consulate in Damascus, Pentagon spokesperson Sabrina Singh said on Tuesday.

"We have made it very clear in private channels to Iran that we were not responsible for the strike that happened in Damascus. I would reiterate, the US had no involvement in that strike, and we had no knowledge about that ahead of time," Singh told reporters.

The US had reached out to Iran as it wanted to make its non-involvement in the attack very clear amid high tensions in the region, the spokesperson added.

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US, NATO Considering Ways to Continue Ukraine Aid in Potential Trump Presidency - Reports

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - The United States and other NATO countries are considering methods to continue the flow of aid to Ukraine in the event former US President Donald Trump returns to the White House, Politico reported on Tuesday.

The US and other countries are considering transferring a US-led multinational group of Ukraine aid coordinators to NATO, the report said, citing three European officials and one US official familiar with internal talks.

NATO foreign ministers are expected to discuss gradually transferring the group, dubbed the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, to the military alliance during talks in Brussels on Wednesday and Thursday, the report said.

NATO aims to finalize the action during a leaders' summit in Washington in July, the report said. The alliance expects the transfer to give non-US NATO member states greater control over the flow of aid if Trump wins the 2024 US presidential election, the report said.

Earlier on Tuesday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that Ukraine will eventually become a member of NATO, although a clear roadmap is required.

Last month, Trump said that other NATO member states must begin paying more into the

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alliance or the US will not protect them.

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Oil Nears $90, Boosting US Inflation Worry, Just As Fed Gets Less Nervous About Prices

NEW YORK, April 2 (Sputnik) - Oil neared $90 a barrel the first time in almost six months in a rally that could send a new frisson of worry down the backs of inflation watchers at the Federal Reserve who have just started taking comfort that price growth in the United States may be coming under control.

Brent crude, the global benchmark for oil, settled at $88.92 per barrel on Tuesday, up $1.50, or 1.7%. It peaked at $89.07 during the day, reaching a level not seen since its October 30 high of $90.15. Last week, Brent finished the first quarter up 13%.

West Texas Intermediate, the benchmark for US crude, settled at $85.15 per barrel — up $1.44, or 1.7%, after a session high at $85.44 — which marked a peak since the $85.90 it scaled on October 27. Last week, the so-called WTI finished the first quarter up 16%.

Tuesday's run-up in oil, the second in as many days, came as Russian energy facilities faced fresh threats from Ukrainian drones and as the conflict in the Middle East appeared to escalate. Both events have a bearing on oil, with Russia being one of the largest exporters of the commodity and the Gaza conflict zone for the Israeli-Hamas war being in the proximity of some of the biggest energy producers.

"The likelihood that continued restricted Russian product exports could further tighten US petroleum supplies has suddenly forced recalculation of US (oil) balances across the rest of this month and possibly beyond," analyst Jim Ritterbusch said in a note issued by his Ritterbusch and Associates company.

In the Middle East, Iran vowed a heightened war against Israel after an Israeli airstrike that killed two top generals and five other military advisers at the Iranian Embassy annex in Damascus. While the two countries have almost always been foes, with Iran even backing Hamas, direct Iranian involvement in the Gaza war could spark a "region-wide conflict with plausible impact on oil supply," commented Tamas Varga at oil broker PVM.

The oil price spike is being watched nervously by both the Fed and investors on Wall Street.

US stocks were headed on Tuesday to their sharpest loss in nearly a month as investors reacted to the likelihood of the Federal Reserve delaying interest rate cuts beyond June as employment data due later in the week could show little retreat in inflation, especially with oil prices surging.

There is no real threat of a recession in the United States and inflation isn't far from the Fed's call.

But the central bank still needs to see more price moderation before embarking on interest rate cuts, Fed Chairman Jerome Powell said last week.

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Russia Calls On International Community To Condemn Israel's Actions In Syria - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, April 2 (Sputnik) - Russia calls on the international community to denounce Israel's actions at the Iranian Consulate in Damascus, Permanent Representative to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said on Tuesday.

"We call on the international community to unequivocally condemn Israel's reckless actions, which violate the sovereignty of the Syrian Arab Republic and the inviolability of diplomatic property," Nebenzia said during a United Nations Security Council meeting.

On Monday, Israel carried out an airstrike on the annex of the Iranian Consulate in Damascus, destroying the building. Iran's elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps said seven of its members were killed in the attack, including two commanders.

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US to Merge Commercial, Military Space Capabilities for Future Contingencies - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) – The United States military is going to integrate commercial space capabilities into its day-to-day operations during peacetime to be prepared for any future contingencies as part of a new strategy, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy John Plumb said on Tuesday.

“We want to integrate commercial space solutions in our day-to-day operations during peacetime, so we can be ready and able to rely on those same commercial solutions during conflict,” Plumb said during a press briefing.

As part of the new strategy, the United States will also support the development of new commercial space capabilities that have the potential to support the US joint force, and the Defense Department has several tools to facilitate commercial companies scale their capabilities, Plumb added.

Later on Tuesday, the Pentagon will release its first-ever commercial space integration strategy that uses the innovation of the commercial space sector to enhance the US resilience and strengthen integrated deterrence, Plumb added.

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US Treasury Removes Former European Subsidiary of Russia's VTB Bank From Sanctions List

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WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - The US Treasury Department on Tuesday removed a former European subsidiary of Russia's VTB Bank from its sanctions list.

In April 2022, German regulator BaFin said that Russia's VTB can no longer exercise any control over its European subsidiary in connection with new sanctions. The watchdog shortly after appointed a special representative to help run the European arm of the Russian bank.

In March 2023, an annual meeting of new shareholders decided to liquidate VTB Bank Europe as of April 1, 2023. VTB calls the moves illegal and political.

