

5/1/24 Wednesday

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Scott Ritter: Student Protests Among 'Most Important Things' to Happen in US in Decades

Last week, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a video address that the protests against his country on American universities that had then only recently sprung up were "antisemitic mobs" that had "taken over" college campuses. He called on US authorities to do more to stop them.

The growing student protest movement against the continued bombardment of Gazans by the Israeli government is among one of the most important things to happen in the US in "many, many decades," former UN inspector and military expert Scott Ritter told Sputnik's [The Critical Hour on Tuesday](#).

"If you were an American like myself, who is not inclined to go out and protest and hold signs and disrupt things, man, we have to wake up," he explained. "I have to wake up. We have to join these students one way or another and join their cause in letting the government know that we will not stand silent in the face of police oppression of the right of American citizens to speak out, to assemble, to hold their government account."

"I think these student protests right now are some of the most important things to have happened in American society in many, many decades," Ritter emphasized.

Tuesday night, what appeared to be hundreds of officers with the New York Police Department entered Columbia University in riot gear and military-grade vehicles, arresting approximately 300 people, according to New York City Mayor Eric Adams. That raid came after similar raids across the country, including in Texas, where 79 people, including some faculty members who joined students, were arrested.

Meanwhile, a 65-year-old professor, Steve Tamari, was hospitalized after an officer at Washington University in St. Louis slammed him to the ground, breaking multiple ribs and his hand, according to a statement he put out from the hospital. More than 100 people were arrested in that protest.

Colleges being a place for the free exchange of ideals is a critical part of our society, Ritter argued, adding that he believes the crackdown is designed to end this.

"As somebody who has taken an oath to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States... I respect not only [the] students' constitutional rights to free speech and freedom of assembly, I also recognize that college is one of the great zones of developing good citizens," Ritter said.

Over the weekend, presidential candidate Jill Stein was arrested at a protest. Stein says she was told she was being charged with assaulting an officer, but clarified in a later interview with journalist Glenn Greenwald that was not on her paperwork.

Part of the purpose of colleges is "to create an incubator for the development of good citizenship, not compliant zombies," Ritter explained, arguing that the US needs, "citizens who

think, who empower themselves with knowledge and information and express that individually and collectively.”

At University of California, Los Angeles, a group of pro-Israeli protesters reportedly fired pepper spray and fireworks at student protesters during clashes. Witnesses claim that while the police were standing by, they did not intervene for hours.

Ritter noted the US government is doing “just about everything possible wrong,” underscoring that the US “needs these students to come out and they’ve picked an issue, Gaza, which is the manifestation of the totality of all we do wrong as a government.”

“When you go to university, we need you to become radical. We need you to think. We need you to exercise your brain and your spirit and your conscience. And [the government is] trying to suppress them because apparently we don’t want good citizens anymore,” the analyst concluded.

On Tuesday, US Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-MN) condemned comments from Sen. Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) calling for students engaged in pro-Palestinian protests to be added to a terrorist watch list and be banned from flying in the United States.

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“Any student who has promoted terrorism or engaged in terrorists[sic] acts on behalf of Hamas should be immediately be [sic] added to the terrorist watch list and placed on the [Transportation Security Administration] No Fly List,” Blackburn wrote on Twitter on Monday.

Omar said Blackburn’s suggestion was “insanely dangerous” and would label “Americans protesting against a foreign country accused of carrying out a genocide with our tax dollars as terrorists.”

Protests have been breaking out at college campuses across the country. Over the weekend, police aggressively acted to remove encampments at several colleges, leading to numerous arrests.

The reason for the intense crackdown on pro-Palestinian protests in America stems from the deep-rooted belief, particularly among the older generations, that Zionism is inseparable from Judaism, Kavanaugh argued.

“And that’s what the young kids don’t have so much. They didn’t know anything about it and now they know about it. ‘This is ridiculous. This is colonialism. And we’ve been taught... to reject colonialism and we reject this,” he added.

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US Senator Calls for Palestinian Protesters to Be Added to Terrorist, No-Fly Lists

Tuesday night, a massive group of NYPD officers broke up the Pro-Palestinian encampment at Columbia university, arresting hundreds. It was the latest in a string of strict crackdowns by US authorities on campus protests.

On Tuesday, US Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-MN) condemned comments from Sen. Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) calling for students engaged in pro-Palestinian protests to be added to a terrorist watch list and be banned from flying in the United States.

“Any student who has promoted terrorism or engaged in terrorists[sic] acts on behalf of Hamas should be immediately be [sic] added to the terrorist watch list and placed on the [Transportation Security Administration] No Fly List,” Blackburn wrote on X (formerly Twitter) on Monday. Omar said Blackburn’s suggestion was “insanely dangerous” and would label “Americans protesting against a foreign country accused of carrying out a genocide with our tax dollars as terrorists.”

Protests have been breaking out at college campuses across the country. Over the weekend, police aggressively acted to remove encampments at several colleges, leading to numerous arrests. Since October 7, more than 1,000 students, educators and other supporters have been arrested at college protests.

“The stupid thing that Columbia did, they had a peaceful group of small people on the campus, setting up an encampment, not bothering anybody, not preventing anybody from doing anything,” Dr. Jim Kavanagh told Sputnik’s The Critical Hour on Wednesday, “and they repressed it and they came in and arrested them, and it spread like wildfire.”

At least 34,500 Palestinians have been killed since Israel launched its campaign on Gaza, a number that is almost certainly a low estimate because an unknown but undoubtedly vast number of bodies remain under the rubble of destroyed buildings and homes. Israel’s actions have been described as a “genocide” by multiple human rights organizations and heads of state, including South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, who brought a genocide case against Israel to the International Court of Justice.

“It’s a colonial mindset that [Senator Blackburn] has,” explained author and independent journalist Esther Iverem. “It’s a colonial mindset of all the people who are thinking that this can stand, that Israel can rule forever... with the barrel of a gun and just keep the indigenous people in this constant state of desperation.”

Blackburn is not alone in her desire to see pro-Palestinian protesters targeted by federal officials. Multiple Republicans and Democrats have urged US President Joe Biden to take action against them. Also on Tuesday, Sen. Rick Scott (R-FL) sent a letter to US Attorney General Merrick Garland, asking what his office is doing “to investigate and prosecute the leaders of groups like US Campaign for Palestinian Rights, Students for Justice in Palestine, Jewish Voice for Peace, or Within Our Lifetime?”

Scott claims that the groups “are conspiring to violate the civil rights of a religious minority.” That at least one of the groups that Scott demanded an investigation into is part of that religious minority did not seem to pierce the consciousness of the junior senator. In a post on X later in

the day, he labeled the encampment at George Washington University “anti-Israel, anti-Semitic, anti-Jewish.”

The application of the term antisemitism to peaceful protesters is Orwellian, Kavanaugh argued. “It’s what Orwell said about politics in the English language, you’re turning words into their opposites and you’re using and you’re making it difficult to say things correctly, and therefore to think about things correctly,” Kavanaugh explained. “They’re cheapening it entirely and they’re trying to say it’s hateful antisemitism, these protesters are hateful, represent hateful antisemitism when [a great number of them] are Jews and Jewish organizations are in the leadership of this.”

Ultimately, the reason for the intense crackdown on pro-Palestinian protests in America stems from the deep-rooted belief, particularly among the older generations, that Zionism is inseparable from Judaism.

“And that’s what the young kids don’t have so much. They didn’t know anything about it and now they know about it. ‘This is ridiculous. This is colonialism. And we’ve been taught... to reject colonialism and we reject this,’” Kavanaugh said.

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The Media's Slow Descent Into Admitting Ukraine's Failures

Since the fall of Avdeyevka in February and accelerating rapidly in the past two weeks, Russian advances to the West and Southwest of the city have left Ukrainian forces scrambling to find a defensive line they can hold, forcing even the US media to admit that Russia had made huge advances.

What US media called “bleak news” brought on by an “artillery drought” is also being ignored by the authorities in Kiev, a veteran pro-Ukrainian military blogger called Deepstate said, per US media.

The Ukrainian military spokesperson “has the opportunity to check the real situation, but he [still] provides untrue information and this undermines our credibility,” one of the group founders [reportedly](#) said.

DeepState shared his experience from on Telegram in a post describing the dire situation for Ukrainian troops in and around the village of Solovyovo, “but nearby there is another location that requires attention: Muscovites calmly moving around the village, keeping it under control. The (Ukrainian) Defense Forces inflict fire damage on them, and one can repeat at least a billion times that two-thirds of the village is under the control of the Ukrainian military, but the picture of reality is completely different.”

Since Avdeyevka fell, Russian forces have captured Berdychi, Lastochkino, Severnoye, Orlovka, and Tonenkoye to the East and Northeast of the city, as well as Opytnoe, Vodyanoye, Nevelskoye, and Pervomayskoye to the Southeast. More recently, Russian forces broke through to the north, capturing Novokalinovo, Solovyovo, and Ocheretino, where a strategic “bloom” has started to develop.

While the media has focused on the area east of Avdeyevka, the victories for Russia were not limited there, with Novomikhailovka, long a Ukrainian stronghold, finally falling last week and last week, Russians entered Krasnogradovka, cutting it into two parts.

Also last week, in the Zaporozhye area, Russia retook Rabotino, the small village that, though it was initially meant to be only the first stepping stone, was the peak of Ukraine's failed counteroffensive last summer.

"There is not a single place left along the line of combat contact where the enemy is behind the 'Surovikin Line,'" one report from the area on Telegram reads.

In response, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called for a "significant acceleration of [Western] supplies" to the front, though even US media admits Ukraine is struggling to fill its ranks with men to fire those weapons.

"The most immediate problem in every unit is lack of people," a Ukrainian company commander told US media recently.

"Ukraine recently sent a platoon of 20 soldiers to fight in Donbass," another report from December reads, citing an unnamed Ukrainian senior officer. "With some taken from villages without notice and one older man who didn't even have time to pick up his false teeth."

Former Ukrainian Commander Valerii Zaluzhny suggested that the country would need up to half a million new soldiers for Ukraine to conquer its goals. That led to a rift with Zelensky, which led to [Zaluzhny's firing](#). Zelensky nevertheless passed a new mobilization law, which lowered the conscription age in Ukraine.

Since at least last summer, videos of Ukrainian conscription officers dragging men off the street and into vans have commonly appeared online, as have videos of Ukrainian men attempting to flee to Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Moldova.

"We have no choice other than to be bloodthirsty," Viktor Kevlyuk, a retired Ukrainian colonel said while justifying the so-called mobilization strategy of Ukraine.

