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More Than 4,000 Embryos Reportedly Destroyed in Gaza Fertility Clinic

A Reuters-commissioned journalist who visited the site said the lab was littered with debris including broken masonry, blown-up lab supplies and the liquid nitrogen tanks which once held hopeful parents' dreams.

More than 4,000 embryos and 1,000 other specimens were destroyed in Gaza's largest fertility clinic in December when an Israeli shell struck Gaza's largest fertility clinic. The explosion caused the lids of five liquid nitrogen tanks stored in Gaza City's Al Basma IVF Center to blast off and lose their liquid nitrogen, destroying hopeful plans for parents experiencing infertility.

There are at least nine clinics in Gaza where in vitro fertilization (IVF) is performed, and most of the frozen embryos were held at the Al Basma center.

"We know deeply what these 5,000 lives, or potential lives, meant for the parents, either for the future or for the past," said Bahaeldeen Ghalayini, 73, the Cambridge-trained obstetrician and gynecologist who established the clinic in 1997.

He adds that at least half of the couples will not have another chance of getting pregnant after their embryos were destroyed.

Large families are very common in Gaza and IVF is widely available in the enclave. Nearly half the population of Gaza is under the age of 18 and the fertility rate is high at 3.38 births per woman, according to the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics.

Some families in the enclave who are struggling to conceive will even sell their TVs or jewelry just to pay the medical fees, said Al Ghalayini, who was forced to close his clinic following the beginning of the conflict between Hamas and Israel.

"My heart is divided into a million pieces," he said.

Israel has denied intentionally targeting civilian infrastructure while at the same time repeatedly accusing Hamas fighters of operating from medical facilities, a claim that an American news source investigated and found little evidence to support.

It is estimated that about 32,000 Palestinians have died compared to 1,200 Israelis since the conflict between Hamas and Israel first broke out. In January, the International Court of Justice found that it is "plausible"that Israel has committed acts that violate the Genocide Convention, after a genocide case was brought against them by South Africa.

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'Drawing a Red Line in The Sand': Iran Reconsiders Nuclear Policy Following Israeli Threats

The Iranian commander asserted that Iran is prepared to repel any Israeli attacks on its nuclear facilities and has also identified the location of “all Israeli nuclear facilities”.

In response to potential threats from Israel against Iran’s nuclear facilities, Brigadier General Ahmad Haghtalab, commander of Iran's Nuclear Centers Protection and Security Corps of the IRGC warned that any aggression would result in a forceful response. Iran is also reconsidering its nuclear policy following Israel’s threat.

Dr. David Oualaalou joined Sputnik’s The Critical Hour on Thursday to discuss Iran's policy change. Oualaalou is an international geopolitical consultant, global speaker, author, veteran, and former international security analyst in Washington, DC.

“There's a lot of elements pertaining to this particular shift in policy, should this move forward,” said Oualaalou. “So it behooves critics to put to rest these nonsense statements that, for example, Iran's nuclear program will dominate the world because that's what was stated. That it's going to wipe out Israel, that it's going to take over the Middle East. No, no, no, no, no, no, it has nothing to do with that.”

“Because back then, the idea was that Iran was not thinking in terms of the bomb in itself. It wanted to have the nuclear capability for civilian use,” he added, noting that the under the Trump administration, the US pulled out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and in doing so, he said, "[violated] any or all the treaties that usually manage these kind of agreements.”

“[By] reimposing more sanctions on Iran, what is Iran supposed to do?” he continued. “Any time [a government] crosses the threshold of the 90% of enrichment that means that uranium becomes weapons grade. But with the circumstances right now that just took place with Israel attacking Iran in Damascus and Iran responding, one of the wild cards that's going to be now, which will create an even worse scenario for Israel, is that if Iran makes the decision to move forward with building the bomb.”

The geopolitical consultant added that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) made a mistake in claiming that their missile defense system intercepted 99% of Iran’s missiles, and that the correct percentage is 84%, a journalist claimed.

“Gone [is] that era when Israel will not have to think about retaliation from Iran because Iran now put the red line in the sand,” Oualaalou said. “What concerns me now the most, especially in that part of the world, is the upcoming military drill between the Philippines and the US that will be outside the territorial waters of the Philippines. That is, to me, a major provocation towards the Chinese.”

“Haven't we had enough with the massive amount of debt that the country, our country, is sinking into and [we're] just sending money at the expense of an average American here? Shame on our government,” he added.

“The [US] is concerned about [its] military bases in the Middle East that are within reach of every type of missile that Iran has developed. And once we start seeing body bags coming here, you're going to see the change in the policy. And, this is why [the US] is concerned as to how far Israel is going to go, and that is the reason why its war cabinet has not reached a decision whether to retaliate against Iran or not, because they know what the consequences will be,” said Oualaalou.

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On Thursday, the US Department of the Treasury announced that the had US imposed new Iran-related sanctions on 16 individuals and two entities, targeting the country's UAV program, steel and automobile industries in response to Iran's retaliatory strike on Israel over the weekend. It was reported on the same day that the UK also added the general staff of the Iranian armed forces and the navy of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to its sanctions list, according to the updated document.
On Thursday night, Israel reportedly struck a site in Iran, according to US officials. An explosion was heard in the city of Qahjavaristan, Isfahan, according to Iranian Media.

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Cannibal Ate My Homework - Cartoon

It's not the first mistaken military memory Biden has had - but it may be the most bizarre.
On Wednesday, US President Joe Biden made a remark suggesting that the body of his uncle Ambrose Finnegan - nicknamed "Uncle Bozey" - was not recovered during World War II because it crashed near New Guinea, where he said there used to be "a lot of cannibals" at the time.
Biden made the comment while drawing a distinction between himself and his political rival former President Donald Trump, who repeatedly said that Americans who died in war or were injured are "losers" and does not understand why they are honored, per a Washington, DC journal article from 2020.
But in drawing the comparison, Biden made a bizarre mischaracterization of his uncle's death.
"He got shot down in New Guinea, and they never found the body because there used to be — there were a lot of cannibals, for real, in that part of New Guinea," Biden told United Steelworkers union members in Pittsburgh.
However, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting agency said that the president's uncle was on an A-20 Havoc headed to New Guinea when it was "forced to ditch in the ocean" off the coast of the island "for unknown reasons."
While it's true that there were documented accounts of cannibalism in the region in the mid-20th century, the accounting agency said that Finnegan and the three men "failed to emerge from the sinking wreck and were lost in the crash" and that an aerial search did not come up with the missing aircraft or the lost crew members.
"Three men failed to emerge from the sinking wreck and were lost in the crash. One crew member survived and was rescued by a passing barge. An aerial search the next day found no trace of the missing aircraft or the lost crew members," the agency wrote.
Other mischaracterizations made by the president regarding the US military include him saying that twice he was picked to attend the Naval Academy, despite no documentation to prove such a claim, and in 2022 he claimed his uncle Frank Biden had won the Purple Heart without evidence of the award and key details of the story being chronologically impossible, according to a New York tabloid.

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Western Investor & Entrepreneur Claims Ukrainian Officials Extorting Him for Millions

This isn't the first time Damerau has lost money after investing in Ukraine. According to the report, he claims he lost €25mn under former President Viktor Yanukovych after corrupt officials approached him regarding a wind farm in Crimea, and made similar threats regarding offshore entities, which he is again experiencing.

An Anglo-German businessman and a former adviser to Glencore, recently told a British-based paper that he is being blackmailed by a group of senior Ukrainian officials. The entrepreneur, Arnulf Damerau, has claimed that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's administration and other senior Kiev officials are trying to extort tens of millions of euros from him.

He is one of the largest private Western investors in Ukraine and co-owns Cosmolot (alongside entrepreneur Sergey Potapov), one of the largest online casino operators in Ukraine, and the country's 10th-largest taxpayers. But the company's accounts have been frozen after they were raided in October by the Economic Security Bureau of Ukraine, which has accused it of violating gambling laws and evading €560mn in taxes, according to the recent report.

The Ukrainian authorities alleged that copycat websites that share design and infrastructure with the company serve some of its clients, but don't report the proceeds that they generate, a separate report said.

Damerau has claims that Ukraine's accusations against his company have been fabricated. He has said that Cosmolot began operating in 2021, after Ukraine changed its gambling laws. He also claims that his total revenues last year were €208mn compared to €4.8mn in 2022 and €250,000 in 2021.

According to the report, the company paid €60mn in taxes last year, and Damerau said the state tax service signed off on its accounts in August. Damerau also claims that a Ukrainian individual met with him in Vienna and told him that the charges against his company would be dropped in exchange for his transferring the control of half of Cosmolot to an offshore trust.

