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4/29/24 Monday

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Potential Security Agreement Between US and Ukraine Likely 'Obliges Nothing'

On Monday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr said that he has begun negotiations with Washington on a long-term bilateral security cooperation deal. Ukraine has already signed several 10-year security agreements with other NATO countries but none included a mutual defense pact.

The potential security guarantee between the US and Ukraine will likely reflect the security agreements signed by European NATO nations, Nicolai Petro, a professor of political science at the University of Rhode Island told Sputnik's The Critical Hour on Tuesday.

"Ukraine has signed a number of such agreements with European countries, and they basically oblige those countries to [do] nothing, to just look sympathetically at Ukraine's needs for the next 10 years," Petro explained. "It's likely that the US agreement will do the same."

With Russia advancing on the battlefield, there is a question of how much of Ukraine will still exist for the Americans and Europeans to defend in ten years' time.

"The countries involved are showing that they intended - intended - to make a long-term security commitment. But, if Kiev falls, well, the details weren't worked out," Petro explained.

However, if peace talks did begin, there "would be something to negotiate"for the Kiev regime, and Petro speculated that the agreements are there to help the leaders involved "save face."

"Zelensky could now sell the idea of negotiating a ceasefire as a victory because 'look what we've already gained,'" Petro said, adding that full "NATO membership is really not" in the cards for Ukraine.

While leaders in Washington and Brussels have continued to insist Ukraine's membership in NATO is "inevitable" no plan has been presented and In July of last year a communique released on the first day of the NATO leaders summit, included a caveat that Ukraine still needs to make further reforms and will only be invited after "allies agree and conditions are met."

The decision reportedly left Zelensky "fuming."

With NATO membership off the table for the foreseeable future, Petro suggests Zelensky should use the security agreements to sell the idea of peace to his people.

"If I were in Kiev reading the tea leaves, I would take what I could. In other words, I would use these agreements and wave them around and suggest to my people… look 'this is what I've accomplished, and now I'm ready to go and talk to Moscow because we have these concrete security guarantees from X and X and X and X,'" Petro explained.

Ukrainian elections were scheduled to take place on May 31, but Zelensky canceled them, citing an amendment to the Ukrainian constitution that was adopted in 2014, signed by then Acting (and unelected) Ukrainian President Oleksandr Turchynov during the height of the Maidan coup.

While Zelensky's term would normally end on May 21, Petro does not think this will prevent Russia from negotiating with whoever is "the leadership in Ukraine" but added that it will "escalate the tensions within Ukraine itself."

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Macron's Tough Talk on European 'Sovereignty' Just Election Fodder

French President Emmanuel Macron has over the last few weeks and months been advocating for Europe to take an active role in the continent's defense to ensure it never becomes a "vassal state" of the United States.

The tough talk from Macron is likely designed to appeal to French and European voters more than achieve his stated goals of a European army, Mark Slelboda, a security and international relations expert, told Sputnik's Fault Lines on Monday.

"He is simply doing a bit of cynical electioneering. His people have determined that words like 'sovereignty' play very well among potential voters of this upcoming European parliamentary election season, and he's playing to that. That's all there is to this, nothing else."

France has long advocated for a European-led military force, rather than depending heavily on US-led NATO.

"Our Europe today is mortal and it can die," said Macron during a speech at the Sorbonne University in Paris last week. "We need to build this strategic concept of a credible European defense for ourselves."

The French president later added that Europe "must show that it is never a vassal of the United States and that it also knows how to talk to all the other regions of the world."

In other interviews, Macron has also said he wants an "open-debate" on how France's nuclear arms can be used to protect the EU. France is the only nation in the EU that holds its nuclear weapons, though some nations do have US weapons on their soil.

To his credit, Macron has been consistent about his desire for Europe to become more independent militarily from the United States, advocating for it fairly consistently throughout his term in office, but very little has been done in that direction and there is little reason to believe it will now.

"I look at actions more than words," Sleboda explained. "And, sorry, Macron, we all know you've got 'US vassal' tattooed on your buttocks. You can't deny it."

Macron's recent spate of comments came as the conservative National Rally party holds a large lead, polling around 30% while Macron's Renaissance is languishing in the low teens and may even come in third as the leftist Socialist party is surging in the polls and nipping at the Renaissance's heels.

The National Rally has already called to dissolve parliament after Macron's government failed to get an immigration bill passed in December of last year. It is expected they will do so again if Macron and his allies suffer a major defeat in the elections.

The European Parliamentary elections are scheduled for June, but it may not be just French voters that Macron is attempting to appeal to.

"He is speaking to the European people as a European leader trying to get European parliamentarians elected who share his opinion rather than, say, the opinion of [Hungarian

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Prime Minister] Viktor Orban," who has called for the end of liberal hegemony in Europe, Sleboda explained, adding that he doesn't think the comments will matter much to voters in other EU countries.

Ultimately, the desire for a more independent Europe is based on fear of a second term for former US President Donald Trump who has had a frosty at best relationship with NATO. In February, Trump said during a rally that he "would not protect" NATO countries that have not met their defense spending targets.
"It is true that all the European [leaders] are... in fear of an upcoming potential Trump presidency part two," Sleboda explained. "This is a sequel that they definitely do not want to see."

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Macron has advocated for a European defense alliance to reduce reliance on US-led NATO and has called for an "open-debate" on how French nuclear weapons can be utilized to protect Europe.

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US Activists to Hold Solidarity Meeting to Commemorate Odessa Massacre in 2014

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) – Several groups of US human rights activists will hold a special solidarity meeting to commemorate the 10th anniversary of murdering of dozens of people in the Ukrainian city of Odessa, Odessa Solidarity Campaign (OSC) coordinator Phil Wilayto told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"To mark the 10th anniversary, the OSC is organizing a solidarity webinar with speakers from the US antiwar movement who have been to Odessa, Crimea and the Donbas," Wilayto said.

The activists will share their experience and will support the call for an international investigation of the massacre, he added.

On May 2, 2014, Ukrainian nationalists locked pro-federalism protesters in Odessa's Trade Unions House and set the building on fire. Almost 50 people died, and some 250 protesters were injured in clashes with the radicals, according to the United Nations.

Wilayto pointed out that the participants of the solidarity webinar will call for an end to all US military, financial and diplomatic support for the government of Ukraine.

The activist recalled that he was among international observers who attended the second-anniversary memorial in Odessa in 2016. The fascist forces were threatening the group, he said.

"Today, we are no longer in touch with our friends in Odessa. All the people we met there have either had to leave the country, have gone into hiding or have been arrested," he added.

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Wilayto stressed that today in Ukraine, no dissent or criticism of the government is allowed. "Any attempt at opposition is silenced either by the government or by the neo-Nazis working in the government's interests," he said.

The clashes in Odessa became one of the deadliest events during the Maidan and anti-Maidan demonstrations in Ukraine that started in late 2013. Moscow has repeatedly criticized Kiev's steps in the investigation of the deadly tragedy and urged the international community and human rights groups to probe the causes of the massacre.

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Americans Name Immigration as Top Issue for Third Consecutive Month – Poll

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) – More than a quarter of Americans say for the third consecutive month that the most important problem in the US is immigration, according to a Gallup poll released Tuesday.

The three-month trend of 27% marks the longest stretch in 24 years during which Americans have identified immigration as the top issue in the country.

The economy, government, and war on Iraq have typically held the top spot since Gallup began surveying the question on a monthly basis in 2001.

The poll found a sharp partisan divide on immigration, with 48% of Republicans naming it as the top issue, compared to 25% of independents and 8% of Democrats.

