

4/30/24 Tuesday

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US Congresswoman Greene Says Calling Motion to Vacate Johnson as House Speaker Next Week

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene said on Wednesday that she will bring a motion to vacate House Speaker Mike Johnson from his leadership position next week.

"Next week I am going to be calling this motion to vacate," Greene said during a press conference.

Greene and other House Republicans have criticized Johnson for backing a \$95 billion foreign aid package and allowing the reauthorization of surveillance powers.

On Tuesday, House Democratic leadership said they would support a motion to table the effort to oust Johnson.

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Over Half of Americans Believe China Uses TikTok to Influence US Opinion – Poll

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) – More than half of Americans believe that China uses the popular short video app TikTok to influence US public opinion, according to a Reuters/Ipsos poll released on Wednesday.

While 58% believed this to be the case, 13% disagreed, and the remainder were unsure or did not answer the question.

The poll, which was conducted April 29-30 among 1,022 US adults, comes on the heels of US President Joe Biden passing legislation that requires TikTok's Chinese parent company ByteDance to divest its stake in the app, which would otherwise be banned in the United States.

The poll found that 50% of Americans supported banning the app, 32% opposed it, and the rest were unsure.

TikTok has denied that it shares data on its US users with the Chinese government or that it promotes or removes content based on Chinese government requests. It has said that it intends

to take the battle to the courts.

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Blinken, Netanyahu Discuss Need to Avoid Further Escalation of Conflict - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken during a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem on Wednesday discussed efforts to avoid further escalation of the Gaza conflict and reaffirmed a "clear position of the United States" about Israel's potential military operation in Rafah, the Department of State said.

"He also discussed the need to avoid further expansion of the conflict and updated the Prime Minister on ongoing efforts to ensure a lasting, sustainable peace in the region. The Secretary reiterated the United States' clear position on Rafah," the statement said.

The two sides focused on efforts to reach an immediate ceasefire in Gaza as part of a hostage deal. Blinken said that Hamas is standing in the way of a ceasefire, according to the statement.

"The Secretary discussed the improvement in the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza since the call between President Biden and Prime Minister Netanyahu on April 4 and reiterated the importance of accelerating and sustaining that improvement," the State Department said.

Axios reporter Barak Ravid said on X, citing a US official, that Blinken reiterated to Netanyahu that Washington still opposes the Israeli military operation in Rafah without a credible plan for protecting civilians. He also said that there are better options to deal with Hamas.

Netanyahu said on Tuesday that Israel will carry out an operation in Rafah regardless of whether a deal on hostages is reached with Palestinian movement Hamas or not. He stated that the Israeli military will enter Rafah to eliminate the remaining Hamas battalions as there is "no other choice."

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Canada Energy Regulator Gives Final Approval for Trans Mountain Pipeline to Operate

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) – The long-delayed Trans Mountain Expansion Project has received the final authorization from the Canada Energy Regulator (CER) to operate and carry crude oil.

"The pipeline is now authorized to carry crude oil from Trans Mountain's Edmonton Terminal, located in Strathcona County, AB, to its Westridge Marine Terminal, located in Burnaby, BC, in Western Canada," CER said in a statement on Tuesday.

The new pipeline pairs with the existing Trans Mountain pipeline system and will increase Trans Mountain's shipping capacity from 300,000 barrels per day to 890,000, the statement said.

Trans Mountain will be required to undertake reclamation projects to return the lands to their original state. The company will also have to provide CER with post-construction environmental

monitoring reports.

CER said it will act as a lifecycle regulator and ensure that the pipeline adheres to conditions, regulations, codes and standards throughout its lifetime.

In 2018, the Canadian government bought Kinder Morgan's Trans Mountain pipeline for C\$4.5 billion (\$3.3 billion) to ensure its expansion would go ahead. Over the years, the cost grew to C\$30.9 billion, mostly due to the project's construction delays.

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Odessa Massacre Exposes Western Lies About Government in Ukraine - US Activist

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - The killing of dozens of civilians in Odessa in 2014 and the subsequent refusal of the Ukrainian government to properly investigate the incident exposes Western lies about the authorities in Kiev, US antiwar activist and Odessa Solidarity Campaign coordinator Phil Wilayto told Sputnik on Wednesday.

On May 2, 2014, Ukrainian nationalists locked pro-federalist protesters in Odessa's Trade Unions House and set the building on fire. Almost 50 people died and some 250 others were injured in clashes with the Ukrainian radicals, according to the United Nations. The clashes became one of the deadliest events during the Maidan and anti-Maidan demonstrations in Ukraine that started in late 2013.

"The massacre and the way the government covered it up and refused to properly investigate or prosecute those responsible reveals a great deal about that government and exposes the lies that Western propagandists are spreading about it," Wilayto said.

Wilayto said neither Kiev nor its allies in the United States want to let the public know the real face of the Ukrainian government.

US antiwar activists have sent multiple letters and requests to the Ukrainian and US authorities, urging them to hold a thorough investigation of the tragic events in Odessa, Wilayto said.

Asked whether the activists received any response, Wilayto said: "Never. Not one."

Wilayto pointed out that the US government has not shown any interest in investigating the Odessa tragedy and if there ever was any interest for such a probe, it does not exist today.

"A true investigation would reveal too much about the relationship between the fascist paramilitary organizations and the government, and that, in turn, would reveal too much about the reasons for the present conflict," he said.

Wilayto expressed regret that after a decade of the tragic event, many people, especially the youth, are not informed about what happened in Odessa ten years ago.

Russia has repeatedly criticized the Ukrainian government for its non-action and has urged the international community and especially human rights groups to investigate the causes of the massacre.

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People Jumped From Windows, Nazis Finished Them Off On Ground: Witness Of Odessa Massacre

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) – Innocent people were jumping from windows of the burning Odessa's Trade Unions House, but the Nazis finished them off on the ground, a witness of the mass murder of innocent civilians in the Ukrainian city in 2014 told Sputnik.

"People tried to escape from the fire and jumped from windows, but the Nazis were finishing them off on the ground. They did not even spare pregnant women, " the witness, who asked to be called by her first name, Natalia, said.

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.

Natalia expressed confidence that it was a well-planned act of intimidation. Those who organized that crime did not like the fact that such a popular movement had formed on Kulikovo Field in Odessa, which was already gaining authority and strength, and more and more people were joining it, she said.

The women shared that many of the people who had gathered on Kulikovo Field just wanted a federal structure for Ukraine and the preservation of the Russian language. "We wanted only this, and did not claim anything more," she added.

Natalia was at Kulikovo Field for a long time but left it just an hour before the tragic events. "When I came home, one of my colleagues called me and said: 'Look what is happening there.' All this immediately began to be shown on the Internet, and I saw it live," she recalls.

The Nazis raked up everyone they could get their hands on, including people who happened to be nearby. "For example, there were women with strollers, mothers, and grandmothers who were just walking nearby and had nothing to do with what was happening," she added.

As Natalia shared, rumors about possible violence began circulating a day before the tragedy. She met a young boy in an old Soviet-style military uniform who worked there. The women gathered around and asked him to leave for his own safety, but the guy replied that his grandfather was a veteran of the Great Patriotic War, and he could not betray him.

Natalia expressed confidence that the Ukrainian government will not investigate the tragedy. "First of all, those who own the so-called Ukrainian authorities do not want to conduct an investigation. They do not allow this to be done," she added.

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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Pentagon Faces Problems Trying to Expand US Domestic Weapons Production Base - Report

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - The Department of Defense government's military departments are awarding multiyear procurement contracts to replace weapons provided to Ukraine, but Pentagon officials say that they face challenges implementing this authority, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) said in a new report.

"The military departments awarded or plan to award multiyear procurement contracts to help replace five types of weapons provided to Ukraine," the report said on Tuesday. "However, [Defense Department] officials and contractor representatives told GAO that they face challenges implementing this authority."

Some suppliers are reluctant to enter into long-term agreements that lock them into certain prices across multiple years, the report said.

"Long lead times associated with the delivery of supplier parts and raw materials are affecting many weapons programs. One missile program that GAO reviewed reported a lead time increase from 19 to 34 months within the last two years for electronic parts, such as circuit card assemblies," the GAO said.

Since February 2022, the Defense Department has committed or obligated over \$2.8 billion to increase weapons production. The Defense Department is using nearly \$2 billion of this funding to drive a sevenfold increase in 155mm ammunition production, the GAO said.

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US Air Force Orders \$400Mln in Support Services For New Mexico Air Base - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - The US Air Force has awarded seven service companies a combined \$400 million contract for maintenance and other utilities at Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"[The companies] were awarded a \$400 million ... contract for the 49th Civil Engineering Squadron's Facility Sustainment Program ... for a broad range of maintenance, repair, alteration, mechanical, electrical, heating/air conditioning, demolition ... on real property at Holloman Air Force Base (AFB), New Mexico and on federal real property within a 100-miles radius," the release said on Tuesday.

The Defense Department identified the companies as Native American Services Corporation doing business as NASCO, Kellogg R-CON Construction, Mesa Verde Enterprises, Jack Wayte Construction Company, NLGC, Mirador Enterprises, and E-Corp.

