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5/3/24 Friday

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Anti-Semitic Awareness Bill Direct Attack on Free Speech

On Thursday, the US House of Representatives passed the HR 6090 Anti-Semitism Awareness Act, which would encode the definition of anti-Semitism defined by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance into the 1964 Civil Rights Act of 1964, which bars discrimination based on shared ancestry, ethnic characteristics or national origin.

The Anti-Semitism Awareness Act would legally define criticism of the government or state of Israel as an act of anti-Semitism, and should concern every American, regardless of their views on Israel.

“It would be as if you could not criticize US capitalism, and if you were to do so, you would be considered to be a bigot,” Dr. Gerald Horne, a professor of history at the University of Houston told Sputnik’s The Critical Hour on Thursday. “Indeed, I think that you should correctly sense a whiff of what befell the United States in the 1950s with the so-called 'House un-American Activities Committee'.”

Speech that the bill would define as anti-Semitic includes “Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel [than the US], or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations.”

In October, Rep. Brian Mast (R-FL) wore an Israeli Defense Force uniform, the same uniform he wore while serving in Israel’s military. That led some to question where his loyalties lie, an accusation that would be deemed anti-Semitic under this law.

It also would define “Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor,” as anti-Semitic. Many pro-Palestinian advocates argue that having a country specifically designed for a group of people, in this case, Jews, is in itself a racist act, just as a country only for white people, Christians or any other group of people would be.

The bill would also ban “Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy of that of the Nazis,” which is a comparison many are making after seeing the images coming out of Gaza which has been described as a Genocide by multiple human rights organizations, heads of state and protesters.

It would also ban the “Applying double standards by requiring of [Israel] a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation,” a definition so broad, that it could be used to shut down any criticism of Israel that the government determines the speaker has not applied to another country.

Similar laws have been enacted in Europe and have had a chilling effect.

In France, two individuals were arrested for wearing shirts to a grocery store that read “Boycott Israel, Free Palestine” and handing out pro-Palestine flyers on the bus.

In Germany, a German-Israeli activist was arrested for holding a sign that read “As a Jew and Israeli, stop the genocide in Gaza.”

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“Europe’s experience with similar laws shows why this [bill] would be a mistake.” Jacob Mchangama, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression posted on X on Thursday.

“It's part and parcel of what can fairly be considered [a] sort of thought crimes,” Horne warned. “There are going to be thought police who are going to ferret out these alleged offenders of these thought crimes.”

There have been several laws passed in states across the US that attempted to ban boycotting Israel, they have all been shot down by federal courts as unconstitutional, and the Anti-Semitism Awareness Act is sure to face a similar challenge if it passes but there is no guarantee how the courts will rule.

“Israel wields a great deal of power in the United States. All you have to do is look at the bill that passed today to see what opinions you are allowed to express and what opinions you are not allowed to express,” explained award-winning journalist and former lawyer Glenn Greenwald on his show on Wednesday. “Therein is the proof of the people and the countries who occupy and exert the greatest power and they have now used that power to formally attack the free speech rights of American citizens in some of the most glaring and explicit ways that I’ve ever seen.”

Later on Thursday, Senate leadership attempted to fast track the bill but were denied by members who oppose the bill, but that won't be the end of it. "We're going to look for the best way to move forward," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) told reporters.

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Democrats Fallback on ‘Outside Agitator’ Trope to Justify Police Violence

More brutal police crackdowns on student protests occurred last night, as leaders of the Democratic party, including US President Joe Biden and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY), refused to condemn the police action and continued to blame “outside agitators” for the unrest.

On Wednesday, Jeffries was asked about the NYPD’s excessive use of force against protesters at New York City schools on Tuesday.

“I didn’t see any excessive use of force by the NYPD yesterday,” Jeffries said flatly. “We shouldn’t see any protest ever veer into threatening the safety and security of others and to Anti-Semitism or racism or xenophobia or islamophobia.”

There have been no credible accounts of protesters engaging in Anti-semitic activities at Columbia, where the biggest police crackdown took place on Tuesday, and many Jewish students are participating in the protest. However, videos posted on social media that night showed the NYPD fighting with protesters and arresting more than 100.

Earlier this week, Democratic New York City Mayor Eric Adams has asserted that “outside agitators” hijacked the protest but has so far declined to provide evidence of the charge. During an arraignment hearing that was described as "chaotic" the Guardian was only able to identify one non-student who was charged during the protest.

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In 2020, former President Donald Trump's Attorney General Bill Barr claimed that the protests surrounding Black Lives Matter protests were coming from "Groups of outside radicals and agitators" who were "exploiting the situation to pursue their own separate and violent agenda."
In 2014, the Ferguson, Missouri unrest over the police killing of Michael Brown, Governor Jay Nixon, a Democrat, blamed outside agitators. "We continue to worry about folks who are coming in from outside who are using this," he told local media. The protests were "attracting bad guys across the country," he added.
"It's like looting tourism," An unnamed Ferguson police officer was quoted as saying.
The history goes back further than that. In 1965, in the wake of protests over racial equality and the killing of black activist Jimmie Lee Jackson, Alabama Governor George Wallace signed a resolution that blamed"continued agitation and demonstrations led and directed by outsiders."
Former President Richard Nixon instructed the FBI to find evidence that the Kent State shootings were provoked by outside agitators and was reportedly dismayed when FBI director J. Edgar Hoover couldn't find any.
Students at Columbia say the government is using the same tricks today.
"WKCR, the student radio [at Columbia] has been trying to counteract all of these fictional stories about outside agitators," a Columbia student who asked to have her name withheld to avoid punishment from the school administration, told Sputnik's Political Misfits on Thursday.
"They've been including in their reports [that] 'we have nothing to substantiate this claim about outside agitators. We recognize almost everyone here'… this is a completely homegrown movement," she asserted.
Even if some of the protesters are from outside the school or even the State, that would not make them agitators, after all, "outsider" is only half of the moniker. Traveling to protests to support a cause you believe in is a time-honored tradition in the United States, going back at least to the Bonus Army March on Washington in 1932.
That protest, of WWI veterans from around the country asking to receive their bonus pay early, camped out in and around the nation's capital for months until Republican President Herbert Hoover ordered the army to remove them. Days before, Washington police shot at the protesters, killing two veterans.
According to Historian Howard Zinn, the group was labeled by the media as "Red agitators" and Army Chief of Staff Douglas MacArthur claimed that it was full of "traitors bent on overthrowing the government," adding that "pacifists and its bedfellow communism are all around us."
While Hoover was successful in squashing the protest, he lost his reelection bid later that year. In 1933, Congress awarded WWI veterans their bonus, overriding a veto from Democratic President Franklin Roosevelt.
Protesters at Columbia believe their movement has similar resiliency. "There were so many freshmen in the encampment as well as graduating seniors," the student told Political Misfits, "I am not worried that the graduating class is going to leave any sort of gap. You might know that Admitted Students Day happened on day three of the Columbia encampment, and my conversations with those admitted students were incredibly hopeful."
"I'm hearing accounts of freshmen saying if I wasn't radicalized before [the crackdown], I'm radicalized now," she added later.

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Peace for Me, Not for Thee - Cartoon

On Thursday, US President Joe Biden spoke about the growing protests at college campuses across the nation and the police response to it.
The President stressed that while dissent and free speech are fundamental to the United States, he accused the protests of being violent and said that has no place in the nation.
While there have been no accounts of violence at the protests, saving for UCLA where clashes occured with pro-Israeli counter-protesters utilizing pepper spray, tear gas and fireworks to attack the crowds, the President was nevertheless concerned about the violence allegedly perpetrated by the pro-Palestine protesters.
He and his office have also repeatedly declined to criticize the tactics of the police, which have flash grenades, tear gas, pepper spray and even rubber bullets. On Thursday, it was reported that one officer discharged his gun while breaching a building occupied by protesters in Columbia, though no one was hurt.
Of course, there is also the issue of Gaza itself, where all 12 universities have been either completely destroyed or significantly damaged. Which might be Biden's genius plan: Gazans can't feel unsafe on campus if there aren't any campuses.

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Some of the most egregious attacks on free speech would include

Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations."
"Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor."
"Applying double standards by requiring of [Israel] a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation."

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“Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy of that of the Nazis”
“It's part and parcel of what can fairly be considered [a] sort of thought crimes,” Horne warned. “There are going to be thought police who are going to ferret out these alleged offenders of these thought crimes.”

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Leaders of the Democratic party, including US President Joe Biden and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY), are refusing to condemn the police action and continue to blame “outside agitators” for the unrest.

On Wednesday, Jeffries was asked about the NYPD’s excessive use of force against protesters at New York City schools on Tuesday.

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Democratic New York City Mayor Eric Adams has asserted that “outside agitators” hijacked the protest but has so far declined to provide evidence of the charge. During an arraignment hearing that was described as "chaotic" the Guardian was only able to identify one non-student who was charged during the protest.

The outside agitator trope has been used to discredit protest for decades, going back to the Bonus Army march in 1932.

According to Historian Howard Zinn, the group was labeled by the media as “Red agitators” and Army Chief of Staff Douglas MacArthur claimed that it was full of “traitors bent on overthrowing the government,” adding that “pacifists and its bedfellow communism are all around us.”

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US, France, Fleeing to Last Bastion of 'Françafrique'

On Thursday, the US State Department confirmed that it is meeting with Nigerien officials to discuss "an orderly and responsible withdrawal of US forces" from the country after Niger's government requested that the US troops leave. It followed the expulsion of French troops following the coup in the country last year.

The United States and France, having been kicked out of much of the African Sahel, including Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad, are fleeing to Côte d'Ivoire, aka the Ivory Coast, and Senegal which are among the few remaining places on the continent where French influence still holds significant sway.

"Côte d'Ivoire is sort of one of the two most important countries, with Senegal, where the French or what's called "Françafrique" is still very strong," Koffi Kouakou, an Africa analyst and senior research fellow at the Center for Africa-China Studies at the University of Johannesburg, told Sputnik's Fault Lines on Friday.

Françafrique was a term used by then Côte d'Ivoire Président Félix Houphouët-Boigny in 1955, who advocated a close relationship with France while ostensibly maintaining the country's independence. It has since been used to describe other countries with a close relationship with France and eventually became a prerogative term to describe countries under French neo-colonialism.

The withdrawal of US troops from Niger will take some time, as they have sensitive and expensive equipment there that they would not want to leave behind, especially with Russian forces taking over counterterrorism activities and training in the US absence. This has led to an awkward situation with US and Russian troops occupying the same air base, albeit in different sections of the compound.

Last year, the military leadership in Niger deposed President Mohamed Bazoum and installed a new government. Not long after, they demanded that French troops leave the region, which eventually happened after it became apparent that Bazoum would not return to power despite economic sanctions and saber-rattling from ECOWAS, an economic alliance in West Africa.

That coup and expulsion of French troops followed similar stories in Mali and Burkina-Faso in the years prior. Then in March, the government of Chad requested that US troops leave bases in that country, a request that the US granted earlier this week. That brought the count of Sahel countries expelling Western forces to four in just the last few years.

While US forces were allowed to remain in Niger for a time, it was always an uncomfortable relationship. "They never trusted the US would support [them]," Ibrahim Yahaya, deputy director for the Sahel Project at the International Crisis Group, told Al-Jazeera.