In November 2023, the former subsidiary changed its name to OWH SE after VTB refused to allow it to operate under the brand.

In February 2024, VTB said that OWH SE denies VTB's right of ownership over the German bank and is demanding the return of dividends since 2013 worth more than 433.8 million euros.

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US Was Not Notified By Israelis About Their Strike in Damascus – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) – The United States was not notified by the Israelis about their strike or the intended target if their strike in Damascus, Syria that killed several senior Iranian military personnel, Pentagon deputy spokesperson Sabrina Singh said on Tuesday.

On Monday, Israel carried out an airstrike on the annex of the Iranian Consulate in Damascus, destroying the building. Iran's elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps said seven of its members were killed in the attack, including two commanders.

"We were not notified by the Israelis about their strike or the intended target of their strike in Damascus," Singh said during a press briefing.

Singh added that the United States does not support strikes on diplomatic missions.

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Wall Street Tumbles As Inflation Worry Returns, Dimming Rate Cut Hopes

NEW YORK, April 2 (Sputnik) - US stocks were headed on Tuesday to their sharpest loss in nearly a month as investors reacted to the likelihood of the Federal Reserve delaying interest rate cuts beyond June as employment data due later in the week could show little retreat in inflation, especially with oil prices surging.

A plunge in the shares of Tesla — the electric car maker and world's most valuable car company with a market capitalization of $566 billion — also pulled Wall Street down, as investors awaited the release of US employment numbers due on Friday.

With two hours to Tuesday's close, the New York Stock Exchange's S&P 500 index, which tracks stocks of the top 500 US companies, was down 49 points, or 0.9%, to 5,195. If those losses hold till the close, it would mark the blue chip indicator's worst day since March 5, when it

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finished down 1%.

The technology-laden Nasdaq Composite Index, which comprises Tesla along with top tech stocks, slid 189 points, or 1.2%, to 16,207. Tesla lost 6% after the electric vehicle manufacturer reported first-quarter car delivery numbers that fell well short of expectations.

Without any change, Nasdaq could end the day matching its worst performance since March 8.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average, Wall Street's broadest equities indicator that tracks the stocks of 30 large US corporations, was at 39,073, down 494 points, or 1.3%. If the Dow doesn't see a change till day's settlement, that would be its sharpest loss since February 13, when it fell 1.4%.

Strong US manufacturing activity data on Monday saw investors push back on expectations of the Fed agreeing by June to its first rate cut since the 2020 coronavirus outbreak.

There is more economic data due later in the week though the main focus will be the US payrolls report for March scheduled on Friday. The economy is expected to have added 205,000 jobs last month, slowing from the 275,000 gained in February. A growth below 200,000 could prompt the Fed into a quicker policy pivot though economists feel the labor will perform better than that.

Amid all these, oil prices reached five-month highs Tuesday, nearing $90 a barrel, that added to inflation worries.

There is no real threat of a recession in the United States and inflation isn't far from the Fed's call. But the central bank still needs to see more price moderation before embarking on interest rate cuts, Fed Chairman Jerome Powell said last week.

The 5.25% to 5.5% range has been in place since July last year.

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Twelve Ukrainian Pilots Currently in F-16 Training in US, Graduating This Year - Air Force

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - Twelve Ukrainian pilots have started their training on F-16 fighter jets in the US state of Arizona and all are expected to graduate later this year, an Air Force spokesperson told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"Twelve Ukrainian pilots are currently in F-16 training at the 162nd Wing, Arizona Air National Guard," the spokesperson said. "The training curriculum will align with the foundational knowledge and skills of each pilot and all 12 are expected to graduate this year."

In February, the Air Force said the United States was set to train a dozen Ukrainian pilots to fly F-16s this year, but had not provided a starting date. The pilots are expected to graduate from training between May and August.

The US Defense Department expects F-16 fighter jets to be delivered to Ukraine sometime this year.

Last week, Russian President Vladimir Putin said F-16 fighter jets, even if Western countries supply them to Ukraine, will not be able to change the situation on the battlefield.

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RFK Jr. Says Biden Presents Bigger Threat to Democracy Than Trump

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - Independent US presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said in an interview for CNN that President Joe Biden poses a bigger threat to democracy than his main opponent and predecessor Donald Trump.

"I can make the argument that President Biden is the much worse threat to democracy, and the reason for that is President Biden is the first candidate in history – the first president in history that has used the federal agencies to censor political speech, so to censor his opponent," Kennedy Jr. said in the interview on Monday.

Kennedy supported his claim by noting that Biden was the first US president who attempted to censor political opponents by removing them from social media platforms.

At the same time, Kennedy called it "appalling" that former President Trump allegedly attempted to overturn the 2020 election results.

Kennedy holds 16% support in a three-way race with Trump and current officeholder Biden, who are the presumptive nominees of their respective parties, according to an Ipsos poll conducted in March.

In February, US media reported that Democratic Party strategists are concerned about support for alternative candidates like Kennedy.

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Biden, Xi Discussed US Efforts to Restrict TikTok During Call - White House

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping discussed efforts within the United States to restrict social media application TikTok, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Tuesday.

“TikTok came up today, yes,” Kirby said during a press briefing. “The president reiterated our concerns about the ownership of TikTok. He made it clear to President Xi that this was not about a ban of the application, but rather, our interest in divestiture so that the national security interests and the data security of the American people can be protected.”

In 2022, the Biden administration banned the use of TikTok by federal government employees on agency-owned devices, due to concerns about TikTok’s privacy and data security policies, as well as its ties to the Chinese government via parent company ByteDance.