Work under the contract will be performed at Holloman AFB, New Mexico, the release added.

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US Senate Passes Bill Banning US Imports of Russian Uranium, Heads to Biden's Desk

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - The US Senate has approved House-passed legislation to ban US imports of Russian uranium.

The Senate passed the bill in a unanimous vote on Tuesday night, sending it to President Joe Biden's desk to be signed into law.

The legislation specifically bans US imports of unirradiated low-enriched uranium that is produced in Russia or by a Russian entity. The bill also prohibits US imports of unirradiated low-enriched uranium that has been swapped for the banned uranium to prevent any efforts to circumvent the ban's restrictions.

However, the legislation notes that the US Department of Energy may issue a waiver to this ban if it determines that no alternative viable source of low-enriched uranium is available to sustain the continued operation of a US nuclear reactor or nuclear energy company, or if it also determines the US importation of the uranium is in the national interest.

Any waiver issued by the Energy Department must terminate by January 1, 2028, while the ban itself expires on December 31, 2040.

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(Updates with background in paras 3-6)

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US Aid Agency Failing to Assess Fraud Risks in Ukraine, Nigeria, Somalia - Report

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - The US Agency for International Development (USAID) failed to properly assess and document fraud risks in its operations in Nigeria, Somalia, and Ukraine, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) said in a report.

"We reviewed how USAID manages risks, particularly in three countries currently experiencing violent conflict: Nigeria, Somalia, and Ukraine," the report said on Tuesday. "We found that USAID didn't comprehensively assess and document relevant fraud risks in these countries."

In Ukraine, corruption remains a concern and the conflict as well as the imposition of martial law by the Kiev government have all created circumstances in which corruption can continue to flourish, the GAO acknowledged.

"Perceptions of corruption in Ukraine remain high, with Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index ranking Ukraine as 104th of 180 countries in 2023," the report said.

However, USAID still has not conducted comprehensive program-level fraud risk assessments covering relevant fraud risks or subsequently developed comprehensive fraud risk profiles specific to Nigeria, Somalia, or Ukraine. As a result, it cannot ensure that it is taking steps to mitigate all relevant fraud risks in these countries, the GAO reported.

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US Air Force Orders New Northrop Assembly Ducts For B-2 Stealth Bombers - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - Northrop Grumman Systems Corporation has been awarded a \$84,836,357 Defense Logistics Agency modification contract to make B-2 Stealth Bomber forward duct assemblies.

"Northrop Grumman Systems Corporation [of] Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, has been awarded a ...\$84,836,357 ...modification ...contract ...for the manufacture and production of B-2 forward duct assemblies," the release stated on Tuesday.

Work on the contract will be carried out at undisclosed locations in California over the next two years with a June 1, 2026, performance completion date, the Defense Department said.

The work will be overseen by the Defense Logistics Agency Aviation at Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma, the Defense Department added.

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Work under the contract will be performed at Holloman AFB, New Mexico, the release added.

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Austin Will Meet With Australian, Japanese, Philippine Officials This Week - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin will meet with Australian, Japanese and Philippine counterparts this week as part of a trip to Hawaii, the Defense Department said in a statement.

Austin is set to travel to Hawaii to preside over a change of command ceremony for US Indo-Pacific Command, the statement said on Tuesday.

"Austin is expected to hold a series of engagements with his counterparts from Australia, Japan and the Philippines, further marking what defense officials say is historic progress toward regional security integration," the statement said.

On Thursday, Austin will meet with Australian Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Richard Marles, the statement said. The two defense officials are expected to discuss US force posture in Australia and cooperation to bolster Australia's defense industrial base, the statement said.

Austin will also meet with Japanese Defense Minister Kihara Minoru, the statement said. The duo is set to discuss regional security and deepening ties between the US and Japan on scientific, technological and defense industrial cooperation, the statement said.

In addition to the bilateral meetings, Austin will convene the 13th US-Australia-Japan trilateral defense ministers' meeting, the statement said. The defense officials are expected to sign a new trilateral agreement outlining cooperation on research, development, testing and evaluation for strategic capabilities, the statement said.

Moreover, Austin will host a quadrilateral meeting that includes Philippine National Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro, marking the second-ever joint meeting between the four countries' defense chiefs, the statement said.

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US Army Pays Intrepid \$445Mln to Maintain Business Systems - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - The US Army is paying the Intrepid Company close to half-a-billion dollars to maintain and run its business systems, the Defense Department announced.

"Intrepid [of] Huntsville, Alabama was awarded a \$445,816,490 ...contract for General Fund Enterprise Business Systems support and services," the Defense Department said in a press release on Tuesday.

The contract is scheduled to last five years with an estimated completion date of May 12, 2029,

the release said.

The Army Contracting Command at Redstone Arsenal in the US state of Alabama will oversee work on the contract, the release added.

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Private Sector Space Station With Manufacturing Modules Will Replace ISS - Axiom Boss

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - The new Axiom space station to be launched later this year and linked to the International Space Station (ISS) is planned to have four modules in which commercial scientific research, testing, and even manufacturing processes will be carried out, new Axiom Space President Matt Oндler told the Meridian Space Diplomacy Forum.

"We think companies will come to us and ask us to build modules on our space station for mass production in space," Oндler said on Tuesday. "We can make things in orbit much faster."

Oндler said zero gravity conditions would dramatically speed up rates of scientific experimentation and discovery, including the testing of new drugs.

"We are building our space station in Italy. It will ship to Houston later this year. We will launch it on a SpaceX Falcon Heavy. ...Our plan is to fly four modules attached to the ISS equivalent in size and power to the American component of the ISS," he said.

Because the new station would be linked to the ISS, it would be able to draw on the ISS and its crew of astronauts and cosmonauts for power, support, and back-up systems as it was being developed, Oндler added.

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Biden Admin. Considering Resettling Certain Palestinians to US as Refugees – Reports

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) – The Biden administration is considering bringing some Palestinians to the United States as refugees as Israel is readying for a massive ground operation in the city of Rafah in the south of Gaza, CBS reported, citing internal federal documents.

US officials from several federal agencies have been discussing various options of how to move certain Palestinians with relatives among US citizens or permanent residents to the United States, the report said on Tuesday.

One option under consideration entails making some Palestinians eligible to participate in the old-standing US Refugee Admissions Program. Those willing to relocate to the United States would need to first enter Egypt and apply for this program from there, according to the report.

Palestinian applicants will have to pass a series of eligibility, medical, and security tests before they can fly to the United States as refugees, the report added.

The news comes as the Israeli army is preparing for a military operation in Rafah, a city with

more than one million refugees who have no place to go and who are trapped there after Israel has pushed them out from the rest of Gaza.

Earlier on Tuesday, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said on Tuesday that he wants to see Israel act in a much different way should it decide to proceed with its ground operation in Rafah in the Gaza Strip.

Over the past two months, Israel has said that an operation in Rafah is imminent, arguing that the remnants of the Hamas forces allegedly are there.

The Biden administration has repeatedly stated that it would oppose Israel proceeding with its military operation while more than one million civilians are still there and without any plans to protect them amid a potential urban fight.

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Wall Street's 5-Month Honeymoon Over as US Stocks End April Lower

NEW YORK, May 1 (Sputnik) - Wall Street's five-month-long winning streak came to an end on Tuesday with sobering losses across US stock indexes for April amid a growing notion that the Federal Reserve could delay interest rate cuts until the end of the year, or even 2025, due to inflation risks.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average, S&P 500 and Nasdaq Composite indexes fell between 1.5 % and 5% after a key measure of US consumer confidence published on Tuesday showed a plunge for April, reinforcing worries that inflation was getting the better of economic growth.

The data landed on the eve of the conclusion of the two-day periodical meeting of the Fed and its decision on rates.

Inflation hit a four-decade high in the aftermath of the 2020 coronavirus breakout, with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) - a major price indicator - growing as much as 9.1% during the year to June 2022.

The Fed then hiked interest rates 11 times between March 2022 and July 2023, bringing 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 central bank has managed to subdue inflation by more than half with its action - the CPI only rose 3.5% in the year to March - it just cannot seem to reach its 2% target, with each update on price growth coming in a tick higher than expected.

Analysts say the Fed target might not be reached until the end of this year, possibly pushing interest rate cuts into 2025.

Core inflation in December, stripped of volatile energy and food prices, initially seemed headed for a 2% to 2.5% range by mid-2024, but this no longer looks to be the case, David Doyle, who leads Macquarie's North America economic team, said. "This range may only be reached in 2025."

The S&P 500, which tracks stocks of the top 500 US companies, finished April down 4.2%. It had risen a cumulative 18% over five previous months.

The tech-laden Nasdaq, which comprises stocks such as Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google,

lost 4.4% for the month after a 25% gain between November and March.

The Dow, the broadest indicator for US stocks, finished May down 5% after a 19% rally over the past five months.

Earlier on Tuesday, the Conference Board announced a consumer confidence reading of 97, versus the 104.7 it reported for March and a forecast of 104 by private economists. It was the weakest such reading since July 2022 issued by the board, a non-profit that counts over 1,000 public and private corporations and other organizations as members.