Last week, Michael Langley, the commander of US Africa Command (AFRICOM) visited Côte d'Ivoire to "reaffirm" the US commitment to the country. Kouakou said that is where US forces are expected to end up next. "Very few people thought they were going to go there because Côte d'Ivoire is" an area where France holds sway, Kouakou explained, noting that the US submarine deal with Australia that reportedly angered French officials was likely making French officials feel "a little bit suspicious" of the US.

"These are the two most important places, sort of the bastion, sort of outpost of French neo-colonialism that are now under attack" morally from the other Sahel countries that have

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expelled their former colonial rulers, Kouakou said. “Senegal and Cote d'Ivoire, and especially Cote d'Ivoire,” noting that Gabon and Cameroon are also important to France in the region.
The United States has been in Niger since 2012, setting up bases there ostensibly to support the government’s fight against terrorism. The former Boko Haram was reportedly gaining steam there and in more recent years Daesh* and al-Qaeda branches have been established in the Sahel region.
The issue Niger and other countries had with the arraignment was that it severely limited their sovereignty according to Kouakou. “For example, all the activities taking place on the bases, coming and going… Niger is not aware of how many people are [in the bases], who's coming in, what materials they're moving in, and then the landing fees of the US aircraft are free, so they’re not paying taxes at all.”
Since the US entered Niger in 2012, instances of terrorism in the Sahel exploded from less than 200 incidents in 2011 to more than 800 incidents in 2021.
“French troops weren’t any help with [fighting terrorism],” international relations and security analyst Mark Sleboda told Fault Lines, “Or the Americans, it must be said.”
* Also known as ISIS, ISIL, and the Islamic State, an internationally recognized terrorist group outlawed in Russia.

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US Aid Package Doing Next to Nothing in Ukraine

On April 24, US President Joe Biden signed a massive $95 billion foreign aid bill which earmarked $61 billion for Ukraine. At the time, Biden promised shipments would begin “in the next few hours” but more than 10 days later, its effects on the battlefield have yet to materialize.
The lack of an impact of the latest US aid package to Ukraine on the frontlines can be boiled down to two things: It was never what it was billed to be, with estimates suggesting only $14 billion of the $61 billion are marked for new weapons and not simply refilling US stockpiles, and a complete lack of manpower that Ukraine can use on the front.
“The US aid package, first of all, wasn’t all that it was cracked up to be. A lot of it is premised on orders for aid that still has to be actually produced,” international relations and security analyst Mark Sleboda told Sputnik’s Fault Lines on Friday. “It might arrive in a couple years’ time and didn’t include some of the big things that the Kiev regime really needs [including] Patriot systems.”
“The US wasn't willing to part with any of its own Patriot systems. Evidently, it is pressuring hard its European allies, Greece, Italy and others, to give up their own air defense systems.”
Even Western media has had to admit Russian gains on the battlefield, both before and after the aid package passed, going as far as to call the recent gains a “breakthrough.”
Russia has made significant gains across the front line, particularly towards Ocheretino, North of Avdeyevka, where a military bloom seems to be taking place. Russian forces also expelled Ukrainian forces from Rabotino, the peak of Kiev’s failed counteroffensive from last year.

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There has been a “sudden renewal of desperation” among Kiev’s Western benefactors since the aid has failed to make an impact, Sleboda explained, which prompted French President Emmanuel Macron’s recent saber-rattling around Ukraine. “We saw this [desperation] through February and March, and then there was a brief, maybe not even quite a week, of these absurdly uplifted spirits” when the US aid passed.

“It seemed to me there was the expectation that… if this didn’t turn things around, that maybe it would at least allow the Kiev regime to stabilize the line and buy time. Neither one of those things happened.”

After signing the bill, Biden admitted that one of the most advanced weapon systems included in the aid package, long-range ATACMS missiles, were already supplied to Ukraine back in March, eliminating any hope they could change the reality on the ground since they were already in use as Ukrainian defenses continued to collapse.

In an article published in Western media on Thursday, the head of the Ukrainian intelligence agency the SBU, Vadym Skibitsky, admitted that Kiev’s troops are still facing a weapon shortage and that the Chasov Yar, a Ukrainian stronghold west of Artemovsk, will eventually fall.

Last month, authorities in Kiev suspended foreign consulate services for men aged 18 - 60 in an attempt to force them back to Ukraine and presumably to the front lines. On Friday, Ukraine’s Defense Ministry also reduced medical exceptions to avoid conscription, forcing some cancer, HIV and tuberculosis patients to serve, some on the frontlines, after an updated medical examination performed by a military medical commission.

This summer, Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky is scheduled to travel to Switzerland for another so-called peace negotiations, the fourth such event that declined to invite Russia, obviously the most critical country to any possible peace negotiations.

“These are billed as pushing Zelensky's peace formula, which is an absurd demand for Russia's unconditional surrender,” Sleboda explained. “Zelensky wants Russia to pull out all of its troops, pay reparations [and] all Russian leaders have to go to war crimes trials. Oh, and Zelensky would like a little pretty little pink pony, too, right? This is the absurd demand from the losing side that Russia unconditionally surrender.”

Instead of helping Ukraine, its leaders’ insistence on hanging out for as long as possible will only compel Russia to push for regime change and unconditional surrender itself.

“I don’t think [Russia] is willing to accept anything less at this point. It’s gone too far… The outrage, as you know, from the Crocus City Hall terror attack to the attacks on civilians to this continual rhetoric that as soon as the conflict ceases, Ukraine will be brought into NATO and the EU… which of course gives Russia absolutely zero incentive [to enter negotiations]. In fact, it impels them to continue until they reach the Polish border,” Sleboda concluded.

On Thursday, Western media posted an article titled “No Safety in Retreat: Ukrainian Soldiers Say Rear Defensive Lines Barely Exist Amid Russian Advance.” It described Ukraine’s desperate attempts to build fortifications ahead of the rapidly approaching Russian forces.

“We entered the war with nothing,” a member of Ukraine’s engineering force told a media outlet, noting that they were only given equipment from the 1960s and shovels. “Accordingly, that’s the kind of trenches we made.”

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The United States and France, having been kicked out of much of the African Sahel, including Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad, are fleeing to Côte d'Ivoire, aka the Ivory Coast, and Senegal which are among the few remaining places on the continent where French influence still holds significant sway.

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UK-Palestinian Surgeon & Rector Who Described Gaza 'Nightmare' Blocked From EU Entry

According to French police, German authorities put a visa ban on Abu-Sitta for a year, which has banned his entry to other European countries.
Professor Ghassan Abu-Sitta, a London plastic and reconstructive surgeon who spent 43 days in Gaza helping to treat those wounded in Palestine-Israel war, said he has been denied entry to France despite being scheduled to speak to the senate there later on Saturday.
Abu-Sitta arrived at Charles de Gaulle airport on Saturday morning after a flight from London, and was informed by French authorities that Germany had placed a Schengen-wide ban on his entry to Europe.
“I am at Charles De Gaulle airport. They are preventing me from entering France. I am supposed to speak at the French Senate today,” Abu-Sitta posted on X on Saturday.
“Fortress Europe silencing the witnesses to the genocide while Israel kills them in prison,” he added.
The surgeon had been invited by Green party parliamentarians to take part in a conference during which he would speak to them about Gaza, as well as France and its responsibility regarding the application of international law there. Through the help of lawyers, he was able to obtain a videoconference link and was still able to speak to the senate, said French Senator Raymonde Poncet Monge on X (formerly Twitter).
“We are outraged that he cannot be present among us,” said the French senator.
The Elysée said it was not aware of Abu-Sitta’s barred entrance, but a spokesperson did say that when “it’s a question of a Schengen refusal, the border police can’t do much about it.”
The Schengen area consists of 26 European countries, including 22 European Union states.
The term “Schengen” comes from the town in southeastern luxembourg where France, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands signed the original Schengen Agreement in 1985.
Abu-Sitta was also denied entrance to an event in Berlin in April. He was scheduled to speak at a Palestine Congress event but was barred entry and questioned for hours. The organizer of the Palestine Congress, Nadija Samour, said that there was “pressure from the federal government” to cancel at the time and that Germany was “actively and illicitly” trying to obstruct the event.
On Friday, Abu-Sitta told a Qatari news site that in Gaza, he experienced a “nightmare” including a scene in which he saw bodies and “body parts everywhere including a small arm, which clearly belonged to a child”following a missile strike outside of a hospital. He described the October 17th strike as the litmus test for “Israel’s full war on Gaza’s healthcare infrastructure”.

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"Victims of Israel's genocidal war on Gaza, including tens of thousands of children, underwent extremely painful procedures without anesthetic; it felt criminal to perform these procedures," wrote Abu-Sitta. "It's indescribably heart-wrenching to hear children scream from pain that you are causing, even when you know you are only trying to save their lives."
Abu-Sitta added that he had completed his medical education at the University of Glasgow, even as it is one of the biggest academic investors in companies that sells arms to Israel, he claimed. He then ran for the position of rector out of respect for his students who "overwhelmingly wanted to end the institution's complicity in the mass slaughter of Palestinians" and won the election with 80% of the vote.
"As a result of my victory, my media appearances, and calls for accountability and justice, I have been the target of several smear campaigns and the subject of several articles that make unfounded claims about me," wrote Abu-Sitta. "I was even denied entry to Germany, detained for three hours and ultimately deported. I was going there simply to speak at a conference."
In 2023, Germany sent Israel 326.5 million euros ($353.7m) in equipment and weapons in 2023, according to Economy Ministry Data.

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France Seemingly Set to Part Ways With Macron, Come June Elections - Reports

Two recent opinion articles have highlighted the lack of faith the French public has in their leader, Macron. The French president has been described as "trailing the hard right" as he tries to steer the EU into a direction that would mark it as a military power.
According to new opinion polls, France's Renaissance (RE) party is trailing the far-right National Rally (RN) by a far second place. A recent article published on Wednesday by The Guardian, says the blame for the RE's poor polling rests with President Emmanuel Macron. The parties were tied in the last European election which took place five years ago.
Elections for the European Parliament will take place between June 6 and June 9. The elections will be a clear sign for how the presidential election in France, in 2027, will unfold.
Macron, 46, "has himself to blame for his political predicament", the article suggests. The French president is "barely two years into his second term in the Élysée Palace, yet lacking a parliamentary majority at home and with his government under the permanent threat of a no-confidence motion."
"[Macron] has so personalized his style of governance that voters blame him for everything from the cost of living to the rise of youth violence and the risk of terrorism during this summer's Paris Olympic Games," according to the news outlet.
The RN is being led by Jordan Bardella, who became the president of the party in 2022. Bardella is just 28-years-old and does not carry the same legacy as his party's former president, Marine Le Pen, though he reportedly said that he first joined the party due to Le Pen's influence. But while Le Pen's influence on the RN is still palpable, young voters are more drawn to Bardella.

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Macron was elected in 2017, becoming France's youngest head of state apart from Napoleon Bonaparte. But now, Macron is seemingly flailing to keep up with the desires of the French public.

"I think it is less about 'Frenchness' in this election than as portraying the people don't feel that they belong, the people who feel they have been humiliated, either economically - not making ends meet, not being recognized, not seeing themselves represented in parliament nor politics," said Cécile Alduy, a Professor of French at Stanford University, explained to a German broadcaster.

A separate survey published in March, shows that Macron's party has fallen out of favorability among young French voters. Just 4% of those aged 18 to 24-years-old expressed their intention of voting for Macron's party next month, compared to 29% among those over the age of 70. Alduy explains that the reason for this is because those who are younger have little to no historical memory regarding Nazism during World War II, as the RN has been criticized for failing to rid itself of its antisemitic heritage.