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US Not Involved Whatsoever in Israel's Strike on Iranian Consulate in Syria - White House

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - The United States was not involved in any way with an Israeli airstrike on the Iranian Consulate in Damascus, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"We had nothing to do with the strike in Damascus. We weren't involved in any way whatsoever," Kirby said during a press briefing.

The US cannot predict what Iran may or may not do in response to the strike, Kirby said.

On Monday, Israel conducted an airstrike on the consular annex of the Iranian Embassy in Damascus, destroying the building. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps said seven of its members were killed in the attack, including two commanders.

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US 'Outraged' to Learn of IDF Strike That Killed Aid Workers in Gaza - Kirby

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - The United States was "outraged" to learn that an IDF strike in Gaza had killed civilian humanitarian workers from the World Central Kitchen (WCK), White House National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"We were outraged to learn of an IDF strike that killed a number of civilian humanitarian workers yesterday from the World Central Kitchen," Kirby said during a White House press briefing.

On Monday, WCK staff were traveling "in a deconflicted zone" in two armored cars branded with the organization's logo, and a soft skin vehicle, the NGO said. The humanitarian convoy was attacked as it left the Deir al Balah warehouse, where the team had unloaded more than 100 tonnes of food aid brought to Gaza by sea. The organization said that its convoy had coordinated its movements with the Israel Defense Forces.

The Israeli strike against the staff of the WCK killed seven employees from Australia, Poland, the United Kingdom, and Palestine, as well as a dual citizen of the United States and Canada. The organization suspended its operations in the Gaza Strip after the deadly incident.

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White House Says US Citizen Killed in Israeli Strike on Aid Workers in Gaza

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) – One of those killed in an Israeli strike on World Central Kitchen aid workers in Gaza was a dual national US citizen, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"I can confirm that one was a dual national American citizen, but I couldn't speak with authority about the nationalities of all those [killed in the strike], and as I understand it, there could be

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additional casualties coming in terms of the count," Kirby said during a press briefing.
Kirby added that he is not aware if there has been any outreach to the family of that dual citizen from the White House yet.
Earlier in the day, the World Central Kitchen staff were traveling "in a deconflicted zone" in two armored cars branded with the organization's logo, and a soft skin vehicle, the NGO said. The humanitarian convoy was attacked as it left the Deir al-Balah warehouse, despite coordinating its movements with the Israel Defense Forces, where the team had unloaded more than 100 tonnes of food aid brought to Gaza by sea, the organization added.
The Israeli strike against the staff of the WCK killed seven employees from Australia, Poland, the United Kingdom, a dual citizen of the United States and Canada, and Palestine. The organization suspended its operations in the Gaza Strip after the deadly incident.

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Biden, Xi Agreed To Pick Up Phone, Speak When Needed - White House

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping have mutually agreed to maintain open lines of communication for any necessary discussions, White House National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby said on Tuesday.
"Both [Xi, Biden] Presidents agreed to pick up the phone and speak when needed," Kirby said during a White House press briefing.
Earlier today, Biden and Xi had a 105-minute phone call, following up on their last meeting in November and discussing various global and bilateral issues.

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White House Reiterates US Troops Will Not Enter Gaza Strip 'Warzone'

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is aware of potential military threats in the Gaza Strip and will not deploy US troops on the ground in the Palestinian enclave, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Tuesday.
"We're under no illusion about the fact that Gaza is a warzone," Kirby said during a press briefing. "Force protection of our troops, which will not be entering Gaza, will be first and foremost in the president's mind, as well as our military leaders.'"
US forces plan to construct a temporary pier off the coast of the Gaza Strip to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid. The United States is working with partners on logistics flow and protection of the project, Kirby said.

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US Fails to Properly Assess Risks to Nuclear Power Plants from Climate Change - Report

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) -The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) does not adequately assess the risks posed to US nuclear power plants from the effects of climate change, a new Government Accountability Office (GAO) report warned on Tuesday.

"NRC's actions to address risks from natural hazards do not fully consider potential climate change effects," the report said.

The Chair of the NRC should direct NRC staff to assess whether its licensing and oversight processes adequately address the potential for increased risks to nuclear power plants from climate change, the GAO recommended.

"NRC officials GAO interviewed said they believe their current processes provide an adequate margin of safety to address climate risks. ...However, NRC has not conducted an assessment to demonstrate that this is the case," the report said.

Assessing its processes to determine whether they adequately address the potential for increased risks from climate change would help ensure NRC fully considers risks to existing and proposed plants, the GAO advised.

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US Congressman Says Proposal to Aid Ukraine With Loans 'Farce'

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Thomas Massie said on Tuesday that a proposal to support Ukraine through loans is a farce, because the regime in Kiev is incapable of paying back the United States.

"In the upcoming foreign aid extravaganza for Ukraine, Israel, Taiwan, et al, there's talk of 'loaning' the money and equipment to Ukraine. OK, why not loan the aid to Israel and Taiwan as well? Because they actually have the means to pay back the loan, that's why. It's a farce," Massie said in a statement via social media platform X.

On Monday, Massie said that so-called "deep state" lawmakers are drafting Ukraine aid legislation, which US House Speaker Mike Johnson intends to fast track.

Johnson said earlier this week that he intends to advance Ukraine aid when the US House of Representatives returns to Washington from a district work period. The legislation could include innovations, such as aiding Ukraine through loans or seized Russian assets, Johnson said.

The push in the US Congress to pass Ukraine aid comes amid warnings from the Biden administration and Ukrainian government that Ukrainian troops could be forced to retreat without further foreign assistance.

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UN Says 186 Humanitarian Workers Killed In Gaza

UNITED NATIONS, April 2 (Sputnik) – The United Nations said on Tuesday that 186 humanitarian workers had been killed in Gaza since the beginning of the current wave of conflict in October.