The Conference Board's monthly survey on consumer confidence reflects prevailing business conditions and likely developments for the months ahead. It details consumer attitudes, buying intentions, vacation plans and expectations for inflation, stock prices and, ultimately, interest rates.

"This is a big surprise," Adam Button wrote in a reaction posted on the ForexLive forum. Unlike monthly wage numbers which are retrospective, the consumer confidence data is "forward-looking and correlates with the weaker S&P PMIs," Button said. He was referring to the Standard & Poor's Purchasing Managers' Index from last week that spoke of deteriorating health in the US manufacturing and service sectors.

"Consumers became less positive about the current labor market situation, and more concerned about future business conditions, job availability, and income," Dana M. Peterson, chief economist at the board, said in a news release. "Despite April's dip in the overall index, since mid-2022, optimism about the present situation continues to more than offset concerns about the future."

While the Fed's next decision on rates will be on May 1, it's also likely true that none of the policy makers on its Federal Open Market Committee believe the inflation target will be met before the third quarter of the year. Wall Street is, in fact, betting on a late year pivot, meaning the November 7 and December 18 dates on the Fed meeting calendar will be the more closely-watched ones for a rate cut.

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Pentagon Does Not Rule Out Abandoning Sentinel ICBM Program - Official

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - The United States Defense Department does not exclude the possibility of abandoning the US Sentinel Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) program or making changes to it, Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment Bill LaPlante said on Tuesday.

"The possibilities of the outcome could be, I would say one of three things. One is the program could be recertified sort of largely as is. Number two, the program could be canceled, and then third it could be certified with modification," LaPlante said during a hearing in Congress, while noting that the program has faced cost overruns and long delays.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) -

STUDENT PROTESTS IN US

- * Seventy-nine people have been arrested during protests at the University of Austin in Texas, Sheriff Travis County Public Information Officer Kristen Dark told Sputnik on Tuesday.
- * Student protesters occupying a building at Columbia University in New York will face expulsion, a university spokesperson said.
- * White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said President Biden views Columbia students taking over a campus building in protest over Israel's war in Gaza as "absolutely the wrong approach."

ARMENIA-AZERBAIJAN NEGOTIATIONS

- * Armenia and Azerbaijan have confirmed that they will take part in negotiations in Kazakhstan, Kazakh Foreign Ministry spokesman Aibek Smadiyarov told Sputnik on Tuesday, adding that the date of the talks will be announced separately.
- * The date of a meeting between the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan in Kazakhstan has not yet been determined, Astana is waiting for Yerevan's response, Kazakh Deputy Foreign Minister Alibek Bakayev told Sputnik.

GAZA STRIP

- * UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Tuesday said it was imperative to give international investigators access to mass graves in Gaza in order to establish the facts amid competing narratives about the deaths of hundreds of Palestinians buried there.
- * Guterres said most health care facilities in Gaza have been destroyed, with the majority no longer functioning and some resembling graveyards.
- * Guterres also said Israel's military attack on Rafah in Gaza would cause an "unthinkable escalation" of the conflict and would result in the death of thousands of Palestinian civilians.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

- * One woman was killed and another one was injured as a result of shelling of a village in Russia's Kursk Region by the Ukrainian military, Governor Roman Starovoit said on Tuesday.
- * The Ukrainian military suffered up to 685 casualties in the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) in the past 24 hours as a result of operations by the southern, central and eastern groupings of the Russian armed forces, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
- * The Ukrainian government has allocated over \$390 million to purchase 300,000 drones for the country's armed forces, Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal said.
- * The United States has already provided ATACMS to the Ukrainian military and intends to continue providing them with as much capability as possible, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd

Austin said.

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PREVIEW - No Fed Rate Cut Seen In May As Americans Worry Over Food, Gas Prices

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - Federal Reserve policymakers are to announce Wednesday the central bank's decision on interest rates, with few economists expecting a cut after a key measure of US consumer confidence plunged in April — reinforcing worry that inflation was getting the better of economic growth.

The Conference Board announced on Tuesday a consumer confidence reading of 97, versus the 104.7 it reported for March and a forecast of 104 by private economists. It was the weakest such reading since July 2022 issued by the board, a non-profit that counts over 1,000 public and private corporations and other organizations as members.

Economists seemed stunned by the plunge. "This is a big surprise," Adam Button wrote in a reaction posted on the ForexLive forum. Unlike monthly wage numbers which are retrospective, the consumer confidence data is "forward-looking and correlates with the weaker S&P PMIs," Button said. He was referring to the Standard & Poors Purchasing Managers' Index from last week that spoke of deteriorating health in the US manufacturing and service sectors.

The Conference Board's monthly survey on consumer confidence reflects prevailing business conditions and likely developments for the months ahead. It details consumer attitudes, buying intentions, vacation plans and expectations for inflation, stock prices and, ultimately, interest rates.

"Consumers became less positive about the current labor market situation, and more concerned about future business conditions, job availability, and income," Dana Peterson, chief economist at the board, said in a news release. "Despite April's dip in the overall index, since mid-2022, optimism about the present situation continues to more than offset concerns about the future."

The consumer confidence data came ahead of Wednesday's conclusion of the periodical policy meeting of the Fed and decision on rates.

The central bank has been consistent that without a meaningful retreat in inflation, there cannot be a policy pivot. Rates are at their highest in two decades and have been unchanged since July 2023 as the Fed sought more comfort with inflation before allowing easier credit conditions that could again bump up prices.

Inflation hit a four-decade high in the aftermath of the 2020 coronavirus breakout, with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) — a major price indicator — growing as much as 9.1% during the year to June 2022.

The Fed, in response, hiked interest 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 central bank has managed to subdue inflation by more than half with its action — the CPI only rose 3.5% in the year to March — it just can't seem to reach its 2% target, with each

update on price growth coming in a tick higher than expected.

The Personal Consumption Expenditures Index, another inflation gauge closely watched by the Fed and often referred to as just as the PCE, showed prices growing 2.7% during the year to March — above the 2.5% growth noted in February and Wall Street's 2.6% forecast.

Core PCE — a measure stripped of volatile energy and food prices — grew even more aggressively, at 2.8% year-on-year, versus a forecast 2.7%.

The Fed has said it is open to cutting rates by 0.75 basis points for both this year and next. If that happens, it would translate to three 0.25-basis point reductions in 2024 alone.

But the central bank has also made clear that any rate reduction would depend on inflation returning to near where it stood during the pre-Covid years. Almost every influential Fed official — from Chairman Jerome Powell to the heads of its different regional jurisdictions — wants either the PCE or CPI to make a meaningful descent towards the 2% target to force their hand.

Peterson at The Conference Board may have given the Fed the best reason to keep rates unchanged when it makes its decision on Wednesday. She said April's survey on consumers showed "elevated price levels, especially for food and gas" dominating Americans' concerns way above that of politics and global conflicts.

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Draft UNGA Resolution on Srebrenica One-Sided, Can Lead to Chain Reaction – Nebenzia

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) – A draft UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution on events in the Bosnian city of Srebrenica is one-sided and can only provoke a new and very serious spiral of escalation, Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said on Tuesday. "The document on Srebrenica is one-sided, politically charged and has nothing to do with the stated purpose of perpetuating the memory of the victims of the 1995 tragedy," Nebenzia warned during a meeting of the UN Security Council.

He stressed that the draft resolution cannot lead to interethnic reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and can only provoke a "chain reaction" all over the world, since many countries have not fully healed from their wounds and grudges against each other.

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Russia Disagrees With Presence of Christian Schmidt at UNSC Meeting on BiH – Nebenzia

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) – Russia objects to the presence of the so-called High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina Christian Schmidt at a UN Security Council on the situation in the country, Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said on Tuesday.

"We will talk more about the unpleasant situation around Mr. Schmidt at a separate meeting in mid-May," Nebenzia said at the UNSC meeting, adding that the US and the UK, by inviting him,

impose his expertise on members of the Security Council.

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F-16 Fighter Crashes in New Mexico, Pilot Successfully Ejects – Air Force Base

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) – A US F-16 fighter jet crashed near Holloman Air Force Base in the US state of New Mexico while the sole pilot was able to eject, the base said in a press release on Tuesday.

“A U.S. Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcon assigned to the 49th Wing crashed west of Holloman Air Force Base near White Sands National Park at approximately 11:50 a.m. [17:50 GMT] today,” the press release said. The sole pilot on board successfully ejected and was transported by ambulance for medical care.”

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draft unga resolution on events in srebrenica one-sided, can lead to chain reaction - nebenzia

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Trump Says ‘Hush Money’ Trial a Disgrace, Interfering With Presidential Campaign

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - Former US President and presumptive 2024 Republican Party presidential nominee Donald Trump said on Tuesday that the so-called hush money case against him is a disgrace and interfering with this campaign.

“They don’t want me on the campaign trail. It’s a real disgrace,” Trump said during remarks at the courthouse.

Trump said he is supposed to be in states like Georgia, Ohio and New Hampshire instead of sitting in a courthouse.

Trump has repeatedly characterized the case as a form of election interference and criticized the court for imposing a gag order on him as an active political candidate.

Earlier on Tuesday, New York State Supreme Court Judge Juan Merchan ordered Trump to pay \$9,000 in fines for violating the gag order, which prohibits him from publicly speaking about potential jurors and witnesses in the case.

