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4/9/24 Tuesday

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Israel Will Have to Drop 'Unachievable Goals' in Gaza

On Tuesday, Hamas representatives said the Israeli proposal it received from Qatari and Egyptian mediators did not meet any of the demands from the Palestinian factions, but said it would study it further before replying.

Israel will have to drop its demand that Hamas be destroyed because it is an "unachievable goal" to destroy something that is "essentially an ideology," the host of The Left is Dead podcast, James Carey asserted on Sputnik's The Critical Hour on Tuesday.

"As far as Hamas goes, we know they immediately flood back into areas that Israel leaves and they immediately start running the government, as they are wont to do, and as they were elected to do," Carey observed. "[Hamas] may not be winning, but they aren't losing, they're still there. It's going to be impossible to kill what is essentially an ideology in the first place. Because even if there's not a Hamas, there's Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and there are other, smaller militias around that can soak up people who may not necessarily be 100% in Hamas."

A ceasefire will not be seriously negotiated until the Israeli demand that Hamas be destroyed is removed, Carey said, but Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has dedicated the war to that goal. "I think we've seen that even at the sacrifice of hostages over the last seven months," Carey claimed.

"I think the thing is, these are unachievable goals," Carey added, referring to both Israel's goals in Gaza and the goals of the US in Ukraine. "Clearly Hamas has done well enough that they've survived to this point."

"These are open proxies, and the US is funneling arms and money to them because they see no other way," Carey explained, referring to Ukraine and Israel. "I don't think the US is competent enough to get involved [directly]. Much less, I don't think the IDF [Israeli Defense Force] is actually that competent after years of resting on their laurels. I think that you're seeing the failure of US policy. The US empire has no real projection of force because there's no willingness for it at home."

Asked about the ongoing protests in Israel against Netanyahu, Carey noted that they are significant but cautioned against hoping for new leadership to end its bombardment of Gaza as a result.

"I think it's incredibly important that Netanyahu has really tied himself to the success of this war, and I don't think it's a war that has a real success," Carey began. "I don't think [Israelis] thought Gaza would last seven months," he added.

"We know a sort of left-wing liberal coalition can't hold together" in Israel, Carey elaborated. "Especially because it has to include [both] Palestinians and opposition to Netanyahu from the center-left." Most of the governmental opposition to Netanyahu comes from the right, described by co-host Wilmer Leon as "more horrific than Netanyahu," referring specifically to the leader of

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the National Religious Party–Religious Zionism, Bezalel Smotrich and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, a description Carey agreed with.

"It's clearly both why Netanyahu is stuck in this war and why I think he'll be gone after the war because that is who the opposition is. That is who the strongest group of voters are in the Israeli Knesset. I think we're going to see a more of a right-wing turn as people get more angry about these things," Carey warned.

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China Sending Message That 'It Has Russia's Back' If West Escalates

On Tuesday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met with Chinese President Xi Jinping, sending a strong message to the West that the two countries will continue their strategic relationship. The meeting came a day after US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen traveled to China and warned it against partnering with Russia.

The meeting between Lavrov and Xi, particularly right after Yellen's visit, is a "message" to the West that China "will have the back of Russia" if the conflict in Ukraine is escalated by the West, lawyer and journalist Dimitri Lascarus told Sputnik's The Critical Hour on Wednesday.

"The timing of announcements such as these tell you a lot," Lascarus said, pointing to not only Yellen's visit but the increasingly provocative attacks on Russia by Ukraine's intelligence services such as the mass shooting outside of Moscow which Russia has blamed Ukraine and its backers in the US and UK for, among other provocations.

"Of course, we have this ongoing drama with little Napoleon in France [French President] Emmanuel Macron, talking about sending a few thousand French troops to their deaths in Odessa," Lascarus recalled. "I wouldn't be surprised at all if it has been interpreted by both the Russian and Chinese governments as an attempt to provoke Russia into a direct attack on a NATO country."

"I think [China is] sending a message that China will have the back of Russia if this escalates. And, no one should have any illusions about that," Lascarus explained.

"They see, I believe, that there is a series of escalations happening here and there are no adults in the room, and they need to send an unequivocal signal that China will have Russia's back in the event that this escalates out of control," he added.

While neither government has any "reservations about the necessity" of their alliance, Lascarus argued that the West is forcing them to strengthen their relationship because of its aggressive actions. "Every day, Western governments are acting in a way which makes this partnership even more compelling to the Russian and Chinese governments."

With public sentiment turning against the "Ukrainian disaster" in both Europe and the US, Lascarus noted that polls show that the vast majority of French citizens think the country is heading in the wrong direction. "[France] has been one of the primary architects of this disastrous neocon policy in Ukraine," he explained. "So we're seeing already, that the political days of these characters are all numbered."

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"The real question we have to confront as citizens of the West is, do we have an actual, competent, ethical, and principled alternative to these people? I don't know that we do. But one thing is for sure, the public has enough and they're on the way out the door."

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'Russiagate' About Seizing Power as Much as Stopping Trump

On Sunday, US Rep. and chair of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence Michael R. Turner (R-OH) claimed that it is "absolutely true" that members of the US Republican party are repeating "pro-Russia messages" on the House floor, without naming the members. The US establishment disproven conspiracy that former US President Donald Trump was controlled by the Kremlin is about seizing control of social media and the internet as much as it is designed to harm Trump's political ambitions, Serbian-American journalist and columnist Nebojsa Malic told Sputnik's Fault Lines on Tuesday.

Malic argues that the "completely fabricated" Russiagate conspiracy was "not just to sabotage the Trump presidency, but to literally take over these social networks, [which] all these big tech people thought was going to be this lovely garden of earthly delights and turn it into a prison."

Last year, a panel of federal judges ruled that the US intelligence agencies' contact with social media companies, urging them to take down specific posts and block or ban certain users, likely constituted government censorship. The administration of US President Joe Biden has appealed the case to the Supreme Court.

"Russiagate was the pretext that started this entire ball rolling, and it wasn't even based on anything real. And now they want to do it all over again," Malic explained.

"I was listening to [Senate Majority Leader, Senator] Chuck Schumer (D-NY) speak yesterday about how Ukraine is losing the war because [House Speaker, Rep.] Mike Johnson (R-LA) doesn't want to give them money. No, Ukraine is losing the war because it has always been [losing] because it is fighting an industrial war it cannot win," Malic continued. "The West can't win because it doesn't have the industrial capabilities because in the past 30 years, we shut down our industry and turned everything over to finance, but Chuck Schumer is too thick to understand that."

The reality on the ground in Ukraine has turned many against US support for NATO's proxy war in Russia, with more Americans (37%) saying the US spends too much on Ukraine than too little (27%) and only 13% responded that they were either "extremely confident" or "very confident" Ukraine will defeat Russia, compared to 49% who say they are "Not too confident" or "Not confident at all."

People are asking "How is this helping freedom and democracy, exactly?" Malic contended. "And [the establishment's] response is 'shut up, Russian Agent.'"

"This is a breakdown. Because, again, the blob's agenda is to use Russia's phantom menace for a power grab at home on one hand, and to push for this geopolitical fantasy that Russia needs Ukraine to be a global empire," Malic said, explaining that Russia doesn't want a global empire.

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"They voluntarily dissolved the Soviet Union in '91, believing all of these stories about freedom and democracy and capitalism and human rights, and they got taken advantage of. Demographically, the country was worse off in the '90s than during World War Two," Malic explained. "When we talk about the golden age of the 1990s, post-Cold War, freedom, democracy, transition from socialism, this is a horror story to these people and nobody in America seems to understand this because they didn't live through it."

However, Malic said that it is "theoretically possible" that the "blob" actually wants Trump to win the election to give them an excuse to get out of Ukraine.

"Maybe they want to get out of this Ukrainian quagmire and blame somebody else for it. They might want Trump to get elected so they can say 'Okay, well, it's all his fault. Had we kept the Democrats in power, we would have totally won the war. But, oh, well, what can we do? We just have to move on to the next war,' which will be China."

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“I think the thing is, these are unachievable goals,” Carey added, referring to both Israel’s goals in Gaza and the goals of the US in Ukraine. “Clearly Hamas has done well enough that they’ve survived to this point.”

“I don’t think [Israelis] thought Gaza would last seven months,” he added later.

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Ukrainian Conscription Officers Assault, Attempt to Press Gang 14 Year Old

The episode brought light to the violent tactics increasingly used by the country’s conscription officers as Ukraine’s desperate military continues to press gang draftees.
The story of a 14-year-old boy who was kidnapped at gunpoint by a group of conscription officers is going viral in Ukraine. The shocking incident took place last week in the Odessa

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oblast according to the website Bessarabia Info, which cited local department of social protection head Oksana Terzi.

The young teenager was reportedly walking alone in the village of Priozernoye to meet his girlfriend when a white minivan pulled up beside him. Four men wearing military uniforms and balaclavas emerged; one pressed a rifle against the boy's temple while forcing him into the car.

"The kid plays sports so the self-defense instinct kicked in," explained Terzi. "He began to struggle and the attackers restrained him, hitting him in the back with an assault rifle. They beat him and tied his hands with a plastic tie."

She speculated the soldiers assumed the boy was an adult due to his broad shoulders.

The men drove for some time before asking the age of the teenager. They initially didn't believe him when he claimed he was only 14.

"When he said how old he was they didn't believe him and asked for his passport," said Terzi. "When they realized that they were transporting a minor they threw him out of the van." The men reportedly threatened the boy not to report the incident.

Local authorities were contacted after the teenager told his teachers at school about the event. Police are investigating the incident as a kidnapping.

The episode brought light to the violent tactics increasingly used by Ukrainian conscription officers as the country's desperate military continues to press gang draftees. Raids have been carried out in gyms, restaurants, shopping malls and on city streets to combat draft dodging, which is reportedly widespread.

Neighboring Russia is meanwhile reporting a surge of volunteers at military recruitment centers. President Volodymyr Zelensky recently signed legislation lowering Ukraine's draft age from 27 to 25, but the country has had difficulty recruiting young servicemembers due to an ongoing demographic crisissince its emergence from the Soviet Union in 1991.

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IMF Expects Global Labor Supply Growth to Be Mere 0.3% by 2030

WASHINGTON, April 10 (Sputnik) – Global labor supply growth is expected to slow down to just 0.3% by 2030, which is more than three times lower than during the decade before the COVID-19 pandemic, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on Wednesday.

"By 2030, global labor supply growth is projected to be a mere 0.3 percent, less than a third of its average in the decade before the pandemic," the IMF said in the Chapter 3 of its World Economic Outlook report.

The fund warned that most of the advanced economies and major emerging markets may face intensification of demographic pressures weighing on labor supply in the medium term. That will contribute to lower global growth, it added.

"Since 2008, growth in the working-age population (ages 15–64) has slowed in about 92 percent of the global economy and has been negative in about 44 percent," the fund said.

The slowdown is visible in most advanced and emerging market economies, however low-income countries still enjoy a demographic dividend, the report said. The IMF expressed the

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hope that these countries could help support growth in the global workforce, it added.

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US House Postpones Sending Mayorkas Impeachment Articles to Senate – Speaker

WASHINGTON, April 10 (Sputnik) – US House Republicans will postpone sending the articles of impeachment against Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas to the Senate to review until next week, Speaker Mike Johnson's spokesperson said in a statement.

"To ensure the Senate has adequate time to perform its constitutional duty, the House will transmit the articles of impeachment to the Senate next week," Johnson's spokesperson was quoted as saying by CBS.

House Republicans impeached Mayorkas in February on two articles and wrote a letter to Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer last month, informing him that they would present the articles to the Senate on April 10.