"According to our humanitarian colleagues, at least 186 humanitarian workers have been killed since October in the occupied Palestinian territory, which is one of the world's most dangerous and difficult place to work as a humanitarian," UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric told reporters.

He added that UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres extended condolences over the death of the World Central Kitchen non-governmental organization staff in the Gaza Strip.

"The multiplicity of such events is an inevitable result of the way this war is currently being conducted," Dujarric said.

He reiterated that the UN insists on the necessity of an immediate humanitarian ceasefire.

Earlier in the day, WCK staff were traveling "in a deconflicted zone" in two armored cars branded with the organization's logo, and a soft skin vehicle, the NGO said. The humanitarian convoy was attacked as it left the Deir al-Balah warehouse, despite coordinating its movements with the Israel Defense Forces, where the team had unloaded more than 100 tonnes of food aid brought to Gaza by sea, the organization added.

The Israeli strike against the staff of the WCK killed seven employees from Australia, Poland, the United Kingdom, a dual citizen of the United States and Canada, and Palestine. The organization suspended its operations in the Gaza Strip after the deadly incident.

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US Air Force Pays Boeing $559Mln to Continue ICBM Testing at Utah Base - Release

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - The US Air Force has given Boeing a contract valued at more than half a billion dollars to continue operating the intercontinental ballistic missile force and nuclear modernization programs at Hill Air Force Base (AFB) in the state of Utah, the defense contractor announced in a press release on Tuesday.

"The US Air Force has awarded Boeing a contract worth up to $559 million over five years to operate, maintain and perform testing at the Little Mountain Test Facility at Hill Air Force Base, Utah," the release said. "The state-of-the-art site is designed to test functionality of the nation's current and future intercontinental ballistic missile force, nuclear modernization programs and other critical defense and deterrence capabilities in the most extreme environments."

Boeing has operated and maintained the Little Mountain Test Facility and site operations including radiation effects, electromagnetic effects, shock and vibration, and other environmental testing for half a century, the release noted.

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"From strategic deterrents to other priority defense and aerospace systems, it's imperative that we rigorously test and verify their ability to carry out their missions no matter the circumstances," Boeing Strategic Missile and Defense Systems Acting Vice President Ted Kerzie said in the release.

Since 1974, Boeing has conducted test operations and provided technical support on nuclear and non-nuclear platforms at the site for the Department of Defense and Department of Energy, according to the release.

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New Electronic Warnings System Transforms Capabilities of Aging US F-15 Force - BAE

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - The US Air Force has completed its testing of a new integrated survivability system for its fleet of F-15 Eagles and concluded that it will provide transformational capabilities to the next generation of operations with the veteran aircraft, which first flew more than half a century ago in 1972, BAE Systems announced in a press release on Tuesday.

"The US Air Force recently completed Initial Operational Test & Evaluation (IOT&E) of the Eagle Passive Active Warning Survivability System (EPAWSS), validating the game-changing capabilities BAE Systems' advanced system brings to the F-15," the release said.

EPAWSS provides critical electronic warfare (EW) capabilities for the F-15E Strike Eagle and F-15EX Eagle II aircraft, BAE Systems explained.

"EPAWSS is a leap in technology, improving the lethality and combat capabilities of the F-15E and F-15EX in contested, degraded environments against advanced threats. EPAWSS has set the baseline for EW within the fighter community," EPAWSS Test Director for the Air Force Operational Test & Evaluation Center (AFOTEC) Maj. Bryant Baum said in the release.

EPAWSS provides instantaneous full-spectrum EW capabilities including radar warning, geolocation, situational awareness, and self-protection. The system enables freedom of maneuver and deeper penetration into battle spaces protected by modern integrated air defense systems, BAE Systems said.

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Guterres Speaks to Iranian Foreign Minister After Strike on Consulate in Damascus - Office

UNITED NATIONS, April 2 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres received a phone call from the Iranian foreign minister this morning after Tehran accused Israel of a deadly strike on the Iranian consulate in Damascus, spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday.

"The Secretary General received a phone call this morning from the Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Secretary General tends to say the same thing publicly as he does privately. We will remain in touch with all other parties through different channels," Dujarric said in the briefing room.

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Earlier in the day, the UN chief condemned Monday's attack on diplomatic premises of Iran in Damascus. He reaffirmed that the principle of the inviolability of diplomatic and consular premises and personnel must be respected in all cases in accordance with international law.
Guterres also called on all parties to practice the "utmost restraint" and adhere to international law.

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Former US Congresswoman Says US President Should Aid Putin-Zelenskyy Peace Talks

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - Former US Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard said on Tuesday that she supports the idea of diplomatic talks between US, Russian and Ukrainian leadership to resolve the conflict in Ukraine.
"Yes, in an ideal world, yes," Gabbard said during an interview with podcaster Lex Fridman, when asked whether she thinks the US president should sit at the negotiating table with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelenskyy.
Such conversations should have started long ago, Gabbard added.
However, US President Joe Biden may not be the "right person" to facilitate peace talks, Gabbard said. The Biden administration's statements on the conflict in Ukraine indicate that they seek the destruction of Russia, Gabbard said.
The Biden administration has thwarted efforts towards peace, Gabbard said. The Biden administration should instead encourage Zelenskyy to sit down and begin peace negotiations, Gabbard said.