The poll was conducted from April 1-22.

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US Economic Confidence Slips for First Time Since October – Poll

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) – Americans' confidence in the US economy fell in April for the first time since October, according to a Gallup poll released Tuesday.

Gallup's Economic Confidence Index, which has a range of -100 to +100 points indicating Americans' overall assessment of the current and future economic conditions, fell to -29 in April.

Not only did it mark the first decline since October, but also the first time in five months that confidence levels did not improve.

Only 24% of American adults rated current economic conditions as "excellent" or "good," while 44% found them "poor."

In terms of economic outlook, 29% of Americans — a drop of four percentage points from March, said the economy was getting better, while 67% — an increase of four points from March —— said it was getting worse.

The poll was conducted from April 1-22, as inflation was on the rise and the stock market lost

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some of its recent gains.

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US, Ukrainian Officials Hold Talks on Long-Term Security Agreement - State Department

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) – Officials from the United States and Ukraine recently held talks on a long-term bilateral security agreement between the two sides, the State Department said in a statement on Tuesday.

"Building on the passage of the President's supplemental funding request, representatives from the Department of State, Department of Defense, and National Security Council spoke with Ukrainian counterparts to continue negotiations critical to long-term bilateral security arrangements," the statement said.

The talks also covered other commitments under the G7 Joint Declaration of Support to Ukraine, which was announced last July, it added.

Washington supports Ukraine's efforts to build its current and future force capabilities, rebuild its economy, and pursue integration into the Euro-Atlantic community, it added.

The US is among 32 countries that are pursuing long-term bilateral security arrangements with Ukraine. To date, nine of those countries have completed negotiations and signed such agreements, the State Department said.

The statement comes after Ukrainian government recently announced that it is in talks with the United States about a 10-year security agreement, which would include military, financial and political aid.

US lawmakers including Congressman Matt Gaetz criticized the announcement, saying the Biden administration wants taxpayers to continue funding Ukraine indefinitely.

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US, Ukrainian Officials Hold Talks on Long-Term Bilateral Security Arrangements - State Department

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Russia Supports Creating UN-Based Mechanisms to Fight Disinformation - Polyanskiy

UNITED NATIONS, April 30 (Sputnik) - Russia supports creating UN-based mechanisms to fight disinformation, however, the current Principles for Information Integrity initiative raises a lot of questions among the UN member states, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the world body Dmitry

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Polyanskiy said.

"Russia fully supports the creation of UN-based transparent mechanisms to combat disinformation," Polyanskiy said on Monday.

A positive example of such work is the successfully implemented "Verified" initiative, aimed at countering fake news in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Polyianskiy said.

However, the proposed new initiative of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres - UN Global Principles for Information Integrity (formerly the Code of Conduct on Digital Platforms) - raises many questions among member states, he said.

"In particular, we note the non-transparent nature of the work on the document, which, even in an interim version, was never presented after three rounds of consultations," Polyanskiy said.

If the United Nations Secretariat plans to release an initiative that will be followed by member states, then an in-depth, truly broad consultation is required, Polyanskiy said.

"Otherwise, you will end up with an inconsistent 'stillborn product,'" Polyanskiy added.

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The activist recalled that he was among international observers who attended the second-anniversary memorial in Odessa in 2016. The fascist forces were threatening the group, he said.

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Wilayto stressed that today in Ukraine, no dissent or criticism of the government is allowed. “Any attempt at opposition is silenced either by the government or by the neo-Nazis working in the government’s interests,” he said.

The clashes in Odessa became one of the deadliest events during the Maidan and anti-Maidan demonstrations in Ukraine that started in late 2013. Moscow has repeatedly criticized Kiev's steps in the investigation of the deadly tragedy and urged the international community and

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US Congress Drafting Bill Against ICC if Warrants Issued to Israeli Officials - Reports

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - US lawmakers are drafting legislation designed to retaliate against the International Criminal Court should it issue arrest warrants to senior Israeli officials over alleged war crimes in Gaza, Axios reported.

The report said on Monday that the legislation could include sanctions against certain ICC officials.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reportedly asked President Joe Biden to intervene to try to block any potential arrest warrants against Israeli officials.

Earlier in the day, the White House said the ICC has no jurisdiction and does not support its investigation.

Earlier on Monday, US media reported, citing an Israeli official familiar with the matter, that the ICC may issue arrest warrants for Netanyahu, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, and other senior officials as early as this week.

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ANALYSIS - US Forces Expulsion May Lead Toward Renewed Russian Influence Across Africa

WASHINGTON, April 27 (Sputnik) - Eroding US influence across Africa, highlighted by the demands of Niger and Chad that the US troops vacate major military bases, are giving Russia more influence on the continent than it has enjoyed in at least 35 years, US analysts told Sputnik.

Chad and Niger have demanded that US forces leave major air bases they have operated in their countries.

The government of Chad felt confident in demanding the evacuation of US forces precisely because their relations with Russia were so markedly improving already, California State University Emeritus Professor of Political Science Beau Grosscup said.

"[The call for US withdrawal was made] because they are shifting toward Russia. It is significant," Grosscup said.

These developments constitute a major boost to Russia's standing across Africa and give Moscow more influence on the continent that it has not had since the fall of the Soviet Union, Grosscup said.

However, the United States could not be ruled out as a continuing major factor and influence across Africa, he said.

"I doubt the United States is losing its footprints as it is expanding in other regions and Chad

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and Niger aren't major players," Grosscup added.

REACTIONS TO US MILITARY POWER IN AFRICA

Covert Action Magazine Managing Editor and military analyst Jeremy Kuzmarov assessed the recent moves in Chad and Niger as reactions against US military power in Africa and around the world that were rebounding to Russia's advantage.

"It is significant, yes. It reflects a growing backlash against US military power in Africa and a growing movement for African autonomy and independence," Kuzmarov said.

Across Africa, there had recently been numerous coups that were designed to remove corrupt leaders backed by the United States and the West and to expel US troops, he noted.

"Niger had a coup and the new government is forcing the closure of a huge US drone base at Agadez," Kuzmarov said.

The United States was trying to negotiate agreements with Ghana and the Ivory Coast to make up for the loss of the Chad base but it was not clear that those governments would give Washington what it wanted, he said.

"Generally, developments in Chad and Niger and elsewhere could have a ripple effect and inspire other countries to seek the removal of US bases," Kuzmarov said.

Russia, and also China, was the clear beneficiary of these developments, he said.

"Many African countries are turning more to Russia and China, which has built a lot of infrastructure and has helped improve people's quality of life in Africa," Kuzmarov said.

However, Kuzmarov too warned that US military forces were not about to evacuate Africa en masse.

"Still the United States still has a huge military presence in Africa, and this won't be eradicated overnight. America has a strong presence across the continent," Kuzmarov said.

Nevertheless, the consequences of the loss of the US military footprint in Africa would be very positive for the continent as an underlying US goal is to steal and exploit Africa's natural resources, he said.

"The US military presence has fueled great instability and terrorism. So, if the United States is forced to leave [Africa], terrorism would decline. Most terrorism is a response to foreign military occupation," Kuzmarov added.

STABILIZING INFLUENCE

Independent Institute Center for Peace and Liberty Director Ivan Eland agreed that the US government for the first time in nearly a quarter century was winding down its military presence in the Sahel region.

"The US presence across the Sahel is shrinking in four countries. But this area is not important for US security," Eland said.

Instead, Russia could step in to play a more successful stabilizing influence in the region and the fight against local Islamists can be done by Russia, he said.