Another article by Financial Times explains Macron's drop in popularity with an opinion poll from February which showed the main preoccupation of French voters is the cost of living. According to that poll, a drop in consumer confidence amongst the French shows a pessimism about their future.

Another issue regarding France's economy includes their high budget deficit which skyrocketed last year to 5.5% of the GDP, according to the newspaper. "Macron's government has already had to announce emergency spending cuts, and more may be on their way in areas such as social benefits and local government budgets", the newspaper suggests, adding that this could affect the results of the 2027 election.

But the news outlet adds that while many French people use the EU elections as a way to cast protest votes against their presidents and governments, many may vote differently in a national election.

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Hundreds of People Rescued Amid Floods in Texas

As of Friday morning, the worst flooding occurred in southeastern Texas with the amount of rain flooding the area having been compared to the disastrous weather event of 2017, Hurricane Harvey.

The Houston, Texas area was slammed with heavy rain over the weekend leading to hundreds of rescues on Saturday.

According to the National Weather Service, rainfall totals from flooding in Texas and Louisiana this week rose to almost two feet in five days. The area also remains under the threat of worsening flood conditions that are so disastrous, they have been compared to Hurricane Harvey in reports.

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A flood watch for the area is now in effect through Sunday afternoon with forecasters predicting more rain on Saturday night that will bring another 1-3 inches (2.5-7.6cm) and trigger major flooding.

While these storms are the latest to prompt evacuations and rescues, Texas and some parts of Louisiana have been experiencing a series of intense weather events since early April, including tornadoes and softball-sized hail as well as months of rain that has triggered flooding comparable to the Category 4 Hurricane Harvey of 2017. Which dropped 30 to 40 inches of rain across the Houston area in just 48 hours.

That strange weather is predicted to continue, according to the Storm Prediction Center which issued a tornado watch for southwestern Texas. The center also predicted hail as large as grapefruit and damaging winds up to 70 miles per hour on Saturday afternoon and evening.

Friday's storms led to at least 400 people having to be rescued from rooftops, roads, and homes.

But despite the downpour damaging homes and triggering evacuations, no deaths nor serious injuries have been reported, according to Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo. The judge added that the predicted surge of water would be “catastrophic” and said several hundred buildings were at risk of flooding.

“It’s been really sad to see the impact of people’s livelihoods, homes, infrastructure as well as just the public infrastructure,” Hidalgo said Saturday. “We’re really asking folks to give it a minute before they go back home.”

Texas Governor Greg Abbott expanded disaster declarations in response to the flooding, which has made declarations active for over a third of Texas counties.

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Israel Bans Al Jazeera And Raids Office

The hard-right, nationalist and Jewish Orthodox parties within the cabinet have floated the idea of closing the channel since the beginning of the conflict between Israel and Hamas in October of 2023.

The Israeli Ministry of Communications said on Sunday that it had confiscated Al Jazeera’s equipment on Sunday just hours after the Israeli cabinet ordered the closure of the broadcaster in its country, which the Qatar-based news network has lambasted as a “criminal act.”

“In addition, the network’s broadcasts on cable and satellite were stopped, and access to its websites was blocked,” the ministry said.

Inspectors from the communications ministry, accompanied by police, raided the Qatari broadcaster’s office at the Ambassador hotel in Jerusalem after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the cabinet agreed to its closure while their war in Gaza continues.

“The government headed by me unanimously decided: the incitement channel Al Jazeera will be closed in Israel,” Netanyahu said in a post on X.

Ofir Gendelman, a spokesperson for Netanyahu to the Arab media, said in a post on X that Al Jazeera’s “broadcast equipment will be confiscated, the channel’s correspondents will be

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prevented from working, the channel will be removed from cable and satellite television companies, and Al Jazeera's websites will be blocked on the Internet."
"Al Jazeera reporters harmed Israel's security and incited against IDF soldiers. It is time to expel the mouthpiece of Hamas from our country," Netanyahu said, according to Gendelman.
Al Jazeera's broadcasts and access to its website have been blocked throughout Israel. The network has denounced Israel's decision as a "criminal act that violates human rights in access to information." The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) has petitioned the move to Israel's Supreme Court.
"Israel's suppression of the free press to cover up its crimes by killing and arresting journalists did not deter us from performing our duty. More than 140 Palestinian journalists have been martyred for the sake of the truth since the beginning of the war on Gaza," said Al Jazeera.
"This is a dark day for the media and a dark day for democracy," Israel's Foreign Press Association added in a statement. "Israel joins a dubious club of authoritarian governments to ban the station."
White House Spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre has called Israel's decision a "concerning step", and claims the US supports the work of journalists around the world, including those in Gaza.

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LA Battles Mosquitoes by Releasing Even More

Technicians have made the male mosquitoes sterile through a radiation process, hoping to drop the population size of the blood-thirsty insects.
On Thursday, the Greater Los Angeles County Vector Control District launched a program to release tens of thousands of sterile male mosquitoes into the local environment. The invasive mosquitoes, called Aedes aegypti are low flying, bite during the day and are capable of spreading diseases like yellow fever, Chikungunya, Zika and dengue.
The mosquitoes - which were first detected in 2011 - are well adapted to laying eggs in small water sources and have also developed a resistance to insecticides, making it difficult to exterminate them.
"Thousands of years ago, a strain of Aedes aegypti moved in close to people and started to specialize to live near houses and bite people," said Daniel Hahn, a professor in the University of Florida's Department of Entomology and Nematology. "They're characterized as aggressive nuisance biters because they'll bite you all day long."
About 20,000 sterile males were released. These mosquitoes were dyed, so they will be recognizable by appearing fluorescent under a black light.
The males don't bite, either, so the program does not pose a risk to human health.
The district will continue to release mosquitoes in the target region of the Sunland-Tujunga area of LA, which could result in up to 32,000 mosquitoes per week before reaching a peak of about 60,000 before the program brings that number back down in the fall.

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The program intends to leave female mosquitoes with eggs that won't hatch. A similar method has been used in the past on Mediterranean fruit flies and screwworms which are fly larvae that feed on living flesh.

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A British-Palestinian surgeon who described Gaza 'massacre' was blocked from EU entry

Professor Ghassan Abu-Sitta, a London plastic and reconstructive surgeon who spent 43 days in Gaza helping to treat those wounded in Palestine-Israel war, said he has been denied entry to France despite being scheduled to speak in the senate there later on Saturday.

"I am at Charles De Gaulle airport. They are preventing me from entering France. I am supposed to speak at the French Senate today," Abu-Sitta posted on the social media platform X.

Abu-Sitta arrived at Charles de Gaulle airport on Saturday morning after a flight from London, and was informed by French authorities that Germany had placed a Schengen-wide ban on his entry to Europe. He had been invited by Green party parliamentarians to take part in a conference during which he would speak about Gaza including France and its responsibility regarding the application of international law there.

On Friday, Abu-Sitta told a Qatari news site that in Gaza, he experienced a "nightmare" including a scene in which he saw bodies and "body parts everywhere including a small arm, which clearly belonged to a child" following a missile strike outside of a hospital. He described the October 17th strike as the litmus test for "Israel's full war on Gaza's healthcare infrastructure".

Abu-Sitta was also denied entrance to an event in Berlin in April. He was scheduled to speak at a Palestine Congress event but was barred entry and questioned for hours. The organizer of the event, Nadija Samour, said that there was "pressure from the federal government" to cancel at the time and that Germany was "actively and illicitly" trying to obstruct the event.

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Israel bans Al Jazeera and raids its office

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Cold War Consequences: US Scrambles for Rare-Earth Magnets Produced in China

US legislation banning the use of crucial components produced in China is creating a major challenge for weapons manufacturers, EV makers, and various other industries.
A 2018 law passed during the height of former US President Donald Trump's trade war with China is causing major headaches for America's defense industry.
The dictate prohibits the use of so-called rare-earth magnets made in China in US military equipment. The powerful magnets, produced from exotic metals like neodymium, europium, and yttrium, are prized for their strength and used in everything from drones and nuclear submarines to F-35 jets and missile-guidance systems.
But the vast majority of them are produced in China, and still more contain materials mined or processed in the country. Trump's law would ban the use of all such magnets by the US defense industry by 2027, leaving arms manufacturers with an insufficient global supply to meet current needs.
"We're talking about a Western-world supply chain that basically doesn't exist," said James Litinsky, CEO of the company MP Materials.
The inability of the United States and allied countries to achieve self-sufficiency in production of rare-earth magnets is a case study of the effects of decades of Western economic policy.
In the United States, neoliberalism has been a bipartisan project. The term first emerged in the 1980s as Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, under advisement from Milton Friedman and other Western economists, implemented legislation designed to reverse the gains of the country's labor movement. Pinochet's military junta instituted mass privatization, deregulation, and government austerity, presiding over a 45-hour workweek.
The Republican Party, on behalf of business interests who had long chafed under the power and influence of trade unions, sought to implement similar policy. Globalization and outsourcing

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allowed companies to ship thousands of jobs overseas to countries with lower pay and fewer regulations, breaking the back of the US labor movement.

Former President Bill Clinton's election in 1992 marked the ascension of a Democratic Party more fixated on social issues than the economic concerns of its historical blue collar base, and neoliberalism continued unabated. Decades of deindustrialization followed.

Meanwhile, Chinese state-run enterprises built the foundations of the country's modern-day dominance in heavy industry. One such company formed part of an investment group that acquired Magnequench, a magnet producer formerly owned by US automaker General Motors. The US government approved the deal.

"I built my own gallows," said Mitchell Spencer, an engineer with the company who trained Chinese workers at a manufacturing plant in the city of Tianjin.

Now, Washington lawmakers who previously embraced neoliberalism are second-guessing the offshoring of crucial technology to a country increasingly portrayed as a threat. But years of corporate and government policy is not easily reversed, and the Biden administration has resorted to desperate measures to halt the trend.

Hundreds of millions of dollars in grants and tax credits have been extended to lure magnet producers back to the United States, raising the threat of inflation and further government indebtedness. Observers note the US currently lacks the skilled workers necessary to resurrect the industry, requiring the import of talent or the sending of employees abroad for training, further ballooning costs

One German company estimates its magnets will be 50% more expensive than Chinese counterparts. The cost could force the US military to settle for fewer jets, submarines, and weapons systems than it would like to purchase.

Still the United States is attempting to turn the tide, producing crucial components without the involvement of the 21st century's global workshop.

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Professor's Arrest Highlights Brutal US Police Response to Pro-Palestine Protests

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu recently demanded a state response to pro-Palestine protests in the US, labeling the demonstrations "horrific" and "antisemitic."

On the evening of April 30, Columbia University professor Gregory Pflugfelder stepped outside of his Morningside Heights apartment in Upper Manhattan to document the presence of hundreds of NYPD police officers preparing to commence a raid on the pro-Palestine encampment at neighboring Columbia University.

"I certainly posed no danger to anybody," he told USA Today. "I was literally standing in the street and not blocking anybody."

The lecturer, who was celebrating the end of his 28-year career at the prestigious university, wandered a short distance from his building to capture video of the immense show of force. One officer warned Pflugfelder to go home and leave the area. When he protested that he lived in the

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neighborhood the officer ordered him detained on charges of "obstructing government administration."