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UN on Ukrainian UAV Attacks in Tatarstan: We Condemn All Attacks, Call For Halt

UNITED NATIONS, April 2 (Sputnik) - The United Nations in response to the Ukrainian drone strikes in Russia's Tatarstan condemns all attacks against civilian infrastructure and calls for a halt to such incidents, UN Spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday.
"We stand against and call for a halt to all attacks on civilian infrastructure," Dujarric said in a briefing when asked about the UN position on Ukrainian attacks in Tatarstan.
Earlier on Tuesday, at least six people were injured in a Ukrainian drone attack that hit the Alabuga Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Russia's Tatarstan

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World Bank,UN Say If Gaza Reconstruction Starts After 2024, Economic Contraction to Worsen

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) – The World Bank and the United Nations said on Tuesday that if reconstruction in Gaza starts after 2024, the economic contraction in the region will worsen this year, exceeding 50%.

"Based on the damage data and if reconstruction starts after 2024, the economic contraction in Gaza is forecasted to worsen significantly this year, exceeding 50 percent (y-o-y [year-on-year] in 2024), as the effects of the capital destruction linger," the World Bank and the UN said in a new report.

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Low Turnout in New York Presidential Primary Amid Lack of Intrigue – Sputnik Correspondent

NEW YORK, April 2 (Sputnik) - A lack of intrigue and rain were major factors in the low turnout in New York State's presidential primary, a Sputnik correspondent reported on Tuesday.

In addition to New York, presidential primaries on Tuesday are also taking place in the US states of Connecticut, Wisconsin, and Rhode Island. The Delaware primaries were called off in March after Nikki Haley withdrew from the race and former US President Donald Trump became the only contestant on the state ballot.

Despite the rain that has been pouring all day in New York, voters come to the polling station located on 56th Street in Manhattan. While most of the pool of 9750 registered voters arriving at the polling location are Democrats, not all of them are voting for the current President Joe Biden.

According to Michael, who has worked at the polling station for 24 years, the voter turnout is "too small" both because the winners have already been determined and due to the rain.

"The migrants are my primary issue because it's on my street, and even though I am a registered Democrat, I am going to vote for Trump because I believe he will close the border. I don't understand where my [Democratic] Party has gone, and I don't understand how they are allowing this to happen," Eleonora, one of the Democratic voters, told Sputnik.

Unlike other Democrats, Eleonora is also quite critical of the US policy towards the conflict in Ukraine.

"I pray that the next president whoever he is. [I hope] he finds a way to stop the war [and] not feeding Ukraine so that our [US] military could make more money. The arms dealers in America are becoming very, very rich because they are selling to Israel, to Ukraine. It's business," Eleonora said.

At the same time, a married couple told the correspondent that they voted for Biden because they believed his policy to be correct.

Democrat Biden and his Republican predecessor Trump are facing a rematch in the November presidential election after a 2020 outcome that favored Biden.

A poll in March conducted by USA Today and Suffolk University showed that Trump currently

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edges Biden 40%-38%, a near-tie for the two candidates.

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World Bank, UN Estimate Cost Damage to Critical Infrastructure in Gaza at Around $18.5Bln

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - The World Bank and the United Nations said on Tuesday that the estimated cost of the damage to critical infrastructure in Gaza is around $18.5 billion, which is equivalent to about 97% of the GDP of Gaza and the West Bank combined.
"The cost of damage to critical infrastructure in Gaza is estimated at around $18.5 billion," the World Bank and the UN said in a new report.

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'Absolutely Unacceptable' – Trudeau Expects Accountability Over IDF Strike on Aid Workers

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) – Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Tuesday that he expected an investigation and full accountability over an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) strike on the World Central Kitchen (WCK) which killed seven, including a Canadian.
"It is absolutely unacceptable that aid workers were killed by the Israeli Defense Force. This is something that never should have happened … We obviously need full accountability and an investigation into this. There needs to be clarity on how this happened," Trudeau said during a press conference.
Trudeau further added that Canada would continue to push for a ceasefire so that humanitarian workers could avoid putting their lives at risk while carrying out their duties in Gaza.
Earlier in the day, WCK staff were traveling "in a deconflicted zone" in two armored cars branded with the organization's logo, and a soft skin vehicle, the NGO said. The humanitarian convoy was attacked as it left the Deir al-Balah warehouse, despite coordinating its movements with the Israel Defense Forces, where the team had unloaded more than 100 tonnes of food aid brought to Gaza by sea, the organization added.
The Israeli strike against the staff of the WCK killed seven employees from Australia, Poland, the United Kingdom, a dual citizen of the United States and Canada, and Palestine. The organization suspended its operations in the Gaza Strip after the deadly incident.

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Biden in Call With Xi Raises Concerns About China's 'Unfair Trade Policies' - White House

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WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden during his phone call with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping raised concerns over Beijing's "unfair trade policies and non-market economic practices," the White House said in a readout on Tuesday.

"President Biden also raised continued concerns about the PRC's unfair trade policies and non-market economic practices, which harm American workers and families," the readout said.

Biden also emphasized that the US would continue to take steps to prevent China from using advanced US technologies to undermine US national security, the readout said.

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Blinken Says US Does Not Support Ukrainian Strikes Inside Russia

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday that the United States does not support strikes Ukraine conducts against refineries and other targets in Russia.

"We have neither supported nor enabled strikes by Ukraine outside of its territory," Blinken told reporters in Paris when asked about strikes against Russian refineries.

At the same time, he said, the US is trying to do everything to support Ukraine's ability to defend itself.

In March, Ukrainian drones attacked several Russian oil refineries, including in the Nizhny Novgorod, Samara, Ryazan regions, and the Krasnodar Territory. The Russian authorities have said that Ukraine has turned into a terrorist state.

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US Diplomat Penny Pritzker Travels to Ukraine, Moldova, Romania – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) – US Special Representative for Ukraine's Economic Recovery Penny Pritzker is traveling to Ukraine, Moldova, and Romania this week to meet with officials and entrepreneurs, the US State Department said on Tuesday.