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US Has Seen No Signs of Nuclear Activity in Iran - Pentagon Official

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - The United States has seen no evidence that Iran is working on a nuclear weapons program, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy Vipin Narang said on Tuesday.

"Iran has not made a decision to build a nuclear weapons facility. It is administration policy to not allow Iran to obtain nuclear weapons. We're monitoring enrichment activity very, very closely. But administration policy remains same: we will not allow Iran to develop nuclear," Narang said.

Last week, the State Department announced it would be working with the International Atomic Energy Agency to get more transparency from Iran on its nuclear activity amid concerns that it is close to developing nuclear weapons.

The State Department said earlier in the week that the United States is not taking part in direct talks with Iran on the return to the nuclear agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

In 2015, Iran signed the JCPOA with China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union. The agreement committed Iran to scaling back its nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief. The United States unilaterally withdrew from the agreement in 2018 but then resumed talks with Iran in a bid to revive the deal. The talks have since hit a deadlock.

Iran has repeatedly said its nuclear program is solely intended for peaceful purposes.

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Already Fragile Situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina Risks Deteriorating Soon – Nebenzia

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) – The fragile situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina risks sharply deteriorating in the near future, Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia warned on Tuesday.

"The already fragile situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina risks sharply deteriorating," Nebenzia said at a meeting of the UN Security Council.

He stressed that the council cannot remain indifferent to cries of help from Bosnian Serbs.

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Top US Officials Have Not Yet Requested Non-Political Ukraine, Gaza Assessments - Hersh

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - Top Biden administration officials have yet to request non-political intelligence assessments on the conflicts in Ukraine and the Gaza Strip, Pulitzer Prize-winning US journalist Seymour Hersh said on Tuesday.

The US government has previously used National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) to produce non-political assessments at the request of the president, Hersh said on his personal Substack blog. NIEs are produced by senior policymakers at the National Intelligence Council, which is considered fiercely independent, Hersh said.

"I was told that the president and his top national security aides, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, have yet to request a study that delves deeply into any of the international crises of the day: the wars in Ukraine and Gaza," Hersh said.

The White House's seeming disinterest in examining foreign policy issues has bewildered some intelligence community veterans, Hersh said, citing a US intelligence official.

The National Intelligence Council is producing "irrelevant" materials on issues such as unidentified anomalous phenomena and diversity, equity and inclusion instead of pressing foreign policy issues, the intelligence official reportedly said.

The National Intelligence Estimates typically provide judgments on the likely course of future events and their implications for US policymakers, Hersh said.

The final conclusions and recommendations in the estimates are often reviewed by outside academics to assure objectivity, Hersh added.

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County Attorney Blames Texas Governor for 'Escalating' Situation With University Protests

AUSTIN, April 30 (Sputnik) - Texas Governor Greg Abbott is "only escalating the situation" by posting comments on his social media accounts, Travis County Attorney Delia Garza said on Tuesday.

"Our governor, I don't know where he is, tweeting or whatever he is doing to escalate the situation. Protests are a hallmark of our democracy," Garza said during her press briefing.

This needs to be handled on a local level and this leadership's behavior does not help, she added.

On Monday, Greg Abbott said on his social media profile: "No encampments will be allowed. Instead, arrests are being made."

The Monday arrests happened after some of the protesters refused to leave an encampment on the campus lawn, with some of them behaving aggressively.

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.

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.

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Blackwater Founder Erik Prince Says US Struggling With Military Capacity, Power Projection

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - The United States is struggling to develop its military capacity and effectively project power due to policy and strategic errors, former US Navy SEAL and Blackwater private military company founder Erik Prince said on Tuesday.

"It is painfully apparent to anyone of sound mind and judgment that there's something gravely wrong with America's current military capacity and our ability to project power in the world," Prince said in an essay for cultural and political magazine IM—1776.

The US continues to wage "forever wars" of convenience due to a belief among officials in Washington that the US is immune to reality and evolved beyond history, Prince said.

The fiat nature of the US dollar and debt spending has enabled the government to overfund the military, Prince said. However, the situation resulted in a lack of strategic discipline and created a military policy that prioritizes benefiting a small number of contractors over winning wars, Prince said.

The US redirected the so-called "peace dividend" after the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War into expanding NATO instead of ending it, Prince said. The US rejected the chance to positively engage with Russia due to the influence of neoconservatives and the military-industrial complex, Prince said.

"The goal was to enrich the military-industrial complex by creating more clients to buy US weapons, at the expense of the opportunity to partner with Russia. Promises of not expanding NATO eastward into former Warsaw Pact countries were broken and NATO troops were deployed on Russia's border," Prince said.

The consequences of expanding NATO eastward despite clear red-line language from Russia on including Ukraine in the alliance were highly predictable, Prince said.

The US' current security assistance model is broken and counterproductive, Prince said. The US military is the most expensive organization in history but serves as a means to sell overpriced equipment to countries that struggle to use or maintain it, Prince said.

Prince suggested that the US send long-term advisors to countries in order to build a lasting capacity, as opposed to organizing multi-week exercises and gifting equipment.

"The foreign policy of the United States should be that our friends love us, our rivals respect us, and our enemies fear us. Instead, our friends fear our self-immolation while our rivals consume us and our enemies fire upon us without consequence," Prince said.

Moreover, a government-only approach undermines US credibility and deterrence, Prince said. The private sector has repeatedly outperformed the government in solving problems, Prince said, adding that the US ought to utilize entrepreneurs in foreign policy to bolster credibility and cut costs.

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US House Panel Asks Heads of Yale, Michigan, UCLA to Testify on Campus Protests - Chair

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) — A US House committee has given notice to administration officials at Yale, UCLA and the University of Michigan to appear for a hearing on the recent protests on campuses across the country, its Chairwoman Virginia Foxx said during a press briefing on Tuesday.

"Actions have consequences. One of those consequences is that I've given notice to Yale, UCLA, and Michigan [University] to appear before the Education and Workforce Committee on May 23rd, for a hearing on their handling of these most recent outrages," Foxx said.

Foxx added that everyone affiliated with these universities would receive a "healthy dose of reality" at the hearing.

Numerous protests have 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 killed more than 34,000 Palestinians and left more than 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 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.

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Justice Dept. Says Brooklyn Resident to Plead Guilty to Exporting Electronics to Russia

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) — The United States Justice Department said in a statement on Tuesday that Brooklyn resident Nikolay Grigorev is to plead guilty today for what it claims is "illicit" export of electronics to Russian military-linked companies.

"Nikolay Grigorev, 36, of Brooklyn, pleaded guilty today to conspiring to defraud the United States for his role in an illicit export control scheme to ship electronic components from the United States to companies affiliated with the Russian military. Co-defendants Nikita Arkhipov and Artem Oloviannikov remain at large," the statement said.

According to the statement, Grigorev, along with his associates, used a Brooklyn-based company, Quality Life Cue LLC (QLC), to allegedly facilitate the export of dual-use electronic components to entities in Russia involved in drone development for the Special Military Operation.

Grigorev is facing up to five years in prison due to his guilty plea, though a hearing date has not been set, the statement added.

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UNGA to Hold Emergency Session on Palestine's Full Membership on May 10 - Source

UNITED NATIONS, April 30 (Sputnik) - The United Nations General Assembly will hold an Emergency Special Session (ESS) on Palestine's request to become a full member of the UN on May 10, a diplomatic source told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"ESS [special emergency session] on May 10," the UN source said.

In Mid April, the wielded its veto power in the UN Security Council to block Palestine's bid for full membership within the world body. 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 Air Force Secretary Says They Face Pilot Shortage

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - US Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall said on Tuesday that they face a pilot shortage and are working to address the situation.

"We do have a shortage of pilots and we've been working to reduce that," Kendall said during a congressional hearing.

Kendall noted that the greatest obstacle to higher pilot production is the pipeline, particularly the availability of training aircraft, which is very thin at present.

Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David Allvin added that they are trying to increase bonuses in order to help with pilot retention in the Air Force.

Allvin also said another effective option for pilot retention is allowing airmen to serve as commercial pilots while also serving in the Air Force Reserve.

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Larger-Scale Drills Will Help US Military Prepare for Indo-Pacific Conflict - US Air Force

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - Conducting large-scale military exercises will help the United States prepare for conflict in the Indo-Pacific region, US Air Force Chief of Staff David Allvin said on Tuesday.

"The increase in being able to do larger-scale exercises, that's where you're going to find out

where some of your weaknesses are. We haven't had the ability to do that as much as we'd like to, and so moving forward, I think that will help us advance our capabilities more effectively in the Indo-Pacific fight," Allvin said during a House Appropriations Committee hearing.

Preparing for complex contingencies requires large-scale exercises in order to find areas for improvement, Allvin said.

The Pentagon has characterized China as the US' pacing threat, prompting the Biden administration to focus on developing ties and bolstering US engagement in the Indo-Pacific region.

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Ex-US Diplomat Says State Dept. Staff Fearful to Express Their Views on Gaza

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) – Many State Department staffers are fearful to openly express views on Gaza which are contrary to the official position of the Biden administration, The Washington Post reported on Tuesday, citing former diplomat Hala Rharrit.