"These are statements I don't want to make. I don't want to say these things about what is happening to me as a businessman trying to invest in Ukraine because the people responsible are in a minority, and they are betraying a young generation of Ukrainians who are giving their blood to try and give their country a European future," Damerau said.

"This is a country which aspires to be part of NATO and the European Union, but what's happening there right now — by a small minority — gives me déjà vu of the darkest Yanukovych times," he added.

Critics of the Ukrainian president have claimed that senior officials have a pattern of going unchecked regarding corruption scandals in their departments, including former defense minister Aleksey Reznikov who was removed from office last September after his ministry was accused of procuring military supplies at flagrantly inflated prices.

The entrepreneur said he would address his concerns at the Ukraine Recovery Summit in Berlin in June, which he was invited to attend as a major foreign direct investor.

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Anti-Establishment German Politician Touts Opposition to Ukraine War, Skepticism of Immigration

Sahra Wagenknecht is finding success in questioning German politics' pieties and sacred cows. A new piece on the website Naked Capitalism takes a deep dive into the modern state of European politics. In an article titled "Can a New German Party Steer the European Left in a More Effective Direction?" author Conor Gallagher examines the salience of the immigration issue in EU politics and the growing working-class rejection of the proxy war in Ukraine.

"Aside from Ukrainians, the war against Russia has arguably hurt working-class Germans more than anyone else," writes Gallagher. "Despite that fact, German politician Sahra Wagenknecht is labeled... one with 'sympathies towards Russia' for her opposition."

"There's no doubt that it's not Russia that has expanded to the west, it is NATO that has expanded to the east," said Lazare. So, I think that the people using this to attack Wagenknecht are just insane."

Wagenknecht is leader of a new party that rejects continued German support for the war in Ukraine. The leftwing politician has also faced criticism from establishment corners for her skepticism towards immigration.

"Wagenknecht's 'left-wing conservativism' would mean a left less focused on identity issues while prioritizing working class economic issues," explains Gallagher's article. "While not opposing immigration on any racial grounds, she acknowledges voters' concerns that too much immigration can be problematic: 'people are experiencing a lack of housing, teachers are overworked, children can't speak German and there are cultural conflicts.'"

"Wagenknecht gets a lot of criticism for her stance on immigration, but the fact is that's what German voters are most concerned about," Gallagher notes, citing polling on the issue.

"I think a lot of people are totally sick and tired of identity politics," said Lazare. "I want to see class issues be the focus."

"Obviously we have to protect the rights of racial minorities," he clarified. "And we also have to recognize that there are a lot of people in the world who have been displaced by war, economics, and climate crises as well." But Lazare predicted Wagenknecht's platform would find support in Germany as voters suffering economic hardship often share her skepticism towards mass immigration.

Lazare predicted the attacks on Wagenknecht for her opposition to the war in Ukraine would backfire, redounding to the advantage of the right who have gained significant traction over the issue.

"The conservatives don't want this war in Ukraine," he noted. "They sympathize ideologically with Putin. And they just don't like this foreign adventurism. And they know their economy is hurting."

"Americans are tired of war," he claimed, noting that opposition to funding for the conflict has increasingly gone global. "They've been fighting wars nonstop for a quarter of a century. Each

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new conflict seems to be more poorly thought out than the preceding one. And they all seem to go badly."

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Techno-Fascism: Privacy Advocates Decry Fusion of Big Tech & Government Surveillance

The likely renewal of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act points the way to a troubling future where the state has unlimited power to spy on our private lives, warns one activist.
After its future was briefly in doubt, US Congress appears poised to extend a controversial law granting the National Security Agency (NSA) sweeping global and domestic spying powers.
The Senate voted to move forward with consideration of the bill Thursday afternoon on a 67 to 32 vote. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) has promised to consider proposed changes to the law before its likely passage Friday, but observers say the renewed Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) is set to grant US intelligence agencies unprecedented abilities with no judicial oversight.
"If it gets renewed… the NSA becomes the most powerful agency in the universe," said host Angie Wong on Sputnik's The Final Countdown program Thursday. "It can spy on everybody – Americans, especially, without a warrant." Activist and writer Tyler Nixon joined Wong and co-host Ted Rall to discuss the issue.
"I think in years past we probably would have thought this was a crazy turn of events," said the US Army veteran. "I think they just figured, 'You know what? We survived this one, let's go for broke, let's add in this massive expansion so that now everybody can be enlisted to be part of the deep state's supposedly non-existent tentacles.'"
"If you are targeted in any way and you find out about it, they can actually just notify you if they want because with it comes a national security letter saying that you are barred by law from discussing or disclosing it to anyone at all whatsoever – even your attorney – you can't even get legal counsel on it," he added. "This is Orwellian-level fascist, totalitarian mechanisms, frankly, come to life right in front of us. And they're just signing off on it."
"We're talking about very serious stuff," agreed Rall. "We're not talking about just trolling your social media feeds, which obviously anyone can just do. But we're talking about listening to your phone calls, opening your mail, breaking into your home and installing wiretaps. This is very old fashioned kind of stuff, going into your bank accounts, looking at all of your transactions. I mean, this is like every detail of your life is going to come out."
"I don't know how this happened… We had civil libertarians both on the left and on the right in Congress who were going to block this. It looked like it was going to die. Even former President Trump, the head of the GOP, was against it."
The renewed FISA law narrowly passed the House of Representatives earlier this week. The legislation was initially deadlocked 212-212, but House Speaker Mike Johnson cast a rare tie-breaking vote in favor of the law. Johnson had previously expressed opposition to the renewal of the act, which has been met with opposition from conservative Republicans.

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The law, which dates back to 1978, was originally envisioned as a check on executive power after the abuses of former President Richard Nixon amid the Watergate scandal. The legislation was dramatically expanded in the 2000s to grant government agencies enhanced spying powers in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

Initially the NSA was required to seek approval for electronic searches from secret FISA courts, which were frequently derided as mere "rubberstamp" institutions. But the most recent revision of the bill dispenses even with that safeguard.

"I literally wrote the book on Ed Snowden," said Rall, referring to the NSA whistleblower who sought refuge in Russia after revealing the breadth of the agency's surveillance activities.

"When I was doing the research on all the stuff that he revealed – it's gobsmacking, right? I mean they have voice recognition software such that if you buy a burner phone and you're like in, let's just say Bangladesh, and you start making a phone call, within seconds your voice… is ID'd in Fort Meade and it's immediately, within seconds, triangulated to its location."

"And if they wanted to, they could just take you out with a drone while you're standing there on the street in Dhaka. It's absolutely like there is no privacy at all. And it's terrifying."

Rall explained that the popularity of cloud storage has spurred spy agencies to refocus their surveillance efforts.

Rather than monitoring communications in real time, the government now seeks access to online data centers. The rise of social media has led to massive amounts of private information being centralized in such locations, and companies like Facebook and Twitter have proven willing to share such data in return for favorable legislation from Congress.

"These are not exactly the people who are going to be worried about individual privacy, the tech giants," said Nixon. "There's no pushback whatsoever. It was really just a matter of how deep on bended knee could they go… They don't really care about an expansion like this. If anything they feel like it takes some of the heat off them and expands it to where every American citizen potentially could be targeted. And I think that's really what this is about."

"The definition of fascism is the merger, frankly, of corporate or concentrated wealth interests with the state and this FISA law and the way they've used these intelligence surveillance powers through these tech companies… just indicates to me that we're closer and closer with each one of these expansions to what is you can't tell the difference," he warned. "You can't tell where the government censors end and your Twitter or whoever begins."

"I think our Congress is very much captured by the national security police state, and they manipulate and control these people one way or another… It's unfortunate because we have totally lost control of even our own elected representatives."

Techno-fascism: privacy advocates decry fusion of Big Tech and government surveillance (Part 2)

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"I don't know how this happened," said host Ted Rall on Sputnik's The Final Countdown program as a renewed Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act seemed poised to pass Congress, granting the National Security Agency unprecedented spying powers without judicial oversight.

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“We had civil libertarians both on the left and on the right in Congress who were going to block this. It looked like it was going to die. Even former President Trump, the head of the GOP, was against it,” Rall clarified.

The renewed FISA law narrowly passed the House earlier this week. The legislation was initially deadlocked 212-212, but House Speaker Mike Johnson cast a rare tie-breaking vote in favor of the law. Johnson had previously expressed opposition to the renewal of the act, which has been met with opposition from conservative Republicans.

“These are not exactly the people who are going to be worried about individual privacy, the tech giants,” said privacy advocate Tyler Nixon, noting that social media companies have proven willing to share user data in return for favorable legislation from Congress.

“The definition of fascism is the merger, frankly, of corporate or concentrated wealth interests with the state and this FISA law and the way they've used these intelligence surveillance powers through these tech companies… just indicates to me that we're closer and closer with each one of these expansions to what is you can't tell the difference,” he warned. “You can't tell where the government censors end and your Twitter or whoever begins.”