"Special Representative for Ukraine's Economic Recovery Penny Pritzker traveled to Chisinau, Moldova on April 1, Lviv, Ukraine on April 2, and will travel to Bucharest, Romania on April 3," the State Department said in a press release.

In Chisinau, Pritzker had a meeting with President Maia Sandu, Prime Minister Dorin Recean, and private sector representatives to discuss joint efforts on Ukraine's economic recovery, the release said.

Pritzker's travel to Lviv focused on Ukraine's IT sector and ways to encourage innovation. The US representative also had a meeting with the Mayor of Lviv Andriy Sadovyi, technology entrepreneurs, and business representatives, according to the release.

During her trip to Bucharest, Pritzker is expected to meet with Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu,

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ministers, and private sector leaders to discuss Romania's role in regional cooperation and tour the RomExpo Refugee Center.

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Truth Media Stock Survives A Day After Mauling; Analysts Maintain Bearish Stance

NEW YORK, April 2 (Sputnik) - Donald Trump's media stock hovered in positive territory on Tuesday after costing the former US president about $1 billion in losses in Monday's trading, with analysts warning that the downside may not be over for a company long on promise and short on delivery.

Shares of Trump Media & Technology Group, the holding company for the Truth Social site trading on the New York Stock Exchange's Nasdaq under the DJT ticker, was up $2.79, or around 6%, at $51.45 a share about an hour after trading began on Tuesday.

On Monday, DJT sank to a session low of $45.30 versus its debut high of $76.20 a week ago.

"It's being priced right in the next 80 days with almost $30 of downside," Tom Sosnoff, chief executive at Tastytrade, an equity markets advisory, said in comments carried by CNBC.

Trump, who owns roughly 60% of DJT, lost about $1 billion from Monday's plunge, analysts estimate.

In the options market for stocks, "Bond King" Bill Gross has joined skeptics of DJT, beating the drum on his decision to sell options on the stock, which he described as courageous given the company's recent listing and the hype it has generated thus far.

DJT is among Trump associated products — which include shoes of the high-cut sneaker variety made popular by rap artists and teens — that have entered the marketplace as the former president resorts to a branding-based charm offensive in his campaign to recapture the White House.

Republican Trump and Democrat President Joe Biden are facing a rematch in November presidential elections, after a 2020 outcome that favored Biden.

But experts who study market behavior and the trading fortunes of companies with little track record for performance are advising serious buyers to stay away from DJT, which they say has all the makings of a meme stock.

Meme stock is a description used for a company that has a cult-like following on social media, and whose market performance is based on investor sentiment instead of fundamentals. Such stocks often don't live up to high valuations. In DJT's case, its high debut price was largely a work of Trump's political supporters — many of whom don't understand how the stock market works — say analysts.

Prior to DJT's listing, analysts pointed to the $49 million in losses posted by Trump Media & Technology Group on a revenue of $3.4 million during the first nine months of 2023.

Monday's plunge of more than 21% in DJT's value was on that same logic — the company's full earnings for 2023 included a net loss of $58.2 million on a revenue of $4.1 million, according to new filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission.

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UPDATE - Canada's Joly 'Horrified' by Strike on World Central Kitchen, Death of Canadian Citizen

(Adds background in paras 5-6)

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) – Canada's Foreign Minister Melanie Joly said on Tuesday that she was "horrified" to learn about an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) strike on the World Central Kitchen (WCK) which also killed a Canadian citizen.

"I am horrified to hear reports of the IDF strike taking the lives of 7 World Central Kitchen employees in Gaza yesterday, including a Canadian citizen," Joly said via X.

Canada condemns the strikes and calls for a full investigation into the incident, a demand that Ottawa intends to directly convey to the Israeli government, Joly added. The minister further emphasized that attacks on humanitarian personnel are absolutely unacceptable.

"International humanitarian law must be respected," Joly continued.

Earlier in the day, WCK said that seven of its employees, including citizens of Poland, Australia, and the United Kingdom, had been killed in Gaza as a result of the Israeli army's strike. The staff was attacked by an Israeli drone in the village of Deir al Balah in the central part of the Gaza Strip while traveling "in a deconflicted zone" in two armored cars, media reported.

The seven killed staff members were from Australia, Poland, the United Kingdom, dual citizens of the United States and Canada, and Palestine, the statement added. The WCK said it had suspended its operations in the Gaza Strip after the deadly strike.

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US Closely Coordinating with France to Prevent War in Lebanon – Blinken

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday that the United States was closely coordinating with France to rein in the spread of Israel's war on Gaza to Lebanon.

"We're coordinating closely when it comes to Lebanon, and trying to prevent any spread of the conflict there, finding a diplomatic way forward," Blinken said at a press briefing in Paris.

The Israel Defense Forces and Hezbollah have been trading airstrikes on a near-daily basis following the Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel, with recent Israeli strikes extending far beyond southern Lebanese border.

Residents on both sides of the border have been displaced amid the ongoing violence, with nearly 270 Hezbollah fighters, around 50 Lebanese civilians, 11 Israeli soldiers, and nine Israeli civilians killed thus far.

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Billions of Cicadas to Emerge in 17 US States in First Dual Emergence Since 1803 - Reports

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - Two broods of cicadas are set to surface this month in 17 US states, marking the first dual emergence since 1803, Fox News reported on Tuesday.

The event will mark the first occurrence in 221 years where the two specific cicada populations, broods XIX and XIII, emerge simultaneously. The last emergence of the two broods dates back to the presidency of Thomas Jefferson, with no anticipated recurrence until 2244.

Billions, and perhaps even trillions of cicadas, measuring one to two inches long with sturdy bodies and red eyes, will mate frenziedly for weeks, lay eggs on forest floors, and then die, continuing the cycle of life, the report said.