Earlier in April, Rharrit resigned from the position of Arabic Language Spokesperson for the State Department and the Dubai Regional Media Hub's Deputy Director in protest of the US policy in Gaza and support for limitless supply of arms to Israel, according to the State Department. She joined the States Department in 2006 as a political officer.

In Hala's view, inside today's State Department, diplomats are afraid to express their viewpoints contrary to official policy despite Secretary of State Antony Blinken stating that welcomes conflicting views and reads the cables that come through the department's official dissent channel, the report said.

"People are scared to talk to each other. People don't know how other people feel. So, they try to assess, you know, how are you feeling? People are scared to mention Gaza at work. They just want to pretend it's not happening," the report quoted Rharrit as saying.

According to Rharrit, she had to refuse several interviews with Arab media outlets about Gaza because she found official talking points to be inflammatory.

"They oftentimes [talking points] completely ignored Palestinians. Early on, it was very, very heavy on 'Israel has a right to defend itself.' Yes, Israel has a right to defend itself, but there was no mention of the plight of the Palestinians. I, in good conscience, could not go on Arab television with those talking points. All that that would have done is have caused someone to want to throw their shoe at the TV, want to burn an American flag or, worse, throw a rock at our troops," the report quoted Rharrit as saying.

Rharrit is not the first US diplomat who resigned in protest of the Biden administration's policy in Gaza. In October 2023, Josh Paul, an official who oversaw arms transfers to foreign nations, resigned in protest to continued US military assistance to Israel.

In March, Annelle Sheline, a State Department officer at the Office of Near Eastern Affairs in the Department of State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, resigned over the disagreement with Biden's policy on Gaza.

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 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.

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Speaker Johnson Says Blinken Affirms White House to Call on ICC About Israeli Officials

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) — House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Tuesday that Secretary Blinken confirmed the White House's intention, during a conversation, to publicly urge the ICC against issuing arrest warrants for Israeli officials.

"I spoke, within the last hour, to Secretary Blinken about this issue, and he confirmed that the position of the White House is our position as well. I'm glad that they are affirming that, and I suspect they will do that publicly later today, they are calling for the ICC to stand down," Johnson said during a press briefing.

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US Air Force 'Very Concerned' About Increased Cancer Rates Among Airmen - Secretary

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - The US Air Force is very concerned about a potential uptick in cancer rates among airmen who serve in certain locations and continues to look into the situation, Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall said on Tuesday.

"We are very concerned about the possibility of increased cancer rates among people that are serving in certain locations," Kendall said during a congressional hearing.

Kendall did not provide details about which locations seem to be exposing airmen to carcinogens that could cause cancer.

The Air Force has a year-long investigation on this matter and intends to be as transparent as possible about its findings, Kendall noted.

A US lawmaker during the hearing noted that US aircrews had a 24% higher rate of all types of cancer. She also noted that a new two-year Air Force study has found what appears to be a higher rate of brain and spinal cord cancer among children of service members who were stationed at Cannon Air Force Base in the state of New Mexico.

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Total of 79 People Arrested Following Protests at University of Austin - Sheriff's Office

AUSTIN, April 30 (Sputnik) - A total of 79 people were arrested following Monday's protests at the University of Austin in Texas, the Public Information Officer of Sheriff Travis County Kristen Dark told Sputnik.

"A total of 79 people were booked into the Travis County Jail in association with yesterday's protest on the University of Texas campus (April 29, 2024). 78 of the people arrested are charged with Criminal Trespass. One of them has an additional charge of Obstructing a Highway or Passageway. One of the people arrested is charged with Interfering with Public Duties," Dark said in statement.

The Austin Police Department arrested 4 of them and the University of Texas Police Department 75 of them, she added.

The Monday arrests happened after some of the protesters refused to leave an encampment on the campus lawn, with some of them behaving aggressively.

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.

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.

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NASA Plans to Have Ready to Go Commercial Stations by 2031 When ISS Deorbited - Nelson

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - NASA plans to have a ready-to-go commercial space stations by 2031 after the International Space Station (ISS) is deorbited, Administrator Bill Nelson said in a congressional testimony on Tuesday.

"We want to replace it with commercial stations so that all the science, the training, all the things that we do in low Earth orbit (LEO) can be done on a commercial station, which at the same time has a business model that they can make money on a commercial station bringing business off the face of the Earth up to LEO," Nelson said.

The NASA chief pointed out that the agency has already put significant funding into three commercial companies to do precisely that.

"That is the intent by 2031 when we would deorbit the Space Station, that there would be the commercial station ready to go," Nelson said.

NASA extended its presence on the US side of the space station through 2030, while the Roscosmos Scientific and Technical Council approved the decision to extend the operation of the Russian segment of the station through 2028.

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US Drug Authorities Plan to Reclassify Cannabis as Schedule III Substance - Reports

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - The US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) intends to reclassify cannabis as a Schedule III controlled substance, The Associated Press reported on Tuesday.

The White House Office of Management and Budget must assess the DEA's plan before the agency moves forward with the reclassification, the report said, citing five people familiar with the matter.

Cannabis, also known as marijuana, is currently classified as a Schedule I drug under the Controlled Substance Act. Schedule I drugs are believed to have no accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse.

Reclassifying cannabis as a Schedule III drug would recognize the substance as having a moderate to low potential for physical and psychological dependence and acknowledge its potential medical uses.

If the White House approves the DEA's plan, then the agency would move into a public comment period on the reclassification before issuing a final rule, the report said.

Some states have already legalized and regulated cannabis for medicinal and recreational use, although it remains illegal on a federal level.

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Student Protesters Occupying Building at Columbia University Face Expulsion - Statement

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - Student protesters occupying a building at Columbia University in New York will face expulsion, a university spokesperson said on Tuesday.

"Students occupying the building face expulsion," the spokesperson said regarding protesters occupying the Hamilton Hall building on campus.

The spokesperson added that any student protesters who have not left the encampment on campus peacefully by now are suspended and seniors will be ineligible to graduate.

The school said the demonstration has reached a point that it has created a threatening environment for many of its Jewish students and faculty, as well as become disruptive to the school's daily classes.

Numerous pro-Palestine demonstrations have emerged on US college campuses in recent days against the United States military, 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.

From: Kristopher Rivera - kgrivera24@gmail.com

Subject:

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Less Than Half of Likely US Voters View House Speaker Johnson Favorably - Poll

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - Less than half of likely voters in the United States view House Speaker Mike Johnson favorably, according to a Rasmussen Reports poll released Tuesday.

Forty-four percent (44%) of respondents said that they have a favorable impression of Johnson, including 16% with a very favorable opinion of the House leader, the poll report said.

Just under one-third of respondents, 32%, have an unfavorable view of Johnson, including 14% with a very unfavorable impression, the poll report said.

The poll, conducted from April 21-23, comes amid threats from Republican US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene to attempt to oust Johnson as speaker. Greene accuses Johnson of relying on Democratic support to pass legislation opposed by some House Republicans.

House Democratic leadership said on Tuesday that they would attempt to table a motion to vacate Johnson if Greene invokes such a measure.

Despite the threat to his leadership position, Johnson's favorability rose from 39% in February, the poll report said.

The poll surveyed 1,105 likely US voters and maintains a margin of error of plus-or-minus three percentage points with a 95% confidence level.

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Funding to Deorbit ISS Should Be Part of Emergency Supplemental Bill - Nelson

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - The funding for a spacecraft to deorbit the International Space Station (ISS) and bring its remains safely to Earth after 2030 should be included in an emergency supplemental bill, NASA Administrator Bill Nelson said in congressional testimony on Tuesday.

"Why is it an emergency and it should not be in the regular request for appropriations? Because we don't know what [Russian President] Vladimir Putin is going to do," Nelson said. "We don't know what the President of Russia is going to do and we could be in an emergency situation if we have to get this structure that is as big as a football stadium down and down safely in 2031, and that's why I am making the request and I am pleading to you all in the Appropriations Committee to put that in the emergency supplemental bill that will be coming up later."

At the same time, Nelson underscored that the ISS was built and operated together with the Russians.

"We have had no hiccup whatsoever with the Russian cosmonauts nor Moscow mission control and Houston mission control of which we have both Russians and Americans in both, we do an integrated crew - on the Soyuz there is an American astronaut, on the Dragon there is a Russian cosmonaut," he noted.

When asked about the cost of the deorbiting vehicle, Nelson said that for the fiscal year of 2024, it is \$80 million, and for a total price over six years is \$1.5 billion.

Earlier in April, Nelson said that NASA had requested additional emergency funding from the US Congress to start preparing a spacecraft to deorbit the International Space Station (ISS) and bring its remains safely to Earth after 2030 if space cooperation with Russia breaks down before then.

Current plans anticipate that NASA and Russian state space corporation Roscosmos work closely together to safely deorbit the space station so that its debris does not threaten any populated areas on Earth, the chief said, adding that the ISS is 357 feet long - longer than an American football field.

However, given the current icy diplomatic relations between the United States and Russia, NASA planners cannot take for granted that their current and ongoing cooperation with Roscosmos will continue safely into the indefinite future, the NASA chief added.