US politicians and policymakers remained obsessed with the idea that the United States needed to compete with Russia all over the world, but this was an obsolete and untrue assumption - a leftover mindset from the Cold War, Eland said.

It was time for US policymakers to finally recognize that Russia had long been fighting Islamist extremists to protect their own people and therefore the United States should let them do so in the Sahel region too if they were willing to, Eland said.

"Why not let Russia help these nations combat the Islamists? The United States needs to

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marshal all resources and attention for East Asia," Eland added.
Russian military specialists have already arrived in Niger to provide combat training and deploy an air defense system in the country, the Nigerien state broadcaster RTN reported on April 12.

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US Navy Pays Raytheon $50Mln For New Ship Security Interdiction System - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - Raytheon has received an almost $50 million US Navy contract to manufacture the first production units of the Navy-Marine Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System Launcher, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.
"Raytheon Company [of] Tucson, Arizona, is awarded a $49,441,113 ...contract for the procurement of low-rate initial production units of the Navy-Marine Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System Launcher," the release said on Monday.
Work on the project will be carried out in Tucson, Arizona (15%); Mooresville, North Carolina (15%); and Kongsberg, Norway (70%), the Defense Department said.
The project is scheduled to last for three years and is expected to be completed by April 2027, the Defense Department said.
Marine Interdiction Systems are set up by the US Navy to ensure harbor security, according to published sources.

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Biden, Qatari Amir Discuss Hostage Release, Gaza Ceasefire - White House

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) — US President Joe Biden and Amir Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani of Qatar had a call on securing the release of hostages and implementing a ceasefire in Gaza, the White House said in a statement.
"President Biden spoke today with Amir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani of Qatar. The two leaders discussed the deal now on the table to secure the release of hostages together with an immediate and sustained ceasefire in Gaza," the statement said on Monday.
Biden said that the US, along with Egypt and Qatar, would ensure the deal's full implementation, urging Amir Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani to work on releasing hostages, which is the sole barrier to an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, the statement added.
Earlier today, the Palestinian movement Hamas was offered a 40-day ceasefire and the release of thousands of Palestinian prisoners in exchange for freeing Israeli hostages.
On October 7, 2023, Hamas launched a large-scale rocket attack against Israel and breached the border, attacking both civilian neighborhoods and military bases. Nearly 1,200 people in Israel were killed and some 240 others abducted during the attack. Israel launched retaliatory strikes, ordered a complete blockade of Gaza, and started a ground incursion into the

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Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages. Over 34,400 people have been killed so far by Israeli strikes in the Gaza Strip, according to local authorities.

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

In early April, a new round of the Israeli-Hamas talks started in the Egyptian capital of Cairo. The ceasefire proposal made at the talks provided for the release of 40 Israeli hostages in exchange for 900 Palestinian prisoners as a part of a three-stage plan adopted by international mediators. Hamas largely rejected the proposal, saying it would present its plan for a permanent end to the conflict in the region.

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US Army Extends Deal With Greek Firm Sielman For More Work on HAWK Missile - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - The Sielman Company in Volos, Greece, has received an almost $50 million contract extension from the US Army to continue working on the HAWK Missile System, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"Sielman [of] Volos, Greece, was awarded a $49,946,600 modification ...contract for the HAWK Missile System," the release said on Monday.

Work on the missile system will be carried out over the next five years with an estimated completion date of May 13, 2029, the Defense Department stated.

The US Army Contracting Command based at Redstone Arsenal, in the state of Alabama, will oversee work on the project as its contracting activity, the Defense Department said.

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Tucker Carlson Interviews Russian Philosopher Aleksandr Dugin

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - US journalist Tucker Carlson released an interview with Russian philosopher Aleksandr Dugin, whose daughter was murdered by Ukrainian special services.

"Aleksandr Dugin is the most famous political philosopher in Russia. His ideas are considered so dangerous, the Ukrainian government murdered his daughter and Amazon won't sell his books. We talked to him in Moscow," Carlson said via X on Monday.

In August 2022, Daria Dugina was killed in a car bombing attack, which the CIA reportedly linked to the Ukrainian government.

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Dugin himself is a scholar known for his work in sociology and political philosophy. Commentators have speculated about Dugin's influence on the Russian government, although he has no official ties to the Kremlin.

Carlson and Dugin discussed topics including the nature of liberalism and shifting attitudes toward Russia over time.

In February, Carlson also interviewed Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow, during which the pair discussed Russian history and the situation in Ukraine.

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Three US Law Enforcement Officers Killed, 5 Others Injured While Serving Warrant - Police

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - Three US law enforcement officers were killed and five others injured by a gunman while attempting to serve a warrant in the US state of North Carolina, Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD) Chief Johnny Jennings said during a press conference.

"There were three members of the US Marshals Task Force who are pronounced deceased," Jennings said on Monday afternoon. "There were four CMPD officers who were shot, one being in critical condition who is now in the hospital fighting for his life. A total of eight law enforcement officers were shot by the suspects in this house."

Jennings explained that the US Marshals Fugitive Task Force attempted to serve a warrant to an individual for possession of a firearm by a convicted felon, but they were shot at when they approached the individual.

Police officers returned gunfire and killed the suspect, but they received additional gunfire from inside the home, Jennings added.

After a long standoff, Jennings said, authorities were able to clear the home and confirm that there were two additional people inside who had been taken into custody for questioning.

Police noted that a suspect used a high-powered rifle during the shootout.

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US Creating Prerequisites for Total Control Over Digital Space - Polyanskiy

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - The United States has been trying to set the stage for the establishment of a global digital dictatorship, Russian deputy envoy to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said.

"The prerequisites are being created for total control over the digital space with the ability to 'turn off' any information alternative to the Western-certified mainstream," Polyanskiy said on Monday.

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The collective West, and specifically the United States, has engaged in such an endeavor given that the main levers of internet governance and the main IT monopolies are registered in their jurisdictions, Polyanskiy said.

US federal and other agencies are often behind the arbitrariness of the large IT corporations' actions to block users and censor information that differs from the government's positions, Polianskiy said.

Xenophobic, racist, nationalist and Russophobic materials have recently been actively distributed on the sites of Western IT monopolies but their moderators do not pay attention to such users and content, Polyanskiy said.

By contrast, they mercilessly block channels and accounts of users and media who present points of view that differ from the government ones, he said.

However, the facts about such interference regularly become public knowledge, Polyanskiy said.

"Thus, in the current configuration, internet intermediaries have become a tool for manipulating public opinion and disseminating aggressive propaganda," Polyanskiy said.

The problem is compounded by the fact that there are currently no international legal standards to properly combat such behavior by IT giants, Polyanskiy added.

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Police Pepper Spray Gaza Protestors Resisting Arrest at University of Austin-Correspondent

AUSTIN, April 30 (Sputnik), Lenka White - Law enforcement officers used pepper spray against pro-Palestine protestors at the University of Austin in Texas, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

Police officers resorted to the measure following aggressive behavior from the students, who were trying to resist police officers.

A Sputnik correspondent had water splashed on her by a protestor, while another protestor knocked her phone out of her hands before stepping on it.

"They are very aggressive," one Texan officer of the Department of Public Safety told Sputnik.

Police have been arresting the protestors who built illegal encampments on the university's campus during the third day of pro-Palestine protests

Numerous pro-Palestine demonstrations have emerged on US college campuses in recent days against the United States military, and financial and diplomatic support for Israel's operation in Gaza, which has resulted in the death of more than 34,000 Palestinians and the wounding of over 77,000 Palestinians.