"I just stayed on my block, relatively well behaved," he said. "Poorly located, unfortunately."

Pflugfelder's arrest marks one of dozens against college faculty in recent weeks, many of them far more violent. News of Noelle McAfee's detention at Emory University in Georgia went viral after the professor was forced to the ground after inquiring about the arrest of one of her students; video shows police slamming her head into the concrete pavement.

In Missouri, 65-year-old history professor Steve Tamari was beaten by police while documenting their response to protests on the campus of Washington University in St. Louis. Video shows Tamari being slammed to the ground and his limp body being carried away from the scene. Doctors told the professor, who suffered 9 broken ribs and a hand injury requiring surgery, that he was lucky to survive.

The incidents have shed light on accusations of widespread police brutality in officials' response to pro-Palestine protests, which have swept across US college campuses.

On the night of Pflugfelder's arrest officers entered the campus of New York City's Columbia University, ejecting demonstrators from the school's Hamilton Hall. The building is known as a target of student occupation during campus protests; undergraduates also took control of the building during protests against the Vietnam war in the 1960s and demonstrations against South African apartheid in the 1980s.

These events are now commemorated on the university's website in a self-flattering retrospective of protest on Columbia's campus.

The historical precedent of their actions hasn't stopped the demonstrators from being widely vilified in mainstream media and by local officials, who claimed the protests had become "threatening" and "disruptive." New York City Mayor Eric Adams alleged the dangerous presence of "outside agitators" at the encampment. The claim has a long history of use to disparage social protest, perhaps most famously during the 1960s when reactionaries employed the term to allege Soviet support for civil rights demonstrations.

A violent crackdown on protesters at UCLA's campus capped off a week of state repression Wednesday, just days after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu demanded action against the "horrific" and "antisemitic" demonstrations. Video shows security forces employing rubber bullets and flashbang grenades to forcefully disband the protest.

Local police were previously observed amicably conversing with pro-Israel demonstrators the day prior, just before the counterprotesters launched an hours-long violent attack on the encampment while the LAPD purportedly looked on. West Los Angeles is home to a large community of Israeli IDF veterans and right-wing Iranian monarchist exiles.

Still, protests continue at dozens of college campuses throughout the United States. Activists' efforts have begun to bear fruit as Evergreen State College in Washington state became the first university to divestits endowment from Israeli interests profiting from the country's occupation of Palestinian territories. The school is the alma mater of Rachel Corrie, an American activist crushed to death by an IDF bulldozer while protecting the home of her Palestinian host family in Gaza.

Officials at the University of Minnesota have also agreed to begin a discussion around divestment. Brown University in Rhode Island has agreed to hold a vote on the matter, as has New Hampshire's Dartmouth College after students there launched a 12-day hunger strike.

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Dartmouth made headlines this week after the former chair of the school's Jewish studies department was thrown to the ground and arrested while participating in a pro-Palestine protest. Gradually, socially conscious students are raising awareness of the United States' complicity in Israeli violence, occupation, and ethnic cleansing. Yet the question remains whether the country's creaking political bureaucracy and repressive state apparatus will respond to Americans' widespread horror over the US ally's myriad abuses.

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Hand of Soros: Georgian Prime Minister Denounces US Color Revolution Tactics

The leader of the country of Georgia has criticized US efforts to interfere in the country dating back several years.

A major scandal emerged in 2016 over the disproven conspiracy theory of Russian interference in the United States presidential election. Russian President Vladimir Putin, Americans were told, had spent vast sums of money to influence the outcome of the vote via social media. According to the conspiracy's most dedicated adherents, US democracy had been near-fatally wounded by the pernicious meddling of a hostile foreign power.

What adherents of the unfounded Russiagate narrative failed to acknowledge is that the United States is guilty of precisely the same type of political interference it accuses others of, and on a far larger scale.

Claims of such foreign meddling came to a head Friday when Georgia's head of state slammed US support for "violence" and "revolution attempts" amidst anti-government protests in the country's capital of Tbilisi.

"Spoke to [US ambassador Derek Chollet] and expressed my sincere disappointment with the two revolution attempts of 2020-2023 supported by the former US Ambassador and those carried out through NGOs financed from external sources," wrote Irakli Kobakhidze, Georgia's prime minister and head of the social democratic Georgian Dream party, on social media.

The prime minister also criticized "false statements" from the US and European Union concerning draft "Transparency of Foreign Influence" legislation currently working through the country's parliament.

The proposed law, which is currently the subject of protests in the country's capital, is aimed at disclosing foreign influence over organizations and media outlets operating in Georgia. Kobakhidze claims the legislation is necessary to promote "transparency and accountability of relevant organizations vis-à-vis Georgian society." Western critics have portrayed it as a clampdown on civil society, likening it to Russia's "foreign agents law" – protesters have even taken to deriding the bill "the Russian law."

But such legislation is common throughout the world, with similar regulation taking place in Canada, Australia, the European Union, and elsewhere. The US Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) requires foreign-affiliated news outlets, such as the one you're reading now, to register with the US Department of Justice and send copies of all "informational materials" to US authorities.

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The United States has frequently opposed such legislation in countries it deems to be foreign adversaries because it threatens the influence of US "soft power." The United States frequently funds foreign activists, media outlets, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to spread US influence in foreign countries. The US has specifically focused on former Soviet-aligned nations after the end of the Cold War, seeking to ensure leaders are elected who will orient such countries towards the West and away from Russia.

When necessary, the United States has even sought to foment regime change in foreign countries through such methods, paving the way for unrest that generates a change in leadership. Such events are commonly known as "color revolutions," after a series of such incidents such as Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution and Georgia's 2003 Rose Revolution. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is a primary tool of such "revolutions."

Investigation by Sputnik has uncovered the historical influence of the United States and allied groups in influencing Georgian politics. USAID's website boasts that the organization has poured a staggering $1.9 billion into the country since 1992. The agency reports funding 39 ongoing projects in Georgia "with a total value of approximately $373 million, and an annual budget of more than $70 million."

Additionally, USAID's Georgian Media Partnership Program backs a range of opposition media outlets in the country, including TV Pirveli, Radio Marneuli, Formula TV, and Mtavari Arkhi. The US agency allocated $10 million in 2021 alone. Samira Bayramova, an administrator of the program, has been noted as a prominent leader of the current protests in Tbilisi.

The Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA) has also strongly backed the ongoing demonstrations. The organization partners with USAID under the pretense of promoting "fair electoral processes in Georgia."

Additionally, the US allies with partnered "philanthropic" foundations to further strengthen opposition forces. The Georgian branch of George Soros' Civil Society Foundation openly promotes the current protests,backing a petition initiative to promote hostility toward the current government. The Civil Society Foundation has operated in the country for 30 years, claiming to have poured $100 million into political interference.

Political opposition leader Nika Gvaramia, whose party has helped organize the ongoing protests, is promoted on the foundation's website.

The US, naturally, has attempted to coerce Georgia's government to shelve the current draft law, with Chollet expressing "concern for Georgia's current trajectory." Senators from both major US political parties have warned the country could face sanctions for attempts to move forward with the transparency legislation.

The United States' foreign subterfuge has increasingly come to light in recent years, with former President Donald Trump offering a rare acknowledgment of US efforts in Iran, Belarus, and Hong Kong.

Still, millions of others remain uninformed about the destructive influence of the United States and billionaire oligarchs like George Soros.

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US Senator Criticizes Uniparty for Borrowing Money to Finance War in Ukraine

Senator Rand Paul criticized US deficit spending that funds conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza, and throughout the globe.

Senator Rand Paul (R-KY) offered criticism of both of the country's major political parties Sunday in comments expressing concern over bipartisan spending on the US proxy war in Ukraine.

"My primary reason for opposing sending money to Ukraine is that we don't have any money," said the libertarian-leaning lawmaker in a radio interview with CEO and talk radio host John Catsimatidis.

"The money has to be borrowed," he continued. "So basically we owe China a trillion dollars, they bought a trillion dollars worth of our debt. We have to basically borrow money from China in order to send it to Ukraine."

Observers have long warned of the consequences of deficit spending,which ballooned in the 1980s amid large tax cuts and has continued ever since. The US has traditionally financed its debt by selling treasury bonds to foreign countries, with China becoming one of the largest holders. But in 2008 the US government found itself without sufficient buyers as it responded to the financial turmoil of the Great Recession, spending billions of dollars to bail out the country's banking system.

The Federal Reserve responded to the dilemma by itself buying US Treasuries, with the government printing money to allow the private bank to do so. The strategy has raised significant concerns over the Fed's "vast expanded powers," with observers fearing the required money printing will drive inflation.

Meanwhile, the dynamic allowing the United States to pursue massive deficit spending – namely the US dollar's status as the defacto global reserve currency – is increasingly being called into question. Central banks have begun diversifying their holdings away from the dollar as a hedge against the threat of US sanctions and other retaliatory measures, while foreign countries gradually pursue trade denominated in their own currencies.

"[Dedollarization] means the demise of American power, because American power is based on the ability to pay bills by printing money," noted US economist Paul Craig Roberts. "That would mean a massive US inflation. It'd be a kind of inflation that results from currency collapse. There's nothing monetary authorities can do about that. Those kinds of inflations are the real inflations, the real deadly ones."

Paul insisted lawmakers should stop funding Kiev's increasingly quixotic war against Russia, and instead push the country to seek a negotiated settlement to the conflict.

"That's the one thing [NATO membership] that, actually, Ukraine... could negotiate," said the legislator.

"If they were willing to negotiate that they would be a neutral country and not allied with the… Russians and not allied with the West but be open to trade with both… that could be negotiated for withdrawal of troops," he added. "There's no guarantee the Russians would withdraw troops, but it'd be worth the offer."

The United States intervened to scuttle at least two opportunities to negotiate an end to the war in the Donbass, while also working to undermine the implementation of the so-called Minsk accords in the years prior. Neoconservative commentators have openly promoted the conflict as

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a way to weaken Russia, with Moscow becoming "bogged down" in fighting in a strategy reminiscent of the Soviet Union's involvement in Afghanistan decades ago.
But Russia has actually grown more resilient in the years since launching its special military operation, becoming more independent from the West, increasing its industrial capacity and expanding its economy. Meanwhile, dollar hegemony has been threatened by the United States' punitive measures against Moscow, Washington has descended deeper into debt and the NATO military alliance has been revealed to be a paper tiger.
These trends suggest it is not Russia that is becoming "bogged down," but rather the United States as the global hegemon's position appears more fragile with each passing day.

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Americans See Civil War Within Five Years with Upcoming Election as Flashpoint

Surveys show many believe Americans will take up arms against each other in the coming years as political polarization in the country remains at an all-time high.
A new poll reveals a startlingly large percentage of Americans anticipate a second civil war within the next few years, with many citing this year's presidential election as a potential flashpoint for a conflict.
The survey by US pollster Rasmussen Reports found that 41% of likely voters think the country is likely to see a civil war by 2029, including 16% who think a civil war in that timeframe is "very likely."
Researchers discovered a significant partisan component to the issue,with 37% of respondents saying civil war is more likely if current US President Joe Biden is reelected in November. Some 25% said the outcome would be more likely under a second Donald Trump presidency, while 30% said the outcome of this fall's election would make little difference.
Surprisingly, more than half of Republican voters anticipate a civil war within the next five years, with 54% of them saying the outcome is likely.
Women, young adults, and non-white voters were found to be most likely to predict an imminent conflagration in the survey of 1,105 US voters.
"The possibility that America could face another civil war soon is not too far-fetched for a lot of voters," said the polling firm. "Such discussions got a boost after the new movie 'Civil War' made its debut as number one at the box office last month."
The Alex Garland film is not the only recent Western movie or television show predicting a dystopian near-future. British director Adam Curtis' film HyperNormalization recognized the trend nearly a decade ago.
"Halfway through Adam Curtis's mind-blowing documentary on the current socio-political turmoil in the world… there is a montage from Hollywood apocalypse movies," noted critic J.J. McDermott. "The montage segues from one dramatic scene to another with prolonged gasping effect… the White House is destroyed in Independence Day, a giant dino-creature chucks cars about the streets of New York in Godzilla and a giant comet looms over North America in Deep Impact."