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US Congressman Suggests Sanctioning Those Responsible for Detaining Americans Abroad

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - The United States should sanction those responsible for the detention of Americans abroad, US House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul said on Tuesday.

"We should be projecting power, we should be leveraging sanctions, punishing bad behavior. If there are no consequences for bad behavior, bad behavior continues," McCaul said during a round table discussion with family members of American detainees abroad.

The congressman said the US government should make additional efforts to bring back home the detained Americans and designate the responsible parties.

"We need to hold them accountable for human rights abuses and negotiate from the position of strength, not weakness," McCaul said.

The US government considers that some 50 publicly known Americans are wrongfully detained abroad.

The family members whose relatives remain detained in Afghanistan, Syria, Nigeria, China, Russia and Iran shared stories during the round table about the ordeal they have encountered since their loved ones were detained.

Pavel Butorin, husband of RFE/RL reporter Alsu Kurmasheva urged the State Department to declare his wife a wrongfully detained person and speed up her release.

"She is not an activist, she is not a member of the Russian opposition. She is an American

journalist," Butorin said.

Russia has designated RFE/RL as a foreign agent and detained Kurmasheva on October 18 for failing to register as a foreign agent, a violation that carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison.

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Austin Says US Wants to See Things 'Done in Much Different Way' in Rafah

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said on Tuesday that he wants to see Israel act in a much different way should it decide to proceed with its ground operation in Rafah in the Gaza Strip.

"If they [Israelis] were to go in, we certainly would want to see things done in a much different way," Austin said in congressional testimony before the US House Armed Services Committee.

The Defense Department has so far not seen civilians in Rafah moved out of the battlespace, but Israel has provided assurances that their operations will be "sequential" whereby they could account for civilians and move wounded ones out of harm's way.

Earlier on Tuesday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that Israel will carry out an operation in Rafah regardless of whether a deal on hostages is reached with the Palestinian movement Hamas.

Over the past two months, Israel has said that an operation in Rafah is imminent, arguing that the remnants of the Hamas forces allegedly are there.

The Biden administration has repeatedly stated that it would oppose Israel proceeding with its military operation while more than one million civilians are still there and without any plans to protect them amid a potential urban fight.

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Louisiana Residents Win Legal Dispute To Establish New Town - Report

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) — Louisiana residents in Baton Rouge have won a legal battle to establish a new town named St. George, Fox News reported on Tuesday.

According to reports, Baton Rouge leaders filed a lawsuit against St. George organizers in 2019, shortly after 54% of voters within the proposed city's boundaries approved its incorporation, citing concerns over financial impact and potential layoffs.

Furthermore, residents of St. George, mostly white and affluent, have long criticized the local government and schools, seeking greater control over tax funds, the report said.

The report added that the proposed city, St. George, had 68,000 residents during the election, with approximately 12% being Black, contrasting with East Baton Rouge Parish's 47% Black population, and its boundaries encompass nearly 100,000 residents.

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UN Chief Says Israeli Illegal Settlements Are 'Obstacle to Peace'

UNITED NATIONS, April 30 (Sputnik) - The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that the illegal Israeli settlements are an obstacle to a peaceful resolution and an overall two-state solution.

"Settlements are illegal by themselves. They are an obstacle to peace. Settlements are an obstacle to the two-state solution," Guterres told the UN journalists on Tuesday.

On October 7, 2023, Hamas attacked Israel from Gaza and killed in the fighting some 1,200 Israelis - military and civilians - and abducted 240 others. Israel imposed a complete blockade of Gaza and invaded the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas and rescuing the hostages. More than 34,400 Palestinians have been killed and more than 77,000 have been wounded in the Israeli military operations, 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. Some 100 hostages are still believed to be held by Hamas in Gaza.

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Russia Could Join US-Led Artemis Program - NASA Deputy Administrator

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - Russia could join the US-led Artemis program on space cooperation if it wanted to, NASA Deputy Administrator Pam Melroy said during the Meridian Space Diplomacy Forum in Washington on Tuesday.

"Absolutely," Melroy said when asked if Russia could join the Artemis Accords.

Moreover, Melroy during the panel discussion highlighted Russia's key role on the International Space Station, noting that the United States cannot operate it without Russia.

NASA established the Artemis Accords in 2020 together with seven other nations, but at present there are a total of 39 countries that have signed on to them. The accords establish a practical set of principles to guide space exploration cooperation among nations, including those participating in NASA's Artemis campaign.

According to NASA, the Artemis Accords reinforce and implement key obligations in the 1967 Outer Space Treaty.

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

US Top General Says Pentagon 'Not Focused at Moment' on Striking Russia's Oil Tankers

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - US Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Charles Brown said on Tuesday that the Pentagon is "not focused" on striking Russia's oil tanker fleet.

"That is not something that we are from an authority standpoint, that we are as a military, focused on right now," Brown said during a congressional testimony before the House Armed Services Committee when asked by Congressman Austin Scott if he has necessary authorizations to take military action against Russia's "shadow fleet."

On Monday, Lloyd's List, a UK journal, reported that one of the key maritime insurers, the International Group of P&I Clubs, said in a statement for the British parliament this week that the price cap on Russian oil doesn't work.

"The OPC [oil price cap] therefore appears increasingly unenforceable as more ships and associated services move into this parallel trade," the journal quoted the insurer as saying in the statement.

The oil price cap led to 800 tankers leaving P&I Clubs and joining the so-called dark fleet and this number will continue to grow as a direct result of restrictions imposed by the G7 on transport companies, according to the report.

In December 2022, the G7, the EU, and Australia introduced a price cap on Russian oil at \$60 per barrel, meaning it is prohibited to transport and insure more expensive oil. At the end of 2023, the G7 tightened control over compliance with the price ceiling and imposed a series of sanctions against companies and individual tankers transporting Russian oil allegedly in violation of the restrictions.

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Pentagon Space Policy Officials Says Militarizing Moon Not 'Achievable'

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) – A Pentagon space policy official said on Tuesday that he did not believe it was realistic to militarize the moon.

"On the specific issue of militarization of the moon, I just personally as a Department of Defense person do not buy that. I do not think that is an achievable thing. I do not think anybody could militarily protect logistics chain all the way to the moon," said John Plumb, assistant secretary for space policy, at a Meridian International Center talk.

Plumb was responding to a NASA statement that China's civilian space program was effectively a military program.

He said it made sense for countries to use their militaries to understand other countries' activities during moon orbits, but that would be a "far cry" from militarization.

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

US Lawmaker Asks Justice Dept. to Probe Special Counsel Smith for Election Interference

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - US Congresswoman Elise Stefanik on Tuesday sent a letter to the Justice Department asking them to investigate Special Counsel Jack Smith for allegedly abusing federal government resources while probing former President Donald Trump and interfering in the 2024 presidential election.

"I write today to request an ethics investigation of Biden Justice Department special counsel Jack Smith for abusing the resources of the federal government to unlawfully interfere with the 2024 presidential election," Stefanik said in the letter addressed to the Justice Department's Office of Professional Responsibility.

Stefanik alleged that Smith used federal resources to accelerate Trump's court trial so it would take place before the presidential election in November. Smith's actions violate a Justice Department manual that prevents prosecutors from selecting the timing of a federal trial for the purpose of affecting any election or for the purpose of giving an advantage or disadvantage to any candidate or political party.

"Jack Smith has not talked about the election in his filings because it is an obviously improper reason to expedite President Trump's trial," Stefanik said. "Biden special counsel Jack Smith's actions, however, leave no doubt that the election is driving his timing decisions."

Smith's prosecutorial team has said that holding Trump's trial mere weeks before the presidential election would not violate Justice Department policy.

Stefanik also alleged that Smith violated a federal court order halting proceedings in 2020 by continuing to submit filings and turn over evidence to Trump and his lawyers.

In August 2023, Smith charged Trump with four criminal counts in the so-called election subversion case, including conspiring to defraud the United States, obstructing the congressional certification of Biden's electoral victory and conspiring to do so, and conspiring against the right of Americans to vote.

In February, a US federal appeals court ruled that Trump is not immune from prosecution in his 2020 election interference case, which Trump appealed to the Supreme Court.

The US Supreme Court agreed to hear the case on April 25, effectively postponing Smith's criminal trial.

Trump faces a total of 91 charges in four criminal cases in what the Republican politician calls an attempt by the Democratic establishment to prevent him from returning to the White House. The most severe counts might cost Trump 20 years in prison. If the punishment were to be determined by adding up the terms, he could be behind bars for more than 700 years.

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Biden Sees Columbia Student Protestors Taking 'Absolutely the Wrong Approach' – Kirby

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) –White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Tuesday that US President Biden saw Columbia students taking over a campus building in protest against Israel's war on Gaza as "absolutely the wrong approach."

"The president believes that forcibly taking over a building on campus is absolutely the wrong approach. That is not an example of peaceful protest," Kirby said at a press briefing.

Kirby later clarified the US belief in the freedom of speech and the right to protest, emphasizing the importance of peaceful means.

He acknowledged that the White House was "watching these protests with concern." He said there was currently "no active effort" to consider federalizing the National Guard to intervene on university campuses.