They have postponed their plan now, amid concerns about the ability of Republican senators to attend what looks to be a vote on Thursday in the Democrat-controlled chamber.

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US Consumer Price Index Up 3.5% Year-On-Year to March vs February's 3.2%

WASHINGTON, April 10 (Sputnik) - US consumer prices grew 3.5% in the year to March, beating Wall Street's 3.4% forecast and the previous annualized growth of 3.2% for February, in a sign that inflation is still running hotter than necessary for the Federal Reserve to cut interest rates.

"The all items index rose 3.5 percent for the 12 months ending March, a larger increase than the 3.2-percent increase for the 12 months ending February," the Labor Department said in a news release on Friday, referring to the headline Consumer Price Index number.

It also noted that stripped of volatile energy and food costs, the so-called CPI grew 3.8% over the last 12 months.

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Global Growth to Drop to 2.8% by 2030 Without Policy Interventions, Technology Boost - IMF

WASHINGTON, April 10 (Sputnik) - The world's economic growth will slow down to 2.8% by the end of the decade, 1 percentage point below its pre-pandemic average, without policy

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interventions or a technological boost, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on Wednesday.

"Without timely policy interventions or a boost from emerging technologies, global growth will be only 2.8 percent by the end of the decade, significantly below its pre-pandemic (2000-2019) average by a gap of 1 percentage point," the IMF said in the Chapter 3 of its World Economic Outlook report.

The situation highlights an urgent need to implement policies and structural reforms that enhance growth by improving capital and labor allocation to more productive firms, enhance labor force participation and harness the potential of artificial intelligence, the IMF said.

"Such measures are critical, especially in light of challenges such as high public debt and geoeconomic fragmentation, which could further constrain global growth," the IMF added.

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US, Japan Will Bolster Intelligence Cooperation - Senior Administration Official

WASHINGTON, April 10 (Sputnik) - The United States and Japan will bolster cooperation on intelligence-related matters, a senior Biden administration official said.

"You will see over the course of the next few days that we are stepping up our intelligence cooperation," the senior administration official said, amid a state visit to the US by Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

Japanese partners and allies have taken substantial steps on information security and procedures to protect sensitive information that could potentially be shared between the US and Japan, the senior administration official said.

The US maintains a "fundamental goal" of being able to share the most important information with Japan as a close ally, the senior administration official said.

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US to Change Force Structure in Japan to Make Most of Joint Operations–Senior Official

WASHINGTON, April 10 (Sputnik) – The United States will change its force structure in Japan for the first time to make the most of joint operations and better integrate the forces of the two allies, a senior US defense official said during a press briefing.

“For the first time ever, we are going to change the force structure that we have in Japan. So, it actually can make the most of their new joint operations center that's part of the defense budget to have a real capacity capability to integrate our forces,” the official said on Tuesday.

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US, Japan Will Form Council to Evaluate Co-Production of Weapons - Administration Official

WASHINGTON, April 10 (Sputnik) - The United States and Japan will form a military-industrial council to examine potential co-production of arms, a senior Biden administration official said.
"With the cap on the defense exports being lifted, we're going to have a military-industrial council that will evaluate where we can co-produce defense weapons," the senior administration official said.
The announcement comes amid a state visit by Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida to the US for meetings with President Joe Biden.

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RPT - PREVIEW - Rate Cut Doubts Grow as US Awaits Another Inflation Reading

WASHINGTON, April 10 (Sputnik) - The United States was supposed to see at least three interest rate cuts this year, but now some Federal Reserve officials think there might not be any and the country may even see another raise instead.
Ahead of Wednesday's release of the Consumer Price Index reading for March, the expectation on both Wall Street and Main Street is that the data will show another tick up in price growth or, at best, a slight moderation from the previous month.
Either way, it might not be enough to convince the Fed that a cut is needed when the central bank's policy makers huddle on May 2 to decide on rates.
In February, the reading for the so-called CPI grew 3.2% year-on-year. As of Tuesday, a poll of economists by US media showed the likelihood of a 3.4% annual reading for March.
Another widely-watched price gauge — the Personal Consumption Expenditures Index — which also happens to be a Fed favorite for tracking inflation, grew 2.5% year-on-year in March.
Both the CPI and its price-tracking cousin, the PCE, are growing faster than the Fed's 2% target for annual inflation.
The Fed has vexed itself trying to meet the 2% target since the coronavirus outbreak of four years ago that first sent rates crashing by busting the economy, then propelled them skywards by crippling supply chains for goods.
Following the COVID-19 outbreak, the Fed hiked rates by as many as 11 times between March 2022 and July 2023. That brought rates to a range of between 5.25% and 5.5% — versus the zero to 0.25% range introduced soon after the start of the pandemic.
The 5.25% to 5.5% range has been in place since July last year.
As this year began, the central bank forecast a 75-basis point cut for each of 2024 and 2025. But it hasn't set a schedule for such reductions. Some on Wall Street remain hopeful of the first snip occurring by June.
Even so, almost everyone on the Fed who will influence the decision-making on rates, from

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Chairman Jerome Powell to the heads of the different regional jurisdictions of the central bank, are hoping either the PCE or CPI will make a meaningful descent toward the 2% target for them to embark on a policy pivot.

Those hopes may be getting increasingly misplaced.

Neel Kashkari, president of the Minneapolis division of the Fed, suggested last week that he could imagine a scenario where rates will not go down at all for 2024.

"In March, I had jotted down two rate cuts this year if inflation continues to fall back towards our 2% target," Kashkari told a live-stream discussion on Fed policy. "If we continue to see inflation moving sideways, then that would make me question whether we needed to do those rate cuts at all."

Raphael Bostic, the Atlanta Fed president, followed up on Kashari's lead by saying he didn't foresee a cut until November or even December.

The pessimism that rates could go lower reached new heights on Monday when JPMorgan CEO Jamie Dimon forecast that actual lending rates set by commercial banks could reach 8%. In comparison, the fixed rate for a 30-year US home mortgage stands at 6.82%.

EMPLOYMENT NUMBERS

The notion of higher rates came back into the Wall Street psyche particularly after the release of US employment numbers for March.

Fed Chair Powell has said all along that if there was one thing besides falling inflation that could influence him and colleagues to cut rates, it would be a tumble in jobs numbers.

Highlighting his point — or rather proving why a cut shouldn't happen soon — the Labor Department reported that non-farm payrolls grew by 303,000 last month, more than 40% above the Wall Street forecast of 214,000.

While policy-makers over the world typically celebrate on seeing good jobs numbers, the Fed is in a different predicament as it is also tasked with ensuring inflation that is sustainable for Americans.

The greatest job security since the 1970s and corresponding wage growth have cushioned many Americans from price pressures and encouraged them to continue spending.

For more than two years, the country has experienced so-called maximum employment — a Fed term marked by a jobless rate of 4% or lower.

In March, the US unemployment situation actually improved, dropping to 3.8% from the February tick-up to 3.9% from January's 3.7%.

In line with that, the average investor's confidence of a rate cut happening by June has also gone lower.

On Tuesday, the FedWatch tool, which tracks money-market aspirations for rate changes, assigned a mere 51% chance of a cut by June. Even the probability of a July reduction had fallen to 70%, from a previous 92%.

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US 'Would Love' to Have Safety Deconfliction Channel With Russia in Space - SPACECOM

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COLORADO SPRINGS, April 10 (Sputnik) - The United States would love to have a safety deconfliction channel with Russia in space, Stephen Whiting, US Space Command Commander told Sputnik.

Whiting's comment comes in response to a question on how to avoid incidents in space amid the absence of space safety contacts between Moscow and Washington and whether a deconfliction channel like the one in Syria would be helpful.

"We would love to have a safety deconfliction channel like that," Whiting said on the sidelines of the Space Symposium in Colorado Springs on Tuesday. "I think we all have to be responsible actors and we need to live up to our international obligations and act responsibly and safely on orbit."

Whiting went on to say that the countries should live up to the Outer Space Treaty obligations and what it imposes on them, as both are signatories to that.

"I think if we do those kinds of things, we can promote trust and that would, you know, help us ensure that we don't have space battles," he added. "as I said this morning, we do not want a war to start in or extend into space."

On Tuesday, Whiting said that while there is a chance that several decades from now, battles may be happening in space instead of the sea or air, Washington does not want any military conflict in space as it would be detrimental to both the United States and its allies.

Earlier, Russia's Foreign Ministry said that the United States and its allies are taking steps to place weapons in space and use outer space for combat operations, not only for defensive purposes.

The West continues to regard space as a new arena of rivalry and conflicts between countries, in which Russia and China are identified as the main opponents, the ministry said.

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US Has No Contact With Russia on Space Safety,Welcomes Opportunity to Share Info -SPACECOM

COLORADO SPRINGS, April 10 (Sputnik) - The United States currently has no contacts with Russia on matters related to space safety, but would welcome the opportunity to share such information, Stephen Whiting, US Space Command Commander told Sputnik.

"I think it would be very important for any spacefaring nation to be able to share safety information and to have a means of, of making sure there aren't misperceptions of certain activities," Whiting said on the sidelines of the Space Symposium in Colorado Springs on Tuesday. "Right now, don't really have any contacts in Russia and I would welcome that opportunity to share safety information."

On Monday, the US National Guard said that military personnel from the United States, Poland, and Romania, among other allied countries, took part in the sixth iteration of the Vulcan Guard Bolt exercise at NATO's Allied Air Command in late March.

In February, the United States claimed that Russia was allegedly developing a space-based anti-satellite weapon that poses a serious US national security threat. Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Moscow had always been categorically against deploying nuclear weapons in space and its position on this issue is clear and transparent. Russia's activities in space are no different from those of other countries, including the United States, and they know it, Putin added.

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US Has No Contact With Russia on Space Safety, Welcomes Opportunity to Share Info-SPACECOM

COLORADO SPRINGS, April 10 (Sputnik) - The United States currently has no contacts with Russia on matters related to space safety, but would welcome the opportunity to share such information, Stephen Whiting, US Space Command Commander told Sputnik.

"I think it would be very important for any spacefaring nation to be able to share safety information and to have a means of, of making sure there aren't misperceptions of certain activities," Whiting said on the sidelines of the Space Symposium in Colorado Springs on Tuesday. "Right now, don't really have any contacts in Russia and I would welcome that opportunity to share safety information."

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Biden Preparing to Ban US Companies, Americans From Using Kaspersky Lab Software - Reports

WASHINGTON, April 10 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden is preparing to ban US companies and Americans from using software made by major Russian cybersecurity company Kaspersky Lab due to national security concerns, CNN reported citing US officials familiar with the matter.

The report said on Tuesday that Biden could issue the executive order as soon as this month.

The order aims to mitigate any risk to critical US infrastructure, the report added.

The executive order would be possible through new Commerce Department authorities stemming from executive orders signed by Biden and former President Donald Trump to ban Kaspersky Lab from providing certain products and services in the United States, the report noted.

At present, only US government agencies are banned from using Kaspersky Lab software. The report said the order still hasn't been finalized but the Commerce Department has made an "initial determination" to ban certain transactions between Kaspersky Lab and Americans.

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US Keen on Having Regular Path for Sharing Safety Data With China - Space Command

COLORADO SPRINGS, April 10 (Sputnik) - The United States would like to have a regular path to share safety information with China, Stephen Whiting, US Space Command Commander told reporters at the Space Symposium in Colorado Springs.

"We would love to have a regular path to share safety data," Whiting said on Tuesday. "Like I said, we push this information to the Chinese, we don't always hear back."

Whiting noted that within the last six months, they have heard proactively from the Chinese twice on two things they wanted to talk to the United States about regarding space safety-related issues.