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"The fascination with 9/11 as a witnessed spectacle has persisted in movie studios and in the minds of their 'disaster' directors ever since and the summer blockbuster season is never without at least one example every year now."

Curtis's provocative film posits that society has increasingly retreated inward in recent years, with the rise of the Internet serving as a substitute for an increasingly unpredictable and chaotic Western world. Brexit and the election of Trump are offered as two key events signifying a descent into political turmoil.

But the existential angst has apparently found its way online as well, with entire Internet communities dedicated to discussing the likelihood of imminent war or apocalypse. The r/Collapse forum on the website Reddit devotes itself to "discussion regarding the potential collapse of global civilization, defined as a significant decrease in human population and/or political/economic/social complexity."

Other surveys in recent years have revealed similar results, with one by YouGov in 2022 finding 43% of Americans think a civil war is likely in the next decade and another poll conducted that year finding 50.1% think it is a possibility.

"No matter what happens here – the verdict – Trump's gonna win or there will be a civil war," said one supporter of the former president protesting outside his current trial in New York City. "I'm not stupid. If you don't vote for Trump, this great big empire is gonna crumble."

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Cold War consequences: US scrambles for rare-earth magnets produced in China

A 2018 law passed during the height of former US President Donald Trump's trade war with China is causing major headaches for America's defense industry.

The dictate prohibits the use of so-called rare-earth magnets made in China in US military equipment. The powerful magnets are used in everything from drones and nuclear submarines to F-35 jets and missile-guidance systems.

But the vast majority of them are produced in China, and still more contain parts mined or processed in the country. Trump's law would ban the use of all such magnets by the US defense industry by 2027, leaving arms manufacturers with an insufficient global supply to meet current needs.

The inability of the US and allied countries to achieve self-sufficiency in production of the magnets is a case study of the effects of decades of Western neoliberal economic policy. Globalization and outsourcing allowed companies to ship thousands of jobs overseas to countries with lower pay, breaking the back of the US labor movement.

Meanwhile, Chinese state-run enterprises built the foundations of the country's modern-day dominance in heavy industry. One such company formed part of an investment group that

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acquired Magnequench, a magnet producer formerly owned by US automaker General Motors. The US government approved the deal.

The added expense of Western production of the magnets could force the US military to settle for fewer jets, submarines, and weapons systems than it would like to purchase.

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Professor's arrest highlights brutal US police response to pro-Palestine protests

On the evening of April 30, Columbia University's Gregory Pflugfelder became the latest of dozens of US college faculty members arrested amid a police crackdown on pro-Palestine campus protests.

"I certainly posed no danger to anybody," he told USA Today. "I just stayed on my block, relatively well behaved," he said. "Poorly located, unfortunately."

News of Noelle McAfee's detention at Emory University in Georgia had previously gone viral after the professor's head was slammed against the pavement when she inquired about the arrest of one of her students. In Missouri, 65-year-old professor Steve Tamari was beaten by police while documenting their response to protests on the campus of Washington University in St. Louis.

Video shows Tamari being slammed to the ground and his limp body carried away from the scene. Doctors told the professor, who suffered 9 broken ribs and a hand injury requiring surgery,that he was lucky to survive.

The incidents have shed light on accusations of widespread police brutality in officials' response to pro-Palestine protests, which have swept across US college campuses.

A violent crackdown on protesters at UCLA's campus capped off a week of state repression Wednesday, just days after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu demanded action against the "horrific" and "antisemitic" demonstrations. Police were previously observed amicably conversing with pro-Israel demonstrators the day prior, just before the counterprotesters launched an hours-long violent attack on the encampment while the LAPD purportedly looked on.

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Hand of Soros: Georgian prime minister denounces US color revolution tactics

A major scandal emerged in 2016 over the disproven conspiracy theory that Russian "meddling" influenced the outcome of the US presidential election. But what adherents of the unfounded Russiagate narrative failed to acknowledge is that the United States is guilty of precisely the same type of political interference it accuses others of, and on a far larger scale.

Claims of such foreign meddling came to a head Friday when Georgia's prime minister slammed US support for "violence" and "revolution attempts" amidst anti-government protests in the country's capital of Tbilisi. PM Irakli Kobakhidze is promoting draft "Transparency of Foreign Influence" legislation forcing foreign-backed organizations and media outlets to disclose the sources of their funding.

The United States and European Union have criticized the proposed bill, even though similar laws exist in numerous Western countries. The US frequently opposes such legislation elsewhere because it threatens its "soft power," represented by the funding of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in foreign countries to the tune of billions of dollars.

Investigation has uncovered that the US government agency USAID has poured $1.9 billion into political interference in Georgia alone. The annual budget for its ongoing projects amounts to some $70 million. Numerous opposition leaders and media outlets have been revealed to be on the United States' payroll, with George Soros' Civil Society Foundation also spending millions of dollars in the country.

US lawmakers have threatened to sanction the country if it moves forward with the planned transparency legislation.

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US senator criticizes uniparty for borrowing money to finance war in Ukraine (Part 1)

Senator Rand Paul (R-KY) criticized both of the United States' major political parties in comments expressing concern over bipartisan spending on the US proxy war in Ukraine.

"My primary reason for opposing sending money to Ukraine is that we don't have any money," said the libertarian-leaning lawmaker. "The money has to be borrowed… So basically we owe China a trillion dollars, they bought a trillion dollars worth of our debt."

Observers have long warned of the consequences of US deficit spending, which ballooned in the 1980s and has continued ever since. The US has traditionally financed its debt by selling treasury bonds to foreign countries, with China becoming one of the largest holders. But in 2008

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the US government found itself without sufficient buyers as it responded to the financial turmoil of the Great Recession, spending billions of dollars to bail out the country's banking system.

The Federal Reserve responded to the dilemma by itself buying US Treasuries, with the government printing money to allow the private bank to do so. The strategy has raised significant concerns over the Fed's "vast expanded powers."

Meanwhile, US dollar hegemony has been challenged as central banks begin diversifying their holdings as a hedge against US sanctions and other retaliatory measures, while foreign countries gradually pursue trade denominated in their own currencies. "[Dedollarization] means the demise of American power, because American power is based on the ability to pay bills by printing money," noted US economist Paul Craig Roberts, who warned of the threat of catastrophic inflation.

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Sen. Rand Paul insisted US lawmakers should stop funding Kiev's increasingly quixotic war against Russia, and instead push the country to seek a negotiated settlement to the conflict (Part 2)

"That's the one thing [NATO membership] that, actually, Ukraine… could negotiate," said the legislator. "If they were willing to negotiate that they would be a neutral country and not allied with the… Russians and not allied with the West but be open to trade with both… that could be negotiated for withdrawal of troops."

The United States intervened to scuttle at least two opportunities to negotiate an end to the war in the Donbass, while also working to undermine the implementation of the so-called Minsk accords in the years prior. Neoconservative commentators have openly promoted the conflict as a way to weaken Russia, with Moscow becoming "bogged down" in fighting in a strategy reminiscent of the Soviet Union's involvement in Afghanistan decades ago.

But Russia has actually grown more resilient in the years since launching its special military operation, becoming more independent from the West, increasing its industrial capacity and rapidly expanding its economy. Meanwhile, dollar hegemony has been threatened by the United States' punitive measures against Moscow, Washington has descended deeper into debt and the NATO military alliance has been revealed to be a paper tiger.

These trends suggest it is not Russia that is becoming "bogged down" in endless global conflict, but rather the United States.

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US Maintains Lead Over China in Global Approval Ratings - Gallup Report

WASHINGTON, May 6 (Sputnik) – The United States continues to maintain a strong lead over China in overall global leadership approval ratings, according to a Gallup report released Monday.

The report found that only nine countries were "strongly aligned" or "aligned" with China, compared with 46 with the US. Moreover, US had higher leadership approval ratings than China in 81 of 133 countries surveyed.

The US held its largest net leadership approval lead in Kosovo at 154 points, while China's was in Russia at 132 points. The US also received its lowest approval rating in Russia at -82 points. China's lowest approval rating was in Sweden at -89 points.

The scores were collected in 2023, as part of Gallup annual global survey of approval ratings for the leadership of the US, China, Russia, and Germany.

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Russian Diaspora in US to Celebrate 190 Years of 'Little Humpbacked Horse' Fairy Tale

WASHINGTON, May 4 (Sputnik) - Members of the Russian community in the United States will celebrate the 190th anniversary of the fairy tale "Little Humpbacked Horse" ("Konyok-Gorbunok") by organizing exhibitions, lectures and cartoon screenings.

Written by author Petr Ershov, the book was first published on May 5, 1834 and became one of the most popular Russian fairy tales. The book has been translated into more than 80 languages and published in many editions around the world.

"We already announced a drawing contest about Konyok-Gorbunok. So far, it is for Russian-speaking children. Because every Russian family has this book," Alla Ransakya, Ershov's great-granddaughter and president of the Ershov Foundation in the United States, told Sputnik.

The Ershov Foundation also plans to better introduce the book to the American audience this summer at an exhibition in Santa Cruz, California, where the local library has a very diverse audience.

"We will also demonstrate a beautiful Soviet cartoon made by Ivan Ivanov-Vano in 1947 and now sounded with the voices of Hollywood actors," Ranskaya said.

The anniversary celebratory events started at the beginning of the year as the Ershov Foundation organized a number of exhibitions in different cities in California and published articles about the writer and his tale in Russian-American newspapers.

"We have a lot of plans, and we already have gone ahead with it. We also published a poem about Jesus Christ, which Ershov wrote in 1834, the same year when he wrote Konyok-Gorbunok," Ranskaya said. She described her great-grandfather as a very religious man and pointed out that this poem has been published only three times in 190 years.

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Another exhibition took place in Monterey, California, where more than 20 different episodes from The Little Humpbacked Horse were presented, illustrated by artists from Russia, the US, France, Italy, and other countries, along with books translated into many languages, including Japanese, Chinese, and Polish.

Ranskaya said her plan is to publish a book with the best verse translations by Louise Maude, who was a friend of Leo Tolstoy and translator of his works.

"It will be a unique book with special pictures, and this is my main goal for this year to celebrate the 190th anniversary of Konyok-Gorbunok," Ranskaya said.

Ranskaya recalled that the book was translated into English more than 20 times under different titles, including Humpy, Magic Horse and others.

Many Russian emigres born in China, Germany, Austria and other countries remember reading the fairy tale as children, she said.

"I am very happy that people from all over the world remember my great-grandfather and his story," Ranskaya said.

The fairy tale unites people from different parts of the world despite the divisions we face now, Ranskaya added.