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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San Diego Zoo to Get 2 Pandas as Part of 10-Year Cooperation Project - Chinese Embassy

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - The zoo in San Diego, California, will receive from China two pandas as part of a ten-year cooperation project, Chinese Embassy in the United States spokesperson Liu Pengyu announced on Tuesday.

"Two giant pandas named Yun Chuan (male) and Xin Bao (female) from China are set to travel to the San Diego Zoo on a ten-year cooperation project," Liu said.

The spokesperson noted that the San Diego zoo is the first US institution to collaborate with China on giant panda research.

The zoo has successfully bred six cubs through six pregnancies and is playing a positive role in improving the conservation of giant pandas as well as forging closer bonds and enhancing friendship between the two countries, Liu said.

"[We] look forward to more progress in this round of cooperation," Liu added.

Last year, the National Zoo in Washington returned three giant pandas to China and said the United States was sad to see them go as well as expressed openness to welcoming the pandas again in the future.

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UN Chief Says Imperative to Give International Investigators Access to Mass Graves in Gaza

UNITED NATIONS, April 30 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Tuesday said it was imperative to give international investigators access to mass graves in Gaza in order to establish the facts amid competing narratives about the deaths of hundreds of Palestinians buried there.

"There are competing narratives around several of these mass graves, including serious allegations that some of those buried were unlawfully killed. It is imperative that independent international investigators, with forensic expertise, are allowed immediate access to the sites of these mass graves, to establish the precise circumstances under which hundreds of Palestinians lost their lives and were buried, or reburied," Guterres said.

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UN Chief Says Health System in Gaza 'Decimated,' Two-thirds of Hospitals Out of Action

UNITED NATIONS, April 30 (Sputnik) - United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Tuesday said most health care facilities in Gaza have been destroyed, with the majority no longer functioning and some resembling graveyards.

"The health system in Gaza has been decimated by the war. Two-thirds of hospitals and health centers are out of action; many of those that remain are seriously damaged," Guterres said. "Some hospitals now resemble cemeteries."

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UN Chief Says Military Assault on Rafah Would Result in 'Unbearable Escalation'

UNITED NATIONS, April 30 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Tuesday that Israel's military attack on Rafah in the Gaza Strip would cause an "unthinkable escalation" of the conflict and would result in the death of thousands of Palestinian civilians.

"A military assault on Rafah would be an unbearable escalation, killing thousands more civilians and forcing hundreds of thousands to flee," Guterres said.

The attack would terribly impact Gaza as well as the residents of the West Bank and the wider region, Guterres added.

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guterres says Israeli assault on rafah would be unbearable escalation, appeals for those with influence over israel to do everything to prevent it

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UPDATE - US Provided ATACSM to Ukraine, Will Provide as Much Capability as Possible – Austin

(Adds details on weapons previously supplied to Ukraine in paras 3-5)

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) – The United States has already provided ATACMS to the Ukrainian military and intends to continue providing them with as much capability as possible, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said on Tuesday.

Austin's remarks came in response to a question on whether the administration of US President Joe Biden planned on sending more ATACMS to Ukraine.

"We have already done that ... We will provide as much capability as we can," Austin said as he testified before Congress.

On Wednesday, a Defense Department spokesperson told Sputnik that President Joe Biden had secretly directed his national security team to provide ATACMS to Ukraine as part of the security aid package announced in March and those munitions arrived in April.

US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said also on Wednesday that the United States was confident Ukraine would only use ATACMS within its own territory as it allegedly did with the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS).

However, US media reported on Thursday, citing UK Defense Chief Adm. Tony Radakin, that Ukraine may use long-range weapons, including the US-supplied ATACMS missiles, to strike inside Russian territory despite Washington's instructions otherwise.

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he testified before Congress.

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US Expects Gaza Pier to Start Receiving Humanitarian Aid 'In Coming Days' - White House

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - The United States expects the temporary pier and causeway currently being built off the Gaza Strip coast to soon facilitate the reception of humanitarian goods, White House National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"We expect that that pier should be ready to receive humanitarian goods ... in the coming days," Kirby said during a White House gaggle.

Kirby explained that while the new pier would not match truck volume, it offers another way to deliver vital supplies like food, water, and medicine to those in need.

In March, the United States announced its intention to deploy the joint logistics over-the-shore (JLOTS) capability off the coast of Gaza to help facilitate the flow of humanitarian aid into the Palestinian enclave.

On October 7, 2023, Hamas attacked Israel from Gaza and killed in the fighting some 1,200 Israelis - military and civilians - and abducted 240 others. Israel imposed a complete blockade of Gaza and invaded the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas and rescuing the hostages. More than 34,400 Palestinians have been killed and more than 77,000 have been wounded in the Israeli military operations, 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. Some 100 hostages are still believed to be held by Hamas in Gaza.

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US Congresswoman Greene Says Will Give Democrats Chance to Back Johnson as House Speaker

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene said on Tuesday that she will give House Democrats a chance to vote in support of Speaker Mike Johnson's continued leadership after leading House Democrats indicated that they would oppose any attempt by Greene to oust Johnson as speaker.

Earlier on Tuesday, House Democratic leadership said that they would vote to table a motion to vacate Johnson if Greene invokes such a measure.

"Mike Johnson is officially the Democratic Speaker of the House. Here is their official endorsement of his Speakership," Greene said via social media platform X, sharing a copy of

the House Democratic leaders' statement.

Greene said that she would give Democrats a chance to support Johnson's continued leadership, adding that she is a big believer in recorded votes for the sake of transparency.

Greene questioned whether Johnson made a "slimy backroom deal" to receive Democratic support and called on him to resign and switch parties.

House Democratic Caucus Chair Pete Aguilar said on Tuesday that Democrats discussed the motion to table a motion to vacate, but not the underlying motion to vacate itself. Aguilar also characterized Greene as a "legislative arsonist" for her actions.

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US 'Welcomes' China's Efforts to Bring Together Palestinian Factions - Kirby

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) – The US "welcomes" China's efforts to bring together the two leading Palestinian political factions if it leads to security and stability in the region, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"Certainly if China wants to exert or use influence that they have – such as we know they have communications with Tehran and we don't – that could lead to security and stability in the region, then that's all to the better and certainly we would welcome those efforts," White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said at a press briefing.

He admitted that he was "not aware" that the US had communicated with China about the country hosting talks between Hamas and Fatah.

Hamas confirmed on Friday that its delegation was flying to China the same day, and Fatah also confirmed that it had sent a delegation to China.

Kirby said that he could not speak to whether the talks would help Hamas and Israel agree on a deal regarding the hostages held in Gaza.

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Congressman Adam Smith Says US Would 'At Some Point' Need to Talk to Russia, China

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Adam Smith said on Tuesday that the United States "at some point" will need to talk to Russia and China using diplomatic skills as well as work with allies to counterbalance emerging partnerships.

"We have to live in the same world that they do, which means we have to talk to China. Yes, at some point I believe we need to talk to Russia. We need to use our diplomatic skills and our partnerships and alliances because one of the things I'm really worried about is that Iran, Russia, China and the others, they're beginning to build partnerships," Smith said in his opening remarks during a US House Armed Services Committee hearing.

Smith noted that China and Russia are working together to undermine the US economic might and to meet this threat, Washington would need to keep the rest of the world on its side and not alienate it.

"We need partnerships and we need diplomacy. We cannot do what alone and we cannot fight everybody everywhere all at once," Smith added.

On Friday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the United States was prepared to take measures against China beyond those already taken if Beijing did not stop supporting Russia.

The United States imposed thousands of sanctions on Russia after the start of Moscow's military operation in Ukraine in February 2022 and dozens of sanctions on companies in China for allegedly cooperating with Russia in the military field or helping the country circumvent existing sanctions.

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Trump Says He Does Not Need to Renegotiate NATO Treaty to Make Alliance's Members Pay More

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - Former US President and presumptive Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump said in an interview with Time earlier this month that he does not need to renegotiate the terms of the NATO treaty to make other alliance member states pay their share of military spending.

"No, I just want them to pay their bills. I don't have to renegotiate it. It's like [current President Joe] Biden. Biden has the right to close up the border right now. He doesn't need anything from Congress. Same thing with NATO. I don't need to renegotiate the terms of the treaty. All I need to do is have them pay their bills. They don't pay their bills," Trump said when asked if he intends to renegotiate the terms of the treaty.

Trump also said that while he does not have a problem with NATO per se, he does not think the alliance would come to defend the United States in case of an attack.

Trump pointed out that Europe should spend more on Ukraine than the United States since it is affected more by the ongoing conflict there.

"But they [Europeans] have taken advantage of us, both on NATO and on Ukraine. We're in for billions of dollars more than they're in in Ukraine. It shouldn't be that way. It should be the opposite way. Because they're much more greatly affected. We have an ocean in between us. They don't. And when I say things like that, that's said as a point of negotiation, and I did a very good job because billions of dollars came in recently," Trump said.

In February, Trump said that the leader of an unspecified NATO nation had asked him while he was in office whether the United States would protect it or other countries in the event of a possible attack by Russia if they do not meet their defense spending obligations. Trump responded he would not but would encourage Russia to "do whatever the hell they want," adding that NATO members "got to pay."