"We think that is very positive and we would like to continue to build on that," he stressed. "Just like in the Cold War, we had ways to communicate with the Soviet Union… to create trust and confidence and deescalate, you know, misperceptions. And we would like to see us find ways to have that ability to share safe information with the Chinese people."

Earlier in the day, Whiting said that China is moving at breathtaking speed in advancing its space capabilities.

Last week, senior US and Chinese military officials concluded a two-day meeting in Hawaii about recent interactions between their air and naval forces. The meeting, referred to as the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement (MMCA) working group, included representatives from the US Indo-Pacific Command, the US Pacific Fleet, and US Pacific Air Forces and their

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Chinese counterparts. The MMCA talks, which have taken place for over two decades, were last held in December 2021.

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US Approves Possible $138Mln Sale to Ukraine for Hawk Missile System Maintenance

WASHINGTON, April 10 (Sputnik) - The United States approved a potential $138 million sale to Ukraine to maintain and upgrade its HAWK Phase III air defense missile system, the US Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said in a press release.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Ukraine of HAWK Phase III missile system sustainment and related elements of logistics and program support for an estimated cost of $138 million," the release said on Tuesday.

The package would include engineering and integration for communications and interoperability, refurbishment and system overhaul of HAWK air defense fire units, missile recertification components, tool kits, test equipment; spare parts, among other items, according to the release.

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US Tries to Hook Allies, Global South on Its Expensive Fuel - Russian Envoy in Washington

WASHINGTON, April 10 (Sputnik) - The United States is trying to get its allies and the countries of the Global South hooked on its expensive fuel, Russian Ambassador in Washington Anatoly Antonov said.

Antonov made the comment in response to a reporter's question regarding the recent threats posed by US officials against Russia's energy sector.

"In reality, the US tries to provide competitive advantages to its own producers, [and] to hook allies and countries of the Global South, who need hydrocarbons, to its much more expensive fuel," Antonov said on Tuesday.

The Russian ambassador characterized the United States' behavior as banal commercialism, coupled with neocolonial aspirations.

The United States has imposed numerous sanctions and has long been nurturing plans to end Russian energy exports but the recent statements were predictable and remain in line with Washington’s strategy, he said.

"The US threats may also point to far more reckless calculations," Antonov said.

The ambassador pointed out that the Russian Nord Steam gas pipelines were blown up in a terrorist attack after repeated US statements that Washington would put an end to this project.

"Moreover, the investigation is being delayed in every possible way by Western capitals.

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Apparently, there is something to hide," Antonov said.
In March, US Assistant Secretary of State for Energy Resources Geoffrey Pyatt said the United States is set to introduce more sanctions against Russia's energy sector.

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FBI Declines to Comment on Russian Claims US Recruiting Drug Cartels to Fight in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, April 10 (Sputnik) - The FBI declined to comment on Russian claims that the US government is allegedly recruiting members of Latin American drug cartels to fight in Ukraine.
"The FBI declines to comment," an FBI spokesperson told Sputnik on Tuesday.
Earlier in the day, Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) accused the US government of recruiting members of Latin American drug cartels serving prison time in the United States to participate in the Ukrainian conflict in exchange for full amnesty.
According to the SVR, the United States allegedly plans to send the first group to Ukraine this summer.
If this project succeeds, the SVR claims, the program will be continued and even expanded to include criminals from other countries with a difficult crime situation.
The Central Intelligence Agency, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, and the White House National Security Council did not respond to Sputnik's request for comment on the matter.

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UPDATE-Senator Pressures Austin on How Much More Money US Will Spend in Ukraine

(updates headline, adds para 5)
WASHINGTON, April 10 (Sputnik) – US Senator Eric Schmitt on Tuesday pressured Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin on the totality of funds the Biden administration is planning to spend supporting Ukraine in a conflict for which it has not articulated any clear goals.
"There's no money [left for Ukraine], so I can only be left to assume one of three things. One is the war is over. Two or B is the United States won't be allocating any more dollars or C that this is a dishonest [supplemental] request. I guess the question is, are we going … to get another supplemental because members of this committee had been told there could be another request for $100 billion? I'm just trying to understand the totality of the request to the American people for this war," Schmitt said in his remarks during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing.
In February, the Senate passed a $95 billion foreign aid bill that includes some $60 billion for Ukraine, but it was held up in the House of Representatives by Speaker Mike Johnson, who prioritized working on budget legislation and exploring other routes for Ukraine funding.

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Austin confirmed to Schmitt, though, that the supplemental request, which has not yet been voted on in the House, will provide additional funding for Ukraine-related needs only through the end of this fiscal year or September 30, meaning that there will be a need for another supplemental package past this date.

In addition, Austin said that it was a goal of the Alliance to admit Ukraine to NATO some time in the future.

The Pentagon chief also agreed with Schmitt that the conflict is unlikely to end by September 30, which essentially means that the pending aid package for Ukraine obviously will not be the last.

Schmitt emphasized that US legislators are skeptical about the $60 billion supplemental package for Ukraine because there are no adequate controls on how the money is being spent by Kiev as well as because the Biden administration to date has not defined what should be considered as a victory in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

"We are continuing to head down this road and now we are getting a budget request that isn't reflective of the administration's ‘how long it takes’ statement," Schmitt said.

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US Defense Secretary Acknowledges Admitting Ukraine in NATO Threatens Russian Security

WASHINGTON, April 10 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin admitted during a congressional testimony that Ukraine’s membership in NATO goes against Russian national interests.

"Certainly, if I was Russia, I would not want that [Ukraine becoming a NATO member]. I would also not want Finland and Sweden to be a part of NATO," Austin told the US Senate Armed Services Committee on Tuesday.

Austin also confirmed that the enlargement of NATO over the past year has created "worse conditions" for Russia, essentially admitting that the military bloc poses a threat to the country.

On Thursday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that Ukraine will become a member of NATO. He said later in the day that the NATO summit in Washington in July will unveil the role the military bloc should play in supporting Ukraine in the longer term.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said that NATO's expansion to include Ukraine would create a direct national security threat to Russia and that Moscow considers the non-aligned status of Ukraine to be extremely important to put an end to the years-long conflict.

Ukraine's stated plans to join the alliance were among the reasons for Russia to launch its special military operation in February 2022.

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"There's no money [left for Ukraine], so I can only be left to assume one of three things. One is the war is over. Two or B is the United States won't be allocating any more dollars or C that this is a dishonest [supplemental] request. I guess the question is, are we going … to get another supplemental because members of this committee had been told there could be another request for $100 billion? I'm just trying to understand the totality of the request to the American people for this war," Schmitt said in his remarks during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, April 10 (Sputnik) –

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* The European Union's institutions and member states have provided Ukraine with more than 88 billion euros ($95 billion) in aid during the conflict since February 2022, European Commission Executive Vice-President and Commissioner for Trade Valdis Dombrovskis said on Tuesday.

* The Russian armed forces have taken control of the settlement of Pervomaiske, also known as Pervomayskoye, in the Donetsk direction in the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), military and political expert Yan Gagin told Sputnik, adding that Russian servicemen had raised a Russian flag there.

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* Russia has requested that a UN Security Council meeting on the supply of Western arms to Ukraine be held on April 12, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said.
* The United States started recruiting members of Latin American drug cartels serving time in the US to participate in the Ukrainian conflict and plans to send the first group to Ukraine this summer, Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) said.
* Switzerland has not invited Russia to the Ukraine peace summit, and Moscow is not planning to participate in any case, a spokesman of the Russian embassy in Bern, Vladimir Khokhlov, told Sputnik.

ATTACKS ON ZNPP

* Whoever is behind the recent attacks on the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (ZNPP) is playing with fire, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Grossi said on Tuesday, adding that such attacks must stop.
* The chair of the Board of Governors of the IAEA received a request to hold a meeting on the ZNPP first from Russia and then from Ukraine, the IAEA.
* Increasingly frequent strikes by the Ukrainian armed forces on the ZNPP may indicate that Ukraine is preparing a provocation against the plant, the communications director of the plant, Evgenia Yashina, said.
* A Ukrainian drone attack on the building of the training center at the ZNPP occurred 10 minutes after representatives of the IAEA monitoring mission passed by the building, Yashina told Sputnik.
* EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell condemned a recent drone attack on the ZNPP and expressed support to the IAEA.

US-JAPAN ALLIANCE

* The United States and Japan will agree to greater coordination and integration of their forces and will announce important deliverables on civil space cooperation during Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's visit to Washington this week, National Security Council senior director for East Asia and Oceania Mira Rapp-Hooper said on Tuesday.
* The Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) alliance will begin consultations with Japan and several other partners to determine their possible participation in advanced capabilities projects, Rapp-Hooper said.

SITUATION IN MOLDOVA

* The head of Moldova's autonomous region of Gagauzia, Yevgenia Gutsul, told Sputnik on Tuesday that Moldovan authorities may detain her in the airport after her return from Moscow.
* Russian President Vladimir Putin is not planning to hold a meeting with Gutsul, who is visiting Moscow on Tuesday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.
* Moldovan authorities will not include Moldova's possible accession to Romania in an upcoming referendum on the country's European integration, Moldovan President Maia Sandu said.

TERRORIST ATTACKS IN RUSSIA

* Money received through various companies, including Ukraine's Burisma Holdings, has been used to finance terrorist attacks in Russia, the country's Investigative Committee said on Tuesday.
* The Russian Investigative Committee said on Tuesday that it has opened a criminal case

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related to the financing of terrorism by officials from the United States and other NATO countries after it received an appeal from lawmakers made following the March 22 Crocus City Hall Attack.

* Russia has added seven more people who are defendants in the Crocus City Hall concert venue terrorist attack case to the list of terrorists and extremists, the Russian Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) said.

* US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan on Tuesday dismissed Russia's criminal case in connection with the West's alleged involvement in terrorism financing, including through the Burisma company.

RUSSIA-CHINA COOPERATION

* China highly values the development of relations with Russia and is ready for close cooperation, Chinese President Xi Jinping said on Tuesday.

* China supports Russia in its fight against terrorism and in maintaining public security, Xi Jinping said during a meeting with Lavrov.

* Russian President Vladimir Putin's state visit to China is expected to take place this year, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

* Contacts between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping are being planned, they are necessary, but it is too early to set the exact day yet, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

ANGARA-A5 SPACE ROCKET LAUNCH IN RUSSIA

* The first launch of the Russian-made Angara-A5 space rocket from the Vostochny Cosmodrome has been canceled, a Sputnik correspondent reported on Tuesday.

* The first launch of the Russian-made Angara-A5 space rocket from the Vostochny Cosmodrome has been delayed for at least 24 hours, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

* Another attempt to launch the Russian-made Angara-A5 space rocket from the Vostochny Cosmodrome will be made on Wednesday, Russia's state space corporation Roscosmos head Yuri Borisov said.

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PREVIEW - Rate Cut Doubts Grow as US Awaits Another Inflation Reading

WASHINGTON, April 10 (Sputnik) - The United States was supposed to see at least three interest rate cuts this year, but now some Federal Reserve officials think there might not be any and the country may even see another raise instead.

Ahead of Wednesday's release of the Consumer Price Index reading for March, the expectation on both Wall Street and Main Street is that the data will show another tick up in price growth or, at best, a slight moderation from the previous month.

Either way, it might not be enough to convince the Fed that a cut is needed when the central bank's policy makers huddle on May 2 to decide on rates.

In February, the reading for the so-called CPI grew 3.2% year-on-year. As of Tuesday, a poll of economists by US media showed the likelihood of a 3.4% annual reading for March.

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Another widely-watched price gauge — the Personal Consumption Expenditures Index — which also happens to be a Fed favorite for tracking inflation, grew 2.5% year-on-year in March.