“I think our Congress is very much captured by the national security police state, and they manipulate and control these people one way or another… It's unfortunate because we have totally lost control of even our own elected representatives,” Nixon emphasized.

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Techno-fascism: privacy advocates decry fusion of Big Tech and government surveillance (Part 1)

Congress appears poised to extend a controversial law granting the US National Security Agency (NSA) sweeping global and domestic spying powers – observers say the renewed Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) will grant intelligence agencies unprecedented abilities with no judicial oversight.

“If you are targeted in any way and you find out about it, they can actually just notify you if they want because with it comes a national security letter saying that you are barred by law from discussing or disclosing it to anyone at all whatsoever – even your attorney – you can't even get legal counsel on it,” said activist and writer Tyler Nixon on Sputnik’s The Final Countdown program.

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Anti-establishment German politician touts opposition to Ukraine war, skepticism of immigration

“Aside from Ukrainians, the war against Russia has arguably hurt working-class Germans more than anyone else,” writes Gallagher. Despite that fact, German politician Sahra Wagenknecht is labeled "one with sympathies towards Russia’ for her opposition," the article highlights.

Journalist Dan Lazare joined Sputnik’s The Critical Hour program to analyze the ongoing vilification of Russia. “There's no doubt that it's not Russia that has expanded to the west, it is NATO that has expanded to the east,” said Lazare. “So, I think that the people using this to attack Wagenknecht are just insane.”

Wagenknecht is leader of a new party that rejects continued German support for the war in Ukraine.

“The conservatives don't want this war in Ukraine,” Lazare noted. “They sympathize ideologically with Putin. And they just don't like this foreign adventurism. And they know their economy is hurting.”

The leftwing politician has also faced criticism from establishment corners for her skepticism towards immigration.

“I think a lot of people are totally sick and tired of identity politics,” said Lazare. “I want to see class issues be the focus.” Lazare predicted Wagenknecht’s platform would find support in Germany as voters suffering economic hardship often share her skepticism towards mass immigration.

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Paraguay Open for Russian Investors, Sees Many Areas for Cooperation – Finance Minister

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WASHINGTON, April 19 (Sputnik), Liudmila Chernova – Paraguay is open for investors from around the world, including from Russia and China, and sees many areas for cooperation, Paraguayan Finance Minister Carlos Fernandez Valdovinos told Sputnik on Thursday.

"We are open for business with every country in the world, even with China, even though we don't have any diplomatic relation," Valdovinos said. "Paraguay has many capabilities or potential areas where many investors from all around the world can work and all of them are welcome to come."

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Paraguay Sees BRICS as Exclusively Economic Club – Finance Minister

WASHINGTON, April 19 (Sputnik), Liudmila Chernova – Paraguay considers BRICS to be an exclusively economic club and believes it should not take any political issues into account when deciding on the admission of new members, Paraguayan Finance Minister Carlos Fernandez Valdovinos told Sputnik on Thursday.

"We think that BRICS is totally an economic club and should only take into account economic considerations [when deciding on the admission of a particular country]," Valdovinos said.

According to Valdovinos, it is unlikely that China would agree to Paraguay's membership in BRICS given Asuncion's diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

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Paraguay Not Holding Talks With Russia on Issue of Trade Settlement – Finance Minister

WASHINGTON, April 19 (Sputnik), Liudmila Chernova – Paraguay is not taking part in any government-level discussions on the issue of trade settlements, including in national currencies, and believes it is up to the private sector to decide what is better for it, Paraguayan Finance Minister Carlos Fernandez Valdovinos told Sputnik on Thursday.

"At the government level, no, because this is a private sector deal. We really believe in the private sector doing whatever they think is most important for them," Valdovinos said when asked if the Paraguayan government is having any talks with Russia on how to settle the issue of trade payments.

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Western Sanctions Result in Losses for Paraguay When Trading With Russia –Finance Minister

WASHINGTON, April 19 (Sputnik), Liudmila Chernova - Western sanctions against Russia lead to an increase in prices for Russian buyers and at the same time to a decrease in profits for Paraguayan suppliers, as in the case of beef supplies to the Russian market, Paraguayan Finance Minister Carlos Fernandez Valdovinos told Sputnik on Thursday.

"Russia is one of the main markets for Paraguayan beef. Right now, there's no restriction but it is more difficult to negotiate with them [Russia] or trade with them," the minister said. "Even though Paraguayan beef could be going to Russia right now, Russia is probably paying a much higher price than it should be paying for Paraguayan beef, and Paraguay is receiving much less money than it should receive under normal circumstances."

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US Missiles Destroying Iran, Houthi UAVs, But Threat Expanding, Growing - Army General

WASHINGTON, April 19 (Sputnik) - US military anti-drone and short-range missile defense systems have been highly successful in protecting shipping in the Red Sea and Israeli cities from recent Iranian and Houthi attacks, but the threat is complex and rapidly evolving and it will continue to require multi-layered defenses including directed energy weapons, US Army Counter-Unmanned Aircraft Systems Office and director of fires Major General David Stewart told a Defense One podcast.

"We are having successes in the Middle East leveraging systems against this dangerous and evolving threat,' Stewart said on Thursday. "Directed energy lasers are really good against smaller type drones [in categories 1 and 2]."

The Army had already carried out four tests to counter swarm activity of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or drones and had another one coming up later this year, Stewart said. However, he cautioned that the threat would grow in scale and seriousness.

"You are going to see proliferation. ...Layered defenses are necessary. There is no magic bullet. You are never going to have enough," he said.

The US military was upgrading and adapting or "leveraging" its older Patriot anti-aircraft and anti-missile systems to defend against tactical ballistic missiles or TBMs, Stewart said. The Army was also leveraging acoustics technology to better detect where the threat was coming from, he said.

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US, China Should Reject Any Notion of Cold War - Embassy Minister

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WASHINGTON, April 19 (Sputnik) - The US and China should reject any notion of a cold war, Minister Jing Quan from the Chinese Embassy in Washington, D.C. said.

"We should resolutely, firmly reject the notion," Jing Quan said on Thursday.

In addition, Jing pointed out that the population of the US and China makes up nearly one-fourth of the whole world and that confrontation and conflict could have broader consequences.

Moreover, Jing underscored that the two countries should always have a channel of communication open.

"If China, US work together, we can bring more benefits to our two peoples. If China, US, work together, we can make the world safe. That's my strong belief," he stated.

Jing spoke at an event In celebration of the 82nd anniversary of the Shangrao Military and Civilian Rescue of the Doolittle Raiders, during which the diplomat also stressed the importance of remembering history and continuing to move forward side by side.

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White House Expresses Condolences Over Death of Kenyan Defense Chief Ogolla

WASHINGTON, April 19 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan in a press release expressed condolences to the Kenyan government for the death of Kenyan Defense Forces Chief Gen. Francis Ogolla in a recent helicopter crash.

Earlier in the day, Kenyan President William Ruto said a Kenyan military helicopter crashed in Elgeyo-Marakwet County, killing Ogolla and nine other military officers.

"I offer my deepest condolences to President William Ruto, the Kenyan Defence Forces, and the Kenyan people on the loss of Chief of Defence Forces General Francis Omondi Ogolla and several other passengers in a helicopter crash earlier today... We share Kenya's grief for this tragedy and offer our resolute support in the days ahead," the release said on Thursday.

Ogolla was a valuable partner in Kenyan-US relations, including on efforts to combat terrorist threats from al-Shabaab to leading efforts to strengthen regional cooperation across a range of domains, Sullivan added.

Sullivan noted that Ogolla received pilot training in the United States and developed strong relationships with US diplomatic and defense leaders, including Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, US Ambassador to Kenya Meg Whitman, and US Africa Command Commander Gen. Michael Langley.

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Palestine Will Not Cede Efforts to Become UN Member State Despite UNCS Vote - Ambassador

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UNITED NATIONS, April 19 (Sputnik) - Palestine will one day acquire full membership within the United Nations, Palestinian Ambassador to the UN Riyad Mansour said.

"The fact that this resolution did not pass will not break our will and it will not defeat our determination. We will not stop our efforts. The state of Palestine is inevitable, it is real," Mansour told the Council members, following the voting on Palestinian full membership within the UN on Thursday.

Earlier, the US Mission to the UN cast a veto, blocking Palestine's full membership within the organization. Russian Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said that the US was trying to change the course of history and was isolated in its actions.

Earlier in April, Palestine officially asked the UN Security Council to consider its request for full membership in the UN. The request was supported by the Arab Group, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Non-Aligned Movement.