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Ukraine Making Stronger Push for US to Provide MQ-9 Reaper Drones - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 4 (Sputnik) - Ukraine is doubling down on its push for the United States to supply it MQ-9 Reaper drones, Politico reported, citing sources familiar with the matter.

The report said on Friday that although Ukraine's request for this capability isn't new, Kiev has become more persistent in recent months about acquiring it.

Ukraine reportedly wants the MQ-9 drone by the summer as part of its plans to help identify Russian targets deep behind the frontlines.

Ukraine previously wanted to use the MQ-9 Reaper drones to carry out strikes and conduct surveillance, but sources tell Politico that Kiev now claims to only want them now to conduct reconnaissance.

However, the United States is hesitant about sending these drones to Ukraine over concerns Russia could shoot them down, the report added.

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US Air Force Secretary Flies in Artificial Intelligence-Piloted Aircraft - Lockheed Martin

WASHINGTON, May 4 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of the Air Force Frank Kendall took a flight in an artificial intelligence (AI)-piloted experimental aircraft produced by Lockheed Martin's high-tech Skunk Works, the company announced in a press release.

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"Lockheed Martin Skunk Works joined the US Air Force Test Pilot School and other government and industry partners in hosting US Secretary of the Air Force Frank Kendall to fly in the X-62A Variable In-flight Simulation Test Aircraft (VISTA)," the release announced on Friday.

Lockheed Martin described the X-62A as a one-of-a-kind aircraft modified to test artificial intelligence (AI) and autonomy capabilities.

"In less than a year, the teams installed initial live AI agents into the X-62A's systems, demonstrated the first AI versus human dogfight, and completed over 100,000 lines of flight-critical software changes across 21 test flights," the company said.

VISTA is an AI pathfinder that facilitates the development and testing of cutting-edge AI techniques with new uncrewed vehicle designs, the release explained.

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US Pressures Qatar to Expel Hamas if Group Continues to Reject Ceasefire Deals - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 4 (Sputnik) - The United States has told Qatar that it should oust Hamas if the group continues to turn down ceasefire agreements with Israel, the Washington Post reported on Friday, citing US officials.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken notified Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani in April, the report said.

Qatari officials have advised Hamas officials, including Ismail Haniyeh, the group's leader who currently lives in Doha, that they should prepare backup residency plans in case they need to leave, the report said, citing diplomatic officials.

The move by the United States comes with some negative feedback from analysts and officials concerned that closing the Hamas office in Doha could further complicate efforts to communicate with Hamas leadership for future hostage negotiations, according to the report.

Earlier this week, US President Joe Biden and Amir Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani of Qatar had a call on securing the release of hostages and implementing a ceasefire in Gaza after Hamas was offered a 40-day ceasefire and the release of thousands of Palestinian prisoners in exchange for freeing Israeli hostages.

Biden said that the US, along with Egypt and Qatar, would ensure the deal's full implementation, urging Amir Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani to work on releasing hostages, which is the sole barrier to an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.

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Canada Charges 3 Indian Nationals in Sikh Leader Homicide - Police Superintendent

WASHINGTON, May 4 (Sputnik) - Three Indian nationals residing in Edmonton have been charged in connection with the murder of Sikh separatist leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar in British

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Columbia last summer, Integrated Homicide Investigation Team Superintendent Mandeep Mooker announced.

"The following three individuals were charged for this homicide. 22-year-old Karan Brar, who's an Indian national who is residing in Edmonton, Alberta. 22-year-old couple Kamalpreet Singh, who was an Indian national, who was also residing in Edmonton, Alberta. 28-year-old Karanpreet Singh, who is also an Indian national residing in Edmonton, Alberta," Mooker said during a press briefing on Friday.

The superintendent also said the authorities believe more individuals may be involved in the case and additional arrests could follow.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Assistant Commissioner David Teboul said during the press briefing that the current announcements are not a complete account of the ongoing investigative work, which involves separate and distinct investigations, including connections to the Indian government.

Last June, Nijjar was fatally shot by two masked gunmen in a parking lot outside in Surrey, British Columbia. Nijjar advocated for the creation of an independent Sikh state in northern India called Khalistan.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said in September that Ottawa was examining "credible allegations" linking Indian officials to the killing of Nijjar. India rejected the allegations, saying they are absurd.

Following the incident, Canada expelled a high-ranking Indian diplomat allegedly linked to the country's foreign intelligence. In response, the Indian authorities ordered a senior Canadian diplomat to leave India.

Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said in January that Canada's policy toward the Khalistan Liberation Force has a negative impact on Indian-Canadian relations.

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Russia's Vinnik Accepts Plea Deal Likely to Lead to Under 10 Years in US Prison - Lawyer

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) – Russian national Alexander Vinnik has accepted a plea agreement with the US government that will resolve his case and likely result in a sentence of under 10 years in prison, his lawyer Arkady Bukh told Sputnik on Friday.

"He entered a plea agreement," Bukh said, adding that Vinnik admitted to charges that carry a far shorter prison sentence than the crimes of which he was initially accused.

The sentencing is anticipated within a few months, he added.

"We are pretty confident that we will be below 10 years [in prison]. It is up to the judge, but we feel that it is a great result, and we will get a good result," the lawyer said, adding that initially, Vinnik was facing almost 200 years in jail.

The US government accuses Vinnik of enabling criminal activity through the cryptocurrency exchange BIC-e by obscuring and anonymizing transactions and sources of funds. Vinnik denies the charges against him.

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US Worried Russian Troops Sharing Base With Americans in Niger Problematic - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 4 (Sputnik) - US officials are becoming concerned that the presence of Russian soldiers on the same base housing American forces in Niger could lead to a miscalculated clash between both sides, Politico reported on Friday citing sources familiar with the matter.

Although the United States assesses that Russian soldiers pose no immediate threat to American personnel on base, US officials worry that even a small hostile encounter could increase the risk of a confrontation that could result in an exchange of fire between the two sides, the report said.

US officials worry that the Russian fighters will harass US troops at checkpoints, the report added.

US defense officials are also concerned that the Russian forces on base could try to gather intelligence on the American capabilities, the report said.

On Thursday, a US official told Sputnik that Russian forces are being housed on the same base in Niger but in a separate compound with no access to US forces until the withdrawal of the contingent of the United States from the country.

There is an estimated 1,100 US personnel in Niger. Washington and Niamey have recently begun discussions for the "orderly withdrawal" of US servicepeople based in Niger. The military pullout was initiated in March after a Nigerien military spokesperson said the country's transitional government, which took power in a coup in July 2023, had terminated the military agreement with the US with immediate effect, citing the interests of the Nigerien people.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, May 4 (Sputnik) -

WESTERN MILITARY AID TO UKRAINE

* The conflict in Ukraine could end in a couple of weeks without the Western military aid to Kiev, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said on Friday.

* The delayed United States military aid to Ukraine could make the difference between winning or losing" the war, Borrell said.

* UK Foreign Secretary David Cameron rejected the idea of French President Emmanuel Macron about the possibility of sending troops to Ukraine.

* The recent statement by Macron about the possibility of sending troops to Ukraine is important and dangerous, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

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CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) experts reported hearing more than 100 rounds of gunfire near the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant on Tuesday, allegedly in response to drones spotted near the facility's training center, IAEA Director General Said on Friday.
* The Ukrainian armed forces have suffered up to 835 military casualties in the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) in the past 24 hours as a result of operations by the southern, central and eastern groupings of the Russian armed forces, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
* Ukraine has already lost more than 111,000 troops and 21,000 units of weapons and military equipment in 2024, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said.

RUSSIA'S FROZEN ASSETS

* The United States is holding talks with allies on leading a group that would give up to $50 billion in assistance to Ukraine to be repaid by the windfall profits of Russia's frozen assets, Bloomberg reported on Friday.
* The representatives of the G7 countries say privately that a complete confiscation of Russia's frozen assets is no longer on the agenda, with the group now exploring alternative measures to extract funds, the Financial Times reported.

MIDDLE EAST

* Yemen's Ansar Allah movement, whose followers are also known as Houthis, are ready to attack any ships heading to Israel from the Mediterranean Sea if the Jewish state launches a military offensive in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, Houthi military spokesman Yahya Saree said on Friday.
* The Biden administration has not yet seen a comprehensive plan for Israel's ground offensive in Rafah, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said.
* More than 2,000 people have been arrested across the United States in the last three weeks at pro-Palestinian protests on college campuses, according to a tally compiled by NBC News.

FIRE IN GERMANY DEFENSE COMPANY

* A fire with toxic smoke has broken out at a metallurgical plant of the German defense industry company Diehl Metal Applications GmbH that specializes in the production of IRIS-T air defense systems, the B.Z.-Berlin newspaper reported on Friday.
* The fire not affected the production of the IRIS-T defense systems, the Spiegel reported.

CYBER ATTACK IN GERMANY

* The German Foreign Ministry summoned Russia's charge d'affaires and expressed protest in connection for allegedly being behind the cyberattack on the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in 2023, the Russian Embassy in Berlin said on Friday.
* The German government attributed the 2023 cyberattack that led to the summoning of a Russian diplomat to the German Foreign Ministry, to the hacker group APT28, also known as Fancy Bear.

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US Air National Guard Opposes Transfer to Space Force Without Governors' Consent

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - A host of US Air National Guard leaders from various states in the United States on Friday spoke during a conference call against Legislative Proposal 480 that would transfer the Air Guard's space units to the US Space Force without the consent of the governors of the impacted states.

Legislative Proposal 480, which the Defense Department submitted for consideration to the Senate Armed Services Committee, has drawn a storm of criticism and strong opposition in the ranks of the US National Guard and among state governors.

On April 29, 53 governors of all US states and territories signed a letter to US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin demanding him to retract the submission of the LP 480 as it would break the law and "deeply damage the relationship between states and the federal government."

The governors estimated that the proposed change would affect the lives of about 1,000 people in the Air National Guard space units across seven US states, including Colorado, Alaska, California, Hawaii and Florida.

"The Air Force's Legislative Proposal 480 would set a dangerous precedent and jeopardize our national security and military readiness by undermining the authority of the governors over the National Guard units in their states," Brig. Gen. Michael Bruno from the Colorado Air National Guard said during the call.

According to Chief of the National Guard Bureau Gen. Daniel Hokanson, Proposal 480 seeks Congress' permission to allow the Air Force to bypass federal laws and take away 14 Guard units across seven states without the consent of these states' respective governors.

In other words, the proposed legislation would create the basis for removing 14 units from state control and reassigning them to the federal government, which, according to the governors, would seriously disrupt gubernatorial authority over the National Guard.

Instead of transferring space units to the Space Force, Gen. Bruno suggested establishing a Space National Guard, adding that it would cost zero dollars to the Defense Department to accomplish that.

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UPDATE - US, Allies Mulling Providing Ukraine With $50Bln From Russian Asset Profits – Reports

(adds details in para 2-6, background in para 7-8)

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) – The United States is holding talks with allied states on leading a group that would give up to $50 billion in assistance to Ukraine which would be repaid by the windfall profits of Russian frozen assets, Bloomberg reported on Friday.

The plan is reportedly being discussed by the Group of Seven (G7) with the aim of reaching an

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agreement before the group's upcoming summit in Italy in June, Bloomberg reported, citing US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and other officials familiar with the matter.

Discussions on the topic have been complicated, and reaching an agreement could take several more months, the report said, citing unnamed sources. Nonetheless, the move is set to put heightened pressure on the European Union to desist from objecting to the use of Russian assets, it added.