Both the CPI and its price-tracking cousin, the PCE, are growing faster than the Fed's 2% target for annual inflation.

The Fed has vexed itself trying to meet the 2% target since the coronavirus outbreak of four years ago that first sent rates crashing by busting the economy, then propelled them skywards by crippling supply chains for goods.

Following the COVID-19 outbreak, the Fed hiked rates by as many as 11 times between March 2022 and July 2023. That brought rates to a range of between 5.25% and 5.5% — versus the zero to 0.25% range introduced soon after the start of the pandemic.

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

As this year began, the central bank forecast a 75-basis point cut for each of 2024 and 2025. But it hasn't set a schedule for such reductions. Some on Wall Street remain hopeful of the first snip occurring by June.

Even so, almost everyone on the Fed who will influence the decision-making on rates, from Chairman Jerome Powell to the heads of the different regional jurisdictions of the central bank, are hoping either the PCE or CPI will make a meaningful descent toward the 2% target for them to embark on a policy pivot.

Those hopes may be getting increasingly misplaced.

Neel Kashkari, president of the Minneapolis division of the Fed, suggested last week that he could imagine a scenario where rates will not go down at all for 2024.

"In March, I had jotted down two rate cuts this year if inflation continues to fall back towards our 2% target," Kashkari told a live-stream discussion on Fed policy. "If we continue to see inflation moving sideways, then that would make me question whether we needed to do those rate cuts at all."

Raphael Bostic, the Atlanta Fed president, followed up on Kashari's lead by saying he didn't foresee a cut until November or even December.

The pessimism that rates could go lower reached new heights on Monday when JPMorgan CEO Jamie Dimon forecast that actual lending rates set by commercial banks could reach 8%. In comparison, the fixed rate for a 30-year US home mortgage stands at 6.82%.

EMPLOYMENT NUMBERS

The notion of higher rates came back into the Wall Street psyche particularly after the release of US employment numbers for March.

Fed Chair Powell has said all along that if there was one thing besides falling inflation that could influence him and colleagues to cut rates, it would be a tumble in jobs numbers.

Highlighting his point — or rather proving why a cut shouldn't happen soon — the Labor Department reported that non-farm payrolls grew by 303,000 last month, more than 40% above the Wall Street forecast of 214,000.

While policy-makers over the world typically celebrate on seeing good jobs numbers, the Fed is in a different predicament as it is also tasked with ensuring inflation that is sustainable for Americans.

The greatest job security since the 1970s and corresponding wage growth have cushioned many Americans from price pressures and encouraged them to continue spending.

For more than two years, the country has experienced so-called maximum employment — a

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Fed term marked by a jobless rate of 4% or lower.
In March, the US unemployment situation actually improved, dropping to 3.8% from the February tick-up to 3.9% from January's 3.7%.
In line with that, the average investor's confidence of a rate cut happening by June has also gone lower.
On Tuesday, the FedWatch tool, which tracks money-market aspirations for rate changes, assigned a mere 51% chance of a cut by June. Even the probability of a July reduction had fallen to 70%, from a previous 92%.

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Michigan Court Sentences Shooter's Parents to 10-15 Years for Manslaughter - Reports

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - Michigan Sixth Judicial Circuit Court Judge Cheryl Matthews sentenced the parents of school shooter Ethan Crumbley to 10-15 years in prison for involuntary manslaughter, ABC News reported on Tuesday.
Earlier this year, Jennifer and James Crumbley were found guilty on four counts of manslaughter in separate trials.
Their son, Ethan, pleaded guilty to 24 charges, including one count of terrorism causing death and four counts of first-degree murder, after committing a mass shooting at his high school in the Oxford Township in the US state of Michigan.
In December, Crumbley was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.
Prosecutors charged Crumbley's parents for failing to take actions to prevent the shooting, which they argued was foreseeable. Crumbley's parents ignored warning signs and purchased him the handgun used in the shooting, according to prosecutors.

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Freeing Remaining Hamas Hostages Remains Biden's No 1 Priority - Vice President Harris

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - Freeing the remaining 180 Israeli hostages held by Hamas in Gaza over the past six months remains the Biden administration's number one priority, Vice President Kamala Harris told the families of Americans captured by the Palestinian group, a White House readout said on Tuesday.
"Vice President Kamala Harris met today with families of Americans taken hostage by Hamas on October 7," the readout said. "The Vice President underscored that President Biden and she have no higher priority than reuniting the hostages with their loved ones."
The Vice President again condemned Hamas as a brutal terrorist organization and its horrific use of sexual violence. She reaffirmed that the threat Hamas poses to Israel must be eliminated and denounced the rise of antisemitism around the world, the readout said.

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"The Vice President told them that they and their loved ones remain at the forefront of her mind and in her prayers as the Biden-Harris administration works to secure the release of all the hostages," the readout added.

Harris also provided the families with an update on US efforts to secure the release of all hostages and establish an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, it said.

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Majority of US Voters Believe Biden Encouraging Immigration as Electoral Strategy - Poll

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - A majority of likely voters in the United States believe that the Biden administration is encouraging illegal immigration in an effort to bolster the Democratic Party's electoral base, according to a Rasmussen Reports poll published Tuesday.

A majority of respondents, 57%, somewhat or strongly agree that the Biden administration is encouraging illegal immigration so that migrants become voters and create a "permanent majority" for Democrats, the poll report said.

Thirty-seven percent (37%) of respondents strongly or somewhat disagree with the premise, the poll report said.

More than three-quarters of respondents, 78%, believe that it is important to prevent illegal immigrants from voting in US elections, the poll report said.

Forty-five percent (45%) of respondents believe that it is likely that the 2024 US presidential election will be influenced by illegal immigrants voting, the poll report added.

The poll surveyed 1,100 likely US voters on April 3-4 and 7. The poll maintains a margin of error of plus-or-minus three percentage points with a 95% confidence level.

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US Judge Sentences Ashley Biden Diary Thief to 1 Month in Prison - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - A US federal judge sentenced a woman who pleaded guilty to stealing the diary of President Joe Biden's daughter Ashley to one month in prison, the US Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York confirmed to Sputnik on Tuesday.

Judge Laura Taylor Swain sentenced the woman, Aimee Harris, to one month in prison and three years of supervised release, the federal prosecutor's office said.

In August 2022, Harris and Robert Kurlander pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit interstate transportation of stolen property, which carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison.

Harris moved into a room where Ashley Biden previously lived and had been granted permission to store personal belongings after moving out. Harris conspired with Kurlander to sell Biden's diary, first offering it to the Trump campaign, which refused the offer, before ultimately selling it to activist group Project Veritas.

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Harris and Kurlander admitted to receiving $20,000 for the diary, which they each agreed to forfeit as part of their plea agreements.

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Sullivan Says US Confident in Global Stand Amid BRICS Expansion

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) — The US remains optimistic about its global position despite more countries joining BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said on Tuesday during a White House press briefing.

"I think if you look at the US role and standing in its relationships across the key regions of the world, we feel very good about where we are," Sullivan said when asked whether the US leadership is diminished after more countries have joined BRICS.

BRICS was established 2009 as a cooperation platform for the world's largest emerging economies. Initially, the bloc united Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

Last summer, their leaders invited Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia to join the bloc. Argentina was also invited to become a member, but its newly elected government declined the invitation. The full membership of the newly admitted members formally started on January 1.

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NASA Launches Plan to Deal With Tech Debris Fragments in Orbit - Deputy Chief Melrose

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - NASA has launched a new Space Survivability Strategy whose first phase will be to manage the scores of thousands of bits of metal debris from previous satellites and other projects currently orbiting the earth, agency Deputy Administrator Pam Melroy told a press conference at Kennedy Space Center in Florida on Tuesday.

"We have updated our debris mediation policy," Melroy said. "We have 43 lines of effort across four organizations. ...Space sustainability cannot be stovepiped anymore, it needs a cross-agency strategy."

There are currently 9,800 satellites from different countries operational in Earth orbit with another 2,000 defunct ones that are also still in space, Melroy said. There are also half a million pieces of human technology space debris between 1 centimeter to 10 centimeters in diameter, and 18,000 greater than 10 centimeters in diameter currently in orbit, NASA said.

NASA is "coordinating an international response. We aim to collaborate with international stakeholders...We aim to minimize these critical uncertainties. We are going to focus on a transition plan for traffic coordination and space situational awareness," she said.

On Tuesday, NASA released the first volume of its sustainability strategy to monitor, coordinate, and try to cope with the vast amounts of space debris in orbit around the earth and volume two of the strategy will be published soon on space debris in the cislunar region, either close to the

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Moon or its orbit, Melrose said.

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Republican Senators Ask House to Delay Delivery of Mayorkas Articles of Impeachment

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - US Republican senators asked House Speaker Mike Johnson to delay sending them the articles of impeachment against Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas until Monday to give them enough time to figure out how to prevent Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer from dismissing the trial, Senator John Kennedy said on Tuesday.

The House was set to send Mayorkas' articles of impeachment to the Senate on Wednesday. House Republicans passed a resolution to impeach Mayorkas for allegedly failing to secure the United States' borders from illegal immigration.

"We asked him [Johnson] to delay sending over the articles until Monday to at least give us a full week," Kennedy said during a press conference. "We'll see if Senator Schumer honors the extra time."

According to Kennedy, Schumer plans to hold a vote on Thursday to dismiss the trial.

Schumer has yet to publicly reveal what his plans are for Mayorkas' trial.

Kennedy pointed out that holding a vote on Thursday is bad timing because it's when senators might be heading to their home states for business.

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US Asks Ecuador to Find Resolution With Mexico After Embassy Stormed - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - The United States wants Ecuador to resolve its diplomatic dispute with Mexico in connection with the storming of the Mexican embassy in Quito, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said on Tuesday.

"We've asked Ecuador to work with Mexico, to find a resolution to this diplomatic dispute, and to that end, we welcome the Organization of American States' Permanent Council meeting this week to help reach a peaceful, diplomatic solution," Sullivan said during a White House press briefing.

Last week, On the night of Saturday, the Ecuadorian police stormed the Mexican embassy in Quito using armed vehicles to arrest former Ecuadorian Vice President Jorge Glas, who had been sheltering in the diplomatic mission, media reported. Mexico City suspended diplomatic relations with Quito, saying that Mexican diplomats had sustained injuries as a result of the storming.

Glas served five years in prison for bribery and criminal conspiracy before being released in late 2022. However, already in December 2023, he was sentenced to six more years in prison in

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a corruption case involving Brazilian construction company Odebrecht, currently known as Novonor. Glas took refuge in the Mexican diplomatic mission in the same month, before an official warrant for his arrest was issued. On April 5, 2024, Mexico granted Glas political asylum. Ecuador called Mexico's decision illegal and demanded the extradition of the politician.

Relations between the two countries also exacerbated this week since Quito declared Mexican Ambassador Raquel Serur persona non grata because of the Mexican president's remarks about the 2023 general election in Ecuador.

Following the events, Mexico City suspended diplomatic ties with Quito, saying that some Mexican diplomats had been injured in the storming. Mexico City also vowed to appeal to the UN International Court of Justice and urge it to condemn the Ecuadorian authorities' actions.

Ecuador's actions against the Mexican embassy in Quito were publicly condemned by at least 20 countries in the Americas, the European Union, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, the Organization of American States, and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States.

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No Evidence China Plans to Provide Direct Military Support to Russia - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - The United States has not yet seen any evidence that China is planning to provide direct military assistance to Russia amid its ongoing conflict with Ukraine, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Tuesday.

"We have not seen any evidence that they'll provide direct military aid to Russia, but we have expressed our concerns about inputs to Russia's defense industrial base," Sullivan said during a press briefing.