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US Govt. OKs Sale of 1940s Design Plane to Serve Antarctic Bases - Security Agency

WASHINGTON, April 19 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has approved the possible sale to Argentina of a light cargo aircraft modeled on the famous Douglas C-47 or DC-3 of the 1940s and World War II vintage to supply its bases in Antarctica, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) announced in a press release.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Argentina of Basler BT-67 Aircraft and related elements of logistics and program support for an estimated cost of $143 million," the release said on Thursday.

The Defense Security Cooperation Agency delivered the required certification notifying Congress of the possible sale on Thursday, the release noted.

"The proposed sale will improve Argentina's capability to meet current and future threats by providing additional capacity for airdrop and airlift operations to service Antarctica during the winter season," the DSCA explained.

The Basler BT-67 is a cargo and general service two-engined aircraft manufactured by Basler Turbo Conversions of Oshkosh, Wisconsin and it is a remanufactured and modified DC-3, according to published reports.

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US House Panel Says Introduced Base Legislation for FY2025 Defense Authorization Bill

WASHINGTON, April 19 (Sputnik) - The US House Armed Services Committee introduced the Servicemember Quality of Life Improvement Act as a base text for the fiscal year (FY) 2025

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National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), the panel said in a statement via the social media platform X.

"The Servicemember Quality of Life Improvement Act will serve as the foundation for everything we do in the FY25 NDAA," the statement said on Thursday.

The NDAA is an annual piece of legislation used to authorize Defense Department funding levels and policies.

The Servicemember Quality of Life Improvement Act increases basic pay for junior enlisted servicemembers by 15%, requires the Defense Department to reevaluate the basic allowance for subsistence and expands eligibility for the basic needs allowance, the panel said.

The bill also requires the Defense Department to reevaluate the calculation of cost of living allowances, the panel said.

Additionally, the bill amends US law to make pay for childcare staff at Defense Department facilities competitive with their private sector counterparts, expands benefits to childcare staff at Defense Department facilities and expands access to childcare for military spouses who are seeking employment, the panel said.

The bill increases access to specialty medical providers for servicemembers and ensures military families receive timely access to mental health care, the panel also added.

The FY2024 NDAA supported more than $880 billion in national defense funding.

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'Patience'- The Fed's New Song As Policy-Makers Defer Rate Cuts On Inflation Wait-And-See

WASHINGTON, April 19 (Sputnik) - It's heard all the time on Wall Street now and it's vexing out the market's biggest bulls: The Federal Reserve's "Patience" song is getting louder by the day, with more policymakers at the central bank getting into the chorus on the need to delay rate cuts until inflation comes under better control.

The latest to strike the wait-and-see chord on inflation/rates were Atlanta Fed President Raphael Bostic and his colleague John Williams, who heads the New York division of the central bank.

Both suggested on Thursday that as long as consumer prices and jobs and wage growth don't move down meaningfully, they were comfortable with rates being where they are.

"I'm comfortable being patient," Bostic said at a banking event in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

His remarks came after Kansas City Fed President Jeff Schmid said on Friday that instead of preemptively adjusting rates, he "would prefer to be patient and wait."

On Tuesday, Fed Chairman Jerome Powell said recent data has not been in favor at all of rate cuts "and it is likely to take longer than expected to achieve that confidence".

All four referenced their comments to inflation being well above the Fed's targets — something Wall Street is painfully aware of, even as those betting on higher stock prices are hopeful of the central bank doing at least two rate cuts of 25 basis points each before the end of the year, if not the six it originally telegraphed.

"Investors are growing increasingly apprehensive about the rising yields on benchmark

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government bonds, as the possibility of a June rate cut by the Fed diminishes," Fawad Razaqzada, a London-based analyst at StoneX, said in a commentary to clients shared with Sputnik. "Uncertainty now looms over the likelihood of even receiving a 50 basis point cut by December."

Wall Street's leading stocks indicator, the S&P 500, closed lower on Thursday for a fifth straight day, marking its longest losing streak since October, as the US Treasury's benchmark 10-year note returned a higher yield for a third time in four days, nearing a six-month peak.

Inflation hit a four-decade high in the aftermath of the 2020 coronavirus breakout, with consumer prices growing as much as 9.1% in the year to June 2022.

In response, the Fed hiked rates 11 times between March 2022 and July 2023. That brought official lending 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.

While the Fed action has chopped annual inflation by more than half — the US Consumer Price Index rose just 3.5% in the year to March — the central bank just can't seem to reach its sweet spot of 2% on this.

The central bank's next decision on rates is on May 1 — an event that Wall Street has written off as academic.

"Right now … our stance is I think a restrictive stance [that] will slow the economy down and eventually get us to 2%," Bostic said. But he added that he was "not in a mad-dash hurry to get there if all these other good things are happening" — a reference to healthy jobs and other data that were holding up the economy.

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

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 contrast, the fight against inflation — reaching the 2% target precisely — has been excruciatingly slow.

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US Says Vetoing Resolution on Palestine UN Bid Not Reflective of Its Support for Statehood

UNITED NATIONS, April 19 (Sputnik) - The United States vetoing a proposed resolution on Palestine becoming a full member in the United Nations does not reflect Washington's position in support of Palestinian statehood, US Deputy Ambassador to the world body Robert Wood said.

"Again, the United States continues to strongly support a two state solution. This vote does not reflect opposition to Palestinian statehood, but instead, acknowledgment that it will only come from direct negotiations between the parties," Wood said after vetoing the draft resolution at the UN Security Council on Thursday.

The central focus of United States policy has been to promote normalization of relations

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between Israelis and Palestinians as well as normalization in the region, Wood added.
Earlier on Thursday, the UN Security Council convened to discuss and vote on the proposed resolution on Palestine's full membership in the United Nations. The United States, which is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, cast a veto against adopting the resolution.
On Tuesday, the Arab Group, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Non-Aligned Movement sent a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres expressing support for Palestine's bid to become a full member of the United Nations. 140 countries have so far recognized the state of Palestine.

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US Tried to Stop Course of History by Vetoing Resolution on Palestine Membership in UN

UNITED NATIONS, April 19 (Sputnik) - The United States cast a veto against the proposed resolution on Palestine's full membership in the United Nations is a hopeless attempt to change the course of history, Russian Ambassador to the world body Vassily Nebenzia said.
"Today's use of the veto by the US delegation is a hopeless attempt to stop the inevitable course of history. The results of the vote, where Washington was practically in complete isolation, speak for themselves," Nebenzia said after the vote at the UN Security Council on Thursday.
However, history will not forgive the United States for its actions, Nebenzia added.
Earlier on Thursday, the UN Security Council convened and discussed the proposed resolution on Palestine's full membership in the United Nations. The United States, which is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, cast a veto against adopting the proposed resolution.

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Parties Select 12 Jurors in Trump Hush Money Trial - Reports

WASHINGTON, April 19 (Sputnik) - US prosecutors and the defense attorneys for former President Donald Trump have finally selected the 12 jurors and one alternate in the so-called "hush money" case, CNN reported from the courtroom in New York.
Jury selection began on the first day of Trump's trial on Monday and continued until Thursday evening, with the parties in the case still having to select and swear in the remaining five alternates.
On Thursday, the parties agreed on selecting as jurors a retired wealth manager, a speech therapist, a retail employee and a physical therapist among others. The only alternate juror selected so far is an analyst for an asset management company, the report said.
The court will spend the fourth day of the trial on Friday selecting the other five alternate jurors
On Monday, Trump arrived at court to face his first day of trial in the case involving alleged

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hush money he paid via his attorney Michael Cohen to pornography actress Stormy Daniels and to other persons from August 2015 to December 2017.
Last year, Trump pleaded not guilty on all 34 counts of falsifying business records in connection with hush money.

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US Vetoes Palestine's Request for Full UN Membership - Correspondent

UNITED NATIONS, April 19 (Sputnik) - The United States on Thursday vetoed Palestine's request for full membership at the United Nations during a vote at the UN Security Council, a Sputnik correspondent reported.
Palestine has had observer status at the world body since 2012.
Earlier in April, amid the ongoing Israeli war on Gaza, Palestine sent a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres seeking renewed consideration of its membership application, which was first submitted on September 23, 2011.
The US has long opposed Palestine's effort to gain UN membership, saying that it should only be recognized as a state and join the world body after concluding a negotiated peace deal with Israel.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, April 19 (Sputnik) -

MIDDLE EAST TENSIONS
* Palestine has urged the UN Security Council to swiftly intervene and take the required measures to end Israel’s military operation in Gaza and ensure its withdrawal from the enclave, Special Representative of the President Ziad Abu Amr said on Thursday.
* The United States will vote against the proposed UN Security Council resolution for Palestine's full membership in the United Nations, US State Department deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel said.
* Russia will soon revert to the issue of Israel not implementing the UN Security Council resolution on Gaza and the possibility of applying sanctions on Israel, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said.
* UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that there has been "perilous escalation" in rhetoric and actions in the Middle East and cautioned that a single miscalculation could lead to a devastating full blow conflict.