Students are calling for their universities to condemn Israel's US-backed military campaign in Gaza, to divest from companies linked to Israel and to discontinue study abroad programs at Israeli universities, among other demands.

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Sener to Make Control Parts for 1,000 Patriot GEM-T Missiles in Spain - Statement

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - Raytheon announced in a press release that it has chosen the Spanish high-tech company Sener to develop and produce the electro-mechanical control section of the Patriot GEM-T missile.

"Raytheon has awarded Spanish supplier, Sener, a contract to develop and produce the electro-mechanical control section of the Patriot GEM-T missile," the release said on Monday.

Sener will directly contribute to missile production in Europe in support of the recently awarded GEM-T contract by the NATO Support and Procurement Agency for a quantity of up to 1,000 missiles for a coalition of nations, including Germany, the Netherlands, Romania and Spain, the release said.

"Sener will play a critical role in supporting our expansion of GEM-T missile production capacity in Europe. ... We are moving forward to increase this critical air defense missile inventory in support of NATO and our European Patriot allies," the release added.

Sener will work with Raytheon's engineering experts to co-develop the critical new components and produce them at its site in Tres Cantos, Madrid, according to the release.

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Ex-NSA Worker Gets 22Yrs in Prison for Attempted Transfer of Classified Info to Russia

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) – A US court sentenced a former employee of the National Security Agency (NSA) to nearly 22 years in prison for attempted transfer of classified information to Russia, the Justice Department said in a press release.

“Jareh Sebastian Dalke, 32, of Colorado Springs, was sentenced today to 262 months in prison for attempted espionage in connection with his efforts to transmit classified National Defense Information (NDI) to an agent of the Russian Federation,” the release said on Monday.

In October 2023, Dalke pleaded guilty to six counts of attempting to transmit classified NDI to a foreign agent.

Dalke worked for the NSA as an Information System Security Designer from June to July 2022, according to the release. Between August and September 2022, Dalke used excerpts of three classified documents to a person he believed to be a Russian agent. However, the person was an undercover FBI agent.

Dalke requested $85,000 for more information that could be valuable to Russia. The FBI arrested Dalke after he transferred top-secret information as part of a sting operation.

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Koch-Linked Political Group Says Launched Anti-Bidenomics Website Aimed at Latino Voters

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - The Libre Initiative, a grassroots organization tied to the Koch family's political activism network, said that it launched a website to try to sway Latino voters in the United States away from President Joe Biden ahead of the 2024 US presidential election.

On Monday, the group launched nobidenomics.com - a Spanish-language website that features criticisms of Biden's economic policy, dubbed Bidenomics.

"We're proud that this website is in Spanish, so that more people have access to information, especially how [Biden] is failing Latinos through #bideNOmics," the Libre Initiative said in a statement via the social media platform X.

The website provides information about the increased cost of living, increased deficit and decreased wages under the Biden administration.

The website also prompts visitors to sign a petition declaring that Bidenomics is the cause of economic problems in the United States and demanding action on the matter.

A Gallup poll released in February found that the Democratic Party has steadily lost ground with Hispanic voters.

A poll released in March by the Siena College research organization and The New York Times also found that 46% of Hispanic voters are prepared to support former US President Donald Trump in the 2024 race, compared to just 40% who are prepared to support Biden.

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US Air Force Orders Seven More MH-139A Helicopters to Expand Current Fleet - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - The US Air Force has ordered seven more MH-139 AgustaWestland MH-139 helicopters to expand its current force to an eventual 26, Boeing announced in a press release.

"The US Air Force has awarded Boeing a $178 million contract to produce seven MH-139A aircraft and provide sustainment and training support," the release said on Monday. "This order brings the total number of aircraft under contract to 26."

The award follows the initial flight of the first production MH-139A in December 2023, the release noted.

Boeing is on track to deliver the first long-range model of the helicopter to the US Air Force this summer, the release noted.

The MH-139 is a multi-mission helicopter designed for patrol, search, and rescue, and troop and cargo transport based on the Leonardo Helicopters AW139 and fitted with custom military equipment by Boeing, according to published sources.

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

Pratt and Whitney Win Almost $66mln Contract to Sustain Saudi F-15 Engines - Statement

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - Pratt & Whitney announced in a release that it has won an almost $66 million maintenance contract to sustain F100 aircraft engines for Saudi Arabia's fleet of F15 Eagle fighter jets.

"Pratt and Whitney has been awarded an F100 engine contract for a material management program by Saudi Arabia's Middle East Propulsion Company (MEPC), the prime contractor of the Saudi Ministry of Defense for F100 engine sustainment services," the release said on Monday.

The maintenance contract, valued at $65.8 million, supplies spare parts and engine services in support of the Royal Saudi Air Force's F-15 Eagle fighter jets, the release said.

Under the contract, Pratt and Whitney will be more strategically integrated with MEPC and the RSAF and will gain streamlined insight into engine data and inventory management processes, the release said.

"Pratt and Whitney will provide forecasting, technical support and timely material delivery to enable stronger operational readiness, more efficient predictive maintenance, optimal module turn times and improved engine availability," the release added.

Work on the contract began in January 2024 and will run through the second half of 2025, according to the release.

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Russia Supports Creating UN-Based Mechanisms to Fight Disinformation - Polyanskiy

UNITED NATIONS, April 30 (Sputnik) - Russia supports creating UN-based mechanisms to fight disinformation, however, the current Principles for Information Integrity initiative raises a lot of questions among the UN member states, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the world body Dmitry Polyanskiy said.

"Russia fully supports the creation of UN -based transparent mechanisms to combat disinformation," Polyanskiy said on Monday.

A positive example of such work is the successfully implemented "Verified" initiative, aimed at countering fake news in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Polyianskiy said.

However, the proposed new initiative of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres - UN Global Principles for Information Integrity (formerly the Code of Conduct on Digital Platforms) - raises many questions among member states, he said.

"In particular, we note the non-transparent nature of the work on the document, which, even in an interim version, was never presented after three rounds of consultations," Polyanskiy said.

If the United Nations Secretariat plans to release an initiative that will be followed by member states, then an in-depth, truly broad consultation is required, Polyanskiy said.

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"Otherwise, you will end up with an inconsistent 'stillborn product,'" Polyanskiy added.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) -

STOLTENBERG VISIT TO UKRAINE
* NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg is visiting Kiev and will give a joint press conference with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, alliance spokeswoman Farah Dakhlallah said on Monday.
* NATO countries should consider transferring weapons to Ukraine as a priority, Stoltenberg said.
* An agreement on Ukraine's membership in NATO is not expected at the alliance's summit in Washington this summer, Stoltenberg said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE
* Germany has sent another package of military aid to Ukraine, including 10 Marder infantry fighting vehicles with ammunition as well as rounds for Leopard 2 main battle tanks, the government's summary of arms and military equipment transfers to Ukraine showed on Monday.
* The Ukrainian armed forces have suffered up to 395 military casualties near the settlements of Krasnohorivka and Kostyantynivka in the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) in the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
* The United States continues to provide military support to Ukraine and hopes it will help Kiev retake lost territory, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters.

MIDDLE EAST TENSIONS
* The United States has found that five Israeli units are implicated in gross human rights violations predating the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, US State Department deputy principal spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Monday.
* The Israeli military's actions in the Gaza Strip are not comparable to Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, Patel said.
* The United States does not interfere in the work of the International Criminal Court (ICC) amid concerns over the possibility the ICC may issue arrest warrants for senior Israeli officials, US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said.
* Palestinian movement Hamas has been offered a 40-day ceasefire and the release of thousands of Palestinian prisoners in exchange for freeing Israeli hostages, UK Foreign Secretary David Cameron said.