Earlier on Tuesday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who is on an official visit to China from April 8-9, held talks with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in Beijing. The two diplomats had a chance to discuss a wide range of bilateral and international issues, including strategic cooperation and the fight against terrorism.

The Financial Times reported on Friday that during last week’s NATO foreign ministers’ summit in Brussels, Secretary of State Antony Blinken rang an alarm over the allegedly "concerning scale" of China’s support for Russia amid the special military operation in Ukraine.

Following a new round of sanctions against Chinese entities for their alleged links to the Russian military industrial base in February, the Chinese Commerce Ministry said that China resolutely stands against US sanctions imposed on Chinese enterprises over alleged links with Russia, and it will adopt the necessary measures to protect the rights and interests of its companies.

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UPDATE - Biden Says Extending US National Emergency Related to Russian Foreign Activities

(Updates with background in paras 5, 6)
WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that he is extending a national emergency declaration in the United States in relation to alleged harmful foreign activities by Russia.
Biden extended the national emergency declaration beyond April 15, the president said in a message to the US Congress. The US president must notify lawmakers of an extension within 90 days prior to the anniversary of the declaration.
"Specified harmful foreign activities of the Government of the Russian Federation… continue to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States," Biden said.
Biden accused Russia of attempting to undermine US elections, engaging in malicious cyber activities against the US and its allies, undermining security in countries important to the US and violating principles of international law.
In March, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Russia does not interfere in any elections and will work with any elected US president.
Last year, US National Security Agency chief Paul Nakasone said that the agency had not seen evidence of attempts by Russia or China to affect the 2024 US presidential election.

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No Answer From Hamas Following Most Recent Round of Talks on Deal With Israel - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - Hamas has not yet responded to an offer made to it by Israel through the mediation of the United States, Qatar, and Egypt during the latest round of talks on a ceasefire and hostage release deal that took place in Cairo over the weekend, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Tuesday.
"I spoke with the Prime Minister of Qatar, Sheikh Mohammed [bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani], this morning. He does not yet have an answer from Hamas. I pressed him to try to secure an answer from them as soon as possible," Sullivan said during a press briefing.
CIA director William Burns was in Cairo, Egypt on Sunday to take part in a "marathon session" that went late into the night. The representatives of the United States, Israel, Qatar, and Egypt were taking part in the meeting with the latter two communicating with Hamas as the talks were taking place, Sullivan said.
According to Sullivan, Israel took "some steps forward" in terms of what the country put on the table to reach a deal with Hamas.
There have been several rounds of ceasefire talks in the Gaza Strip in recent months, but they have so far failed. Al Thani said that Israel's opposition to Palestinians returning to the northern Gaza Strip was hampering progress on the truce talks, which have stalled on the same points discussed in Paris in March.

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On October 7, 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 33,300 people have been killed so far by Israeli strikes in the Gaza Strip, according to local authorities. Over 100 hostages are still believed to be held by Hamas in Gaza.

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USAID Chief Says Famine Conditions Already Present in Northern Gaza

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - Famine conditions are already present in northern Gaza, US Agency for International Development (USAID) Administrator Samantha Power said on Tuesday.

"The IPC [Integrated Food Security Phase Classification] report indicates that famine conditions are already present in northern Gaza," Power said during a US Senate hearing.

USAID is getting a growing number of reports of death by malnutrition or disease induced by malnutrition, Power added.

Power underscored that Israel has not done enough to facilitate humanitarian access into the Gaza Strip.

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Oil Down 2nd Day in Row Moving Away From 5-Month Highs

NEW YORK, April 9 (Sputnik) - The selloff in crude oil continued for a second day in a row on Tuesday, moving the market away from last week's five-month highs amid the remote possibility of a ceasefire being reached in Gaza.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that a date had been set for the ground offensive in the city of Rafah - the last frontier for Hamas fighters, as well as Palestinian civilians.

Peace talks in Cairo on Tuesday between Israeli and Hamas representatives did not provide any breakthrough, with reports saying none of the Palestinian demands for laying down arms have been met by Israeli negotiators.

Yet, oil traders held out hope that Israel's invasion of Rafah could be halted and the ensuing calm would ease tensions around Middle East oil-producing countries. That reduced some of the premium tacked on by the crude market in recent weeks, after procrastination prior to that which erased the initial price peaks set by the conflict in October.

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"It's still very hard to make a significant call from here in either direction," Scott Shelton, a broker and commentator for crude oil at ICAP in North Carolina, said in an email to clients shared with Sputnik. Shelton added that macro influences, including geopolitical considerations like the Gaza conflict, are also a supportive part of the market.

West Texas Intermediate (WTI) the benchmark for US crude, settled New York trading down 1.4% at $85.23 per barrel. In the previous session, the WTI benchmark slid 0.6%. On Friday, the US crude benchmark hit $87.63 per barrel, a peak not seen since October. WTI also ended the first quarter up 16%.

Brent crude, the London-based global benchmark for oil, appeared headed for a lower close of nearly 1% in Tuesday's New York trading, hovering at $89.50 per barrel. It was the second day in a row that Brent had slid as much after setting a five-month high of $91.91 on Friday. At the close of last week's trading, it finished the first quarter up 13%.

Despite the two-day drop in oil prices, some analysts said the market could ratchet higher if the Gaza conflict worsens.

Aside from Hamas, Israel is also facing the possibility of attacks from Iran, after its airstrike that killed two top generals and five other military advisers at the Iranian embassy compound in Damascus.

The commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guard's navy said this week his forces would close the Strait of Hormuz straddling their country if deemed necessary. About a fifth of the volume of the world's total oil consumption passes through the strait daily.

Turkey also announced that it would restrict exports of various products, including jet fuel, to Israel until a ceasefire is reached. Israel said it would respond with its own curbs.

Adding to concerns of a tight market, Mexico's state oil company Pemex indicated it would reduce crude exports by 330,000 barrels per day in May, so it can supply more to domestic refineries. That would cut by a third the supply available to its US, European and Asian buyers. Pemex had already cut its April exports by 436,000 barrels daily.

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US Congresswoman Says Bringing Bill to Sentence Child Sex Abusers to Death, Life in Prison

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - US Congresswoman Anna Paulina Luna said on Tuesday that she intends to introduce legislation this week to raise the federal punishment for child sex abuse to execution or life imprisonment.

"You cannot rehabilitate predators. If you rape children, you deserve the death penalty," Luna said in a statement via social media platform X, linking to a report on her legislation.

The bill, dubbed the No Repeat Child Sex Offenders Act, would raise the federal sentence for interstate transport of an individual for sexual activity to the death penalty or life in prison, the report said.

Luna will introduce the legislation on Thursday, the report said. Luna will also introduce a bill to raise the federal minimum sentence for rape, the report said.

The introduction of the bills coincides with Sexual Assault Awareness Month, which is observed

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in April.

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Sullivan Says Russia's Probe of West Financing Terrorist Attacks 'Nonsense'

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan on Tuesday dismissed Russia's criminal case in connection with the West's alleged involvement in terrorism financing, including through the Burisma company.

"I mean, it's nonsense," Sullivan said during a White House press briefing.

He also reiterated that the United States believes the Islamic State terror group (banned in Russia) was responsible for the deadly terrorist attack on Crocus City Hall outside Moscow.

Earlier in the day, the Russian Investigative Committee said that money received through various companies, including Ukraine's Burisma Holdings, has been used to finance terrorist attacks in Russia.

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US Lawmakers Claim Biden Administration Underreported Amount of Ukraine Aid - Letter

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - A group of US lawmakers on Tuesday sent a letter to White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Director Shalanda Young requesting an explanation for the Biden administration’s apparent underreporting of Ukraine aid figures.

In January 2023, lawmakers requested information from OMB about US government expenditures related to Ukraine since February 24, 2022. Lawmakers found OMB to be non-responsive to their inquiry due to numerous deficiencies in the information provided, the letter said.

"For the reasons outlined above, we believe we lack key information about the US government’s Ukraine-related expenditures. Perhaps most notably, we remain without an accurate figure for how much the United States has spent to date in total on this conflict," the letter said.

OMB-provided figures indicated that the figure is around $111 billion, but it appears likely that data yet to be provided would raise the figure by "an indeterminate magnitude," the letter said. Lawmakers estimated in January 2023 that the US has spent at least $114 billion on Ukraine.

Lawmakers have since received confirmation that Ukraine aid figures are "significantly higher" than the Biden administration admitted, the letter said. There is at least $684 million in appropriated Ukraine spending that the administration previously failed to report, the letter said.

There is an additional $900 million in US Defense Department assistance that ought to have been included in the figure, the statement said. The Biden administration also has more than $4 billion in remaining authority to transfer US weapons stocks to Ukraine, which will take $10

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billion to replenish, the letter said.

"Together, these figures bring the total amount of assistance the administration has given to Ukraine to more than $125 billion, and the amount it could give Ukraine to more than $129 billion," the letter said.

The letter requests information from OMB about the administration's Ukraine aid accounting and how long it intends to draw out military assistance for Ukraine. The letter also requests information on how many supplemental funding bills for Ukraine aid the administration intends to request from Congress.

The letter is signed by more than a dozen lawmakers, including Senator JD Vance, Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene, Senator Rand Paul and Congressman Bill Posey.

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Biden Says Arizona Faces' Extreme' 1864 Abortion Ban, Blames GOP Agenda

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) — US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that millions in Arizona will soon endure a severe 1864 abortion ban, attributing it to the "extreme agenda" of Republican officials aimed at curtailing women's freedoms.

"Millions of Arizonans will soon live under an even more extreme and dangerous abortion ban, which fails to protect women even when their health is at risk or in tragic cases of rape or incest. This cruel ban was first enacted in 1864—more than 150 years ago, before Arizona was even a state and well before women had secured the right to vote. This ruling is a result of the extreme agenda of Republican elected officials who are committed to ripping away women's freedom," Biden said in a statement.

Furthermore, Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes, in a separate statement, criticized the Arizona Supreme Court's decision as a grave assault on freedom, stating it jeopardizes Arizonan's health by overturning a modern law for one from 160 years ago.

"Today's decision to reimpose a law from a time when Arizona wasn't a state, the Civil War was raging, and women couldn't even vote will go down in history as a stain on our state. This is far from the end of the debate on reproductive freedom, and I look forward to the people of Arizona having their say in the matter. And let me be completely clear, as long as I am Attorney General, no woman or doctor will be prosecuted under this draconian law in this state," Mayes said in a statement.

Earlier today, the Arizona Supreme Court decided to reimpose an 1864 abortion ban, which mandates a prison sentence of two to five years for those found guilty of facilitating an abortion unless it's to save the woman's life, set to take effect in two weeks.

This comes after the Florida Supreme Court last week endorsed a 15-week abortion restriction and green-lit a six-week ban, overturning over thirty years of precedent that had protected the right to abortion through the second trimester.

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Canadian Embassy in Syria Damaged by Israeli Strike on Iran's Consular Annex – Reports

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) – The bombing of Iran's Embassy in Syria's Damascus also damaged the building of the neighboring Canadian diplomatic mission, CBC News reported on Tuesday.

The Canadian Embassy in Damascus closed its doors in March 2012 amid a worsening situation due to the Syrian Civil War. All diplomats were evacuated, and consular services were transferred to Beirut, Lebanon.

The embassy sustained damage following Israel's strike on April 1, including the destruction of several of the building's windows, the report said, citing a source at Global Affairs Canada (GAC).

The same official noted that Canada has been unable to assess the presence of any structural damage to the embassy, the report added.

GAC did not provide an answer to whether the Israeli Government had warned Ottawa of the impending strike or if it had checked with them about the presence of Canadian personnel on site, the report continued.