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SANCTIONS AGAINST IRAN

* The United States has imposed new Iran-related sanctions on 16 individuals and two entities, targeting the country's UAV program, steel and automobile industries in response to Tehran's retaliatory strike on Israel over the weekend, the US Department of the Treasury said on Thursday.

* The United Kingdom added the general staff of the Iranian armed forces and the navy of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to its sanctions list, according to the updated document.

* The European Union has decided to expand sanctions against Iran and target the drone industry, among other measures, French President Emmanuel Macron said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* The Ukrainian armed forces have been using multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) against the city of Tokmak in the Zaporizhzhia Region, Vladimir Rogov, a senior official at the regional administration, said on Thursday.

* There will be no conditions for inviting Ukraine to NATO during the upcoming summit of the alliance in Washington, NATO Deputy Secretary-General Mircea Geoana said.

* NATO allies are able to deliver six Patriot air defense systems to Ukraine, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said.

* The Russian military destroyed the control point of the "North" operational command of the Ukrainian armed forces, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

* The draft US aid package to Ukraine is de facto about provoking Kiev to "fight to the last Ukrainian", Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

WESTERN RESTRICTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

* The EU leaders believe that further tariffs should be imposed on imports of certain Russian and Belarusian agriculture products into the European Union, the European Council said in its summit conclusions published on Thursday.

* All European Union member states support strengthening sanctions against Russia, French President Emmanuel Macron said.

* The G7 plan to seize frozen Russian assets to aid Ukraine was not discussed at a G20 finance ministers and central bank governors meeting in Washington, Brazilian Finance Minister Fernando Haddad said.

ARGENTINA-NATO PARTNERSHIP

* Argentina wants to become NATO's global partner and has submitted a corresponding request, Defense Minister Luis Alfonso Petri said on Thursday.

* NATO welcomes Argentina's request to become the alliance's global partner, Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoana said.

RUSSIAN CITIZENS DETAINED IN GERMANY

* Moscow has no information about the alleged detention in Germany of two people of Russian origin suspected of working for the Russian security services, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Thursday.

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* The German Foreign Ministry has summoned Russian Ambassador in Berlin Sergey Nechaev in connection with the detention in Bavaria of two alleged Russian spies, German newspaper Bild reported, citing sources.

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Israel Agrees to Take Into Account US Concerns Over Possible Rafah Actions - White House

WASHINGTON, April 18 (Sputnik) - Senior US and Israeli officials met to discuss Iran's recent retaliatory attack on the Jewish state and the Israeli delegation agreed to take into account the United States' concerns over the possible military operations in Rafah, the White House said on Thursday.

"The two sides agreed on the shared objective to see Hamas defeated in Rafah. US participants expressed concerns with various courses of action in Rafah, and Israeli participants agreed to take these concerns into account and to have further follow up discussions between experts, overseen by the SCG [US-Israel Strategic Consultative Group]," the White House said in a statement.

The United States was represented by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, and Israel by Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer and National Security Advisor Tzachi Hanegbi, the statement said.

The discussion began in a small group format to discuss Iran's retaliatory strike as well as the efforts to further enhance Israel’s defense through advanced capabilities, the statement also said.

Sullivan briefed his Israeli counterparts on the new US sanctions and other measures taken against Iran, the statement added.

On Monday, US media reported that Israel postponed its plans for a ground operation in Rafah while it assesses the security situation with Iran following Tehran's retaliatory attack on Saturday.

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US Will Try to Secure Saudi-Israel Normalization Deal in Coming Months - Reports

WASHINGTON, April 18 (Sputnik) - The United States is hoping that in the coming months it will be able to broker a deal to normalize ties between Saudi Arabia and Israel, the Wall Street Journal reported on Thursday, citing US and Saudi officials.

The Biden administration will exert pressure on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to accept a new commitment to Palestinian statehood in exchange for a normalization deal with Saudi Arabia, the report said.

The United States will offer Saudi Arabia a more formal bilateral defense relationship,

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assistance in acquiring civil nuclear power and a renewed push for a Palestinian state in an effort to broker the deal with Israel.

The United States and Saudi officials are in the final stages of negotiating this proposed package.

US officials believe that Israel's security can be enhanced through closer integration with Saudi Arabia, according to the report.

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CIA Director Says Ukraine Could Lose on Battlefield by End of 2024

WASHINGTON, April 18 (Sputnik) - Ukraine could lose to Russia on the battlefield by the end of 2024 if the US Congress does not provide more aid to the regime in Kiev, CIA Director William Burns said on Thursday

"There is a very real risk that the Ukrainians could lose on the battlefield by the end of 2024, or at least put [Russian President Vladimir Putin] in a position where he could essentially dictate the terms of a political settlement," Burns said during an event at the George W. Bush Presidential Center.

However, further military assistance from the US Congress could enable Ukraine to hold out through 2024, Burns said.

The US House of Representatives is considering a bill this week with $60.84 billion in Ukraine-related funding, as part of a broader set of legislation to aid Ukraine, Israel, and Taiwan.

Earlier on Thursday, US House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul said that Ukraine has between two weeks and one month before Russia "takes over" the country.

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Trump Calls on European Nations to Boost Spending for Ukraine Aid - Statement

WASHINGTON, April 18 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump on Wednesday called on European nations to immediately boost their spending for aid to Ukraine and match the United States' contributions.

"Why can’t Europe equalize or match the money put in by the United States of America in order to help a Country in desperate need? As everyone agrees, Ukrainian Survival and Strength should be much more important to Europe than to us, but it is also important to us! Get moving Europe!" Trump said.

Trump reiterated that the conflict in Ukraine would have never happened if he were still in the White House.

On Wednesday, Trump met with Polish President Andrzej Duda and discussed matters related to Russia's special military operation in Ukraine as well as Duda's proposal for NATO countries

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to increase defense spending to 3% of GDP.
The US House of Representatives is expected to vote on a $60 billion Ukraine aid bill on Saturday.

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Austin to Discuss Support for Ukraine With NATO Counterparts April 19 - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, April 18 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin will join a virtual NATO-Ukraine Council meeting on Friday to discuss Kiev's urgent needs amid the ongoing conflict with Russia, Defense Department spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Thursday.
"Tomorrow, Secretary Austin will participate in a virtual NATO-Ukraine Council meeting with fellow NATO Defense ministers," Ryder said during a press briefing. "The Secretary and his fellow defense ministers will discuss the international effort to meet Ukraine's urgent needs to include air defense and artillery."
Ryder added that Austin and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Charles Brown Jr. will host the Ukraine Defense Contact Group virtually on April 26.
On Wednesday, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg announced that the NATO-Ukraine Council will convene on April 19 at the request of Volodymyr Zelenskyy to address the urgent need for more support to Ukraine.
Western countries have been providing military and financial aid to Kiev since the start of Russia's military operation in Ukraine in February 2022. The Kremlin has consistently warned against continued arms deliveries to Kiev, saying it would lead to further escalation of the conflict. In April 2022, Russia sent a diplomatic note to all NATO countries on the issue of arms supplies to Ukraine. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov warned that any cargo containing weapons for Ukraine would become a legitimate target for Russia.

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Chad Threatens to End Agreement Governing US Military Presence in Country - Reports

WASHINGTON, April 18 (Sputnik) - The Chadian government sent a letter to the US defense attache last week, threatening to cancel an agreement regarding the United States' military presence in Chad, CNN reported on Thursday.
Chad threatened to end the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with the United States, which governs how US military forces can operate in the country, the report said, citing four US sources.
The letter ordered the United States to remove personnel from the French base in N'Djamena, although it did not explicitly demand the US military to leave Chad.

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Chad specifically raised the presence of a US Special Operations Task Force at the base, but all US military personnel in Chad are located in N'Djamena.

A US official reportedly said that there are fewer than 100 US troops in Chad. While Chad did not send the letter through official diplomatic channels, that could be a negotiating tactic by N'Djamena to secure a better agreement.

The threat to end the agreement caught US officials off guard as Chad could be attempting to replicate the actions of Niger, which ended its agreement with the US military last month, according to the report.

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Los Angeles Police Investigating Alleged Battery Involving US Artist Ye - Reports

WASHINGTON, April 18 (Sputnik) - Police in Los Angeles are investigating an alleged battery incident involving US artist Ye, also known as Kanye West, NBC News reported on Thursday.

A Los Angeles Police Department spokesperson reportedly said that officers responded to an incident on Sunset Boulevard at approximately 12:30 a.m. (4:30 a.m. GMT) on Wednesday.

However, Ye had left the scene of the incident by the time officers arrived, the spokesperson said. Police took an incident report from the person who made claims against Ye, although further details have yet to be made public, according to the report.