PRO-PALESTINE PROTESTS AT US UNIVERSITIES
* Former President Donald Trump on Monday called for an immediate end to pro-Palestine

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protests on university and college campuses in the United States.
* Texas state police have started arresting pro-Palestinian protesters at the University of Austin, a Sputnik correspondent reported.
* Hundreds of protesters continued rallying at Columbia University despite an established deadline by the authorities to either vacate the premises by 2:00 p.m. or face suspension.

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Western Media Spread Fake Report About Use of N. Korean Missile in Kharkiv - UN Source

UNITED NATIONS, April 29 (Sputnik) - Western media outlets are disseminating a fake report claiming that Russia used a North Korean -made missile to strike a target in Kharkiv, a source at the United Nations told Sputnik on Monday.
Earlier in the day, Reuters reported that some three experts allegedly provided a report to the UN Security Council Sanctions Committee with a conclusion that the debris from a missile found at the site of a January 2 strike in the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv belongs to a North Korea Hwasong-11 series ballistic missile.
"The report is fake. It's non-existent. The group of experts did not submit any report to the UN Security Council," the source said.
The fake document described by Reuters was written by a group of specialists who went to Ukraine on the invitation of the government and wrote what the Ukrainian puppet authorities told them, the source said.
"It has no value," the source said, adding that there were no missile or conventional weapons specialists in the group.
The Ukrainian mission to the United Nations organized the trip for the specialists, who made their conclusion based on the alleged similarity of the missile remains they saw in Kharkiv with those that can be seen at military parades in North Korea.
"The group of experts did not present any report. There is a procedure for a report approval and submission to the UN Security Council and it means that this report contains their personal views. Simply speaking, they wrote a report on a business trip that was offered to them [by Ukraine]," the source said.
On January 17, the Russian Defense Ministry said that the Russian armed forces destroyed a temporary deployment point for foreign fighters in Kharkiv, most of them French mercenaries, killing 60.
The French Foreign Ministry rejected the information that French citizens serve in the ranks of the Ukrainian military and said that the Russian statement was a gross manipulation. The Russian Foreign Ministry later summoned the French Ambassador over the matter.
Russia has repeatedly dismissed media reports and US claims that Moscow is using North Korean missiles to attack targets in Ukraine. The United States has not provided to date any evidence supporting its claims.

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Urgent Measures Needed to Rectify Situation Around UNRWA - Polyanskiy

WASHINGTON, April 29 (Sputnik) - Urgent steps must be taken to correct the situation around the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Russian Deputy Ambassador to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Monday.

"A sad example of disinformation is the smear campaign launched by west Jerusalem against the Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) aimed at eliminating the activities of the Agency in the occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), which, despite external pressure, has been effectively assisting Palestine refugees in the OPT for more than 70 years in extremely difficult conditions," Polyanskiy said. "We consider it necessary to take urgent measures to rectify this situation around UNRWA."

Polyanskiy added that to date, more than 180 Agency employees have been killed in the Gaza Strip, making it "an absolute anti-record" for the UN.

In January, Israel shared data with UNRWA's leadership on the alleged involvement of some of its staff members in the October 7 Hamas attack and vowed to hold accountable anyone involved in "acts of terror." A number of countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Canada, Japan and others, responded by suspending funding to the agency. By March, however, many of these nations had decided to resume their funding.

In early February, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appointed an independent review panel led by former French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna to check UNRWA's activities for alleged links with Hamas. Their final report, published last Monday, said that Israel had provided no evidence of the agency's workers allegedly being members of "terrorist organizations."

Colonna's UN panel is probing allegations against 19 UNRWA staff and has closed one case and suspended four others due to a lack of evidence, Spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Friday.

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Multiple Law Enforcement Officers Injured in Shooting Incident in N. Carolina - Atlas One

WASHINGTON, April 29 (Sputnik) - Multiple officers have been injured during a US Marshals Task Force investigation in Charlotte, North Carolina, after encountering gunfire from a person, the public safety application Atlas One said in an alert.

"The US Marshals Task Force, which is comprised of officers from multiple agencies, was conducting an investigation in the area of the 5000 blk of Galway Dr. when they were engaged by active gunfire from a subject," the alert said.

The injured law enforcement officers have been transported to a hospital.

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department and a special weapons and tactics (SWAT)

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team are currently on the scene of the incident.
The authorities are urging the public to avoid the area until further notice, according to reports.

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US Denies Visa for Russian Delegate to Participate in UNGA Committee Meeting - Polyanskiy

WASHINGTON, April 29 (Sputnik) The United States has denied visa for a Russian representative to take part in the UN General Assembly's Committee on Information, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Monday.
"Once again we have to begin our speech in the Committee on Information with the issue of the US side continuing systematic abuse of its position of the country hosting the UN headquarters," Polyanskiy said. "Again, the participation of a representative of the Russian delegation in the 46th session of the UN General Assembly Information Committee was derailed due to the failure to issue him a visa, despite the timely submission of documents."
Polyanskiy went on to say that Russia hopes that the UN Secretariat and the leadership of the relevant structures of the organization, based on legally binding agreements with the host state, will make the necessary efforts to correct this unacceptable situation.

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First US Nuclear Power Plant in Over 30 Years Goes Fully on Line - Georgia Power

WASHINGTON, April 29 (Sputnik) - The fourth and final unit of the first nuclear power station to be built in the United States in more than 30 years finally went online after a seven year delay, Georgia Power announced in a press release on Monday.
"Georgia Power declared today that Plant Vogtle Unit 4 has entered commercial operation and is now serving customers and the state of Georgia," the release said.
The new unit, which can produce enough electricity to power an estimated 500,000 homes and businesses, will provide energy to customers for at least 60 to 80 years, the release said.
"With all four units now in operation, Plant Vogtle is the largest generator of clean energy in the nation, expected to produce more than 30 million megawatt hours of electricity each year," the release said.
The plant is operated by Southern Nuclear on behalf of Georgia Power, Oglethorpe Power, MEAG Power and Dalton Utilities, the release added.
The third and fourth Plant Vogtle units may also be the last nuclear reactors built in the United States, according to media reports.

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US Continues Providing Aid to Ukraine, Hopes Will Help - White House

WASHINGTON, April 29 (Sputnik) - The United States continues to provide military support to Ukraine and hopes it will help Kiev retake lost territory, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters on Monday.

"The aid into Ukraine is ongoing, they have been receiving that security assistance," Jean-Pierre said when asked to comment on Ukraine's recent losses to the Russian army.

Jean-Pierre declined to provide details allegedly due to security reasons but expressed hope that the aid would reach the front lines.

"They have lost ground, and so we are hoping to get that security aid to the brave people in Ukraine," Jean-Pierre added.

President Joe Biden signed last week a supplemental package passed by Congress that provides $61 billion in additional aid for Ukraine.

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US denies visa for Russian delegate to participate in un general assembly's committee on information - polyanskiy

Sputnik

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RPT - Texas Police Start Arresting Protesters at University of Austin - Correspondent

AUSTIN, Texas, April 29 (Sputnik), Lenka White - Texas state police have started arresting pro-Palestinian protesters at the University of Austin, a Sputnik correspondent reported on Monday.

"Hands off students," students began shouting when the police officers started arresting the protesters.

"We need a medic," one of the students shouted.

The state troopers have encircled the protesters' encampment on the university lawn, while legal observers from the Austin Lawyers Guild are surrounding the officers.