On April 1, Israel carried out 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 had been killed in the attack, including two commanders. On Tuesday, the Syrian Health Ministry said that the attack had also killed four Syrians and injured 13 more.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry said it "reserves the right" to respond to the Israeli attack and "punish the aggressor." Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi also vowed that Israel would pay a "heavy price" for the strike.

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ESA Head Says Europe Facing Launcher Crisis, Has No Independent Access to Space

COLORADO SPRINGS, April 9 (Sputnik) - Europe is experiencing a launcher crisis, with the next launch of the new Europe-made Ariane-6 expected to take place this summer almost a year after the previous launch, ESA's Director General Josef Aschbacher said during the Space Symposium in Colorado Springs on Tuesday.

"I myself was calling at the beginning of last year that Europe is entering a launcher crisis," Aschbacher said, pointing out that Ariane-5's last launch took place mid-last year. "I said, look, we will have a crisis because, after the last launch of Ariane-5, we will not have a European launcher and therefore no European independent access to space."

In addition, Aschbacher said that Ariane-6 was not on the launch pad yet.

"To make the long story short, Ariane-6 was really having several technical issues, which we

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had to overcome. When I did an assessment of where we are, it was pretty frightening," he shared. "I have to say it was not in a very strong shape."

He went on to say that they had to stabilize both the technical challenges and the schedule, and the launch period is now scheduled for between mid-June till the end of July.

The European Union signed a deal with the United States allowing it to launch satellites with Elon Musk's SpaceX amid delays in the commissioning of its launcher, Politico reported in March, citing unnamed US diplomats.

According to the report, two canceled launches that were supposed to proceed using Russia's Soyuz launcher from the EU's space center in French Guiana in April and September 2022, as well as a delay in the release of Ariane 6, have forced Brussels to look for alternative capacities to urgently resume launches of its Galileo satellites.

On July 6, the Ariane-5 rocket blasted off for the last time, marking its farewell flight after 27 years of service, as it carried German experimental satellite Heinrich-Hertz and French military communications satellite Syracuse 4B into orbit.

In February 2022, Russia, whose Soyuz rockets were used to launch EU satellites from French Guiana, announced it was terminating its cooperation with the ESA and withdrawing its technical personnel from the Kourou space center in response to the European Union's imposition of sanctions on Moscow over the Ukraine conflict.

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Major US Television Networks Will Urge Trump, Biden to Hold Presidential Debate - Reports

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - Five major television networks in the United States will jointly urge US President Joe Biden and former US President Donald Trump to hold debates as part of the 2024 presidential election, The New York Times reported on Tuesday.

The networks - ABC, CBS, CNN, NBC and Fox News - wrote a letter urging Biden and Trump to debate as their parties' presumptive presidential nominees, the report said, citing two people with knowledge of the plan and a draft copy of the letter.

"We, the undersigned national news organizations, urge the presumptive presidential nominees to publicly commit to participating in general election debates before November's election," the draft letter said.

General election debates have played a vital role in US presidential elections for decades and there is no substitute for the candidates holding a public debate, it added.

The networks are also seeking endorsement for the letter, which has not yet been finalized, from other news organizations.

Trump has urged Biden to debate him, although Biden said that his decision on whether to debate will hinge on Trump's behavior. Trump has also called for Biden to be drug tested if they debate.

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Biden Says Extending US National Emergency Related to Russian Foreign Activities

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that he is extending a national emergency declaration in relation to alleged harmful foreign activities by Russia.

Biden extended the national emergency declaration beyond April 15, the president said in a message to the US Congress. The US president must notify lawmakers of an extension within 90 days prior to the anniversary of the declaration.

"Specified harmful foreign activities of the government of the Russian Federation… continue to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States," Biden said.

Biden accused Russia of attempting to undermine US elections, engaging in malicious cyber activities against the US and its allies, undermining security in countries important to the US and violating principles of international law.

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UPDATE - US, Japan to Bolster Defense, Space Cooperation During Kishida's Visit – White House

(Adds details in para 3-6)

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) – The United States and Japan will agree to greater coordination and integration of their forces and will announce important deliverables on civil space cooperation during Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's visit to Washington this week, National Security Council senior director for East Asia and Oceania Mira Rapp-Hooper said on Tuesday.

"We [the US, Japan] will both bolster our defense and security cooperation to enable greater coordination and integration of our forces to ensure they are optimally postured and linked to one another," Rapp-Hooper said during a press briefing. "Our leaders will announce some important deliverables on civil space cooperation as we lead the way in space exploration and the return to the moon," she added.

A third announcement is set to be made on major first partnerships between both countries' leading institutions in the spheres of critical and emerging technologies. Notably, cooperation will be enhanced in the areas of artificial intelligence, quantum semiconductors as well as clean energy, Rapp-Hooper said.

The official argued that such partnerships in addition to other commercial deals previously announced, would strengthen bilateral economic ties and security.

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During the visit, the US intends to highlight Japan's continued role in world diplomacy and development, and showcase "important deliverables" on the work currently being done by Washington and Tokyo in the Pacific islands, Rapp-Hooper added.

The White House official further said that the US will begin consultation with several countries, including Japan, on their potential participation in Pilar II of the Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) alliance. This includes participation in advanced capabilities projects and closer cooperation in countering China's influence in the Indo-Pacific.

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US Space Command Invites Germany, France to Join Operation Olympic Defender - Chief

COLORADO SPRINGS, April 9 (Sputnik) - The US Space Command has invited Germany, France and New Zealand to become part of its Operation Olympic Defender (OOD), Commander Stephen Whiting announced at the Space Symposium in Colorado Springs on Tuesday.

"Now, operation Olympic Defender is our named operation in space that today is conducted with four countries, the United States, Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom," Whiting said. "I'm proud to announce today that we have invited three new allies to join Olympic Defender Germany, France and New Zealand."

The purpose of the OOD is to strengthen the abilities of US allies to deter hostile acts in space, enhance deterrence against hostile actors, and reduce the spread of debris orbiting the earth, according to the US Space Force.

Whiting emphasized that the United States' allies and partners provide strategic and operational advantages.

"We share intelligence, we plan together and we work to ensure that space is safe for all and we're working to even improve our integration through improved command and control and planning to make sure that we get even better in the future," he explained. "I've been proud to work alongside Germany, France, and New Zealand for many years and I look forward to their consideration of our invitation for them to join Operation Olympic Defender."

The Space Symposium annually brings together the world's space, military, civil and government research industry leaders.

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Number of Cyberattacks Almost Doubled Since Start of Pandemic - IMF

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) – The number of cyberattacks worldwide has almost doubled in the last four years, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on Tuesday.

"Cyber-related incidents have become much more frequent over the past two decades, and

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especially since 2020. In particular, the number of cyber incidents with a malicious intent ('cyberattacks')—such as cyber extortions or malicious data breaches—have almost doubled relative to the period before the COVID-19 pandemic," the IMF said in its new Global Financial Stability Report (GFSR).

The IMF warned that cyberattacks can impose substantial costs on firms.

"Since 2020, the aggregated reported direct losses from cyber incidents have amounted to almost $28 billion (in real terms), with billions of records stolen or compromised," the report said.

However, the total direct and indirect costs of these incidents are most likely substantially higher, according to the report.

While many factors have contributed to the rise in cyber incidents, the IMF stressed the role of increasing dependency on technology and financial innovation. Geopolitical tensions, including the conflict in Ukraine, may also be a contributing factor, the report said.

The IMF stressed that the financial sector is highly exposed to cyber risk, and such threats in the US and other developed countries are higher than in emerging markets and developing economies.

"Financial firms have reported significant direct losses, totaling almost $12 billion since 2004 and $2.5 billion since 2020," it added.

The IMF also warned that direct losses from cyberattacks reported by firms could become very large. Some incidents cost hundreds of millions of US dollars and could lead to significant problems for firms, according to the report.

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Austin Says Ukrainian Attacks on Russian Refineries to Undermine Global Energy Situation

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said in congressional testimony on Tuesday that Ukrainian attacks on Russian oil refineries can have a “knock-on” effect on the situation with global energy.

“Certainly, those attacks could have a knock-on effect in terms of the global energy situation, but quite frankly I think Ukraine is better served in going after tactical and operational targets that can directly influence the current fight,” Austin told the US Senate Armed Services Committee.

The Financial Times reported in March that the United States urged Ukraine to avoid strikes on Russian oil refineries as a means to prevent an energy crisis that could destabilize the global oil market.

US officials have declined to comment on the report, but have instead reiterated that they do not encourage Ukrainian attacks inside Russia.

Later in March, Volodymyr Zelenskyy confirmed that the United States asked Kiev not to carry out strikes against Russian oil refineries and that the request was not well received by Kiev, according to an op-ed in the Washington Post.

Ahead of the Russian presidential election that took place from March 15-17, Ukraine intensified drone and other attacks against Russia, including on oil refineries. In one of the latest

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attacks, Ukrainian drones hit a dormitory and a refinery in Russia's Tatarstan region earlier in April, injuring citizens of nine countries.

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ULA Retires Delta Rocket Program After Launch of US Satellite on Tuesday

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - United Launch Alliance's (ULA) Delta rocket program launched its final mission after sending a US satellite into space on Tuesday afternoon, the company said in a statement.

"Three main engines up and running! And liftoff of the #NROL70 mission for the National Reconnaissance Office as the #DeltaIVHeavy rocket clears the tower for the final time!" ULA said in a statement via X shortly after liftoff.

The Delta IV Heavy rocket launched from Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in the state of Florida carrying a US satellite that will service the US National Reconnaissance Office and support the US Space Force's Space Systems Command, ULA noted.

The satellite, ULA added, is designed to provide intelligence data to US senior policymakers, the US Intelligence Community, and the Department of Defense.

ULA will replace its Atlas and Delta rockets with its new Vulcan rocket for future launches, according to the company.

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Central, Eastern Europe Maintain Poor Representation in EU - Consulting Firm Analysis

MOSCOW, April 9 (Sputnik) - Citizens of Central and Eastern European countries maintain poor representation in the European Union, the consulting firm European Democracy Consulting said in its annual analysis of geographical representation in the bloc.

"The main conclusion of this 2024 edition is a dramatic worsening of the representation of citizens from Central and Eastern Europe," the firm said in its analysis report released on Monday.

Previous analyses of geographical representation in the European Union found that Western and Southern Europe dominate the bloc, accounting for more than 80% of all EU appointments since the 2004 enlargement, the report said.

Not a single citizen from Central or Eastern Europe was appointed to an EU leadership position in 2023, whereas Western Europe received 73% of appointments in 2023, the report said.

Proportional to the number of EU member states in the region, Western Europe received 51% of appointments from 2021-2023 - a 14-point increase compared to the previous triennium, the report said.

Accounting for population sizes, Western Europe received more than 1.5 times its fair share of

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office-holders in 2023, while Central and Eastern Europe received just over one-quarter of their fair share, the report said.

The report recommends acknowledging the European Union's lack of proper geographical representation and its likely negative impact on citizens' inclusion. The report also recommends the EU establish goals, implement measures such as affirmative action policies and publicly track progress through a yearly review of geographical representation.

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UN Dismisses Trump's Peace Plan For Ukraine, Says Position Remains Unchanged -Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, April 9 (Sputnik) - The United Nations says it has not been informed about former President Donald Trump's idea of a peace plan for Ukraine and that the organization's position remains unchanged, UN Spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday.

"First point, we are not privy to this plan," Dujarric said in a briefing. "Second point… the Secretary General's position has remained consistent throughout this conflict. He wants to see an end to the conflict…"

In addition, he said that the end of the conflict should be in line with the UN Charter and the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

On Monday, Trump reported that he would end the war in Ukraine within 24 hours, which would include ceding the surrounding Crimea and Donbas regions to Russia. Trump has already said multiple times that he would have Russian President Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelenskyy sit at one table and find an agreement.