While harmless to humans, pets, gardens and crops, cicadas benefit ecosystems by serving as food for wildlife and enhancing soil quality and water filtration as they decompose, the report added.

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Biden Discusses Ukraine, Russia-China Ties With Xi - Senior Administration Official

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping were expected to discuss Russia-China ties and the conflict in Ukraine during a phone call on Tuesday, a senior administration official said.

"[Biden] will likely also raise concern about the People's Republic of China's support for Russia's war against Ukraine and its efforts to help Russia reconstitute its defense industrial base," the official said.

The US is increasingly concerned that China's support of Russia will impact European security in the longer term, the official said.

Russia has been a focus of the US' diplomatic conversations with China since the launch of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, the official said.

The US is concerned with the direction of Russia-China ties, the official said. However, China is a sovereign country that will make its own decisions about its relationships, the official added.

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Blinken to Visit China in Coming Weeks - Senior US Official

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WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is expected to visit China in the coming weeks, a senior US administration official said.

"We will continue to advance our interests through cabinet-level diplomacy, including visits to the PRC by Secretary of the Treasury Yellen in the coming days and Secretary of State Blinken in the coming weeks," the official said.

On Tuesday morning, US President Joe Biden held a phone call with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

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Biden Discusses Resumption of Military Channels During Call With Xi - Senior Official

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden was expected to bring up the resumption of military-to-military communication channels during his bilateral call with China's President Xi Jinping on Tuesday, a senior administration official said.

"There are also of course areas of cooperation where our interests align and it is important to work together to deliver on issues that matter to the American people. These areas include counter narcotics, risk and safety issues related to AI, resumption of military-to-military communication channels and climate issues," the official said on Monday.

The official added that during his call with Xi, Biden would reaffirm the one-china policy and reiterate the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait.

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Twelve Ukrainian Pilots Currently in F-16 Training in US, Graduating This Year - Air Force

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - Twelve Ukrainian pilots have started their training on F-16 fighter jets in the US state of Arizona and all are expected to graduate later this year, an Air Force spokesperson told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"Twelve Ukrainian pilots are currently in F-16 training at the 162nd Wing, Arizona Air National Guard," the spokesperson said. "The training curriculum will align with the foundational knowledge and skills of each pilot and all 12 are expected to graduate this year."

In February, the Air Force said the United States was set to train a dozen Ukrainian pilots to fly F-16s this year, but had not provided a starting date. The pilots are expected to graduate from training between May and August.

The US Defense Department expects F-16 fighter jets to be delivered to Ukraine sometime this year.

Last week, Russian President Vladimir Putin said F-16 fighter jets, even if Western countries supply them to Ukraine, will not be able to change the situation on the battlefield.

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Canadian Soldiers Forced to Rely on Donated Food During Cyber Training - Reports

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - Canadian soldiers were forced to rely on food donations during cyber training in Ottawa because of inadequate military support and the city's high cost of living, Ottawa Citizen reported on Tuesday.

Some soldiers did not receive reimbursement for their expenses during the cyber training for months, the report said, citing military personnel familiar with the matter.

The soldiers were not initially eligible to receive a housing allowance for their time in Ottawa, the report said.

Staff at Willis College, where the cyber training took place, eventually created a food donation cupboard for hungry military personnel, the report said.

National Defense spokesperson Andree-Anne Poulin reportedly said that the Canadian military takes the issue very seriously. The military recognizes the financial pressures that servicemembers in Ottawa face due to a high cost of living and limited support services, Poulin said.

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Blinken Urges Israel to Probe Foreign Aid Worker Killings in Gaza

(Adds details in paras 3-8)

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday that he had spoken directly with the Israeli government to urge an investigation into the Israeli airstrike that killed seven World Central Kitchen aid workers in Gaza on Monday.

"We've spoken directly to the Israeli government about this particular incident. We've urged a swift, a thorough, an impartial investigation to understand exactly what happened," Blinken said at a joint press conference with his French counterpart.

Blinken extended condolences to the family, friends, and colleagues of the dead and injured.

Seven World Central Kitchen workers – six of whom were foreign nationals and one Palestinian – were killed on Monday after an Israeli strike hit their convoy after it left a warehouse in Deir al Balah where it had unloaded humanitarian food aid.

World Central Kitchen CEO Erin Gore called the strike "unforgiveable" and "an attack on humanitarian organizations showing up in the most dire of situations where food is being used as a weapon of war."

The organization said that its convoy had coordinated its movements with the Israeli Defense Forces and were traveling in a "deconflicted zone in two armored cars branded with the WCK logo and a soft skin vehicle."

As a result of the attack, it has suspended its operations in the region.

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Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in the wake of the deadly strike that Israeli forces "unintentionally hit innocent people" in a "tragic incident."

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Blinken Justifies US Arms Deliveries to Israel: Many Were Approved Years Ago

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken justified on Tuesday arms deliveries to Israel, saying that many of them were approved years ago.

"With Israel, and this is also true with other countries, there are a number of open cases, open requests of previously notified cases, which has not been fully fulfilled or completed," Blinken told reporters.

Every single transfer of weapons happens consistent with statutory and policy requirements, including formal and informal notifications to Congress.

The United States started the process on many of Israel's requests many years ago, he added.

"It takes time often to produce the materiel or the weapons in question, the parts, etc. These complex systems, simply put, take years to actually allow us to fulfill the request in the agreement," Blinken said.

Many of these cases underwent Congressional review many years ago, well before the current conflict in Gaza began, the secretary said.