Last week, Ukraine [announced](#) that it would not allow men aged 18-60 to renew their passports while abroad, forcing military-aged men to return to Ukraine and presumably be conscripted if they need to update their passports.

While Germany said they would not force Ukrainian men back into a conflict zone, Polish deputy foreign minister Andrzej Szejna expressed support for the plan, telling Polish television that they "definitely won't protect draft dodgers."

Western media has been slow to admit Ukraine's failures on the battlefield. First, they insisted Ukraine was winning even when it was clear to any objective observer they weren't.

Before Ukraine's failed counteroffensive kicked off last summer, it was heavily hyped, with commercials and promises of reaching the Sea of Azov and splitting Russian forces in the process.

By August, they had resorted to rationalizing the counteroffensive's failures into victories.

"How the Ukraine Counteroffensive Can Still Succeed," [a headline](#) from US media read that month, arguing that "The situation in Ukraine still favors [Kiev] despite the limited progress made in the counteroffensive so far."

"Ukraine's counteroffensive is making real progress on the Crimean front," [a blog post](#) from the pro-war think tank The Atlantic Council proclaimed in September, apparently forgetting that Crimea is not on the front.

“More than three months since the start of Ukraine’s much-hyped counteroffensive, Ukrainian forces have only managed to liberate a tiny portion of the territory currently under Russian occupation. However, the success or failure of the campaign cannot be measured in square kilometers alone,” the post stated, arguing that the drone and missile attacks in Crimea were “steadily reducing Russia’s ability to wage war” and are preparing conditions “for future advances.”

By December, the West had downgraded their overly optimistic predictions, saying that the war was in a “stalemate” but again argued that things weren’t as bad as they seemed.

“Stalemate Is Not Checkmate in Ukraine” [an article](#) from the Foreign Policy Research Institute read. It argued that “stalemates are part of warfare” that could be broken through more soldiers being sent to the meat grinder and air superiority.

Now, with US media and even openly pro-Ukrainian sources like Deepstate admitting that Russian gains are coming faster than any time for either side since 2022, it appears even the downgraded optimism of a stalemate was still too optimistic.

Today, they argue that Ukraine is losing, but will be able to stop the Russian advance once the recently passed military aid from the US hits the front lines.

Ukraine will soon obtain “the necessary air defense assets and the necessary range of ammunition concentrated on the frontline, which will make it impossible for the enemy to perform tasks with the intensity it has now,” a Ukrainian soldier was recently quoted as saying in US media.

Their predictions were wrong before, but when it comes to the war machine, they just need the reader to believe until the very end.

“Ukraine’s \$61 bln lifeline is not enough” another recent headline read, already preparing the public for the next aid package that will surely turn the tide, this time.

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How Biden Showed the World the US & NATO Are Paper Tigers

On April 13, Iran responded to an Israeli attack on its embassy in Syria by striking Israel with more than 300 drones and missiles. While most were shot down by Israeli and US air defenses, hypersonic missiles fired by Iran hit their targets, showcasing the limits of Western defenses. US President Joe Biden revealed to the world that the US military is no longer the giant that woke up on December 7, 1941, but a paper tiger unable to exert the power it once held. Both former Chinese leader Mao Zedong and Al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden described the United States in this way. Though it may have taken several decades, they are finally being proven correct.

The United States showed in the 1990s and through the start of this century that it was capable of dominating the battlefield when facing opponents with significantly less sophisticated equipment.

But, as American hegemony has slipped, other countries have caught up and in some aspects surpassed the so-called world’s only remaining superpower.

This is evident in the United States' inability to halt the Yemen Ansar Allah (Houthi) movement's blockade against ships traveling to Israeli ports and the United States' failure to prevent Iran's attack on Israeli military targets.

With the Houthis, the United States has resorted to attempting to bribe the group into stopping their attacks, a tactic that has failed. But the attack by Iran was worse for the perception of American-dominance, because the failure of its weapons were on full display.

While most if not all of the drones sent by Iran were taken out by a combination of Israeli and US air defense systems, the drones were intended to distract and exhaust the defenses and allow Iran's hypersonic missiles to hit their targets, which most reports say they did.

The attack from Iran showed the world "that US defense capabilities" are "not there," retired senior security policy analyst Michael Maloof told Sputnik's [The Critical Hour on Monday](#).

"The ability to have a strong missile defense is not there, and the Russians [also] have these hypersonic capabilities," Maloof explained. "[Iran] did hit their targets, and they did it with hypersonics and there was no defense."

In Ukraine, the situation would be comical were it not so dark. As the Kiev regime hyped what became its failed counteroffensive last year, a succession of NATO equipment was touted as the game changer that would send the Russians into retreat.

First, it was the Bradley Fighting Vehicles, then Leopard tanks, then Challenger tanks, then a growing list of air defense systems and long-range artillery. Russia systematically destroyed them all, proving that NATO weapons are not the pinnacle of modern warfare and in many cases are relics of 20th-century warfare that will act as a gilded millstone around the neck of any army that relies on them in the 21st century.

There was another tank the US provided to Ukraine last summer, but it was not seen on the battlefield until very recently: the Abrams M1 tank. It too was touted as a game changer, but despite Ukraine's desperate need for armor, they were not used until the battle for Avdeyevka in February of this year.

In September, Sputnik wrote an article highlighting the weaknesses of the Abrams tank, which was responded to by Popular Mechanics. The outlet asserted the Abrams would represent a "huge leap in the capabilities" of Ukrainian armor formations and accused Sputnik of exaggerating "not only the threat to Abrams tanks, but the tank's vulnerabilities."

The article concluded that Russian forces "will have to work very hard to kill an Abrams tank." But when it finally arrived, five tanks were quickly destroyed and at least one tank was captured. Last week, US military officials confirmed to US media that Ukraine had removed the Abrams tanks from the front lines, saying that they are too easily destroyed by Russian drones.

"We saw, as with pretty much every type of tank we've seen in this combat that relatively cheap, \$500, \$1,000 a pop, Kamikaze drones can seriously damage a tank fairly easily," security and international relations expert Mark Sleboda told Sputnik's [Fault Lines on Monday](#).

The Abrams tank costs roughly \$10 million a piece.

The shattering of NATO's veneer of invincibility will have geopolitical implications, Maloof argued. "Are we going to ... convince the Saudis now that we're going to defend them, when they saw with their own eyes that whatever layering we performed for the Israelis didn't work. Are they going to buy into that? No, they're going to start going their own way, increasingly more so."

On Tuesday, Iranian Economy Minister Ehsan Khandouzi described his talks with the Minister of Economy and Planning of Saudi Arabia, Faisal F. Alibrahim as “productive.”

“Faisal F. Alibrahim agreed with all [of] Iran’s [economic] proposals,” Khandouzi noted.

“The days of US dominance [are] over, and we’re seeing this now as some 40 countries want to join BRICS and get out from under the dollar,” Maloof explained. “So, all of this is interrelated. It’s all playing [out] in real-time, before our very eyes, and it’s happening very rapidly.”

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Democrats Criticizing Netanyahu to Avoid ‘Paying the Price’ for Israel Support

Last week, Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) called on Netanyahu to resign, while stressing her belief in “Israel’s right to protect itself.”

Democrats are publicly criticizing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to head off electoral blowback from their support of Israel during this November’s election.

In March, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) called for [new elections](#) to be held in Israel. A few weeks later, US President Joe Biden offered his sharpest public criticism of Netanyahu, saying “I think what he’s doing is a mistake. I don’t agree with his approach.”

Those comments came in Biden’s first interview after three Israeli airstrikes killed seven World Central Kitchen workers in what the organization’s founder described as a “direct attack on clearly marked vehicles” that targeted workers “systematically, car by car.”

“The Democrats, they know that they will pay the price during the election. So, they are trying to stay away from Netanyahu,” journalist Mohamed Gomaa told [Sputnik’s Fault Lines on Tuesday](#). “On the other hand, they continue to support Israel, not Netanyahu, not the government. They speak on Israel [only].”

While the criticism from most Democratic politicians has largely shifted from the Israeli Prime Minister to protesting American college students, it was never focused on the actions of the Israeli and was never intended to stop the war in Gaza, but instead to placate voters.

“Anywhere there are protests against their government to stop supporting... Netanyahu, they [also] ask to stop [the] support of Israel, which,” will be difficult for those governments, Gomaa explained. “That’s why they changed their tone to criticize Netanyahu or criticize the government, [but] not Israel.”

College protests have broken out across the United States, with demonstrations against Israel’s actions in Gaza, and their universities’ investments in the Israeli government, taking place in nearly 400 campuses as of Sunday, a number that continues to rise.

More than 150 of those are listed as including a “police presence” and some have seen brutal police crackdowns and campus buildings being occupied by students.

Pelosi, just days after she called Netanyahu “an obstacle” to peace, called on protesters to add Hamas to their list of protests. “I’ve said to those [protesters]... do you care about what Hamas has done, do you care about what happened in Israel?”

On Monday, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre declined to condemn the actions of the local and state police forces.

“We’ve seen the videos that have pretty much gone viral out there and I can’t speak to that. We might have more to say about those videos once we look into— we’d have to look into them. Just don’t have anything to share beyond that.”

When pressed she said the decision to bring police on campus is “up to the colleges and universities, that’s for them to decide.”

The refusal to publicly support student protesters likely will not help Biden’s poll numbers with young people, which have collapsed from 60% in 2020 to just 45% in the latest poll.

After the 1968 DNC riots in Chicago, Yippie activist and Chicago Seven defendant Jerry Rubin thanked Judge Julius Hoffman for his heavy-handed rulings during the trial.

“Julius, you radicalized more young people than we ever could. You’re the country’s top Yippie,” Rubin wrote in a copy of his book, which he gifted to Hoffman.

Democrats will have to hope the actions of law enforcement on college campuses today won’t create a new generation of radicals, something Gomaa says is already happening in Palestine.

“Now the Palestinians support Hamas because they’re already under war, under bombardment every day or every moment. So, they will support Hamas,” Gomaa explained. “They will not be Hamas fighters, but they will not be against [Hamas] because they see that [they] are [being] killed,” even when they don’t support Hamas.

“So, if we are killed while we are normal people, why would [we] not be with them?” Gomaa asked, adding that Israel could not “imagine” their actions would cause more people in Palestine to support Hamas or result in more people in the United States to become more sympathetic to the Palestinian cause.

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It’s Coming From Inside The (White) House

According to a review of official changes to White House transcripts of speeches and comments made by US President Joe Biden, the President of the United States has stumbled on his words or said the incorrect thing more times than he has given public comments.

The report [notes](#) that Biden’s transcripts have been officially edited 148 times across 118 statements, speeches, or comments he has made this year up to April 24.