Russian and Ukrainian delegations engaged in several rounds of peace talks, including in Turkey in March 2022. Later that year, Zelenskyy signed a decree stating that Kiev could not hold peace talks as long as President Vladimir Putin was in power in Russia.

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US, UK Make Progress on Goal of Using Frozen Russian Assets for Ukraine - Cameron

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - The United States and United Kingdom have made progress on the proposal to use frozen Russian assets to fund aid for Ukraine, UK Foreign Secretary David Cameron said on Tuesday.

"We know that they [Ukraine] need support from NATO allies and a good outcome to the NATO summit which we were discussing this morning, and we know that they need money in the form of the frozen Russian sovereign assets, and we're making good progress in how to access those funds on an agreed basis that I think we can take forward at the G7 [summit in June],"

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Cameron said during a press conference alongside his US counterpart Antony Blinken.
Cameron was in Washington for a meeting with Blinken to discuss Ukraine's needs but also economic and security matters related to China and the war in Gaza, among other issues.
Blinken added during the press conference that Ukraine is in dire need of air defense and artillery munitions.
Cameron declined to get into details about his private meeting with former President Donald Trump, which was reportedly about Ukraine, NATO and defense spending.

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US, Uruguay to Sign Space Domain Awareness, Data Sharing Agreement This Week - SPACECOM

COLORADO SPRINGS, April 9 (Sputnik) - The United States and Uruguay will ink a space domain awareness and info-sharing agreement this week, Stephen Whiting, US Space Command Commander announced at the Space Symposium in Colorado Springs on Tuesday.
"US Space Command has now signed 185 space domain awareness, data sharing agreements, and later this week I will sign another one with the country of Uruguay," Whiting said.
The Space Symposium annually brings together thousands of the world's space, military, civil, and government research industry leaders.

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US Does Not Want War in Space As It Would Be 'Detrimental' - Space Command

COLORADO SPRINGS, April 9 (Sputnik) - While there is a chance that several decades from now, battles may be happening in space instead of the sea or the air, Washington does not want any military conflict in space as it would be detrimental to both the United States and its allies, Stephen Whiting, US Space Command Commander said at the Space Symposium in Colorado Springs on Tuesday.
“Several decades from now, the key battles may not be sea battles or air battles, but space battles, and we should be sending a certain fraction of our national resources to ensure we do not lag in obtaining space superiority,” Whiting said. “But let me be crystal clear, those of us in US space command do not want a war to start in or extend into space war.”
In addition, Whiting said that war in space is not “inevitable” and that one of the priorities of the Space Command is maximizing combat readiness by 2027.
“All of us at US Space Command are laser-focused on improving all of our existing forces and capabilities so that we can stitch them together seamlessly when called upon,” he said. “We're also working with capability providers to try to deliver as much new capability as we can within

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the next three years."

Another priority of the Command, Whiting said, is countering threats as they are "no longer theoretical possibilities".

"The threats we've been talking about for years are no longer theoretical possibilities. They are deployed in the domain terrestrially and many of them are now on combat duty in China and Russia," he said. "They hold at risk our modern way of life and how we defend this nation."

Earlier, the Russian embassy in Washington commenting on Pentagon officials' criticism of an initiative by Russia and China on the non-deployment of weapons in outer space, said that the United States is using Russophobic rhetoric to justify its plans for military space exploration.

Russia and China have for many years led global efforts to prepare comprehensive measures to prohibit the deployment of weapons of any kind in outer space, while the US, supported by its allies, has for years been blocking the development of a comprehensive legally binding international agreement on the issue, the embassy added.

The Space Symposium annually brings together thousands of the world's space, military, civil, and government research industry leaders.

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Idaho Teen Arrested for Plotting IS Attacks on Churches - US Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - An 18-year-old Idaho man was arrested for allegedly swearing allegiance to the Islamic State terror group (banned in Russia) and plotting attacks on churches, the US Justice Department said in a statement.

Law enforcement arrested the suspect, Alexander Scott Mercurio, on April 6 for attempting to provide material support and resources to ISIS, which is a designated foreign terrorist organization in the United States, the statement said on Monday.

"According to the affidavit in support of the criminal complaint, Mercurio pledged his allegiance to ISIS and intended to commit attacks on its behalf. He planned to attack individuals at churches in Coeur d'Alene on April 7 using weapons, including knives, firearms, and fire," the statement said.

The FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force investigated and thwarted Mercurio's alleged plot, the statement said. Mercurio faces up to 20 years in federal prison if convicted, the statement added.

The case should act as an "eye-opener" to the threat self-radicalization poses to communities, according to the statement.

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AUKUS to Consult Japan on Participating in Advanced Capabilities Projects - White House

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WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - The Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) alliance will begin consultations with Japan and several other partners to determine their possible participation in advanced capabilities projects, National Security Council senior director for East Asia and Oceania Mira Rapp-Hooper said on Tuesday.

The remarks come ahead of the visit of Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida to Washington this week.

"We will begin consultations with a range of additional partners, including Japan, as was indicated yesterday, towards their possible participation in these additional capabilities projects," Rapp-Hooper said during a press conference.

Rapp-Hooper clarified that Pilar I of AUKUS, which includes the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines, has not and will not expand under any circumstances. She however noted that Pilar II is open to enlargement.

Pillar II includes advanced capabilities built upon longstanding deep defense ties between current AUKUS member states. It commits to trilateral cooperation on emerging tech areas, such as quantum; AI and autonomy; hypersonics and counter-hypersonics; electronic warfare; undersea warfare and cyber. It also focuses on security in the Indo-Pacific region with the aim of countering Chinese influence in the region.

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Top US House Foreign Affairs Democrat Puts Arms Sale for Israel on Hold

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - US House Foreign Affairs Committee ranking member Gregory Meeks said on Tuesday that he is holding up a US arms sale for Israel that includes F-15 fighter jets and munitions over concerns about how the weapons would be used.

“I want to know what types of weapons and what the weapons would be utilized for...I don't want the kinds of weapons that Israel has to be utilized to have more deaths,” Meeks told CNN. “I want to make sure that humanitarian aid gets in. I don't want people starving to death, and I want Hamas to release the hostages. And I want a two-state solution."

Meeks said he will receive a classified briefing on the weapons package before he decides whether to approve the arms sale.

The Biden administration will need approval from the top two leaders of the House Foreign Affairs and Senate Foreign Relations committees before formally notifying Congress of the potential sale. The top two Republicans have already said they support the weapons package.

In February, President Joe Biden asked the four congressional foreign affairs leaders to approve a package that includes 50 new F-15 fighter jets valued at $18 million, 30 advanced medium-range air-to-air missiles and a number of so-called Joint Direct Attack Munition kits, which turn dumb bombs into precision-guided weapons.

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David Cameron Says Trump Meeting 'Entirely' Appropriate

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - UK Foreign Secretary David Cameron said on Tuesday that his meeting with former President Donald Trump was "entirely" appropriate and part of a long history of government ministers meeting with opposition politicians during US presidential elections.

"It was entirely in line with a precedent of government ministers reaching with opposition politicians in the run-up to elections," Cameron said during a joint press availability with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, when asked by a reporter about his meeting with current presidential candidate Trump.

Cameron met with Trump on Monday night at the former president's Mar-a-lago residence in Florida.

"It was a private meeting, so I haven't really got anything to add but we discussed a range of important geopolitical subjects," Cameron added.

He said the pair discussed, among other things, the upcoming presidential election, the Gaza hostage situation, and the future of NATO.

Cameron traveled to the United States on Tuesday for talks to increase aid for Ukraine. In addition to his meetings with Blinken and Trump, Cameron is expected to meet with key members of Congress to urge them to unlock $60 billion in new Ukraine aid.

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China Moving At Breathtaking Speed to Advance Space Capabilities-US Space Command

COLORADO SPRINGS, April 9 (Sputnik) - China is moving at breathtaking speed in advancing its space capabilities, Stephen Whiting, US Space Command Commander said at the Space Symposium in Colorado Springs on Tuesday.

“Both the PRC and Russia have made rapid advancements in fielding capabilities which threaten the peaceful use of space. The People's Liberation Army has made their terrestrial forces space-enabled as well,” Whiting said. “And frankly, China is moving at a breathtaking speed.”

Whiting went on to say that since 2018, China has more than tripled its on-orbit intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance satellites.

“With these systems, they've built a kill web over the Pacific Ocean to find fixed track and yes, target United States and allied military capabilities,” he said. “And they've built a range of counter space weapons from reversible jamming all the way up to kinetic hit to kill direct descent and co-orbital sats.”

The Space Symposium annually brings together thousands of the world's space, military, civil,

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and government research industry leaders.

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Blinken Says US Looking into New Northern Port of Entry for Gaza Aid

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - The United States is looking into a new northern port of entry for getting aid into Gaza, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday.

"We're looking at a number of critical things that need to happen in the coming days including opening a new northern point of entry for assistance into Gaza," Blinken said during a joint press availability with UK Foreign Secretary David Cameron.

Cameron traveled to the United States on Tuesday for talks to increase aid for Ukraine. Additionally, Cameron met with former President Donald Trump in Florida before meeting with Blinken in Washington.

On October 7, 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 33,300 people have been killed so far by Israeli strikes in the Gaza Strip, according to local authorities. Over 100 hostages are still believed to be held by Hamas in Gaza.

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US Senator Tuberville Says Washington Spent $300Bln in Ukraine Since 2014

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - The United States has spent about $300 billion to support Ukraine since 2014 when a US-backed coup d'etat took place in Kiev, US Senator Tommy Tuberville said on Tuesday.

"It is my understanding … that we have spent $300 billion since 2014 in Ukraine. Does that sound about right to you?" Tuberville said during a hearing at the US Senate Armed Services Committee.

Under Secretary of Defense and Comptroller Michael McCord, to whom this question was addressed, said that the number was too high.

McCord explained that Ukraine was getting about $300 million per year from the US government for several years preceding the escalation of the conflict with Russia and in the last two years alone it received about $40 billion.

Tuberville responded that the United States could find a better way to spend the money than sending it to Ukraine because, in his view, the country is one of the most corrupt in the world.

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"Right now, we are printing about $80,000 per second, $4.6 million a minute. We can't sustain that much longer. We got to find the best ways to spend our money," Tuberville said.

In February, the Senate passed a $95 billion foreign aid bill that includes some $60 billion for Ukraine, but it was held up in the House by Speaker Mike Johnson, who prioritized working on budget legislation and exploring other routes for Ukraine funding.

Ukraine is in dire need of additional funding from the United States, which has provided more than $75 billion since Russia's special military operation started in February 2022. Since US funds allocated for Ukraine ran out in December, the United States has been able to provide only a $200 million aid package in March.

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West Faces Growing Fatigue Due to Burden of Financing Ukraine - Russian Ambassador to US

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - The people in the collective West feel a growing fatigue because of the burden of financing Ukraine and this is a reality rather "Russian propaganda," Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said on Tuesday.

"In the West, the population is objectively growing tired of the burden of financing Ukraine. This is not an invention of Russian propaganda," Antonov said.

The ambassador pointed out that Americans seem not to understand why they need to work hard and pay taxes, which are then used to militarily and economically support a distant Eastern European country while the United States faces acute socio-economic problems.

Antonov said in such a situation, the US government practically daily accuses Russia of every and all "sins" without providing evidence or fact-checking its claims and not recognizing the fallibility of its policy toward Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union.