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"Hands off students," students began shouting when the police officers started arresting the protesters.
"We need a medic," one of the students shouted.
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UPDATE-US State Dept. Says Russia's Actions in Ukraine, Israel's Actions in Gaza Not Equivalent

(Update: adds reports in para 6, background in para 9, White House comments in para 10)
WASHINGTON, April 29 (Sputnik) - The Israeli military's actions in the Gaza Strip are not comparable to Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, US State Department deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel told reporters on Monday.
"There is no moral equivalency between the kinds of things that we see [Russian President Vladimir Putin] and the Kremlin undertake in comparison to the Israeli government," Patel said when asked whether the United States was opposing potential International Criminal Court (ICC) action against Israel but supporting ICC action against Russia.
The United States does not believe that the ICC has jurisdiction over the Palestinian situation, Patel added.
Earlier on Monday, US media reported that the ICC may issue arrest warrants for Israeli officials, including Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant.
Israel is working via diplomatic channels to prevent the issuance of such arrest warrants, the report said, citing an Israeli official familiar with the matter.
Netanyahu reached out to US President Joe Biden to ask for his help to prevent the ICC from issuing arrest warrants against him and other senior Israeli officials, a separate report said, citing two Israeli officials.
In March 2022, the ICC issued an arrest warrant for Putin and Russian Children's Rights Commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova for allegedly engaging in the unlawful deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia.
Russia does not recognize ICC decisions as it is not a party to the treaty that established the court, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said last month.
Patel likewise noted that the United States is not party to the treaty that established the ICC. However, the Biden administration welcomed the ICC's actions against Russia, which Biden called justified.
White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre also said on Monday that the Biden

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administration opposes the ICC investigation into Israel and believes they lack jurisdiction.

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Pro-Palestine Protesters at Columbia University Defy Deadline to Disperse - TV Footage

WASHINGTON, April 29 (Sputnik) — Hundreds of pro-Palestinian demonstrators continued rallying at Columbia University on Monday despite a deadline to either vacate the premises by 2:00 p.m. or face suspension, television footage showed.

Earlier in the day, Columbia University said in a statement that students who left voluntarily by 2 pm, identified themselves to a university official, and signed a form promising to abide by university policies would retain eligibility to complete the semester without suspension.

"It is important for you to know that the University has already identified many students in the encampment. If you do not identify yourself upon leaving and sign the form now, you will not be eligible to sign and complete the semester in good standing. If you do not leave by 2 pm, you will be suspended pending further investigation," the statement said.

Numerous protests have erupted at various universities in the past month against the United States' financial, military, diplomatic, and other support for Israel's military operation in the Gaza Strip, which has left more than 34,000 Palestinians dead and 77,000 others wounded.

Students and faculty have called for the universities to condemn Israel’s military campaign in Gaza, divest from companies linked to Israel, and discontinue study abroad programs at Israeli universities, among other demands.

According to US media, more than 900 individuals — students, faculty and also others — have been arrested on university and college campuses in the United States in a show of force broadcast on US media to compel the demonstrators to stop. Some of the students have been suspended from the schools they attend.

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Hunter Biden Threatens Fox News With Lawsuit Over 'Intimate' Images - Reports

WASHINGTON, April 29 (Sputnik) - Hunter Biden, son of US President Joe Biden, is threatening Fox News with a defamation lawsuit if the news organization refuses to remove explicit images of him from their platforms, CNN reported on Monday.

Hunter Biden and his attorneys sent a letter to Fox News and Fox Corp. alleging the company committed conspiracy to defame and unlawful publication of the images, which they claim are the result of hacking, the report said. Hunter and his attorneys are seeking public retractions from the company in addition to changes in online articles alleging that Hunter and his father Joe Biden are involved in an international bribery scheme, the report said.

"While routinely defaming and disparaging Mr. Biden, FOX has simultaneously sought to profit

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by the unlawful exploitation of Mr. Biden's image, name, and likeness for commercial purposes and reprehensible dissemination of salacious photographs depicting Mr. Biden," wrote Hunter and his lawyers in the letter, which is quoted in the report.

According to the report, the move by Hunter is part of a strategy to retaliate against conservative media for actions taken by the company in 2022, which focused on Hunter's bribery allegations and published explicit images of him in the nude, the report said, citing the letter, which also alleges that the images were digitally manipulated.

Additionally, the letter demands that Fox News hosts update their viewers about the February indictment of Alexander Smirnov, a former informant charged with lying to the FBI about Hunter Biden's business dealings, the report said.

House lawmakers are investigating alleged criminal activity by the Biden family, including potential bribery and foreign influence peddling. Hunter Biden has denied that his father profited from or engaged in his business activities, which include serving on the board of Ukrainian energy company Burisma.

US President Joe Biden has publicly defended Hunter, who also faces an upcoming trial for gun charges in Delaware next month. Hunter has maintained that he is not guilty of these crimes.

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US Says No Moral Equivalency Between Russia's Actions in Ukraine, Israel's Actions in Gaza

WASHINGTON, April 29 (Sputnik) - The Israeli military's actions in the Gaza Strip are not comparable to Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, US State Department deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel told reporters on Monday.

"There is no moral equivalency between the kinds of things that we see [Russian President Vladimir Putin] and the Kremlin undertake in comparison to the Israeli government," Patel said when asked whether the United States was opposing potential International Criminal Court (ICC) action against Israel but supporting ICC action against Russia.

The United States does not believe that the ICC has jurisdiction over the Palestinian situation, Patel added.

Earlier on Monday, US media reported that the ICC may issue arrest warrants for Israeli officials, including Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant.

Israel is working via diplomatic channels to prevent the issuance of such arrest warrants, the report said, citing an Israeli official familiar with the matter.

In March 2022, the ICC issued an arrest warrant for Putin and Russian Children's Rights Commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova for allegedly engaging in the unlawful deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia.

Russia does not recognize ICC decisions as it is not a party to the treaty that established the court, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said last month.

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Patel likewise noted that the United States is not party to the treaty that established the ICC.

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Number of Aid Trucks to Gaza Not Best Measurement as Obstacles Remain - UN Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, April 29 (Sputnik) - The increase in the number of trucks delivering humanitarian aid to Gaza Strip is not the best measurement to assess the assistance efforts because the challenges that the United Nations faces in distributing the aid remain, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Monday.

"We're seeing in an uptick in trucks but I think if you remember, Mr. Lazzarini here on Friday or Thursday, last week, was very clear that counting trucks was not the best measure because once the trucks cross into Gaza, the challenges that we face remain," Dujarric said during a press a briefing.

Dujarric was referring in his comment to Philippe Lazzarini, commissioner-general of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Dujarric emphasized that the problem with distribution, Israeli checkpoints and all other previously reported stumbling blocks remain.

The issue for the United Nations is that the fighting in Gaza is ongoing and delivering aid in an active combat zone is challenging, Dujarric added.

On Sunday, the United States clarified that the pier it is constructing off the coast of Gaza to allow for aid deliveries by sea could become operational in the next several weeks.

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US Allows Energy-Related Transactions With Certain Russian Firms Through Nov. 1- Treasury

WASHINGTON, April 29 (Sputnik) - The United States has extended a license that allows US business to conduct financial transactions related to energy with certain Russian firms through November 1, 2024, the US Treasury Department said on Monday.