The Biden administration has been adamant in its fight against what it calls “misinformation.” In 2022, the Department of Homeland Security announced plans to create a new “Committee of Public Information” that would have been aimed at fighting disinformation online.

The plans were canceled after critics rightly pointed out that the proposed committee sounded a lot like a “ministry of truth” and that its proposed head, alleged “[disinformation fellow](#)” and “Russian disinformation expert” Nina Jankowicz, previously promoted discredited conspiracy theories about Hunter Biden’s infamous laptop was part of a Russian disinformation campaign. Biden’s inability to stay on message has sometimes led to confusion about the official stance of the White House. When it comes to disinformation, Biden officials, like Pogo, are learning that the enemy is closer than they think.

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"The ability to have a strong missile defense is not there, and the Russians [also] have these hypersonic capabilities," Maloof explained. "[Iran] did hit their targets, and they did it with hypersonics and there was no defense."

Meanwhile, the failure of NATO equipment in Ukraine has done the same.

"We saw, as with pretty much every type of tank we've seen in this combat that relatively cheap, \$500, \$1,000 a pop, Kamikaze drones can seriously damage a tank fairly easily," Security and International relations expert Mark Sleboda told Sputnik's Fault Lines on Monday.

"The days of US dominance [are] over, and we're seeing this now as some 40 countries want to join BRICS and get out from under the dollar," Maloof explained. "So, all of this is interrelated. It's all playing [out] in real-time, before our very eyes, and it's happening very rapidly."

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an report says that by april 12, at least 5% of population in gaza had been killed or severely injured, palestinian economy lost about 8.7% of gdp

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US Imports From Russia Increased to \$427Mln in March - Census Bureau

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - The United States imported \$427 million worth of goods from Russia in March, up from \$287.9 million in February, according to US Census Bureau data published on Thursday.

US exports to Russia also grew from \$36 million in February to \$43.7 million in March.

The nation's trade deficit with Russia totaled \$849.2 million for the first three months of this year, according to the data.

US-Russian trade ties have shrunk in recent years due to sanctions and export controls imposed on Moscow. The bilateral trade plummeted from \$38.2 billion in 2013 to \$5.2 billion in 2023, the US Trade Representative's Office said in a report in March.

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Americans Citing Inflation as Top Financial Problem Reaches Record High – Poll

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) – The percentage of American citing inflation at their top financial problem has reached a new high of 41%, according to a Gallup poll released on Thursday.

The 41% marked an increase of six percentage points from 2023 and nine percentage points from 2022. Previously, the highest percentage of American citing inflation was recorded at 18% in 2008, since Gallup began conducting its annual Economy and Personal Finance poll in 2005.

Fourteen percent of Americans also cited the cost of owning or renting a home as their important financial problem this year, which can also be read as a form of inflation.

Americans have typically cited healthcare costs and a lack of money or low wages as their top

financial problem.

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West Freezing \$300Bln in Russian Assets 'Largest Theft in History' - Russia's IMF Envoy

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - The Western countries' move to freeze more than \$300 billion in Russian assets has become the "largest theft in history," International Monetary Fund (IMF) Executive Director for Russia Aleksei Mozhin told Sputnik.

"Our reserves were stolen and this is the largest theft in history," Mozhin said.

Iran, Venezuela and Afghanistan also faced similar actions by the collective West, however, there has never been a theft of \$300 billion before, Mozhin said.

Mozhin pointed out that the entire world is monitoring the situation, which represents an unambiguous signal that anybody else could be treated in exactly the same way.

The collective West is now proposing to issue bonds for 30 years, secured by the stolen Russian assets, and allegedly provide funds to Ukraine on the earned income from them, Mozhin said.

"They propose that assets not be returned to Russia for 30 years and that income from them should be appropriated," Mozhin added.

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IMF Committee Forgoes Communique Due to Stances of European, Muslim Nations - Russia Envoy

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - The positions taken by European nations on Ukraine and Muslim countries on Gaza prevented the International Monetary and Finance Committee (IMFC) from adopting a joint communique during ministerial meetings in April, IMF Executive Director for Russia Aleksei Mozhin told Sputnik.

Washington hosted the spring ministerial meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank last month.

"The participants failed to reach an agreement for the fifth time in a row," Mozhin said.

"Previously, Spain chaired the committee for two years and four meetings. The West insisted on a political preamble, which included insults and accusations against Russia, which we refused to sign."

This year, Saudi Arabia presided over the IMFC for the first time and did a very good job in trying to work out a joint communique, Mozhin said.

As a result, Russia agreed to the proposed document, taking into account the enormous efforts made by the Saudi chairmanship, Mozhin added.

However, two IMFC member states — one representing a group of small European countries

and the other leading a group of large Muslim nations — rejected the text.

"Those Europeans wanted to directly condemn Russia, while Muslim countries were not satisfied with the expression 'humanitarian crisis' that would not mention Israel. These participants prevented the communique from being adopted," Mozhin said.

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US Visa Issues Prevent Heads of Russian Delegation From Attending IMF-WB Events - Mozhin

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) – The United States failed to provide visas in time for the heads of the Russian delegation to attend the spring meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, IMF Executive Director for Russia Aleksei Mozhin told Sputnik.

"Deputy Finance Minister Ivan Chebeskov and First Deputy Bank of Russia head Vladimir Chistyukhin were due to come. They filed applications for visas," Mozhin said, adding that other staff from these agencies had also planned to attend the meetings.

Mozhin explained that the US only issued visas within an acceptable time frame for junior employees of the Bank of Russia to attend. The Ministry of Finance did not receive visas in time for anyone to participate.

The US Embassy in Moscow notified the delegation that they could obtain visas only on Tuesday, April 16, when the conference was already underway and their trip was canceled. A meeting of BRICS finance and central bank deputies was scheduled for the very same day, he said.

"When visas were given, they were no longer needed. This is baseness and meanness, reaching the level of sadism. I cannot imagine that Russia would behave this way toward our worst enemies. This is a matter of culture, we are just different," Mozhin said.

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IMF-World Bank Ministerial Meetings Have Never Been Worse Than This Year - Russian Envoy

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - The spring ministerial meetings of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have never been as "obnoxious" as they were this year, (IMF) Executive Director for Russia Aleksei Mozhin told Sputnik.

"I would say there have never been such obnoxious spring ministerial meetings like this year," Mozhin said in reference to the meetings that took place in April in Washington.

Members of the Russian delegation were not even provided with chairs during an International Monetary and Financial Committee (IMFC) ministerial plenary session. The organizers tried to justify this by claiming that high-ranking officials from Russia were not present at the meeting, Mozhin said.

"As a result, we were unable to say anything at all. For example, if other participants attacked

Russia in their speeches, we would be unable to respond to them. Fortunately, it did not happen," Mozhin said.

Russian Finance Minister Anton Siluanov spoke via video link, Mozhin added.

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West Freezing \$300Bln in Russian Assets 'Largest Theft in History' - Russia's IMF Envoy

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - The Western countries' move to freeze more than \$300 billion in Russian assets has become the "largest theft in history," International Monetary Fund (IMF) Executive Director for Russia Aleksei Mozhin told Sputnik.

"Our reserves were stolen and this is the largest theft in history," Mozhin said.

Iran, Venezuela and Afghanistan also faced similar actions by the collective West, however, there has never been a theft of \$300 billion before, Mozhin said.

Mozhin pointed out that the entire world is monitoring the situation, which represents an unambiguous signal that anybody else could be treated in exactly the same way.

The collective West is now proposing to issue bonds for 30 years, secured by the stolen Russian assets, and allegedly provide funds to Ukraine on the earned income from them, Mozhin said.

"They propose that assets not be returned to Russia for 30 years and that income from them should be appropriated," Mozhin added.

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2014 Odessa Massacre Well Orchestrated, CIA Likely Involved - US Activist

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - The 2014 massacre in Odessa conducted by Ukrainian nationalists was well orchestrated and the CIA possibly played a role, US antiwar activist and Global Network Against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space Coordinator Bruce Gagnon told Sputnik.

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 250 others were injured in the attack by the Ukrainian radicals, according to the United Nations.

"It was well orchestrated," Gagnon said on Wednesday.

The CIA as well as other US agencies were likely involved in the planning and execution of the massacre, he said.

Gagnon pointed out that the perpetrators were well-equipped to carry out the massacre and Ukrainian law enforcement did practically nothing to prevent it.

"Molotov cocktails were on hand to firebomb the Trade Union House. Bats were on hand to beat those who jumped from windows trying to get away from fire and smoke. Back door was

broken into, and Nazis moved inside to kill people hiding," Gagnon said.

The police at the scene did nothing while the assault was underway and arrested those who had been inside the building but not those who attacked them, Gagnon said.

Fire trucks were blocked from arriving at the scene for quite some time and could not extinguish the fire in the very beginning, Gagnon added.

"It is obvious to me that decisions made at the highest level in Ukraine, and likely in the United States, determined that no prosecutions would happen to those who attacked," Gagnon said.

The activist noted that he visited Odessa on May 2, 2016, and saw with his own eyes the neo-Nazi Azov battalion holding weapons and roping off the Trade Unions House from people who carried flowers to pay tribute to the victims of the attack.

"No one was allowed to approach the building. The Nazis threw stones at the bus carrying the mothers [of the victims] and the international guests as we approached the area," Gagnon added.

The clashes in Odessa became one of the deadliest events during the so-called Maidan and anti-Maidan demonstrations in Ukraine that started in late 2013.

Moscow has repeatedly criticized the steps Kiev took to allegedly investigate the massacre and has urged the international community and human rights groups to conduct a probe.

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IMF Directly Financing Terrorism by Aiding Ukraine - IMF Director for Russia

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund is directly financing terrorism by providing aid to Ukraine, IMF Executive Director for Russia Aleksei Mozhin told Sputnik.

"The fund is directly financing terrorism by providing support to Ukraine," Mozhin said.

Mozhin pointed out that he had repeatedly raised the issue during the meetings of the IMF Board of Directors.

The IMF's loans to Ukraine mainly allow it to close the old ones, and there is virtually no net increase in the fund's assets being provided to Kiev, Mozhin added.

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US Air Force Says Preparing New Charges Against Convicted Pentagon Leaker Teixeira

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) -The US Air Force is preparing to file new charges against convicted Pentagon leaker Jack Teixeira under the military justice system for alleged misconduct related to his military duties, an Air Force spokesperson said in a statement to Sputnik.

"Following close coordination with the Department of Justice, the Air Force determined that

separate and distinct charges should be preferred against A1C Jack Teixeira, for alleged misconduct related to his military duties," the spokesperson said on Wednesday.