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Canada's Joly 'Horrified' by Strike on World Central Kitchen, Death of Canadian Citizen

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) – Canada's Foreign Minister Melanie Joly said on Tuesday that she was "horrified" learn about an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) strike on the World Central Kitchen (WCK) which also killed a Canadian citizen.

"I am horrified to hear reports of the IDF strike taking the lives of 7 World Central Kitchen employees in Gaza yesterday, including a Canadian citizen," Joly said via X.

Canada condemns the strikes and calls for a full investigation into the incident, a demand that Ottawa intends to directly convey to the Israeli government, Joly added. The minister further emphasized that attacks on humanitarian personnel are absolutely unacceptable.

"International humanitarian law must be respected," Joly continued.

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UN Chief Condemns Attack on Iran's Consulate in Damascus - Statement

UNITED NATIONS, April 2 (Sputnik) - United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned the attack on Iran's consulate in Damascus and reaffirmed the need for all parties to respect diplomatic facilities in all cases, UN Spokesman Stephane Dujarric said in a statement on Tuesday.

"The Secretary-General condemns the attack on diplomatic premises of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Damascus on 1 April, as well as the reported casualties. The Secretary-General reaffirms that the principle of the inviolability of diplomatic and consular premises and personnel must be respected in all cases in accordance with international law," the statement said.

The UN chief also called on all parties to practice the "utmost restraint" and adhere to international law, it added.

On Monday, Israel carried out an airstrike on the consular annex of the Iranian Embassy in Damascus, destroying the building. Iran's elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps said seven of its members were killed in the attack, including two commanders.

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Ukraine Will Become NATO Member, but Roadmap Needed to Ensure This - Blinken

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - Ukraine will join NATO, but a roadmap is required to get to that point, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday.

"Ukraine will be a member of NATO," Blinken said in a joint press conference with his French counterpart in Paris. "For us the issue is having good and clear roadmap to reach this conclusion, and I believe the NATO summit for the 75th anniversary will indeed be highly focused and quite concretely as to how we can establish this map."

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RFK Jr. Says Biden Presents Bigger Threat to Democracy Than Trump

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - Independent US presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said in an interview for CNN that President Joe Biden poses a bigger threat to democracy than his main opponent and predecessor Donald Trump.

"I can make the argument that President Biden is the much worse threat to democracy, and the reason for that is President Biden is the first candidate in history – the first president in history that has used the federal agencies to censor political speech, so to censor his opponent," Kennedy Jr. said in the interview on Monday.

Kennedy supported his claim by noting that Biden was the first US president who attempted to censor political opponents by removing them from social media platforms.

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At the same time, Kennedy called it "appalling" that former President Trump allegedly attempted to overturn the 2020 election results.

Kennedy holds 16% support in a three-way race with Trump and current officeholder Biden, who are the presumptive nominees of their respective parties, according to an Ipsos poll conducted in March.

In February, US media reported that Democratic Party strategists are concerned about support for alternative candidates like Kennedy.

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Canada's Top Diplomat to Attend NATO Foreign Ministers Meeting in Belgium – Ministry

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) – Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs Melanie Joly will visit Belgium this week to attend a NATO Foreign Ministers meeting, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) said on Tuesday.

The NATO foreign ministers meeting will address matters related to Ukraine, and the alliance's cooperation with its partners in the Indo-Pacific such as Japan, South-Korea, Australia and New-Zealand.

"The Honourable Melanie Joly, Minister of Foreign Affairs, today announced that she will be traveling to Brussels, Belgium, to attend the NATO Foreign Ministers' Meeting from April 3 to 4," GAC said in a statement.

Joly is set to meet with her NATO counterparts to discuss the current global security environment and welcome Sweden's foreign minister of his first foreign ministers meeting in NATO following its accession on March 7, GAC added.

Among other topics of discussion, marking the 75th anniversary of the creation of the military alliance and a NATO-Ukraine Council meeting on the continued assistance being provided to Ukraine amid Russia's ongoing special military operation, GAC said.

Joly will reiterate both its support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and Ottawa's position that Kiev should be able to join NATO as soon as "conditions allow," GAC continued.

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US Works 'Day In, Day Out' to Prevent Arms Transfers to Russia From Iran, China - Blinken

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - The United States is working hard every day to prevent any transfer of weapons to Russia, including from China and Iran, US Secretary of State Antony blinken said on Tuesday.

"We are working day in and day out to effectively prevent the transfer of weapons and materials to Russia to fuel that war machine, to fuel its defense industrial base, including from Iran, from North Korea and from China," Blinken said in a joint press conference with his French

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counterpart in Paris.

Western countries have provided hundreds of billions of dollars worth of aid to Ukraine since the start of Russia's special military operation in February 2022. Aid shipments began in 2022 with artillery munitions and training and have escalated to include tanks, advanced air-defense systems, missiles and cluster munitions.

The Kremlin has consistently warned against the West's continued arms deliveries to Ukraine, saying that they only prolong the conflict.

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US House Republicans Propose Renaming Dulles Airport After Donald Trump - Bill Text

WASHINGTON, April 2 (Sputnik) - A group of US House Republicans are proposing to rename the Washington Dulles International Airport after former President Donald Trump, according to a bill text made public on Tuesday.

The legislation would designate the facility as Donald J. Trump International Airport. The airport is currently named after former US Secretary of State John Dulles.

"As millions of domestic and international travelers fly through the airport, there is no better symbol of freedom, prosperity and strength than hearing 'Welcome to Trump International Airport' as they land on American soil," US Congressman Guy Reschenthaler said in a statement on the bill to Fox News.

The legislation is backed by House Republicans including Reschenthaler, Michael Waltz, Paul Gosar and Troy Nehls.

Washington Dulles International Airport serves as a major airport for the Washington area, alongside Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport and Baltimore/Washington International Airport.

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