"Except as provided in paragraph (c) of this general license, all transactions prohibited by Executive Order (E.O.) 14024 involving one or more of the following entities that are related to energy are authorized, through 12:01 a.m. eastern daylight time, November 1, 2024: (1) State Corporation Bank for Development and Foreign Economic Affairs Vnesheconombank; (2) Public Joint Stock Company Bank Financial Corporation Otkritie; (3) Sovcombank Open Joint Stock Company; (4) Public Joint Stock Company Sberbank of Russia; (5) VTB Bank Public Joint Stock Company; (6) Joint Stock Company Alfa-Bank; (7) Public Joint Stock Company Rosbank; (8) Bank Zenit Public Joint Stock Company; (9) Bank Saint-Petersburg Public Joint Stock

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Company; (10) Any entity in which one or more of the above persons own, directly or indirectly, individually or in the aggregate, a 50 percent or greater interest; or (11) the Central Bank of the Russian Federation," the Treasury said in a notice on its website.

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US Found 5 Israeli Units Responsible for Gross Human Rights Violations - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, April 29 (Sputnik) - The United States has found that five Israeli units are implicated in gross human rights violations predating the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, US State Department deputy principal spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Monday.

"We found five Israeli units responsible for individual incidents of gross violations of human rights. All of these were incidents much before October 7 and none took place in Gaza," Patel said during a press briefing.

Four of the identified units had successfully addressed and remedied the violations, Patel added.

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US Mental Health Diagnoses Rise Nearly 40% Since 2019 - Report

WASHINGTON, April 29 (Sputnik) - The percentage of people in the United States diagnosed with mental health conditions increased by nearly 40% from 2019 to 2023, the nonprofit healthcare data organization FAIR Health said in a report on Monday.

"Nationally, the percentage of patients with mental health diagnoses rose 39.8 percent, from 13.5 percent of patients who received medical services in 2019 to 18.9 percent in 2023," the report said.

The analysis performed by FAIR Health is based on data from a repository of more than 46 billion private healthcare claim records.

Whereas only 5.6% of patients without a mental health diagnosis had a substance use disorder, 15.7% of patients with a mental health diagnosis also had a substance use disorder, the report said.

The most common mental health diagnoses include generalized anxiety disorder, major depressive disorder, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), adjustment disorders and bipolar disorder.

The largest increase in patient diagnoses was for ADHD, which rose from the fourth to the third most common diagnosis from 2019 to 2023, the report said.

The percentage of claim lines associated with mental health diagnoses rose in every state, with

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the largest increases in Georgia, Connecticut, Hawaii, Montana and Nevada, the report added.

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Body of Russian Who Died in Cuba Remains in Montreal Morgue - Consul General

WASHINGTON, April 29 (Sputnik) - The body of a Russian national who died in Cuba remains in a morgue in Montreal after the Cuban authorities mistakenly sent the body to Canada and the body of a diseased Canadian national to Russia, Russian Consul-General in Montreal Alexander Noskov told Sputnik.

"The body, as far as we know, is still here in Montreal, in the morgue of one of the funeral companies," Noskov said on Monday. "We are in contact with the Canadian side, in particular with this funeral company."

Noskov said the funeral company representatives were expected to provide the documents required for exhumation proceedings.

Earlier in April, the family of the diseased Canadian national Faraj Allah Jarjour confirmed to local media that his body was mistakenly sent to Russia. Jarjour died of a heart attack while swimming during a family vacation in Varadero, Cuba, on March 22.

After the body was repatriated, the funeral home noticed that it did not match the photograph provided by the family, according to media reports.

Noskov said the Canadian authorities are leading the process of returning the bodies to the relevant countries given that they discovered the mistake.

"Moreover, the Canadians say they themselves will be turning the situation back around in order to correct the mistakes of the Cubans," Noskov said. "As of now, we don't have a task to provide any assistance in returning the body of the Russian to the homeland."

Noskov pointed out that the current political tensions between Canada and Russia are not affecting cooperation regarding the incident with the two bodies.

"This may not be an ordinary case, but it is quite a real-life case," Noskov said. "In such cases, political issues do not arise in any way."

On Wednesday, Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez apologized and vowed to investigate the incident of mistakenly sending the wrong body to Canada instead of the one of the Canadian national who died while vacationing on the island nation.

Foreign Minister Melanie Joly said via social media that she expressed to Rodriguez Canada's utmost concern for the "unimaginable situation" that Jarjour's family faces.

Joly also said she had spoken with the family and promised to continue to assist them until resolving the situation.

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US Congressman Says Introduced Bill to Grant Patents Rights on 'First to Invent' Basis

WASHINGTON, April 29 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Thomas Massie said on Monday that he introduced legislation to grant patent rights to the original inventors of a product instead of the first to file for protections.

The bill, dubbed the Restoring America's Leadership in Innovation Act (RALIA), would grant patent protections to initial inventors and reform other aspects of the United States' patent system, Massie said in a statement.

"A return to a 'first to invent' patent protection system ensures that inventors and the investors who back them can be confident that their innovative work and ideas will be safeguarded. Patents should protect those who innovate, not those who win the race to the patent office," the statement said.

Article 1, Section 8 of the US Constitution grants lawmakers the authority to promote scientific progress by securing exclusive rights to authors and inventors for limited times.

However, the 2011 Leahy-Smith America Invents Act, as well as several US Supreme Court decisions, eroded the strength and value of the protections, the statement said.

Massie's RALIA bill would also affirm that patents secure private property rights, allow inventors to get injunctions against intellectual property theft, abolish the Patent Trial and Appeal Board and end the automatic publication of patent applications unless a patent is granted, the statement said.

The legislation is co-sponsored by a bipartisan group of House lawmakers, including Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur, Congressman Paul Gosar, and Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene.

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US Does Not Interfere in Work of ICC Amid Concerns About Israeli Officials - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, April 29 (Sputnik) - The United States does not interfere in the work of the International Criminal Court (ICC) amid concerns over the possibility the ICC may issue arrest warrants for senior Israeli officials, US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said on Monday.

"It's an independent organization and their efforts are being undertaken without any contact or interference by the US," Thomas-Greenfield said in a press briefing.

Earlier on Monday, US media reported, citing an Israeli official familiar with the matter, that the ICC may issue arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant and other senior officials as early as this week.

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State Attorneys General Challenge Biden Administration's Title IX Rule Change - Statements

WASHINGTON, April 29 (Sputnik) - Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton and Mississippi Attorney General Lynn Fitch said on Monday that they are challenging the Biden administration's update to Title IX protections in the United States education system, which were modified to cover self-professed gender identity.

Title IX is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any federally funded educational program.

"The new rule contorts these protections for women by forcing schools to accommodate the wishes of men claiming to identify as women (or 'transgender') to enter female-only spaces and join female-only organizations. This would force schools to permit biological males to use female restrooms and lockers," Paxton said in a statement.

Educational institutions will lose federal funding if they refuse to implement the updated protections, the statement said. The rule violates existing federal law, ignores the US Constitution, and denies women the protections that Title IX was intended to give them, the statement said.

Moreover, the rule forces communities to adhere to "unscientific gender ideology" and puts girls and women at risk, the statement said.

Fitch also said in a statement on Monday that she filed a lawsuit challenging the Title IX rule change. The Biden administration cut legal corners to impose the rule change, the statement said.

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ANALYSIS - US Losing Footprint Across Africa as Niger, Chad Demand Military Forces Pullouts

WASHINGTON, April 29 (Sputnik) - The United States is rapidly losing influence across Africa and its military footprint on the continent is shrinking following the announcements of troop withdrawals from Niger and Chad that could serve as a catalyst for other countries to follow suit, analysts told Sputnik.

The United States will begin to withdraw its troops from Chad and Niger after the two African countries demanded that the US forces leave. There are around 1,100 US personnel in Niger and about 100 in Chad.