The spokesperson explained that a commander reviewed the evidence and determined that charges against Teixeira should be "preferred" under the US military justice system.

A hearing will be held at Hanscom Air Force Base in the state of Massachusetts on May 14 to examine whether the evidence is sufficient to refer the charges to trial by courts-martial, the spokesperson noted.

In March, Teixeira pleaded guilty to federal charges, including six counts related to leaking top-secret military intelligence documents, and he accepted a potential prison term of 200 months or more than 16 years. His sentencing is set for September 27.

US authorities arrested Teixeira in April and indicted him on six counts of willful retention and transmission of classified information relating to national defense. The documents purportedly contained information regarding the conflict in Ukraine, US espionage activities, and other national security matters.

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Niger, Chad Expulsions Show US Neocolonialism Has Run Its Course - Ex-Pentagon Analyst

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - The expulsion of US forces from Niger and Chad along with similar trends across Africa show that the post-World War II era of US-led neocolonialism to exploit the continent's peoples and riches is finally ending, veteran Defense Department analyst Lt. Col. Karen Kwiatkowski told Sputnik.

The Pentagon said last Thursday that it would withdraw nearly 100 Special Operations Forces from Chad and around 1,000 troops from Niger after the two countries reversed the so-called status-of force-agreements. The two countries have reportedly been part of the United States' counter-extremism and counter-terrorism efforts across the Sahel region.

Kwiatkowski said the expulsions "show that the US military strategy of carving up the world into US combatant commands is a colonial-style paradigm that has finally run its course."

These moves mark the end - and failure - of the neocolonial policies toward Africa launched by the Clinton and Bush administrations starting in the 1990s, she said.

They also indicate the ignominious end of the much-vaunted African Crisis Response Initiative of the late 1990's, which was always shallow in terms of mutual commitment, Kwiatkowski said.

US SHOWS NO INTEREST IN A NEW AFRICA STRATEGY

The moves are part of the United States retreat from the continent because the Biden administration has given no sign of even being interested in coming up with any new continent-spanning strategy or replacing the old and now abandoned concepts, Kwiatkowski said.

"It is significant because nothing programmatic awaits in the wings to shore up US bilateral relationships with most African countries," Kwiatkowski said.

US policies toward the entire continent had always been last thoughts, casually cobbled together without much regard for their practicalities or their impact on the peoples of Africa, she

said.

"Truly, the United States never had much of a consistent or serious footprint in Africa beyond leftover Cold War proxies, oil corporation protection and more recently so-called anti-terror operations that most in Congress were absolutely unaware of," Kwiatkowski said.

Policy toward the region had been subcontracted to dubious elements of the US government and to its allies, she noted.

"The CIA, of course, has been active throughout the continent, and US-Israel cooperation has also been evident and useful to the United States in past decades," Kwiatkowski said.

AFRICA SEEKS TRADE AND INVESTMENT, NOT US MILITARY ADVENTURES

The peoples of Africa are looking for constructive relations based on trade and investment - now trending downward and consisting mainly of oil and raw materials - rather than a continuation of the US military adventures and political intrigues, Kwiatkowski said.

"What is not needed is left behind, and I see the rejection of Pentagon and CIA anti-terrorism projects as recognition of this fact by Africans themselves," Kwiatkowski said.

US constructive input on economic development had been nonexistent and one can think of no examples where the United States has genuinely wished to improve economies or governments on the continent, she said.

China and India had both approached Africa with an eye to economic mutuality and political respect, unlike the United States, Kwiatkowski said.

"The Cold War US-Soviet 'division' of Africa ended 30 years ago, and while Russia's economy is small compared to China, India and the US, it likewise has looked for mutuality in trade and expertise in Africa," Kwiatkowski said.

On the other hand, the US government invested heavily in African neocolonialism and persisted in Cold War thinking. Therefore, the decisions of the Niger and Chad governments to expel US forces from their operating bases have domestically been very popular, she added.

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Two-Decade George W. Bush 'Global War on Terror' Degraded US Military Readiness - Report

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - The military operations around the world unleashed by President George W. Bush's two-decade-long "Global War on Terror" after the attacks of September 11, 2001, have resulted in the erosion of US military readiness, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) said in a new report.

"Our work has shown that conflicts during nearly two decades have degraded US military readiness," the report said on Wednesday.

The GAO has monitored the US armed forces' readiness levels for many years and it has observed a decline in readiness as overall demand for the joint force remained high and is likely to remain high to support global needs, the report noted.

"Multiple deployments and busy training schedules can stress US special operations forces and their families. ...In April 2023, we made three recommendations to address these issues. DOD concurred with our recommendations but has not yet taken actions to fully implement them," the

GAO said.

The number of Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) forces operating around the world during the period of the Global War on Terror has increased from 45,700 in fiscal year 2001 to 73,900 in fiscal year 2021, the report said.

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US Marines F-35B Fails Minimum Performance by 45% - Government Accountability Report

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - The US Marines' F-35B variant of the Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter is still failing to meet its minimum performance goals by 45%, and both other versions of the aircraft are also at least 13% below minimum performance requirements, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) said in a new report.

"We found in April 2024 that the F-35 has not met its targets for mission capable rates for the past several years," the report said on Wednesday. "In fiscal year 2023, the F-35A and F-35B variants were below the full mission-capable minimum-performance target by more than 27 and 45 percentage points, respectively."

Also, each F-35 variant in fiscal year 2023 did not meet its target for mission-capable minimum performance by at least 13 percentage points, the GAO said.

"Slow repair times for the F-35 fleet have resulted in over 10,000 components waiting to be repaired -substantially above desired levels. At the same time, a lack of technical data, spare parts, and training hinders the ability of maintainers to maintain the aircraft," the report said.

According to the program's 2023 estimates, the Air Force will pay \$6.6 million annually to operate and sustain an individual F-35 aircraft, well above the \$4.1 million 2018 target, the GAO said. Since 2014, the GAO has made 43 recommendations to improve the F-35 program but 30 of them (about 70%) remain unimplemented, the report said.

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US Navy Orders Longer Range Anti-Ship Missile Variant From Lockheed Martin - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - Lockheed Martin Missile and Fire Control has received a \$288 million US Navy contract extension to help produce a new Long Range Anti-Ship Missile variant, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"Lockheed Martin Corporation., Missile and Fire Control [in] Orlando, Florida, is awarded a ...\$288 million modification ...order ...to provide ...engineering and material ...required to establish a new Long Range Anti-Ship Missile variant (AGM-158C-3)," the release said on Wednesday.

The new version of the missile will extend its range beyond the existing AGM-158C-1, the Defense Department said.

The new missile variant will also include "advanced communications and survivability capabilities while supporting maritime strike missions for the Navy," the release explained.

Most of the work on developing the new missile variant will be performed in Orlando, Florida (97.5%) over the next two and a quarter years and is expected to be completed in August 2026, the Defense Department said.

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US Army Hires General Atomics to Develop Artificial Intelligence Prototype - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - General Atomics Aeronautical Systems has received an almost \$95 million US Army contract to research and develop Artificial Intelligence for the Smart Sensor Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Program, the Department of Defense said in a press release.

"General Atomics Aeronautical Systems [of] Poway, California was awarded a \$94,808,020 ...contract for research, development, test, and evaluation of Artificial Intelligence for the Smart Sensor Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance prototype," the release said on Wednesday.

Work on the project will be performed in Poway, California over the next two years with an estimated completion date of March 31, 2026, the Defense Department said.

The Army Contracting Command in Adelphi, Maryland will oversee work on the project, the Defense Department added.

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Trump Says He Told NATO Country US Would Not Defend It If Delinquent on Defense Spending

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said during a campaign rally that he told the head of state of a NATO member that the United States would not help defend it in a conflict with Russia if it is delinquent on its required defense spending.

"I remember during a meeting, one of the presidents of one of the European countries stood up, and it was a closed-door meeting, he said, 'May I ask you a question, Mr. President? If we don't pay, we're not paid up, and we're attacked by Russia, will you defend us?' Trump recalled on Wednesday. "I said, 'You mean you're delinquent? You haven't paid? No, I will not defend you.'"

Trump explained that this hardline stance helped get NATO members to pay their fair share for security in Europe instead of becoming overly dependent on the United States' contributions.

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

Trump emphasized that he could have prevented the Ukraine conflict if he was US president.

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US Navy Orders \$457Mln in Engineering Support For F/A-18 Super Hornet Force - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - Boeing has received a more than \$457 million US Navy contract boost to continue providing engineering support for 29 F/A-18 Super Hornets, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"The Boeing Company [of] St. Louis, Missouri is awarded a \$457,686,992 modification ...contract ...to extend service life from 6,000 flight hours to 10,000 flight hours and incorporate Block III avionics capabilities for 29 F/A-18 Block II Super Hornets," the release stated on Wednesday.

Under the contract, Boeing will provide additional aircraft inductions, continued non-recurring engineering, systems engineering, and program management support, the release explained.

All the work on the contract will be performed in San Antonio, Texas (55%); and San Diego, California (45%) over the next two years and is expected to be completed in June 2026, the Defense Department said.

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Trump Says If Elected the US Will Build Its Own Iron Dome Air Defense System

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said during a campaign rally that if he is elected as US president he will look into building an Iron Dome air defense system for the US mainland.

"In my next term, we will build a great Iron Dome, very much like Israel has, but even better," Trump said on Wednesday.

Trump said any US version of the Iron Dome system will be more technologically sophisticated than Israel's.

Trump noted that Israel's Iron Dome system's system has been impressive as it has repelled various attacks since the start of the Gaza war last October.

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Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Lab Gets \$493Mln Space Engineering Contract - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory has received a more than \$493 million US Air Force contract for space systems engineering, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory [in] Laurel, Maryland was awarded a \$493,166,340 ...contract for space systems engineering," the release said on Wednesday.

The contract provides systems engineering, technical support tasks, and specialized research and development, the Defense Department explained.

Work on the contract will be performed in El Segundo, California over the next seven years and is expected to be completed by May 1, 2031, the Department of Defense said.

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US Air Force Orders \$820Mln in Depot Support for KC-46 Tanker Fleet - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - Seven companies have been awarded US Air Force contracts totaling \$820 million for the KC-46 air refueling tankers commodities depot activation support, the Defense Department announced.

"[The seven companies] have been awarded \$820 million ... contracts for the KC-46 commodities depot activation support," the Defense Department said in a press release on Wednesday. "This contract provides for line replaceable units and commodities to stand up organic depot repair capabilities of the KC-46A aircraft to support the Air Force fleet."