"Clearly, the 'hawks' in Washington do not need an end to the conflict, but the exhaustion of our country, even at the cost of the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians. Or better yet, the disappearance of the Russian Federation from the geopolitical map of the world," Antonov said. "Hence all these stories that after Ukraine, Russia will allegedly inevitably attack the states of NATO. Anything that does not fit into this picture is discarded and declared to be disinformation."

Antonov emphasized that Russia will continue to defend the truth and the United States' reactions reflect the effectiveness of this approach.

"If the truth destroys stereotypes that are convenient and beneficial for the US authorities, this is not our problem. Washington's painful reaction to such work only speaks of its effectiveness," Antonov said.

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US, Japan to Bolster Defense, Space Cooperation During Kishida's Visit – White House

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) – The United States and Japan will agree to greater coordination and integration of their forces and will announce important deliverables on civil space cooperation during Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's visit to Washington this week, National Security Council senior director for East Asia and Oceania Mira Rapp-Hooper said on Tuesday.

"We [the US, Japan] will both bolster our defense and security cooperation to enable greater coordination and integration of our forces to ensure they are optimally postured and linked to one another," Rapp-Hooper said during a press briefing.

"Our leaders will announce some important deliverables on civil space cooperation as we lead the way in space exploration and the return to the moon," Rapp-Hooper added.

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US Railroad Pays Out $600Mln to Ohio Town Residents Over Toxic Train Crash - Statement

ASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - Northern Southern Corporation will pay $600 million to settle a class action lawsuit over the 2023 crash of a train it operated carrying toxic chemicals that forced the emergency evacuation of 1,500 people from East Palestine in the US state of Ohio, the company said in a press release on Tuesday.

"Norfolk Southern Corporation announced Tuesday that it has reached a $600 million agreement in principle to resolve a consolidated class action lawsuit relating to the East Palestine derailment," the release said.

If approved by the court, the agreement will resolve all class action claims within a 20-mile radius from the derailment and also personal injury claims from within a ten-mile radius from the derailment, the release said.

The settlement contains "$104 million in community assistance to East Palestine and the surrounding areas in Ohio and Pennsylvania, including $25 million for a regional safety training center, $25 million in planned improvements to East Palestine's city park, $21 million in direct payments to residents, and $9 million to local first responders," the release said.

The disaster caused the emergency evacuation of half of East Palestine and threatened long-term health consequences from the toxic chemicals that spilled and burned from the derailed rail cars.

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US Senators Introduce Bill to Strengthen Interagency Export Control Center - Statement

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WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - US Senator Mitt Romney said on Tuesday that he introduced bipartisan legislation to strengthen the federal government's interagency export control center to bolster export control enforcement.

Romney introduced the legislation, dubbed the Export Controls Enforcement Improvement Act, alongside Senator Maggie Hassan, the lawmaker said in a statement.

"The United States leads the world in technological innovation and countries like China, Russia, and Iran go to great lengths to acquire our sensitive technologies, like semiconductors and artificial intelligence — often in contravention of US export controls. Our legislation would ensure that the interagency Export Enforcement Coordination Center has the resources it needs to effectively lead export control enforcement and coordination efforts," the statement said.

The legislation would establish and promote consistent staffing levels for the Export Enforcement Coordination Center, focus enforcement efforts on critical national security matters, and support coordination with the private sector, the statement said.

The Export Enforcement Coordination Center was created by Executive Order 13558 in 2010 and includes representation from eight US government departments and 18 federal agencies.

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Russia Requests UNSC Meeting on Western Weapon Supplies to Ukraine on April 12 - Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, April 9 (Sputnik) - Russia has requested that a UN Security Council meeting on the supply of Western arms to Ukraine be held on April 12, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Tuesday.

"We, again, in order not to break tradition and not allow Westerners to freely advance their narrative, requested a separate meeting on the supply of Western weapons to the Kiev regime at 10:00 New York time on April 12," Polyanskiy said via Telegram.

The Western countries have requested holding a UN Security Council meeting on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine on April 11.

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US Intends to Impose Further Sanctions on Russia as Russian Economy Adapts - US Treasury

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - The United States intends to impose more sanctions on Russia alongside allies as Russia's economy adapts to the existing sanctions regime, Deputy US Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo said on Tuesday.

"Our goal is to make sure that, as Russia adjusts to those sanctions, we do even more to make sure we're putting sand in the gears of Russia's military-industrial complex," Adeyemo said during a US Senate banking panel hearing.

The US must work to sanction Russia alongside other allied countries, Adeyemo said.

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The international sanctions coalition must do more to target Russian revenues and weapons-building capabilities, Adeyemo said.

The US and other countries have imposed numerous sanctions on Russia in response to its special military operation in Ukraine, including restrictions on its financial and energy sectors.

Russian officials have said despite Western attempts to contain and weaken the country's economy the sanctions regime has failed.

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Pentagon Chief Says No Evidence of Israel Committing Genocide in Gaza

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin testified on Tuesday that there was no evidence of Israel committing genocide in the Gaza Strip.

"We don't have any evidence of genocide being created," Austin said at a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing when asked whether Israel was committing genocide in Gaza.

On January 26, the International Court of Justice found it was plausible that Israel was committing genocide in Gaza and issued a provisional order that Israel must immediately ensure its forces did not violate the Genocide Convention. The court has yet to make a final ruling in the genocide case filed by South Africa on December 29.

In the report "Anatomy of a Genocide" published on March 25, UN Special Rapporteur for the Occupied Palestinian Territories Francesca Albanese concluded there were "reasonable grounds" to believe that Israel has been committing genocide in Gaza.

In the six months of the Israel-Hamas war thus far, the official casualty toll in Gaza includes at least 33,360 Palestinians killed and 75,993 wounded. Seventy percent of residential areas in Gaza have been destroyed and 80% of the entire population has been forcibly displaced.

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Pentagon Chief 'Seriously Doubts' Hamas Would Stop Attacks if Israel Ends War

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said Tuesday that he "seriously doubts" that Hamas would stop its attacks on Israel if Israel ended its war on Gaza.

"I seriously doubt that," Austin said at a Senate Committee on Armed Services hearing, when asked "if Israel laid down its arms today, would Hamas stop their aggression against Israel?"

Additionally, when asked whether Israel's war on Gaza would end if Hamas laid down its arms today, Austin said "we certainly would hope so, but that's left to be seen."

Austin also said that creating a maritime corridor to Gaza was a "legitimate mission" for the US military and he expected that the "initial operation capability" would be in place by the third weekend of April.

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Austin Says He Asked US Intelligence to Look Again Into Russia's Role in 'Havana Syndrome'

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said on Tuesday that he has encouraged the Defense Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency to take another look into new reports that Russia was behind the so-called "Havana syndrome" affecting US diplomats and other government workers.

"I've spoken to leaders in the intelligence community and addressed this issue with them. They have assured me that they will continue to address and investigate any new evidence that presents itself and they will continue to assess, and the intelligence agencies that are a part of the Department of Defense will continue to support that overall effort, but yes, to answer your question," Austin said in a testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee.

On March 31, CBS reported that based on alleged new evidence, Russia was allegedly behind a series of Havana syndrome-style attacks, including against US officials in Vietnam ahead of Vice President Kamala Harris' trip there in 2021.

Following the report, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov called the accusations groundless and emphasized that no evidence has ever been provided to substantiate the claims.

In early March, the Washington Post reported that five US intelligence agencies concluded it was "very unlikely" that any foreign adversary targeted US diplomats and intelligence staff with the help of some sort of energy weapon that caused strange and painful acoustic sensations.

US government and related personnel have reported cases of Havana syndrome, also known as anomalous health incidents, since 2015. Reported symptoms include dizziness, pain, visual problems and cognitive dysfunction, following intrusive sounds and head pressure.

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US Treasury Says Terrorists Will Increase Use of 'Virtual Assets' Unless Congress Acts

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - Terrorist organizations will increase their use of virtual assets unless the US Congress takes action to empower financial regulators, Deputy US Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo said on Tuesday.

"While we continue to assess that terrorists prefer to use traditional financial products and services, we fear that without Congressional action to provide us with the necessary tools, the use of virtual assets by these actors will only grow," Adeyemo said in remarks to the US Senate banking panel.

Terrorist and state actors are increasingly finding ways to conceal their identities and move resources using virtual assets, Adeyemo said.

The US Treasury Department needs to build an enforcement regime capable of preventing illicit

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finance in the virtual asset ecosystem, Adeyemo said.

The United States should expand existing authorities to cover key entities in the virtual assets ecosystem as well as reform authorities to clarify that they can reach extra-territorially when virtual asset entities harm US national security, Adeyemo also said.

The US Treasury Department looks forward to working with lawmakers on their ideas and proposals on bolstering the regulation of virtual assets, Adeyemo added.

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Greene Says Will Not Tolerate US House Speaker Johnson's 'Total Surrender' to Democrats

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene said on Tuesday that she would not tolerate the current type of leadership exhibited by House of Representatives Speaker Mike Johnson, equating it to a "total surrender" to the demands by Democrats.

Earlier in the day, Greene sent a letter to her Republican colleagues in which she blasted Johnson for his failure to abide by his own imposed tenets and for failing to fulfill the promises he ran on to become a speaker of the House of Representatives.

"I will not tolerate this type of Republican 'leadership.' This has been a complete and total surrender to, if not complete and total lockstep with, the Democrats' agenda that has angered our Republican base so much and given them very little reason to vote for a Republican House majority," Greene said in the letter.

As the House of Representatives is coming back into session, a vote on passing additional assistance for Ukraine to the tune of $60 billion is expected, Greene said.

The congresswoman noted that Johnson was among those House Republicans who cast their votes against providing $300 million in aid to Ukraine last September.

But Johnson is now saying that passing the funding Ukraine needs amid the ongoing armed conflict with Russia is among his top priorities, Greene said.

The congresswoman also expressed concern over Johnson's plans to introduce the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) bill into the House of Representatives that would allow for "mass surveillance" of Americans.

Should Johnson continue down the same path, the Republican party would effectively cease to exist and turn into a "Uniparty" with the Democrats as a result of the self-inflicted destruction, Greene said.

In February, the Senate passed a $95 billion foreign aid bill that includes some $60 billion for Ukraine, but it was held up in the House of Representatives by Johnson, who prioritized working on budget legislation and exploring other routes for Ukraine funding.

Johnson recently said that the House of Representatives will work on the national security supplemental package right after the recess on April 9, noting that it will have some important innovations.

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G20 Emerging Markets Have Almost Doubled Footprint in Global Trade, Investment - IMF

WASHINGTON, April 9 (Sputnik) - Emerging markets from the Group of Twenty have almost doubled their role in global trade and investment in the past 20 years, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on Tuesday.

"G20 EMs [emerging markets] have indeed become more important for global economic activity. Their global trade and investment footprint has almost doubled since the early 2000s, while global financial integration continues to increase," the IMF said in its World Economic Outlook report.

Consumers and firms in the G20 emerging markets make up a growing share of global demand and firms in countries like China, India and Russia supply a larger share of total inputs globally, the report said.

The IMF emphasized that after more than two decades of growth, the G20 emerging markets now account for about 30% of global economic activity and about one-quarter of global trade.

"At the same time, these economies have become increasingly systemic through their integration into global value chains (GVCs), with the potential to move global markets. This implies that spillovers to growth from shocks originating in these economies - as well as from their structural slowdown over the past decade - can have far greater ramifications for global activity," the report said.

However, the IMF warned that potential large spillovers from these countries present an important set of issues. The IMF also called on policymakers to focus on how large and different aggregate growth spillovers from G20 emerging markets are and how they compare with those from advanced economies, as well as which countries generate the largest global and regional spillovers, according to the report.

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