These developments were not isolated events but had a profound wider significance that was recognized across the continent, said Tunde Osazua, a member of the Black Alliance for Peace human rights project.

"The withdrawal of the US military from Niger and Chad is an immensely significant development. It signals a potential shift in dynamics across Africa, particularly in strengthening and acting on existing anti-imperialist sentiment," Osazua said.

These latest developments served to accelerate an already strong trend eroding US standing across Africa as exemplified by the declining US footprint across the continent, he said.

"The formation of the Alliance of Sahelian States is a testament to the resonance of this sentiment and the growing assertiveness of African nations in shaping their own destinies,"

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Osazua said.

Osazua added that it was crucial to recognize that the United States, through its interventions and actions, had played a significant role in fueling instability in the region.

"The aftermath of the war on Libya stands as a stark reminder of the consequences of US involvement and its implications for regional stability," Osazua said.

The conditions sustained by neo-colonialism in Africa rendered it increasingly untenable for the United States to maintain its traditional relationships with the continent, he said.

"As the grip of neocolonialism weakens, the US finds itself in a state of desperation, grappling with the loss of influence and relevance in the region," Osazua said.

AFRICAN COUNTRIES SHIFTING FROM US INFLUENCE

The consequences of African countries shifting away from US influence were likely to be multifaceted and would unfold over time, he said.

"One significant outcome could be the opportunity for African countries to explore alternative economic and political relationships with other world powers, such as China and Russia. This diversification of partnerships may pave the way for greater economic stability," Osazua added.

Campaign to End the Moroccan Occupation of the Western Shara Co-Coordinator Bill Fletcher agreed that the latest developments in Chad and Niger had far wider implications across Africa.

"There is a multilevel crisis in the Sahel. Part of it is a revolt against France. There is also a major jihadist insurgency underway in multiple countries," Fletcher said.

According to former vice president of the Eurasia Group and retired US Army Lt. Col. Earl Rasmussen the developments in Chad were yet another indication of the waning influence of the United States in Africa.

However, Rasmussen cautioned that it would be some time before any real US withdrawal of forces from Chad could be confirmed.

"Will we really leave and when? I would hesitate to give an answer. I am sure, as in Niger, we will work the agreement such that there is a planning time, and an orderly withdrawal …. Orderly meaning potentially never," he said.

Nevertheless, it was already clear that the influence of the United States and the West in general was diminishing across Africa, he said.

"I believe Africa is awakening and hopefully will realize their true potential, which I believe is very great," Rasmussen added.

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Biden, Mexican Counterpart Discuss Ongoing Efforts to Manage Migration - White House

WASHINGTON, April 29 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden and Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador recently discussed ongoing efforts to help deter the record surge of migrants heading to the US-Mexico border, the White House said on Monday.

"The two leaders discussed how to effectively manage hemispheric migration, strengthen operational efficiency on our shared border, and thereby improve the security and prosperity of citizens of both countries," the White House said in a readout of a phone call between the two

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leaders on Sunday.

Biden and Lopez Obrador agreed to have their national security teams work together to immediately implement concrete measures to significantly reduce illegal border crossings, the release said.

The two leaders also pledged to advance initiatives to address the root causes of migration throughout the Western Hemisphere, the release added.

Illegal crossings on the US southern border have gone through three consecutive record-breaking years since Biden took over the White House in January 2021, totaling nearly 8 million illegal encounters during that period, according to US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) data.

Since October 2023, some 1.3 million migrants have been apprehended for illegally crossing into the United States on the southern border, CBP data shows.

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Trump Calls for Immediate Halt to Pro-Palestine Protests at US Universities - Statement

WASHINGTON, April 29 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump on Monday called for an immediate end to pro-Palestine protests on university and college campuses in the United States.

"Stop the protests now," Trump said via the social media platform Truth Social.

According to US media, more than 900 individuals - students, faculty but also others - have been arrested on university and college campuses in the United States in a show of force broadcast on US media to compel the demonstrators to stop. Some of the students have been suspended from the schools they attend.

Numerous protests erupted on various campuses in the past month against the United States' financial, military, diplomatic and other support for Israel's military operation in the Gaza Strip, which has resulted in the death of more than 34,000 and the wounding of more than 77,000 Palestinians.

Students and faculty have calling for the universities to condemn Israel's military campaign in Gaza; divest from companies linked to Israel; and to discontinue study abroad programs at Israeli universities, among other demands.

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US' Key Indo-Pacific Partners May Attend Next NATO Summit – US Representative

WASHINGTON, April 29 (Sputnik) – Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand may join the upcoming NATO summit in Washington, US Ambassador to NATO Julianne Smith said at a think tank in Washington.

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"I would suspect that once again, we will see the four Indo-Pacific partners join us at the Washington summit. Nothing's been finalized yet, but I think after having had them present, both at the Madrid summit in 2022 and the Vilnius summit in 2023, I think we would welcome the chance to have those four leaders join us again at the Washington summit," Smith said.

Smith noted that NATO was "increasingly" discussing China's activities in the Atlantic area, and it could "no doubt learn from our friends in the Indo-Pacific."

The next NATO summit is scheduled for July 9-11 in Washington.

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US Government Wants Taxpayers Funding Ukraine 'Forever' - Congressman Gaetz

WASHINGTON, April 29 (Sputnik) - The US government wants taxpayers funding Ukraine indefinitely, Republican US Congressman Matt Gaetz said on Monday.

"They want you paying for Ukraine forever," Gaetz said in a statement via social media platform X.

Gaetz's statement came in response to the Ukrainian government indicating that it is in talks with the United States about a 10-year security agreement, which would include military, financial and political aid.

The statement also comes following the passage of nearly $61 billion in Ukraine-related by the US Congress last week.

US House Speaker Mike Johnson, who backed the multi-billion-dollar foreign aid package, is willing to give Ukraine permanent funding, US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene said.

"Permanent funding for Ukraine is exactly what they want and Mike Johnson will give it to them," Greene said via X on Sunday. "They're [sic] plan is keep funding the proxy war with Russia in Ukraine and when that doesn't work, after all the Ukrainian men have been slaughtered, next they will put American troops on the ground."

Johnson's days as speaker of the House of Representatives are numbered, Greene said; the congresswoman has previously indicated that she will attempt to oust Johnson as speaker with the support of multiple other House Republican lawmakers.

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NATO Working on 'Actual Deliverable' for Ukraine - US Representative

WASHINGTON, April 29 (Sputnik) - NATO is currently working on an "actual deliverable" for Ukraine, US Permanent Representative to the alliance Julianne Smith said at an Atlantic Council event on Monday.

"We are working right now on an actual deliverable for Ukraine," Smith said. "What I am expecting allies to do is to construct a bridge to membership by offering Ukraine a deliverable

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that will enable them to become even closer to this alliance."
Smith declined to provide details because NATO members have been allegedly debating the matter.
Smith would only say that NATO was looking at how to "institutionalize… some of the bilateral support that's been provided to Ukraine."

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US NATO Envoy Says Does Not Expect Alliance to Extend Invitation to Kiev This Summer

WASHINGTON, April 29 (Sputnik) – US Permanent Envoy to NATO Julianne Smith said on Monday that she does not expect the military bloc to invite Kiev to join the alliance during the upcoming summit in Washington this summer.
"We were not prepared last summer to extend a proper invitation to Ukraine for full-fledged membership, and I am not expecting the Alliance to do that this summer," Smith said in remarks at a think tank in Washington.

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RPT - us ambassador to nato says does not expect alliance to extend invitation for ukraine to join group this summer

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