The release listed the companies as Boeing in Seattle, Washington; Rockwell Collins in Cedar Rapids, Iowa; AAR Government Services in Wood Dale, Illinois; Aviation Repair Technologies in Blytheville, Arkansas; Honeywell International in Tempe, Arizona; VSE Corporation in Alexandria, Virginia; and AMI Industries in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Work on the contract will be performed in US government main operating bases over the next eleven years and is expected to be completed by April 30, 2035, the release said.

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US Military Issues \$43Bln in New Contract to Recruit Health Staff - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - The Defense Health Agency (DHA) has issued a \$43 billion contract to 11 companies to hire health care professional staff for the US military, the Defense Department announced.

"[The companies] will share a ... contract ... of \$43 billion support of the DHA Medical Q-Coded Support and Services-Next Generation (MQS2-NG) program's unrestricted vendor pool," the Defense Department said in a press release on Wednesday.

The release identified the companies as the Arora Group; Decypher Health Services; Dilligas Corporation doing business as US Got People; Federal Staffing Resources doing business as Epic Government; KBR Wyle Services; Loyal Source Government Services; Luke & Associates; Matrix Providers; Optumserve Health Services; Spectrum Healthcare Resources; and Vesa Health and Technology.

"The MQS2-NG program is an enterprise strategic sourcing program that hires health care professional staff," the release said.

The required services include credentialed and non-credentialed contract workers in various health care labor categories in support of mission requirements within DHA hospitals, clinics and dental facilities as well as health activities in the 50 US states, the release added.

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Purported CIA Contractor Says US Intelligence Community Kept Information From Trump

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) - A man claiming to work as a contractor for the CIA told an undercover investigative journalist that US intelligence agencies intentionally withheld information from former US President Donald Trump.

"We kept information from [Trump]... He's an idiot," the purported CIA contractor said in undercover footage released Wednesday by O'Keefe Media Group.

The man, identified as Amjad Fseisi, claimed to do cyber operations for the CIA. Fseisi appeared to show the undercover journalist a so-called green badge to the undercover journalist; green badges are given to US intelligence community contractors.

Fseisi said that the intelligence community, including former CIA director Gina Haspel, would give Trump intelligence overviews but withhold details out of fear that he would disclose information.

The claims about the CIA are "absolutely false and ridiculous," the agency said in a statement. Fseisi is a former contractor who does not represent the CIA, the statement said.

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UN Chief Says 'Deeply Distressed' About Hundreds of Deaths in East Africa Due to Floods

UNITED NATIONS, May 2 (Sputnik) - The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is worried over the high number of deaths as a result of heavy flooding in places like Burundi, Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania and other parts of East Africa, the UN said in a statement.

"The Secretary-General is deeply distressed to hear of the hundreds of lives lost and many others affected by heavy flooding in Burundi, Kenya, Somalia and Tanzania and other parts of East Africa," the statement said.

In addition, the statement said that the United Nations stands ready to offer humanitarian assistance.

Guterres also expressed concern over the impact of El Niño-driven extreme weather, which could further devastate communities and undermine their means of living.

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US Defense Official Says Russia's Alleged Nuclear Space Capability Not Imminent

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) – Russia's alleged nuclear space capability does not pose an imminent threat to the United States, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy John Plumb said in congressional testimony.

"It is not imminent in the way that we should have to worry about it right now, but we are concerned about it at the department and the entire administration," Plumb told a House Armed Services Committee Hearing.

In his remarks, Plumb cited several analysts who believe that a nuclear detonation in space of the right magnitude and in the right location could render low earth orbit unusable for about a year.

In February, the United States claimed that Russia was allegedly developing a space-based anti-satellite weapon that poses a serious US national security threat.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Moscow had always been categorically against deploying nuclear weapons in space and its position on this issue is clear and transparent. Russia's activities in space are no different from those of other countries, including the United States, and they know it, Putin added.

Earlier in April, Russia vetoed the US- and Japan-sponsored UN Security Council draft resolution prohibiting the use of weapons of mass destruction in outer space.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said Moscow vetoed the draft resolution on the placement of WMDs in outer space because Russian amendments had been ignored. Prior to the vote, Russia and China had proposed an amendment that would have extended the ban to include the placement of any type of weapons in space, rather than just nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction.

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Russia Opposes US Logic That Palestine Membership in UN Would Be Barrier to Negotiations

UNITED NATIONS, May 2 (Sputnik) - Russia opposes the United States logic that admitting Palestine as a full member of the United Nations would be a barrier to negotiations with Israel, Russian Ambassador to the world body Vassily Nebenzia said.

"According to their logic, Palestine becoming a full-fledged member of the United Nations would be a barrier to negotiations with Israel. We categorically oppose this logic," Nebenzia said in the UN General Assembly on Wednesday.

The Russian ambassador said satisfying Palestine's request for full membership in the United Nations would be an act of restoring historical justice.

In mid-April, the United States vetoed the proposed UN Security Council draft resolution to

support Palestine's for full membership in the United Nations.

Nebenzia said the United States 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 United Nations. The request was supported by the Arab Group, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Non-Aligned Movement.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, May 2 (Sputnik) -

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* The Russian armed forces have hit the positions of the US-made HIMARS rocket launchers on the Kupyansk sector of the front, destroying two of them, a source in the Russian Defense Ministry told Sputnik on Wednesday.

* The Ukrainian military suffered up to 920 casualties in the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) in the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

* Several hundred people took to the streets to take part in the "March for Peace" protest in the center of Warsaw, demanding Poland's non-interference in the hostilities in Ukraine and also an end to arms supplies to Kiev, a RIA Novosti correspondent reported.

US ECONOMY

* US inflation is still way above levels desired by the Federal Reserve and progress in bringing it down is not assured, US central bank Chairman Jerome Powell said on Wednesday.

* The Federal Reserve is unlikely to agree on an interest rate hike at its next policy meeting in June, Powell said.

* The Federal Reserve left US interest rates unchanged in its May policy meeting, its sixth such decision since July, with the central bank saying cuts can only come with satisfactory decrease of inflation.

PROTESTS IN GEORGIA

* A fire has broken out near the building of the Georgian parliament during a protest against the bill on foreign agents, with one of the barricades presumably burning, a Sputnik correspondent reported on Wednesday.

* The Georgian Parliament passed the bill on foreign agents in the second reading, according to the results of the vote.

WESTERN SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

* The United States imposed sanctions on the chief designer of the Russian tank Armata, Andrei Terlikov, as well as Ural Automobile Plant Director-General Pavel Yakovlev as part of

new sanctions on Russian and foreign entities and individuals, the Treasury Department said on Wednesday.

* The United States is imposing sanctions on two subsidiaries of Russian State Atomic Energy Corporation Rosatom, the State Department said.

* The United States has imposed sanctions on Russian companies involved in natural gas infrastructure projects, including Neftegazstroy and Vnipegazdobycha, the Treasury Department said.

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US House Passes Bill to Update Definition of Anti-Semitism Amid Pro-Palestine Protests

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives passed legislation on Wednesday to update the definition of anti-Semitism for the enforcement of federal anti-discrimination laws concerning educational programs.

House lawmakers passed the bill, dubbed the Antisemitism Awareness Act, in a vote of 320 in favor and 91 opposed.

The legislation applies a definition of anti-Semitism created by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) and includes examples of anti-Semitism identified by the group. Anti-Semitism is a "certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred towards Jews," according to the IHRA definition.

However, US Congressman Thomas Massie said that the legislation violates the First Amendment of the US Constitution, which prohibits the government from abridging freedom of speech.

"This is a poorly conceived unconstitutional bill and I will vote no," Massie said in a statement via social media platform X.

Massie shared examples of alleged anti-Semitism listed by the IHRA alongside its definition, which include: accusing Jewish people of being more loyal to Israel or the interests of other Jews than to the interests of their nations; comparing contemporary Israeli policy to Nazi Germany; and alleging a world Jewish conspiracy or Jewish control of the media, government or other societal institutions.

The House advanced the legislation amid numerous pro-Palestine protests on college campuses around the United States, which have in some cases prompted police responses. The Biden administration and some lawmakers have accused demonstrators of anti-Semitism for their participation in the protests.

The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) said that the legislation would chill political speech about the Israel-Palestine conflict on US college campuses. The definition of anti-Semitism adopted by the bill is unconstitutionally vague and overbroad, FIRE said.

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Fed Leaves US Rates Unchanged, Neither Hike Nor Cut In View Until Inflation Changes

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - The Federal Reserve on Wednesday left US interest rates unchanged for a sixth straight time since July, saying neither a hike nor cut was on the cards without a marked change in inflation which was running above its target.

“I think it's unlikely that the next policy rate move will be a hike ... I would say it's unlikely,” Powell told a news conference after the Fed left rates unchanged in a range of between 5.25% and 5.5% at its May policy meeting. The central bank's next rate decision will be on June 12.

The Fed's long-term target for inflation is 2% per annum. Current inflation indicators are middling between 2.5% and 3.5%. The central bank has all but ruled out any easing of rates until it is more confident that its target will be met.

Asked if a rate cut might take place before 2025 — the Fed suggested at the start of this year there could be as many as three reductions in 2024 — Powell replied that the central bank needed to see inflation dropping meaningfully first. “Then rate cuts will be in scope,” he said. “And I don't know exactly when that will be.”

At the conclusion of the periodical meeting of its Federal Open Market Committee on Wednesday, the Fed said recent months had shown a further lack in progress toward its 2 percent inflation target.

The US economic outlook had also been uncertain and remained “highly attentive to inflation risks,” it said.

The Fed met after data this week showed a key measure of consumer confidence hitting a 21-month low in April, reinforcing worry that inflation was getting the better of economic growth. Earlier, data showed gross domestic product growth at 1.6% year-on-year for the first quarter, versus the previous quarter's 3.4%. It was the slowest quarterly growth in nearly two years and bucked Wall Street's forecast for a 2.5% expansion.

Inflation surged to 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% a year by 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 managed to subdue inflation by more than half with its action — the CPI only rose 3.5% in the year to March — it cannot seem to easily 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.

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

The Fed had previously 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 Powell to the heads of its different regional jurisdictions — wants either the PCE or CPI to head towards a flat 2% rather than staying closer to 3%.

“Of course we're not satisfied with 3% inflation,” Powell said on Wednesday. In spite of uncertainties over the economy, he said the Fed was confident of meeting its target. “We think our policy stance is appropriate to do that,” he added.

While the Fed's next decision on rates will be on June 12, it has four more opportunities to make a change this year: July 31, September 18, November 7 and December 18.

Wall Street is betting on a late year pivot, meaning the November 7 and December 18 dates will be the more closely watched ones.