Biden responded to Trump's remarks by saying that he would never walk away from NATO.

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RPT - Protester Interrupts US Defense Budget Request Committee, Says Austin Supports Genocide.

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) – A protester briefly interrupted US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin's testimony in Congress on Tuesday, urging him to "stop supporting genocide" in Gaza.

"It is illegal. It is immoral. It is disgusting. The whole world is watching what we are doing in Gaza, right now. Secretary General [Austin], you are supporting a genocide. Stop supporting genocide. Free Palestine," the protester shouted, before being removed from the room.

Since the onset of the Israeli-Hamas conflict six months ago, the US had been one of the staunchest supporters of Israel and its "right to self-defense." On April 20, the US House passed a set of supplemental foreign aid bills that totaled \$95.3 billion in funding for Ukraine, Israel and the Indo-Pacific region.

Out of the total supplemental amount, \$26 billion are in Israel-related funding which is expected to help Israel replenish its depleted air defenses.

On October 7, 2023, Hamas attacked Israel from Gaza and killed some 1,200 Israelis and abducted 240 others. Israel imposed a complete blockade of Gaza and invaded the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas and rescuing the hostages. More than 34,400 Palestinians have been killed and more than 77,000 have been wounded in the Israeli military operations, according to local authorities.

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Yellen Worried About Where US Debt Going, Calls For Significant Steps to Reduce Deficit

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen expressed worry Tuesday about runaway US debt, saying crucial action was needed to tamp down the annual deficit in the nation's budget.

"Well, I would say I'm not terribly concerned about where we are, but I do have concern about where we're going, unless we undertake some significant steps to reduce the budget deficit," Yellen said in testimony before Congress, where she was asked about the national debt level. "If you look at the president's 2025 budget, you'll see that he's proposed \$3 trillion dollars in measures to reduce the deficit over the next decade."

The US national debt currently stands at around \$34 trillion. The debt load had grown at a quicker rate in recent months, increasing about \$1 trillion nearly every 100 days, data shows.

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US House Democrats Say Would Oppose Motion to Oust Johnson as Speaker

(Updates with more detail in paras 4-5)

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - US House Democratic leaders said on Tuesday that Democrats would oppose an attempt to oust House Speaker Mike Johnson from his leadership role, which Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene has threatened with the backing of multiple other House Republicans.

"We will vote to table Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene's Motion to Vacate the Chair. If she invokes the motion, it will not succeed," House Democratic leaders said in a joint statement.

Greene and other Republican lawmakers have criticized Johnson for relying on Democratic support to pass foreign aid bills, despite objections from many House Republicans. Greene said earlier this week that Johnson's days as speaker are numbered.

Reporters asked Johnson about the Democratic leaders' statement during a press conference on Tuesday, to which he said it was the first he had heard about the matter.

Johnson reiterated that he will not resign as speaker and called it an "absurd notion" to bring a

motion to vacate against him. Republicans need a united front to advance their agenda and win additional seats in Congress, Johnson said.

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Yellen Says Concerned Where US Debt Is Going 'Unless We Undertake Some Significant Steps To Reduce Budget Deficit'

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Canada's McGill University Requests Police Assistance to Remove Student Encampment

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - McGill University in Montreal said in a statement on Tuesday that it has requested law enforcement assistance to remove a pro-Palestine student encampment from the campus.

McGill's request came after most encampment protesters decided to stay past the deadline set by the university to gather their belongings, dismantle the encampment and vacate the premises.

"As we have failed to reach a resolution, university leadership decided to take the final step in our protocol, and requested police assistance late afternoon yesterday," McGill said in the statement. "Police representatives, who have expertise in skillfully resolving situations such as these, have now started their own process. We continue to work with them to resolve the matter."

On Saturday, pro-Palestinian protesters began establishing an encampment at McGill's downtown lower field campus in a bid to emulate similar actions undertaken by students from university campuses across the United States.

McGill allowed the protests emphasizing that it supported the right of the students to freely assemble and express themselves but made it clear that encampments would violate university's policies and the law.

McGill said the situation "significantly changed" on Monday as the number of encamped persons increased threefold whereby the majority did not belong to the student community and used antisemitic language while behaving in an intimidating manner.

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Trump Says He Would Be Able to Negotiate Deal With Putin on WSJ's Gershkovich Release

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) – Former US President and presidential candidate Donald Trump said in an interview with Time earlier this month that he would be able to negotiate the release of Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich with Russian President Vladimir Putin, according to a transcript released on Tuesday.

“I think Biden has dealt with Putin very poorly. Putin should never have gone into Ukraine. And he didn't go in for four years with me. I get along very well with Putin, but the reporter should be released and he will be released. I don't know if he's going to be released under Biden,” Time quoted Trump as saying.

In March 2023, Gershkovich was arrested in the Russian city of Yekaterinburg on suspicion of trying to collect classified defense information for the United States. Earlier this week, the Moscow City Court extended his pre-trial detention.

Putin reiterated in an interview with Tucker Carlson in February that Gershkovich was caught red-handed when he was receiving classified information and did it covertly.

Putin added that Russia is willing to reach an agreement on a potential release of Gershkovich, and its terms are being discussed via special services channels.

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US House Democrats Say Would Oppose Motion to Oust Johnson as Speaker

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - US House Democratic leaders said on Tuesday that Democrats would oppose an attempt to oust House Speaker Mike Johnson from his leadership role, which Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene has threatened with the backing of multiple other House Republicans.

"We will vote to table Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene's motion to vacate the chair. If she invokes the motion, it will not succeed," House Democratic leaders said in a joint statement.

Greene and other Republican lawmakers have criticized Johnson for relying on Democratic support to pass foreign aid bills, despite objections from many House Republicans. Johnson's days as speaker are "numbered," Greene said earlier this week.

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Trump Says Doubts Two-State Solution Will Resolve Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said in an interview with Time earlier this month that he does not believe a two-state solution will end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

“Most people thought it was going to be a two-state solution. I'm not sure a two-state solution anymore is gonna work,” Trump said.

Israel leans toward a two-state solution when it is not making progress in its military operation against Hamas in Gaza and rejects it when the situation on the battlefield is good, Trump said.

On October 7, 2023, Hamas attacked Israel from Gaza and killed in the fighting some 1,200 Israelis - military and civilians - and abducted 240 others. Israel imposed a complete blockade of Gaza and invaded the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas and rescuing the hostages. More than 34,400 Palestinians have been killed and more than 77,000 have been wounded in the Israeli military operations, 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 imprisoned Palestinians as a part of a three-stage plan adopted by international mediators. Hamas rejected the proposal, saying it would present its plan for a permanent end to the conflict in the region.

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US Court Fines Trump \$9,000 for Violating Gag Order - Reports

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) - New York State Supreme Court judge Juan Merchan ordered former US President Donald Trump to pay \$9,000 in fines for violating a gag order in the so-called hush money case, MSNBC reported on Tuesday.

Merchan fined Trump \$1,000 for each of nine violations of the gag order, which prohibited him from publicly speaking about potential jurors and witnesses in the case, the report said.

Merchan could have jailed Trump for up to 30 days under state law, although prosecutors did not request jail time for the gag order violations, the report said.

Trump has characterized the court case as an attempt at election interference amid the 2024 US presidential race.

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Trump Says He Would Deploy US Military to Deport Migrants as President

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) – US presidential candidate Donald Trump said in interviews with Time earlier this month that he would deploy the US military to conduct a mass deportation operation if elected later this year, according to transcripts released on Tuesday.

“We will be using local law enforcement,” Trump said. He replied in the affirmative when asked if he would also use the US military, saying that “When we talk military, generally speaking, I talk

National Guard.”

When the interviewer pointed out that federal law prohibited the deployment of the US military against civilians, Trump replied that migrants “aren’t civilians” and “aren’t legally in our country.”

While he said he “would not rule out” building migrant detention camps, he said there would not be a need for them, given his mass deportation plan.

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Car Chase in Canada’s Ontario Leaves Multiple Fatalities, Including Infant - Police

WASHINGTON, April 30 (Sputnik) – Several people including an infant died in a multi-vehicle crash that occurred as police chased a suspect who was driving the wrong way on the 401 Highway in Canada’s Ontario province, Durham Regional Police Service (DRPS) said.

The chase began late Monday night, when police were called to investigate reports of a robbery in the city of Clarington. When they arrived, the suspect fled the scene, and a chase was initiated, the DRPS said in a statement issued overnight.

The suspect proceeded to drive in the opposite direction on the 401 Highway, leading to a fatal multi-vehicle collision, the DRPS said.

The collision caused the death of four people, including an infant in the Whitby portion of the highway, the Special Investigation Unit (SIU) – Ontario’s civilian police watchdog – said in a separate statement on Tuesday after it was called to investigate the incident.

The highway’s westbound lane which had been closed overnight reopened at 7:00 a.m. EST, media reported from the scene. The Eastbound one will remain closed for some time, Ontario Provincial Police Sgt. Kerry Schmidt was quoted as saying.

More details will be provided as the investigation unfolds, the DRPS said.