The incident occurred as a result of someone allegedly battering and sexually assaulting Ye's wife, Bianca Censori, the report said, citing Ye's chief of staff, Milo Yiannopoulos.

"He put his hands under her dress, directly on her body, he grabbed her waist, he spun her around, and then he blew her kisses," Yiannopoulos said in a statement on the incident, as quoted in the report.

Ye garnered public attention in recent years for his presidential ambitions and a series of statements considered anti-Semitic by watchdog groups. In December, Ye publicly apologized to the Jewish community, claiming that he regrets any pain he may have caused.

Ye's music and fashion brand Yeezy appointed Russian designer and photographer Gosha Rubchinskiy as its head of design in December as well.

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Israel Must be Forced to Halt Military Adventurism on Iranian Interests – Foreign Minister

UNITED NATIONS, April 18 (Sputnik) – The Israeli Government must be compelled to halt any further military adventurism against Tehran's interests, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian told the UN Security Council (UNSC) on Thursday.

Earlier in the day, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that it was high time to end the "bloody cycle of retaliation" ongoing between Israel and Iran.

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"Mr. President, I emphasize again, Iran's legitimate defense and counter measures have been concluded. Therefore, the Israeli regime … must be compelled to stop any further military adventurism against our interests," Amir-Abdollahian said.

The Foreign Minister stressed that were the Israeli military to carry out operations attempting against Iran's sovereignty, Tehran would not hesitate to assert its right to self-defense by giving a "decisive and proper response" to Tel Aviv.

Amir-Abdollahian further urged the UNSC to force Israel into ceasing military operations in the Gaza Strip and emphasized Iran's commitment to the promotion of regional peace and stability.

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 (IRGC) said seven of its members had been killed in the attack, including two commanders. On April 2, the Syrian Health Ministry said that the attack had also killed four Syrians and injured 13 more.

On Saturday, Iran's IRGC launched over 300 drones and missiles at Israel in its first-ever direct attack on Israeli territory, according to Israel Defense Forces (IDF) data. IDF spokesman Daniel Hagari said that Israel had intercepted 99% of the aerial targets fired by Iran, including all drones.

Tel Aviv reportedly intends to retaliate against Tehran's strikes.

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Kennedy Family Endorses Joe Biden Over RFK Jr

WASHINGTON, April 18 (Sputnik) - The Kennedy family endorsed President Joe Biden in his 2024 reelection campaign during an event in Philadelphia on Thursday, in a marked shift away from Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s own presidential campaign.

"Nearly every single grandchild of John Kennedy supports Joe Biden. The Kennedy family endorses Joe Biden for President," Kerry Kennedy, a younger sister of Robert F. Kennedy Jr., said at the event.

Kennedy added that in her opinion Biden has championed the rights and freedoms that her father and uncles stood for, including equal justice, human rights, and freedom from fear.

RFK Jr. took to social media platform X to respond to the news of his family's endorsement of Biden, using the opportunity to vocalize his own campaign mission.

"I hear some of my family will be endorsing President Biden today. I am pleased they are politically active — it's a family tradition. We are divided in our opinions but united in our love for each other. I hold this as a possibility for America too," RFK Jr. wrote.

RFK has been vocal about his distaste for President Biden, saying in a recent CNN interview that the president has been a bigger threat to democracy than his major opponent, Donald Trump.

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

In February, US media reported that Democratic Party strategists are concerned about support

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for alternative candidates like Kennedy.

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No Discussion on G7 Plan to Seize Russian Assets at G20 Meeting - Brazilian Minister

WASHINGTON, April 18 (Sputnik) - The G7 plan to seize frozen Russian assets to aid Ukraine was not discussed at a G20 finance ministers and central bank governors meeting in Washington, Brazilian Finance Minister Fernando Haddad said on Thursday.

"We did not talk about it," Haddad told reporters.

Moscow has maintained that any attempt to confiscate its assets would violate international law. The Russian Foreign Ministry has condemned the freezing of Russian assets as outright theft.

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World Bank Says to Expand Health Services to 1.5 Billion People

WASHINGTON, April 18 (Sputnik) - The World Bank said on Thursday that it would expand a program providing affordable heath care services to 1.5 billion people by 2030.

"The World Bank Group today announced an ambitious plan to support countries in delivering quality, affordable health services to 1.5 billion people by 2030," the statement said.

The program would focus on expanding attention from maternal and child health to coverage throughout a person's lifetime. The World Bank also intends to expand operations to hard-to-reach areas, including remote villages, cities, and countries.

The bank will also work with governments to cut unnecessary fees and other financial barriers to health care, according to the statement.

World Bank President Ajay Banga stressed the importance of international cooperation on achieving this ambitious goal.

"It will require partners, a coalition of public and private sector, working together to expand access to health care services," he said.

The bank stressed that around 2 billion people in the world face severe financial hardship when paying for health services.

"Intertwined challenges, such as climate change, pandemics, conflicts, societal aging, and a projected shortfall of 10 million health-care workers by 2030, exacerbate the cycle of poverty and inequality," it added.

Financing provided by the World Bank's International Development Association will help bring health care workers into communities in the poorest countries where people may otherwise have no access to services, the statement said. In middle-income states, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development will deploy financing to incentivize government

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investments in health care, the statement said.

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US Will Vote 'No' on Proposed UNSC Resolution for Palestine Membership in UN - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, April 18 (Sputnik) - The United States will vote against the proposed UN Security Council resolution for Palestine's full membership in the United Nations, US State Department deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Thursday.

"The United States is voting 'No' on this proposed Security Council resolution," Patel said during a press briefing.

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UPDATE – US House Foreign Affairs Chief Says Collapse of Kharkiv Imminent

(Update: adds details in paras 3-4)

WASHINGTON, April 18 (Sputnik) - The Ukrainian-controlled city of Kharkiv is on the verge of collapse, US House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul said on Thursday.

"Looking at Ukraine, it's a dire situation. I talked to the ambassador yesterday. Kharkiv is on the verge of collapse — the second largest city in Ukraine — and the power grid could go out any day," McCaul said during a House Rules Committee hearing.

McCaul said that Ukraine has between two weeks and one month before Russia "takes over" the country.

The consequences of a Ukrainian collapse would be akin to the consequences of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, insofar as it sends a message of US weakness to the world, McCaul said.

The House Rules Committee hearing focused on a series of foreign aid bills backed by House Speaker Mike Johnson, which include billions of dollars in assistance for Ukraine, Israel and the Indo-Pacific region.

Both the Biden administration and the Ukrainian government have warned that Ukraine risks battlefield setbacks without further aid from the US Congress.

Earlier this week, Ukrainian Energy Minister German Galushchenko said that Ukraine's power generation capacity is suffering "huge" losses and is nearly depleted in Kharkiv due to infrastructural damage.

Russia launched its special military operation in Ukraine in February 2022. In October 2022, Russia ramped up strikes on Ukrainian infrastructure, including energy, defense, communications and military administration facilities, following an attack on the Crimean bridge, which was claimed by Ukraine's domestic intelligence agency.

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Schumer Says Will Meet With Ukrainian Prime Minister Shmyhal, Discuss Ukraine Aid

WASHINGTON, April 18 (Sputnik) - US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said on Thursday that he will meet with Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal to discuss further aid for Ukraine from the US Congress.

"This afternoon, it'll be my honor to meet with Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, who is here to push for more funding for Ukraine," Schumer said during remarks on the Senate floor.

Schumer said he will tell Shmyhal that the United States will not abandon Ukraine.

On Wednesday, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said that she discussed efforts to financially support Ukraine with Shmyhal. The Biden administration remains committed to providing military and economic aid to Ukraine, Yellen said.

The meetings come amid efforts by the US House of Representatives to pass legislation with $60.84 billion in Ukraine-related funding.

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Biden Talked to Xi About Chinese 'Unfair Trade Practices' Flooding Global Markets - Kirby

WASHINGTON, April 18 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden pointed out to Chinese President Xi Jinping during their latest telephone conversation that Beijing's alleged unfair trade practices have resulted in the flooding of the global markets with Chinese goods, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Thursday.

"The president [Biden] did talk to President Xi about unfair trade practices and the flooding in the global market of certain commodities that make it hard for American workers and families and businesses," Kirby said during a press briefing.

On Wednesday, Biden urged the Office of the United States Trade Representative to consider tripling the existing tariffs on steel and aluminum from China. Biden claimed that such action would not hurt his relations with Xi.

The Chinese Commerce Ministry responded by urging the United States to immediately lift the increased tariffs on steel and aluminum imports from China.

In 2018, then-US President Donald Trump placed tariffs of 25% on steel imports and 10% tariffs on aluminum imports, citing national security threats from foreign shipments. The tariffs remain in effect except for several nations, including Mexico.