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Russia Calls for Independent International Investigation of Mass Graves in Gaza - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, April 30 (Sputnik) - Russia calls for undertaking an independent international investigation to bring to justice the perpetrators in relation to the reported mass graves in the Gaza Strip, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Wednesday.

"We had chilling reports about mass graves that were discovered in the Gaza Strip. We need an independent international investigation to ensure that the perpetrators are held to account," Nebenzia said in the UN General Assembly hall.

Palestinian officials reported that more than 300 bodies - including of women, children, elderly and injured persons - were found in mass graves on the grounds of Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, Gaza's second-largest city and al-Shifa medical compound in Gaza City.

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US Imposes New Sanctions to Further Constrain Russia's Arctic LNG 2 Project - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - The United States has sanctioned entities and vessels linked to Russia's Arctic LNG 2 Project, a US State Department fact sheet revealed on Wednesday.

"Today, the [State] Department is designating two vessel operators involved in the transport of highly specialized liquefied natural gas (LNG) modules and gravity-based structure (GBS) equipment designed specifically for Russia's Arctic LNG 2 project," it said.

The actions demonstrate the United States' continued resolve to constrain the Arctic LNG 2 project's production and export capacity and limit third-party support to the project, the State Department said.

The sanctions target two Russian companies providing maritime logistics and construction

support for Russian energy projects, including Arctic LNG 2, the State Department said.

The latest sanctions target the Singapore-based company Red Box Energy Services Ltd. and two vessels - Audax and Pugnax, in which Red Box has an interest, the State Department said.

Another sanctioned company is the Hong Kong-based CFU Shipping Co Ltd. along with the vessels in which it has interest - Hunter Star and Nan Feng Zhou Xing, the State Department said.

In addition, the United States sanctioned EKO Shipping Limited Liability Company for operating in the marine sector together with nine vessels in which it has interest, including Arctica 2, Andrey Osipov and Mikhail Britnev, the State Department said.

The United States also sanctioned Transstroy Limited Liability Company along with the vessels Arctica 1, Mys Zhelaniya and Vasily Lanovoy, the State Department added.

Moreover, the United States sanctioned Modmer Trading Uluslararası İthalatve İhracat Limited Sirketi based in Turkey, according to the State Department.

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Regional Leader of Sanctioned Russia's Group Pleads Guilty to Lying to FBI – Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) – Tomas Ianchauskas, a US green card holder and regional leader of the sanctioned Russian organization the Tsargrad Society, pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI, the Justice Department said on Wednesday.

“Damian Williams, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced today the guilty plea of Tomas Ianchauskas, a regional leader of a sanctioned Russian Organization known as the Tsargrad Society (the “Society”), for lying to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (“FBI”) about his participation in the Society and its predecessor during an in-person interview in the U.S.,” the statement said.

Ianchauskas pled guilty and is scheduled to be sentenced on July 11, 2024, it added.

US authorities stressed that the Tsargrad Society is controlled by Russian businessman Konstantin Malofeyev, also known as Malofeev, who has been under US sanctions since 2014.

Ianchauskas told the FBI twice that he had no involvement in the Tsargrad Society and its predecessor entity the Double Headed Eagle Society for the three prior years, according to the statement.

The complaint previously filed against Ianchauskas indicated that he resides in Russia.

“By operation of the Ukraine-Related Executive Orders 13660, 13661, 13662, and 14024, Ianchauskas is prohibited from, among other things, making any contribution or provision of funds, goods, or services to or for the benefit of sanctioned Russian oligarch Konstantin Valeryevich Malofeyev or certain Malofeyev-controlled designated entities, including the Society, formerly known as the Double Headed Eagle Society (“DHES”),” the statement said.

Ianchauskas pled guilty to one count of making false statements to special agents of the FBI, which carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison, it added.

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US Military Experiencing Serious Sustainment Challenges Across Branches – Defense Official

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) – The US military is experiencing significant sustainability challenges across all branches, including the failure of F-35 jets to pass the annual mission readiness goal and belated maintenance of Navy ships, Director of Defense Capabilities and Management, Government Accountability Office Diana Maurer said on Wednesday.

“All too often the sustainment enterprise is not delivering mission capabilities. Less than 40% of ships completed maintenance on time. The F-35 and most aviation systems failed to meet annual mission-capable or availability goals and missile defense sustainment is optimized for specific systems rather than across the enterprise,” Maurer said in congressional testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Maurer emphasized that the United States is experiencing personnel shortages, adding that the Navy today is having 16% fewer sailors than required in the battle force and the Space Force is short 2,000 of uniformed personnel.

Moreover, US aviation and sustainment suffers from a lack of spare parts and shortages of trained maintenance personnel, and the Marine Corps faces a significant gap between the number and current condition of the amphibious fleet's near-term operational needs, Maurer added.

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Pentagon Says Another US Delegation Leaving to Niger This Week for Exit Talks

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - Another US delegation will depart to Niger later this week for further talks about the withdrawal of US forces from the West African country, Pentagon Deputy Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said on Wednesday.

"We are waiting to send another delegation to Niger," Singh said during a press briefing. "That delegation has not left, but they should be scheduled hopefully to leave this week, and that will be to continue to have those conversations about withdrawing US forces."

Singh noted that there are no major updates on this topic at present.

The military pullout was initiated in March after a Nigerien military spokesperson said the country's transitional government, which took power in a coup last July, had terminated the military agreement with the US with immediate effect, citing the interests of the Nigerien people.

Last week, the Pentagon confirmed that Washington and Niamey had begun discussions for the "orderly withdrawal" of US servicemen based in Niger. Interior Minister Mohamed Toumba said on Wednesday that Niger is working on the withdrawal of US troops from the country, and a top US military official will visit the country soon.

There are around 1,100 US personnel in Niger.

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Biden Administration Coerced Tech Companies to Censor Online Content - US House Panel

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - The US House Judiciary Committee and its Select Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government released an interim staff report on Wednesday, which covers the Biden administration's coercion of tech companies to censor online content.

"The report details the monthslong campaign by the Biden White House to coerce large companies, namely Facebook [banned in Russia as extremist], Google, and Amazon, to censor books, videos, posts, and other content online. By the end of 2021, Facebook, YouTube, and Amazon changed their content moderation policies in ways that were directly responsive to criticism from the Biden Administration," the panel said in a statement on the report.

The panel reviewed tens of thousands of emails and nonpublic documents between the White House and big tech companies, the statement said.

The panel found that the White House's censorship efforts targeted true information, satire and other policies that did not violate platforms' policies, the statement said. The censorship efforts had a "chilling effect" on other speech, the statement said.

Moreover, the White House pushed to censor books, not just social media content, the statement said.

"By suppressing free speech and intentionally distorting public debate in the modern town square, ideas and policies were no longer fairly tested and debated on their merits," the statement said.

The First Amendment of the US Constitution prohibits the government from abridging freedom of speech. The panel uncovered serious violations of the First Amendment throughout the executive branch during the Biden administration, the statement said.

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US Fleet Readiness Below Standards in Part Due to Deliveries to Ukraine – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) – The readiness of the United States Fleet is currently below the established standards, partly due to weapons and equipment deliveries to Ukraine, Vice Chief of Staff of the Army General James Mingus said on Wednesday.

Mingus made the remarks while testifying before a Senate Armed Forces Committee on the current readiness of the Joint Force.

"Our fleet readiness currently is below the standards that we hold for ourselves, and part of that is a confluence of cascading of equipment from one unit to other, back to depot, some of it is equipment that we've given to Ukraine and the supply parts that have to go to Ukraine ... It's

been a host of things that have caused this," Mingus said.

Mingus noted that the fleet overall operational readiness standard is of 90%, however with the current shortfalls and diversion of resources, the current level stands at 80%.

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CORRECTION - Next Fed Meeting Unlikely to See Rate Hike, More Confidence Needed On Inflation - Powell

(Corrects headline and lede)

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - The Federal Reserve is unlikely to agree on an rate hike at its next policy meeting in June, Chairman Jerome Powell said Wednesday, adding that he was not sure how long it would be before an easing can begin as the central bank needs to see inflation retreating meaningfully first.

The Fed's long-term target for inflation is 2% per annum. Current inflation indicators are middling between 2.5% and 3.5%.

"I think it's unlikely that the next policy rate move will be a hike," Powell told a news conference after the Fed left US interest rates unchanged in a range of between 5.25% and 5.5% at its May policy meeting, the sixth time it has done so since July. "I would say it's unlikely."

Asked when a cut will take place, he replied: "I don't know how long it will take. I can just say that when we get that confidence, then rate cuts will be in scope. And I don't know exactly when that will be."

Earlier, Powell said it would not be appropriate for the Fed to ease "until we have greater confidence inflation is going back to 2%."

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Next Fed Meeting Unlikely to See Rate Cut, More Confidence Needed On Inflation - Powell

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - The Federal Reserve is unlikely to agree on an rate cut at its next policy meeting in June, Chairman Jerome Powell said Wednesday, adding that he was not sure how long it would be before an easing can begin as the central bank needs to see inflation retreating meaningfully first.

The Fed's long-term target for inflation is 2% per annum. Current inflation indicators are middling between 2.5% and 3.5%.

"I think it's unlikely that the next policy rate move will be a hike," Powell told a news conference after the Fed left US interest rates unchanged in a range of between 5.25% and 5.5% at its May policy meeting, the sixth time it has done so since July. "I would say it's unlikely."

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US Imposes Sanctions on Russian Defense Ministry's Research Institute – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed sanctions on the 48th Central Scientific and Research Institute of the Russian Ministry of Defense for being allegedly associated with Russia's biological weapons program, the US State Department said in a press release on Wednesday.

The State Department claims in the release that the decision to designate the entity came after it determined that Russia had allegedly used the chemical weapon chloropicrin against Ukrainian forces in violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

The State Department did not provide any evidence of Russia's alleged use of chemical weapons against the Ukrainian military amid the ongoing conflict.

Besides the 48th Research Institute, the State Department and the Department of the Treasury have also imposed sanctions on Radiological, Chemical, and Biological Defense Troops of the Russian Ministry of Defense and the Scientific Research Institute of Applied Acoustic, according to the release.

The new package of sanctions lists nearly 300 individuals and entities, including from Russia, Turkey, China, and the United Arab Emirates, for their alleged roles in circumventing Western sanctions on Russia and providing critical technology to its military-industrial complex.

The Russian Defense Ministry has on many occasions accused the United States of funding research for the development of biological weapons in Ukraine. In the first months after the start of the special military operation, the Russian military said they had discovered over 30 biological laboratories in Ukraine involved in the research. Washington has denied the allegations.