Talks over the matter were confirmed by Yellen, who in an interview with Bloomberg said that "it's something we're discussing."

"Ideally, this is something we would like the entire G-7 to participate in, be part of, not just have the United States doing it alone," Yellen was quoted as saying.

Seized Russian assets have generated about 3.9 billion euros ($4.2 billion) in net profit since last year, the report said.

Earlier on Friday, the Financial Times newspaper reported that representatives of the G7 countries privately express that a complete confiscation of Russia's frozen assets is no longer on the agenda, with the group now exploring alternative measures to extract funds.

The G7, spearheaded by the United States and the European Union, has been discussing legal ways to confiscate Russian assets since the start of Russia's military operation in Ukraine in early 2022. Moscow has criticized the efforts to seize its sovereign assets as an act of theft and a violation of international law. The European Central Bank has warned that seizure poses reputational risks to the euro in the long term.

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White House Says Death of Palestinian Surgeon in Israeli Custody 'Devastating'

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Friday that the death of Palestinian surgeon Adnan Al-Bursh under Israeli custody is devastating and that the United States continues to express its concerns to Israeli officials about the need to protect civilians in Gaza.

Media reported that Bursh, 50, who worked as a Palestinian surgeon in Gaza, died in an Israeli prison Thursday. He was detained by Israeli forces along with 10 other medical workers in December.

"That is devastating news and devastating to hear," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing.

Jean-Pierre emphasized that civilians in Gaza providing humanitarian care should be protected and conversations on this matter will continue between the US and Israeli governments.

Over 34,500 people have been killed so far by Israeli strikes in the Gaza Strip, according to local authorities.

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Crude Prices Down 7% On Week; Inflation, Economic Worry Makes Worst Week For Oil Since Feb

NEW YORK, May 2 (Sputnik) - Crude prices closed with their worst weekly loss since February as inflation fears across the world weighed on the outlook for the global economy and its demand for energy.

UK-origin Brent crude, the global benchmark for oil, settled Friday's trading at $82.96 per barrel, down 71 cents, or 0.9%. For the week, Brent was down 7.3%. That made its sharpest weekly decline since a 7.4% drop during the week to February 2.

West Texas Intermediate (WTI), which serves as the US crude benchmark, settled at $78.11, down 84 cents, or 1.1% on the day. For the week, it fell 6.8%, its most. Like Brent, it was WTI's worst weekly loss since a 7.4% decline in the week to February 2.

While oil is one of the most important commodities, its cost also determines its demand and influence on prices of other goods and services in an economy.

"The question on people's lips is yes, [oil] prices seem to be going down right now, but eventually people are going to need to start buying [it]," Kyle Holland, an analyst at Mintec, said in a comment carried by CNBC.

Crude markets rose with little interruption between January and March, resulting in a gain of as much as 13% for oil by the close of the first quarter. That led to renewed inflationary pressure for the global economy, which has come back to bite at oil.

The US economy grew just 1.6% year-on-year in the first quarter, versus the previous quarter's 3.4%. It was the slowest growth in nearly two years and bucked Wall Street's forecast for a 2.5% expansion. Inflation, middling at between 2.5% and 3.5% — and well above the Federal Reserve's 2% target, has been cited as a reason.

Economies outside the United States are also feeling the repercussions of higher energy costs.

A steep climb in oil prices at the start of the year, combined with the resilience of the dollar against other currencies, had led to bloated prices of goods, higher interest rates and dampened business sentiment in Asia, said Dio Herdiawan Tobing, head of public policy for the region at the Amsterdam-based World Benchmarking Alliance. He noted that pricier oil had, particularly, hurt member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which import at least 50 percent of their crude oil requirements from the Middle East.

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US State Dept. Says Cannot Answer How Close Russia is to Deploying Alleged Space Weapon

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - US Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control, Deterrence and Stability Mallory Stewart said on Friday that she is unable to answer how close

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Russia is to deploying an alleged space-based nuclear weapon.

"I don't have an answer for that, for how close they are to deploying," Stewart said during an interview with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, when asked how close Russia is to deploying the alleged capability.

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

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said that Russia has always been categorically opposed to deploying nuclear weapons in space. Russia's activities in space are no different from those of other countries, including the US, Putin said.

The US has tried to be as transparent as possible about its space programs, Stewart said, when asked if the US is willing to provide more information about its own space-based capabilities. Stewart called it an "interesting question" because it assumes capabilities that may or may not exist.

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RPT - US Joins Germany in Blaming Russia for 2023 Cyber Attack

(Repeats to correct typos in paras 3, 5)

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - The United States on Friday joined Germany in pinning the blame on Russia for an alleged 2023 cyber attack and urged Moscow to stop its "malicious cyber activities" in Europe.

"The United States strongly condemns the malicious cyber activity by Russia's General Staff Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU), also known as APT28, against Germany, Czechia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Sweden," State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said in a statement. "We join Germany in attributing specific malign activity carried out by APT28 that targeted a German political party."

Miller said that the US Department of Justice assisted Germany in remediating a network of hundreds of small routers that APT28 allegedly used to conceal and carry out malicious cyber activity.

Earlier on Friday, the Russian Embassy in Berlin said that the German Foreign Ministry summoned Russia's charge d'affaires in Germany to protest in connection with the allegedly proven cyberattack on the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in 2023.

The embassy has dismissed the accusations of the involvement of Russian state structures in the attack and the activities of the APT28 group in general as unfounded and groundless. Russia sees the German Foreign Ministry's demarche as "another unfriendly step aimed at fomenting anti-Russian sentiments in Germany and leading to further destruction of Russian-German relations," the mission said.

The West has on many occasions accused Moscow of interference in internal affairs and various cyberattacks. The Russian authorities, for their part, have denied any involvement in cyberattacks, expressing readiness to cooperate in the fight against hackers and conduct

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dialogue on cybersecurity.

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US, Allies Mulling Providing Ukraine With $50Bln From Russian Asset Profits – Reports

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) – The United States is holding talks with allied states on leading a group that would give up to $50 billion in assistance to Ukraine which would be repaid by the windfall profits of Russian frozen assets, Bloomberg reported on Friday.

The plan is reportedly being discussed by the Group of Seven (G7) to reach an agreement when the G7 leaders meet in the upcoming summit in Italy in June, the report said, citing people familiar with the matter.

Discussions on the topic have been complicated and reaching an agreement could take several more months, the sources added.

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US Congressman Cuellar Charged for Allegedly Accepting $600,000 in Foreign Bribes

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Henry Cuellar and his wife have been charged in federal court for allegedly accepting $600,000 in bribes from foreign entities in exchange for favors in his capacity as a lawmaker, the US Justice Department said on Friday.

"An indictment was unsealed today in the Southern District of Texas charging U.S. Congressman Enrique Roberto 'Henry' Cuellar, 68, and his wife, Imelda Cuellar, 67, both of Laredo, Texas, with participating in two schemes involving bribery, unlawful foreign influence, and money laundering," the Justice Department said in a press release.

According to the release, Cueller accepted approximately $600,000 from December 2014 to November 2021 from two foreign entities, which includes an oil and gas company wholly owned and controlled by the government of Azerbaijan, and a bank headquartered in Mexico City.

Cuellar allegedly agreed to use his office to influence US foreign policy in favor of Azerbaijan, the release said. In exchange for the bribes paid by the Mexican bank, Cuellar allegedly agreed to influence legislative activity and to pressure senior "US Executive Branch" officials regarding measures beneficial to the bank, the release added.

The bribe payments were allegedly laundered through a series of front companies and middlemen into shell companies owned by the Congressman's wife, the Justice Department said.

Cuellar and his wife each face 16 charges in this case that add up to a punishment of up to 204 years in prison if they're convicted, according to the release.

House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries' office said Cuellar will take leave as ranking member of the House Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee while this case is

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ongoing.

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US State Dept. Says Important to Continue Cooperation Between NASA, Roscosmos

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - It is important for the United States and Russia to continue cooperation between NASA and Roscosmos, US Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control, Deterrence and Stability Mallory Stewart said on Friday.

"I think it's important that we continue as much cooperation as possible," Stewart said during an interview with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, when asked about the potential impact of the deployment of an alleged Russian space-based nuclear weapon on cooperation.

The existing capacity to cooperate should not be further diminished by disputes over the alleged Russian capability, she said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said that Russia has always been categorically opposed to deploying nuclear weapons in space. Russia's activities in space are no different from those of other countries, including the US, Putin said.

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White House Says Still Has Not Seen Comprehensive Plan for Rafah Operation

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - The Biden Administration has not yet seen a comprehensive plan for Israel's ground offensive in the city of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Friday.

"So what I can say is, and we've been pretty clear, we haven't seen a comprehensive plan as it relates to their thinking on the Rafah operations," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing.

Jean-Pierre added that the Biden administration would not support a large-scale military operation in Rafah and that the major concern is for the protection of innocent Palestinian lives.

"We understand that they [Israel] want to dismantle Hamas and understand that is a priority, obviously, and we are we certainly appreciate that. We also want to make sure that those 1.5 million lives, Palestinian lives, who are seeking refuge there are protected and we believe there's a way to do that," Jean-Pierre added.

Earlier this week, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that an Israeli operation in Rafah would be an "unbearable escalation" that would kill thousands of civilians and force hundreds of thousands of others to flee. European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell also urged Israel not to launch an offensive in Rafah.

On October 7, 2023, Palestinian movement Hamas launched a large-scale rocket attack against Israel and breached the border, attacking both civilian neighborhoods and military bases. Nearly 1,200 people in Israel were killed and some 240 others abducted during the

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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 34,500 people have been killed so far by Israeli strikes in the Gaza Strip, according to local authorities. More than 100 hostages are still believed to be held by Hamas in Gaza.

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CIA Director in Cairo for Hostage, Ceasefire Deal Between Israel, Hamas- Report

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) — CIA Director William Burns arrived in Cairo on Friday, joining Egyptian mediators to negotiate a hostage and ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas, Axios reports on Friday.

According to the report, Burns' trip indicates the Biden administration's urgency in securing a deal quickly, seeing this as a crucial moment in negotiations, with the current deal being seen as the only viable path to a Gaza ceasefire and ending a war that has led to criticism of Biden before the election.

The report added that a Hamas delegation is expected to arrive in Cairo on Saturday to respond to the latest Egyptian proposal for a deal.

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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Canadian Police Arrest Alleged Hit Squad Members Who Killed Sikh Leader - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - The Royal Canadian Mounted Police have arrested members of an alleged hit squad that killed Sikh separatist leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar in British Columbia last summer, CBC reported on Friday.

Investigators identified the alleged hit squad in Canada months ago, keeping them under surveillance, and are now probing links between the suspects, who allegedly played roles in the killing of Nijjar and three other murders, including the shooting death of an 11-year-old boy in Edmonton.

Last year in June, Nijjar was fatally shot by two masked gunmen in a parking lot outside the Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara in Surrey, BC. Nijjar advocated for the creation of an independent Sikh state in northern India called Khalistan.

In September, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Ottawa was examining "credible allegations" linking Indian officials to the killing of the separatist leader. India rejected the allegation as "absurd."

Following the incident, Canada expelled a high-ranking Indian diplomat allegedly linked to Indian foreign intelligence. In response, the Indian authorities ordered a senior Canadian diplomat to leave the country. The Indian Foreign Ministry later urged its citizens planning to visit or currently in Canada to exercise extra caution.