The United States regularly accuses China of implementing non-market policies. Beijing maintains that it "firmly supports" the multilateral trading system and points to the US practice of "bullying" and imposing sanctions to suppress other countries' companies.

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China Calls on UNSC to Cast 'Favorable Vote' on Palestine's Adhesion to UN – Chinese Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, April 18 (Sputnik) – China calls on United Nations Security Council (UNCS) member states to cast a "favorable vote" in support of Palestine's accession to the international body as a full member, Chinese Permanent Representative to the UN Fu Cong said on Thursday.

"Palestine has requested renewed consideration of its application for full membership in the UN. China calls on all members of the Council [UNSC] to take a responsible attitude in light of history and cast a favorable vote this afternoon to support Palestine joining the UN family as a full member," Fu told the UNSC.

The Chinese Envoy said that while Israel has long fulfilled its sovereignty and statehood, the right for Palestine to self-determination has been disregarded. Full membership in the UN will be an important step toward the creation of an independent Palestinian state, he added.

Earlier on Thursday, the Maltese Mission, which holds the council's rotating presidency, informed that the UNSC is set to hold a vote on Palestine's full membership in the United Nations at 17:00 local time (21:00 GMT).

For the resolution to be adopted, at least nine Security Council members must vote in favor of it, with no vetoes from permanent members Russia, China, the US, Britain, or France. If passed, the draft would then advance to the UN General Assembly, where two-thirds of members must vote in favor of a state to be admitted as a full member of the United Nations.

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White House Has No Information on Condition of Gaza Hostages – Kirby

WASHINGTON, April 18 (Sputnik) – The White House admitted on Thursday that it does not have information on the current condition of any of the hostages believed to be held in Gaza by Hamas or other militant groups.

"We just don't have the ability to know the individual condition of any one hostage," said White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby, when asked about proof of life.

Kirby added that "we want them all back," regardless of whether or not the hostages would return alive or dead.

He also said that there was still a proposal "on the table" and urged Hamas to accept it.

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Canadian Trade Minister to Lead 'Team Canada' Delegation to South Korea – Ministry

WASHINGTON, April 18 (Sputnik) – Canada's Minister of Trade Mary Ng will lead a "Team Canada" trade mission to South Korea to explore investment opportunities in the Indo-Pacific region, the Canadian Foreign Ministry said on Thursday.

"As part of Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy, the Honourable Mary Ng, Minister of Export Promotion, International Trade and Economic Development, will lead the Team Canada Trade Mission to South Korea, from April 21 to 25, 2024," Global Affairs Canada (GAC) said in a statement.

The Minister will be accompanied by a large delegation comprised of 240 individuals representing over 160 Canadian businesses and organizations who will seek new investment opportunities in the Indo-Pacific region and the establishment of "meaningful connections" with regional business partners and clients, GAC added.

Throughout the visit, the business delegation will learn how the Canada-Korea Free Trade Agreement can benefit them, GAC said. The trade mission will also offer expansion opportunities to already existing Canadian companies in the country, it added.

Ng is further set to meet with her South Korean counterparts to advance more sustainable and inclusive trade that benefits everyone, GAC said.

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US Extradites Colombian From Chile for Kidnapping 2 US Soldiers - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, April 18 (Sputnik) - The US government has extradited a Colombian citizen from Chile and is charging him with kidnapping and assaulting two US soldiers serving in Colombia, the Justice Department announced on Thursday.

"A Colombian national was extradited from Chile to the United States [on Wednesday to face charges related to kidnapping and assaulting two US Army soldiers who were on temporary duty in Bogota, Colombia," the Justice Department said in a press release.

According to court documents, Pedro Jose Silva Ochoa and his co-conspirators targeted, incapacitated and kidnapped two US soldiers in Bogota in order to rob them of their valuables on March 5, 2020, the release said.

"Silva Ochoa is charged with kidnapping an internationally protected person, conspiracy to kidnap an internationally protected person, assaulting an internationally protected person, and conspiracy to assault an internationally protected person," the release added.

If Silva Ochoa is convicted, he faces a maximum penalty of life in a US federal penitentiary, according to the release.

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Russia to Raise Issue of Israel Sanctions for Failing to Implement UNSC Resolution on Gaza

UNITED NATIONS, April 18 (Sputnik) - Russia will soon revert to the issue of Israel not implementing the UN Security Council resolution on Gaza and the possibility of applying sanctions on Israel, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Thursday.

"If the resolution isn't implemented, the Security Council is within its rights to impose sanctions on those who violate and sabotage its decisions. We'll be reverting to this issue very soon," Nebenzia said during a meeting of the UN Security Council.

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US to Further Restrict Iran's Access to Low-Level Tech, Cooperation With Russia - Notice

WASHINGTON, April 18 (Sputnik) - The US Commerce Department will issue new export controls designed to further restrict Iran's access to so-called low-level technology and Tehran's cooperation with Russia, a notice in the Federal Register revealed on Thursday.

"Consistent with the US government's commitment to restrict Iran from obtaining any item that might contribute to its manufacture of missiles, including those used against Israel and Ukraine, this rule amends the EAR [Export Administration Regulations] to impose new controls restricting Iran's access to additional low-level technology, including items manufactured outside the United States that are produced using US technology," the notice said.

The new rule, which is set to be published in the US Federal Register on Monday, is being issued in light of Iran's retaliatory attack on Israel and its military support for Russia, the notice added.

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Asia-Pacific Regional Economy Projected to Grow by 4.5% in 2024, 4.3% in 2025 - IMF

WASHINGTON, April 18 (Sputnik) - The Asia-Pacific regional economy is projected to grow by 4.5% this year and 4.3% in 2025, International Monetary Fund (IMF) Asia and Pacific Department Director Krishna Srinivasan said on Thursday.

"We now project the region to grow by 4.5 percent in 2024 - an upward revision of 0.3 percentage points relative to October," Srinivasan told reporters.

Such development would allow the Asia-Pacific region to contribute about 60% of global growth, Srinivasan said.

"The region is projected to grow by 4.3% in 2025," Srinivasan said.

With respect to major growth drivers, Srinivasan highlighted the IMF's expectations that investment in the public sector in China and India would play a significant role in economic

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development.
In other countries, robust private consumption will remain the main growth engine, Srinivasan added.

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US House Lawmakers Considering Dozens of Amendments to Ukraine, Israel Aid Bills

WASHINGTON, April 18 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives is considering dozens of amendments to the multi-billion-dollar foreign aid bills for Ukraine and Israel, including measures to conscript lawmakers who support the legislation into the Ukrainian military and to develop space lasers for US border security.
On Thursday, the US House Rules Committee held a hearing on the bills, to which lawmakers have proposed numerous amendments, prior to their consideration by the full House of Representatives.
US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene introduced an amendment to require all members of the US Congress who vote in favor of the Ukraine aid bill to conscript in the Ukrainian military.
"If you want to fund the endless foreign wars, you should have to go fight them," Greene said in a statement via the social media platform X.
Greene also introduced amendments to prohibit funding for Ukraine until it holds free and fair elections, stops persecuting Christians, closes all bio-laboratories, begins peace talks with Russia and turns over information related to Hunter Biden and the Ukrainian energy company Burisma.
US Congressman Andy Ogles introduced an amendment to prohibit the use of funds to arm, train or otherwise assist Ukraine's neo-Nazi Azov Battalion or any successor organization.
Greene also introduced amendments to the Israel aid bill to provide funding for the development of space laser technology and an Iron Dome air defense system for the use at the United States' southern border.

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Palestinian Representative Urges Swift UNSC Intervention to End Israel Operation in Gaza

UNITED NATIONS, April 18 (Sputnik) – Palestine urges the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to swiftly intervene and take the required measures to end Israel's operation in Gaza and ensure its withdrawal from the enclave, Special Representative of the President Ziad Abu Amr said on Thursday.
"Your August Council. We call on you today, more than ever, to swiftly intervene and take the necessary measures to compel Israel to put an end to its aggression, to allow the delivery of humanitarian assistance to a starving people, to immediately withdraw from the Gaza Strip, to

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comply with international law and the resolutions of international legitimacy," Abu Amr told the UNSC.

The Special Representative added that the international community could not stand idly while Israel violates international law and enjoys impunity for its actions.

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US Imposes New Iran-Related Sanctions Targeting UAV Program, Steel Industry - Treasury

(Updates with more details, background in paras 4-8)

WASHINGTON, April 18 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed new Iran-related sanctions on 16 individuals and two entities, targeting the country's unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) program, steel and automobile industries in response to Tehran's retaliatory strike on Israel over the weekend, the US Department of the Treasury said in a release on Thursday.