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US Inflation Still 'Too High,' Further Progress in Bringing It Down Not Assured - Powell

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - US inflation is still way above levels desired by the Federal Reserve and progress in bringing it down is not assured, the central bank's chairman Jerome Powell said Wednesday.

“Inflation is still too high,” Powell told a news conference after the Fed left US interest rates unchanged in a range of between 5.25% and 5.5% at its May policy meeting, the sixth time it has done so since July. The central bank chair added: “Further progress in bringing it down is not assured. And the path forward is uncertain.”

The Fed's long-term target for inflation is 2% per annum. Current inflation indicators are middling between 2.5% and 3.5%.

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US Issues Hundreds of Sanctions Targeting Russian Defense Sector, Third-Country Support

(Updates with more details in para 4)

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - The United States imposed hundreds of new sanctions targeting Russia's defense industry as well as targeting individuals and entities in third countries that are alleged to support it, the US Treasury Department said on Wednesday.

"Today's actions target Russia's military-industrial base and chemical and biological weapons programs as well as companies and individuals in third countries that help Russia acquire key inputs for weapons or defense-related production," the Treasury Department said in a press release.

The release said the nearly 300 sanctions also designate entities based in China and other countries that allegedly provide critical technology and equipment to Russia's defense industry.

The State Department detailed in a separate press release that the sanctions target entities in Azerbaijan, Belgium, China, Russia, Slovakia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates.

The sanctions also target the Russian Defense Ministry's radiological chemical and biological defense forces and the Russian airline Pobeda.

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Mozambique to Advocate for Ceasefire, Draft Supporting Resolution - UN Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, May 1 (Sputnik) — Mozambique will encourage a ceasefire in Gaza and is prepared to draft a resolution to bolster such efforts if negotiations falter, Permanent Representative of Mozambique to the United Nations Ambassador Pedro Comissario Afonso said on Wednesday.

"We are also going to encourage efforts in order to have a ceasefire and in case there is a ceasefire, we will certainly draft a resolution to strongly support[the ceasefire], to strongly encourage[the ceasefire], in case the negotiations are not fruitful," Afonso said during a press briefing.

Afonso added that Mozambique is concerned about the situation in Gaza and is eager for a ceasefire to be implemented as soon as possible, either through the Security Council or by Mozambique's own initiative.

Earlier this week, the Palestinian movement Hamas was offered a 40-day ceasefire and the release of thousands of Palestinian prisoners in exchange for freeing Israeli hostages.

On October 7, 2023, Hamas launched a large-scale rocket attack against Israel and breached

the border, attacking both civilian neighborhoods and military bases. Nearly 1,200 people in Israel were killed and some 240 others abducted during the attack. Israel launched retaliatory strikes, ordered a complete blockade of Gaza, and started a ground incursion into the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages. Over 34,400 people have been killed so far by Israeli strikes in the Gaza Strip, according to local authorities.

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

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

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US Sanctions Two Rosatom Subsidiaries - State Department

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - The United States is imposing sanctions on two subsidiaries of Russian State Atomic Energy Corporation Rosatom, the US State Department said on Wednesday.

"This is the seventh Russia sanctions action that includes designations of [Rosatom] subsidiaries. These targets include Rosatom entities distributing machine tools for the enterprise," the US State Department said in a statement.

The sanctions target Joint Stock Company IPN Stankostroenie and Rusatom Machine Tools Joint Stock Company, the statement said.

The sanctions are part of a new US sanctions package on Russia, which designated more than 280 individuals and entities.

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Fed Leaves US Rates Unchanged at May Meeting, Cites Uncertain Economy, Inflation Risks

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - The Federal Reserve left US interest rates unchanged at its May policy meeting, its sixth such decision since July, with the central bank saying cuts can only come with satisfactory declines in inflation.

Concluding the periodical meeting of its Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) on Wednesday, the Fed noted a further lack in progress toward its 2 percent annual inflation target

in recent months. The US economic outlook is also uncertain and remains “highly attentive to inflation risks,” it said.

“In support of its goals, the Committee decided to maintain the target range for the federal funds rate at 5-1/4 to 5-1/2 percent,” the Fed said in a statement issued after the FOMC’s two-day meeting. “In considering any adjustments to the target range for the federal funds rate, the Committee will carefully assess incoming data, the evolving outlook, and the balance of risks. The Committee does not expect it will be appropriate to reduce the target range until it has gained greater confidence that inflation is moving sustainably toward 2 percent.”

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Trump Stock Down After Rally That Gave Embattled Ex-President Some New Wealth

NEW YORK, May 1 (Sputnik) - The media stock associated with Donald J. Trump fell 8% Wednesday after a rally over the past week that gave some new wealth to the former president, who is fighting charges in court that his 2016 election win came after he bought the silence of a woman he allegedly had an extramarital affair with.

Trump Media & Technology Group Corp — trading under the DJT symbol synonymous with Trump’s initials — hovered at just above \$46 a share. The stock, linked with the former president’s blogging site called Truth Social, hit a high of \$79.38 at its March 26 before falling to as low as \$22.55 by April 15. It began recovering from there, reaching a session high of \$54.50 on Wednesday before retreating.

The rebound in the stock came after DJT chief executive Devin Nunes complained about potential market manipulation of the company’s stock by short sellers, and the firm encouraged shareholders to take steps that would prevent their stock from being loaned for short-selling trades. The borrowing fee to short the stock has also risen exponentially, those in the know said.

Trump, who already owned more than 78 million DJT shares, received an extra 36 million shares on Wednesday, the company said in a filing to the Securities and Exchange Commission. This was due to a deal assuring him such a windfall if the share price remained above the pre-set benchmark of \$17.50 for 20 trading days from its debut.

Trump launched Truth Social after his suspension from Twitter and another social media site for allegedly inciting his supporters to storm the US Capitol following his loss to Joe Biden in the 2020 presidential election. Seeking a White House comeback, he is challenging Biden again in this November’s election, using Truth Social as one of his campaign boosters. But the former president’s social media has been massively diminished since he left office, with his attempts to encourage his followers to flock to his new website apparently not resonating well enough.

Truth Social says it has almost nine million users but it doesn’t say how many of these are active. In comparison, X, the platform formerly known as Twitter, has nearly 240 million daily active users as of June 2022.

Despite the company’s success in warding off some short sellers, DJT’s price may be susceptible to new lows due to its poor finances, analysts said. The company lost \$58.2 million on revenue of \$4.1 million in 2023 and says it expects to remain in the red “for the foreseeable

future” as it works to expand its user base, attracting more platform partners and advertisers.

Stock market advisers also are telling investors to stay away from DJT, which they describe as a meme stock. Such a stock, they say, has a cult-like following on social media, with market performance determined by investor sentiment instead of fundamentals.

Trump has been stuck in New York for a third week now, fighting allegations that he ordered payment be made to silence porn star Stormy Daniels from telling publicly of the sexual encounter the two allegedly had in 2006. Trump is accused of buying her silence in the run-up to the 2016 election.

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US Sanctions Chief Designer of Russian Tank Armata Andrei Terlikov - Treasury

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) – The United States imposed sanctions on the chief designer of the Russian tank Armata Andrei Terlikov as well as the director general of the Ural Automobile Plant Pavel Yakovlev as part of a new massive package of restrictions on Russian and foreign entities and individuals, the US Department of the Treasury said on Wednesday.

The new package of sanctions lists nearly 300 individuals and entities, including from Russia, Turkey China, and the United Arab Emirates, for their alleged roles in circumventing Western sanctions on Russia and providing critical technology to its military-industrial complex.

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US Sanctions Russian Natural Gas Companies Neftegazstroy, Vnipegazdobycha - Treasury

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed sanctions against Russian companies involved in natural gas infrastructure projects, including Neftegazstroy and Vnipegazdobycha, the US Treasury Department said on Wednesday.

"Guided by commitments made in February by President Biden and G7 leaders to take steps to limit Russia's future energy revenues and impede Russia's development of future energy projects, today Treasury is targeting two Russia-based entities involved in natural gas-related construction projects, Neftegazstroy and Aktsionernoe Obshchestvo Vnipegazdobycha," the Treasury Department said in a press release.

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US Issues Hundreds of Sanctions Targeting Russian Defense Sector, Third-Country Support

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"Today's actions target Russia's military-industrial base and chemical and biological weapons programs as well as companies and individuals in third countries that help Russia acquire key inputs for weapons or defense-related production," the Treasury said in a press release.

The release said the nearly 300 sanctions also designate entities based in China and other third countries that allegedly provide critical technology and equipment to Russia's defense industry.

The sanctions list also includes the Russian Defense Ministry's radiological chemical and biological defense troops, as well as Russian airline Pobeda.

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Israel to Punish Palestinian Authority if ICC Issues Arrest Warrants Against It – Reports

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) – Israel has told the Biden administration that it will take retaliatory steps that could result in the collapse of the Palestinian Authority should the International Criminal Court (ICC) issue arrest warrants against Israeli leaders, Axios reported on Wednesday, citing Israeli and US officials.

In recent weeks, Israel shared with the United States information about the Palestinian Authority's alleged pressure on the ICC prosecutor to issue arrest warrants against Israeli leaders amid the ongoing investigation into potential war crimes dating back to the Israeli-Hamas war in 2014, the report said.

Israel threatened to block the transfer of tax revenues it collects for the Palestinian Authority, which would go bankrupt without the funds, the report said.

Earlier on Wednesday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned that the International Criminal Court (ICC) would unleash a scandal of historic proportion if it were to issue arrest warrants against Israelis over the Gaza war.

The White House said on Monday that it did not support potential ICC action against Israeli officials, who reportedly includes Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, the Israel Defense Forces chief of staff Herzi Halevi, and Netanyahu himself.

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US Authorizes Safety, Wind Down Transactions With Russian Airline Pobeda - Treasury

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - The US Treasury Department on Wednesday issued a general license authorizing aviation safety and wind down transactions involving the Russian airline Pobeda through July 30.

"[A]ll transactions prohibited by Executive Order (E.O.) 14024 that are ordinarily incident and necessary to the provision, exportation, or reexportation of goods, technology, or services to ensure the safety of civil aviation involving Limited Liability Company Aviakompaniya Pobeda are authorized through 12:01 a.m. eastern daylight time, July 30, 2024," the text of the license reads.

All transactions prohibited by E.O. 14024 that are "ordinarily incident and necessary to the wind down of any transaction involving Limited Liability Company Aviakompaniya Pobeda are authorized through 12:01 a.m. eastern daylight time, July 30, 2024," the license said.

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US Senate Majority Leader Says Reintroducing Bill to Reform Federal Cannabis Policy

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said on Wednesday that he and other Senate Democrats reintroduced legislation to reform federal cannabis policy, following reports that the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) is planning to reclassify the drug into a lower regulatory category.