"Today, in response to Iran's unprecedented attack on Israel on April 13, the Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) is targeting 16 individuals and two entities enabling Iran's UAV production, including engine types that power Iran's Shahed variant UAVs, which were used in the April 13 attack," the release said.

President Joe Biden said in a statement that he directed his team to continue imposing sanctions on Iran to further degrade the country's military industries.

The Treasury Department also designated five companies that provide component materials for steel production to Iran's Khuzestan Steel Company (KSC) and make purchases from it, including the Dubai-based PSI DMCC; Germany-based Kara Industrial Trading GmbH; United Kingdom-based Good Run Limited; Hong-Kong-based Magellanic Phoenix Marine and Trading Limited; and Turkey-based HSF Dis Ticaret Limited Sirketi, the release said.

Regarding Iran's UAV sector, the new sanctions target executives of two major engine manufacturing companies - Oje Parvaz Mado Nafar Company and Aseman Pishraneh Co. Ltd - Mohammad Sadegh Abutalebi, Ali Asghar Abutalebi and Ali Habibi Najafi, the release said.

The Treasury Department also designated Abbas Sartaji, Mehdi Ghaffari Naghneh, Hasan Arambunezhad, Hadi Jamshidi Zavaraki, Reza Nahar Dani, and Abolfazl Ramazanzadeh Moshkani for allegedly being embers of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force involved in UAV testing, development and supply, the release said.

In addition, the sanctions target executives and employees of Kimia Part Sivan Company - an alleged UAV arm of IRGC-QF - including Ali Reza Nurian Ramsheh, Mohsen Sayyadi Turanlu, Mohammad Sadegh Fatehi, Hamid Hajji Ebrahimi Forushani, and Ali Asghar Al-Taf, the release said.

With respect to Iran's automobile industry sector, the Treasury Department imposed sanctions on the subsidiary companies of Bahman Group, including heavy truck manufacturer Bahman Diesel Co.; motorcycle manufacturer Iran Docharkh Co.; and Iran Chassis Manufacturing Co., the release added.

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US House Foreign Affairs Chief Says Collapse of Kharkiv Imminent

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"Looking at Ukraine, it's a dire situation. I talked to the ambassador yesterday. Kharkiv is on the verge of collapse — the second largest city in Ukraine — and the power grid could go out any day," McCaul said during a House Rules Committee hearing.

The House Rules Committee hearing focused on a series of foreign aid bills backed by House Speaker Mike Johnson, which include billions of dollars in assistance for Ukraine, Israel and the Indo-Pacific region.

Both the Biden administration and the Ukrainian government have warned that Ukraine risks battlefield setbacks without further aid from the US Congress.

Earlier this week, Ukrainian Energy Minister German Galushchenko said that Ukraine's power generation capacity is suffering "huge" losses and is nearly depleted in Kharkiv due to infrastructural damage.

Russia launched its special military operation in Ukraine in February 2022. In October 2022, Russia ramped up strikes on Ukrainian infrastructure, including energy, defense, communications and military administration facilities, following an attack on the Crimean bridge, which was claimed by Ukraine's domestic intelligence agency.

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UN Chief Warns of Escalation in Middle East as 1 Miscalculation Can Devastate World

UNITED NATIONS, April 18 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Thursday that there has been "perilous escalation" in rhetoric and actions in the Middle East and cautioned that a single miscalculation could lead to a devastating full blow conflict.

"Recent days have seen a perilous escalation - in words and deeds. One miscalculation, one miscommunication, one mistake, could lead to the unthinkable - a full-scale regional conflict that would be devastating for all involved - and for the rest of the world," Guterres said.

All parties must exercise maximum restraint in such a tense atmosphere, Guterres added.

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Guterres Says High Time to End 'Bloody Cycle of Retaliation' Between Israel, Iran

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UNITED NATIONS, April 18 (Sputnik) – UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Thursday that it was high time to stop the "bloody cycle of retaliation" between Israel and Iran.

"It is high time to end the bloody cycle of retaliation. It is time to stop. The international community must work together to prevent any actions that could push the entire Middle East over the edge, with a devastating impact on civilians," Guterres told the UN Security Council.

The secretary general condemned both the April 1 deadly attack on the Iranian consulate in Damascus and Tehran's retaliation against Israel over the weekend.

On Saturday, Iran launched hundreds of drones and missiles toward military targets in Israel in retaliation for Israel's April 1 strikes on its consulate in Damascus that killed seven Iranian nationals, including two IRGC generals, and six Syrian nationals.

Most of the aerial targets were intercepted by Israel's air defense systems as well as US, UK, French and Jordanian forces.

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Security Council to Vote on Palestine's Full UN Membership This Afternoon - President

UNITED NATIONS, April 18 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council will vote on Palestine's full membership in the United Nations at 17:00 local time (21:00 GMT), the Maltese Mission, which holds the council's rotating presidency said in a post on X on Thursday.

The resolution would need at least nine Security Council members must vote in favor of it, with no vetoes from permanent members Russia, China the US, Britain or France. If passed, the draft would then advance to the UN General Assembly, where two-thirds of members must vote in favor for a state to be admitted as full member of the United Nations.

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US Benefits From Rise in Energy Prices, Unlike Europe - IMF Chief

WASHINGTON, April 18 (Sputnik) – A recent spike in energy prices benefited the US economy but harmed Europe, International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Thursday.

"[The] US has benefited from more favorable conditions in terms of energy prices, something that has been quite a serious factor for Europe, not a positive factor for Europe," Georgieva told reporters, when asked why the US economy is doing better than Europe's.

An influx of foreign labor force also helps the US economy, despite creating domestic migration issues, the IMF chief added.

"Not everybody who crosses the border adds positively to the economy, but that labor supply also gave the US another comparative advantage," she stated.

Georgieva pointed out that the influx of labor force allows salaries to stay at their current levels

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because there is no strong pressure on wage growth due to the lack of workers.
Among other factors that help the US economy, the IMF chief highlighted its focus on innovation. Europe still has work to do to unleash the power of innovation, Georgieva said.

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US Imposes New Iran-Related Sanctions Targeting UAV Program, Steel Industry - Treasury

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"Today, in response to Iran's unprecedented attack on Israel on April 13, the Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) is targeting 16 individuals and two entities enabling Iran's UAV production, including engine types that power Iran's Shahed variant UAVs, which were used in the April 13 attack," the department said in a press release.
US President Joe Biden said in a statement that he has directed his team to continue imposing sanctions on Iran to further degrade its military industries.

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US House Releases Bill on Transfer of Russian Assets, Iran Sanctions, TikTok Divestiture

WASHINGTON, April 18 (Sputnik) - The US House on Rules has released the fourth and final bill as part of the Republican national security supplemental package that includes measures to transfer frozen Russian sovereign assets to Ukraine, sanctions on Iran, as well as a push for TikTok divestiture.
The legislation dubbed the "21st Century Peace through Strength Act" was introduced by House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul on Wednesday night.
The package includes multiple pieces of legislation including the REPO Act that would empower the executive branch to transfer frozen Russian assets to Kiev.
It also includes provisions demanding that TikTok divest from Chinese owner ByteDance or face a ban.
In addition, the legislation will declare international fentanyl trafficking a national emergency and direct the Treasury Department to sanction transnational criminal organizations and key members of drug cartels involved the trafficking.
The US president will also be required to impose sanctions on Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Al-Asqa Martyr's Brigade, the Lion's Den and their supporters.
The legislation will also seek sanctions on ports and refineries that receive and process Iranian oil, as well as more export restrictions against the Islamic Republic to curb its missile and drone

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programs.

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US, Israel to Hold Virtual Meeting on Rafah Plans Thursday - Reports

WASHINGTON, April 18 (Sputnik) – The United States and Israel will hold a high-level virtual meeting on Thursday regarding Israel's operational plans for Rafah, Axios reported Thursday, citing two US officials.

White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan will lead the US side and Israeli Minister for Strategic Affairs Ron Dermer and National Security Adviser Tzachi Hanegbi will lead Israel's delegation.

An in-person meeting in Washington this week was postponed due to Iran's retaliatory strikes on Israel over the weekend in response to the April 1 attack on its consulate in Damascus.

The officials also denied that the White House will permit Israel to launch a military operation in Rafah if it agrees not to attack Iran again and perpetuate a cycle of retaliations.

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US FCC Says Investigating Reports of 911 Service Outages

WASHINGTON, April 18 (Sputnik) - The US Federal Communications Commission (FCC) said Thursday it was investigating problems related to the emergency 911 phone service after law enforcement agencies reported outages in at least four states across the United States.

"We are aware of reports of 911-related outages and we are currently investigating," the FCC said in a social media post on X.

Local law enforcement agencies said earlier that the outages had affected the whole of South Dakota and parts of Nebraska, Nevada and Texas.

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