"Today, I am proud to join with [Senator Cory Booker] and [Senator Ron Wyden] to reintroduce the Cannabis Administration and Opportunity Act, a comprehensive and necessary update to the federal government's approach to cannabis," Schumer said in a statement via the social media platform X.

The bill lays the foundation to decriminalize, regulate and tax cannabis in the United States. The measure removes cannabis from the Controlled Substances Act and empowers US states to create their own cannabis laws.

The bill establishes a Center for Cannabis Products within the US Food and Drug Administration to regulate the production, labeling, distribution and sale of cannabis. The legislation also directs the US Transportation Department to create a standard for cannabis-impaired driving within three years.

On Tuesday, US media reported that the DEA intends to reclassify as a Schedule III substance under the Controlled Substances Act. Cannabis is currently classified as a Schedule I drug, which is believed to have no accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse.

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.

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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US Troops Withdraw From Chad Amid Ongoing Cooperation Review – Defense Official

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) – The United States has relocated 60 of its military personnel from Chad to Germany amid an ongoing review of security cooperation between the countries, a US defense official told Sputnik on Wednesday.

“We can confirm the safe and orderly relocation of approximately 60 US forces from Chad to Germany where they will continue their work. This temporary step is part of an ongoing review of our security cooperation, which will resume after the May 6 Presidential election,” the official said in a statement.

According to media reports, there were fewer than 100 US troops in Chad.

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US Oil Price Dives Below \$80 Per Barrel After Huge Weekly Build in Crude Stocks

NEW YORK, May 1 (Sputnik) - Oil prices tumbled almost 3% on Wednesday, with US crude falling beneath the \$80 per barrel mark and extending April's losses after a three-month rally, as traders reacted to data showing a huge build in weekly crude stockpiles in the United States.

By 12:30 p.m. in New York (5:50 p.m. GMT), West Texas Intermediate (WTI) was at \$79.50 per barrel, down \$2.43, or 3% from Tuesday's settlement for April.

WTI lost 1.5% last month after a cumulative gain of about 15% between January and March. Prior to its tumble, the US crude benchmark hit a nearly six-month high at \$87.67.

The London-traded Brent, the global benchmark for crude, was off \$2.39, or 2.8%, to trade at \$83.94. Brent fell 1.3% in April, after a gain of almost 14% over three prior months. The global crude benchmark rose to a near six-month high of \$92.18 on April 12.

As of Wednesday, WTI was up 12% on the year while Brent showed an annual gain of 10%.

Oil prices have lost upward momentum from earlier in the year amid on-off and on-again talk of a ceasefire between warring Israeli and Palestinian Hamas forces in the six-month old Gaza conflict.

Recent back-and-forth aerial attacks between Iran and Israel also pushed prices up before they fell again as it became clear that those were more of a distraction than an added dimension to the Gaza conflict.

Wednesday's tumble in crude prices came after the Energy Information Administration (EIA) said in its Weekly Petroleum Status Report that US crude balances rose by 7.265 million barrels during the week ended April 26.

In the prior week to April 19, EIA reported a decline of 6.368 million barrels in crude stocks. That was the only deficit after a four-week build of nearly 15 million barrels.

A consensus of forecasts by Wall Street energy analysts showed crude stockpiles were expected to decline by 2.3 million barrels last week.

Gasoline balances rose by 344,000 barrels during the week ended April 26, after a prior decline of 1.4 million.

Distillate stockpiles bucked the building trend in the inventory data. These fell by 732,000

barrels last week from a prior build of 1.614 million.

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US Navy Secretary Del Toro Says US Not Capable of Building LNG Carrier Ships

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - No shipyards in the United States can build carrier ships capable of transporting Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), US Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro said in a congressional testimony on Wednesday.

"We've lost that art here in the United States. We can't even build our own LNG ships here in the United States," Del Toro told the US House Armed Services Committee.

The last time a US shipyard produced an LNG tanker was in 1980. In total, 16 LNG ships were built in the United States between 1977 and 1980. Since then, the United States has ordered its tankers abroad, including in South Korea, and essentially stopped building such vessels at US shipyards, according to shipbuilding records.

While the United States has become the world's largest LNG exporter amid the conflict in Ukraine and Western sanctions on Russian gas deliveries, US companies continue to rely on foreign-flagged ships to deliver their gas to Europe - the primary destination for US LNG vessels.

In January, President Joe Biden paused the approval of new LNG exports in the United States, citing a need to assess better climate, health and economic considerations of pending licenses.

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US Has Tools to Build Up Uranium Strategy So That Country Secure - Energy Secretary

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) – The United States has all the necessary tools to build up an uranium strategy so that the country is secure, Jennifer Granholm said on Wednesday.

Granholm made the remarks after the Senate late Tuesday approved a House-passed bill to ban imports of Russian enriched uranium.

"I think we've got the tools necessary to make sure that we build up this uranium strategy in this country so that we are secure," Granholm said during a congressional hearing.

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.

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Yellen Says in Rare Speech Democracy 'Critical' to Building, Sustaining Strong Economy

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in what she admitted was a rare speech in an election year that democracy is the cornerstone of a strong economy.

"I admit that this doesn't seem like typical terrain for a Treasury Secretary," Yellen said at the Washington-based McCain Institute's Sedona Forum. "Democracy isn't just important in and of itself. I believe that democracy is critical to building and sustaining a strong economy."

Yellen said the correlation between democracy and the US economy could be seen from the benefits of having a free and transparent Federal Reserve, which sets monetary policy according to the nation's best interest while being answerable to Congress and not the federal government.

"Undercutting democracy undercuts a foundation of sustainable and inclusive growth," Yellen said.

Yellen explained that as the previous Fed chair, she insisted on the central bank's independence and transparency because it matters for financial stability and economic growth.

Recent research has shown that greater central bank independence is associated with greater price stability, which contributes significantly to long-term growth, she said.

Yellen also said that democracy has recently come under threat.

"That challenge was especially terrifying on the notorious day of January 6th, when rioters, spurred on by a lie, stormed the Capitol," she said.

Yellen made the comment in reference to the events that transpired on January 6, 2021, when supporters of former President Donald Trump stormed the Capitol in the belief that the 2020 presidential election was stolen from him.

Trump is challenging incumbent President Joe Biden again in the November presidential election. The Wall Street Journal reported earlier in the week that some Trump allies want to curb the independence of the Fed if he is re-elected and compel the central bank to consult with

the White House on monetary decisions.

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US Electrical Grid Old, Needs to Be Upgraded - Energy Secretary

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) – The US electric grid is old and requires significant upgrades and expansion to keep pace with growing demand for electricity, US Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said on Wednesday.

“I definitely share the concern that the grid is not up to what it needs to be in order to allow us to continue to grow,” Granholm said during the congressional hearing, stressing the demand for energy is increasing. “We know that the grid is old old old, and the poles and the wires and transformers, they need to be replaced.”

Granholm noted that in many parts of the country, electrical grids were built in the 1950s and 60s.

“We need to continue to invest in upgrading the grid, hardening the grid and expanding the grid,” she said.

The Energy Department has previously said that about 70 percent of the country's transmission lines are over 25 years old, making critical infrastructure and economic interests vulnerable to power outages, cyber-attacks or other emergencies caused by faulty infrastructure.

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Canada 'Overly Reliant' on Chinese-Held Minerals Required for Weapons Production - Blair

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - Canada's production of weapons and other defense systems has become "overly reliant" on critical minerals that are almost exclusively controlled by China, Minister of National Defense Bill Blair said on Wednesday.

Blair made the comment during a discussion on the modernization of the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), hosted by the Canadian Global Affairs Institute.

"One of the really very significant areas of concern to me and to our government is the issue around critical minerals and some of the things that are required in order to build the system ... and the weapons," Blair said.

Blair pointed out that Canada has become overly reliant on some critical minerals that are almost entirely under China's control, a situation that affects ground assets as well as their processing.

Canada must be able to manufacture and defend its own abilities to produce elements that the military industry will be required to deliver to the country's armed forces, Blair said.

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New York Mayor Says Some 300 Protesters Arrested at Columbia University, City College

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - The New York Police Department (NYPD) has arrested approximately 300 protesters at the campuses of Columbia University and the City College of New York amid pro-Palestine demonstrations across the United States, Mayor Eric Adams said on Wednesday.

"Approximately 300 people were arrested at Columbia [University] and City College, we are pressing the arrests to distinguish between who were students and who were not supposed to be on the ground," Adams said during a press briefing.

The mayor explained that the protests were instigated by external actors, not students, to create chaos instead of peaceful protests.

On Tuesday, a Sputnik correspondent reported that NYPD officers wearing helmets and armed with batons and plastic zip-tie handcuffs set up so-called iron barricade a couple of blocks from Columbia University. Students opposing Israel's deadly military operations in the Gaza Strip had barricaded themselves in and were preventing people from reaching their friends at the university.

Columbia University President Minouche Shafik sent a letter to NYPD Deputy Commissioner for Legal Matters Michael Gerber asking the police to retain a presence on campus through at least May 17 in order to maintain order.

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

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

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

(Adds details in paras 5-8)

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.

Republicans will lose their majority in the House of Representatives in November if Johnson remains speaker, Greene said.

Greene is not proving herself a "serious lawmaker," Johnson said on Tuesday, when asked about his colleague.

US Congressman Thomas Massie, who joined Greene in supporting the motion to vacate Johnson, said that Johnson is not a serious speaker or constitutionalist and defended Greene as a serious lawmaker.

Massie urged Johnson to consider resigning as speaker so that Republicans can select a new speaker without halting other legislative business.

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US Libertarian Party Says Trump Accepted Invite to Address National Convention

WASHINGTON, May 1 (Sputnik) - The US Libertarian Party said on Wednesday that former US President and presumptive 2024 Republican Party presidential nominee Donald Trump accepted their invitation to attend the Libertarian National Convention later this month.

On April 25, the Libertarian National Committee sent letters to both Trump and US President Joe Biden, inviting them to address the party's national convention, which is scheduled for May 23-26.

On Wednesday, the Libertarian Party said via social media platform X that they received a response from Trump.

"I'm in," Trump said, as quoted by the party.

Libertarian National Committee Chair Angela McArdle said last month that the party has been trying to get on the debate stage with the Republican and Democratic presidential candidates for decades.

However, the party decided to "flip the tables" and invite the candidates to its convention, McArdle said.

The Libertarian Party's website describes the organization as opposed to any government interference in personal, family and business decisions. The party received approximately 1% of votes in the 2020 US presidential election and 3% in the 2016 race.