In late September, the Indian diplomatic mission in Canada suspended visa application services. In late November, India resumed the issuance of e-visas for Canadian tourists and business travelers.

Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said in early January that Canada's policy toward the Khalistan Liberation Force has a negative impact on Indian-Canadian relations.

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US Launches Satellites to Boost Monitoring of World's Most Populous Regions - Raytheon

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - The United States has launched two new WorldView satellites that will greatly boost surveillance capabilities over the most populous parts of the world, Raytheon announced in a press release on Friday.

"Two next-generation imaging instruments designed by Raytheon launched [on Thursday] as part of Maxar's WorldView Legion satellites," the release said. "These are the first two of six planned WorldView Legion satellites, which will provide a significant leap forward in Earth observation capabilities, offering improved surveillance and monitoring for a wide range of applications."

Positioned in low Earth orbit, the two satellites - the first of six planned in the total constellation - will provide the highest commercially available resolution. When all six join the constellation, they will enable a revisit rate of up to 15 times per day over the most populated parts of Earth, the release said.

"These WorldView Legion satellites will support applications across multiple sectors, including

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national security, military and commercial mapping, maritime monitoring, telecommunications network planning, change detection and feature identification." the release added.
Raytheon's telescope design is the culmination of 15 years of research and development into a novel optical material that is stronger and lighter than previous designs, according to the release.

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Boeing Starliner Passes Pre-Launch Review, Ready for Crewed Flight on Monday - NASA

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - The long-delayed Boeing Starliner has passed its pre-launch review and is on schedule to be launched with a two-person crew to the International Space Station (ISS) on Monday, top NASA officials told a press conference.
"We have good flight rationale to go," NASA Commercial Crew Program Manager Steve Stich told reporters at Kennedy Space Center on Friday. "Things are looking good for launch... I feel like we're making history."
Boeing's CST-1000 Starline is planned to be the sister manned shuttle spacecraft to the International Space Station ISS alongside the successful SpaceX Dragon. Originally it was planned to make its first manned test flight in July 2023 but Boeing and NASA had to redesign the linking for two reentry parachutes on the vehicle, along with other issues.
"This is a really critical milestone for the agency," NASA International Space Station Program Manager Dana Weigel told the press conference.
Launch Weather Officer Brian Cizek said the weather conditions looked good for the scheduled Monday evening takeoff time with a 95% probability. The spacecraft is due to make a 26 hour flight to dock with the space station, according to NASA.

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Boeing Struggles to Ramp Up Production of 787 Jets Due to US Sanctions on Russia - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - US aerospace company Boeing is struggling to ramp up production of its 787 Dreamliner jet after a supplier's capability to provide parts for the aircraft was hampered by US sanctions against Russia, the Wall Street Journal reported on Friday.
The report said a supplier of a temperature-regulating part for the 787 jet terminated its Russian operations and moved its production out, but the transition has made it difficult for the company to keep up with Boeing's growing demand.
This delay is reportedly not only harming Boeing's business but also airlines, who now have to reduce the number of long flights offered to customers.
Boeing did not immediately respond to Sputnik's request for comment on this matter.
Moscow has said that the sanctions imposed by the United States - and the collective West - on

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Russia dealt a serious blow to the global economy and have actually increased the prices of electricity, fuel and food products in Europe and in the United States.

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Russia Unlikely to Have Meddled in Canadian Elections - Preliminary Report

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - Russia is not likely to be a significant actor with respect to foreign interference in Canadian federal elections, the Foreign Interference Commission said in a preliminary report on Friday.

The report is part of the Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference in Federal Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions tasked with probing alleged meddling attempts by countries like China, Russia and India among other states. Quebec Court of Appeals judge Marie-Josee Hogue, who was charged with leading the inquiry, is set to deliver a definitive assessment by December 31.

"Intelligence holdings reveal that Russia has significant capabilities and seeks to undermine public confidence in political systems and democratic processes in the West. However, intelligence agencies reported that Russia is likely not currently a significant foreign interference actor in relation to Canadian federal elections," the report said.

In addition, nothing suggests that Russia favors any particular Canadian political party or leader as the Russian government might "likely assess" that the major federal parties' policies toward Moscow are similar.

The Panel did not observe nor was it notified of any evidence of a concerted Russian disinformation campaign in the 2021 elections, the report said. Moreover, despite participants of the diaspora contesting that view and seeking an independent probe, the Commission lacks the expertise or mandate, it added.

"I agree with them that the lack of intelligence collected by CSIS [Canadian Security Intelligence Service] or the CSE [Communications Security Establishment] does not definitively prove that there has been no foreign interference by Russia in the 2021 election. But it does mean that no such interference has been observed," the report continued.

In early September, Canada announced a public inquiry into foreign interference in its federal elections and democratic institutions, mandated to examine alleged interference by China, Russia and other foreign states as well as non-state actors.

The Chinese and Russian governments have both consistently denied Canada's claims of interference in its elections.

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Elon Musk Says US Must Address National Debt Before Dollar 'Worth Nothing'

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WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - Billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk said on Friday that the United States must do something to address the national debt, lest the value of the dollar continue to fall.

"We need to do something about our national debt or the dollar will be worth nothing," Musk said in a statement via social media platform X.

The US national debt is approximately $34.56 trillion, according to US Treasury Department data.

Musk said in a separate post that the US should at least try to slow down the debt growth. Musk also said that he is just "stating the obvious" about the US' economic situation.

The percentage of Americans citing inflation as their top financial problem reached a record high of 41%, according to a Gallup poll released on Thursday.

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Trump Media Auditor Borgers Fined $14Mln for 'Massive Fraud,' Banned for Life - SEC

NEW YORK, May 3 (Sputnik) - The auditing firm for former President Donald Trump's publicly-traded media company has been charged by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) with carrying out massive fraud in filings it had made on behalf of clients, the SEC said in a statement on Friday.

BF Borgers CPA and its owner Benjamin Borgers will permanently cease practicing as auditors under an agreement with the SEC and will pay a $14 million penalty for their scheme that affected more than 1,500 filings, the statement said.

"Ben Borgers and his audit firm, BF Borgers, were responsible for one of the largest wholesale failures by gatekeepers in our financial markets," SEC Enforcement Division Director Gurbir Grewal said in the statement.

The perpetrators carried out a "massive fraud" by doctoring accounts to make them appear to be in line with public accounting standards, Grewal said.

An SEC audit found at least 75% of the firm's filings were not in compliance with auditing standards.

The SEC did not say if the fraudulent filings include those made on behalf of Trump Media and Technology Group Corp., which trades on the US stock exchange under the DJT symbol synonymous with the former president's initials.

The SEC typically does not name clients of fraudsters and Grewal's focus for now appeared to be the bigger, widespread impact of the fraud.

The Borgers, he pointed out, "put investors and markets at risk by causing public companies to incorporate noncompliant audits and reviews into more than 1,500 filings with the Commission" and also "undermined trust and confidence in our markets".

While the audit firm and its owner did not admit nor deny the SEC's findings, "both consented to an order, effective immediately, pursuant to which they are ordered to pay civil penalties and are denied the privilege of appearing or practicing before the Commission as an accountant," the statement said.

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Shares of Trump Media, the publicly-traded vehicle of the former president's blogging website Truth Social, were down 5% to $46.24 at the time of writing, after falling to a session low of $44.32 earlier.

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USAID Hiring Humanitarian Assistance Advisor to Monitor Situation in Ukraine - Notice

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - The US Agency for International Development (USAID) is hiring a humanitarian assistance advisor to monitor the situation in Ukraine with respect to recovery and long-term development programs in the country funded by the US government, according to a solicitation notice published on Friday.

"USAID/Ukraine is hiring a Relief and Development Coherence Advisor (RDC Advisor) to continuously monitor the situation in Ukraine as it relates to the nexus between humanitarian assistance, early recovery, and long-term development," the notice said.

The advisor's duties will include representing USAID at relevant coordination meetings, workshops, and presentations with US government and international partners and providing continuous reporting to USAID and other elements of the US Mission in Kiev on updated activities, approaches and plans, the notice said.

The advisor would perform his or her duties in Kiev for one year with the option for up to four more years dependent on satisfactory performance, the notice added.

The contract provides an annual salary for the advisor in an amount ranging between $104,604 and $135,987 per year, according to the notice.

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Foreign Meddling in Canada Did Not Impact Federal Elections – Inquiry's Preliminary Report

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) – Foreign interference did not impact the outcomes of Canada's 2019 and 2021 federal elections, despite evidence that several international actors tried to meddle in the country's democratic processes, the Foreign Interference Commission said on Friday.

The Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference in Federal Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions tasked with probing alleged meddling attempts by countries like China, Russia and India among others, released its preliminary report on the matter on Friday.

Quebec Court of Appeals judge Marie-Josee Hogue, charged with leading the inquiry, is set to deliver a definitive assessment by December 31.

"Acts of foreign interference did occur during the last two federal general elections, but they did not undermine the integrity of our electoral system Hogue said in the Commission's statement. "Our system remains sound."

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Voters were able to cast their ballots, their votes were duly registered and counted, and nothing suggests that there was any sort of interference in regard to that, Hogue said. Moreover, foreign interference had no influence on which party formed the government.

Hogue nonetheless said that evidence of foreign meddling created a “stain” on Canada’s federal electoral process.

Questioned on the release of the report, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau maintained that the 2019 and 2021 elections were not influenced by foreign interference and further thanked the commissioner for her work, vowing to continue collaborating over the coming months for the next phases of the inquiry.

In early September, Canada announced a public inquiry into foreign interference in its federal elections and democratic institutions. The inquiry was mandated to examine and assess alleged interference by China, Russia, and other foreign states as well as non-state actors.

China and Russia have both denied Canada’s claims of interference.

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Trump Considers Increasing NATO Military Spending Target to 3% of GDP - Report

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) — Former President Donald Trump is considering increasing the NATO military spending target from 2% to 3% of GDP if he wins the election, The Times reported on Friday.

According to the report, Trump was influenced by last month's meeting with President Duda of Poland, who has called for increased defense spending across NATO.

Last month, former US President Donald Trump met with Polish President Andrzej Duda and discussed the Polish leader's proposal for NATO countries to increase defense spending to 3% of GDP, among other topics.

Trump and Duda also discussed the Ukraine conflict, the conflict with Israel in the Middle East, and other security-related topics. The meeting took place in Trump's apartment at Trump Tower in New York and lasted for two and a half hours.

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Canada Probes Alleged Dumping Practices by UAE, Bulgaria, Thailand - Border Services

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - Ottawa will probe the alleged dumping of certain concrete reinforcement bars from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bulgaria and Thailand, the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) said on Friday.

"The CBSA announced today that it is launching an investigation to determine whether certain concrete reinforcing bar from Bulgaria, Thailand and the United Arab Emirates is being sold at unfair prices in Canada," the agency said in a statement.

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The probe into the alleged dumping practices was initiated following complaints filled by several Canadian companies - AltaSteel Inc; ArcelorMittal Long Products Canada, G.P.; and Gerdau Ameristeel Corporation, the statement said.

The complaints were supported by Max Aicher North America Ltd. and Ivaco Rolling Mills 2004 LP, the statement added.

The companies have argued that they suffered material injury in the form of market share and sales loss, and price undercutting, depression and suppression, due to an increase in volume of the alleged dumped concrete reinforcement bars from the three countries.

The investigation will be conducted by CBSA together with the Canadian International Trade Tribunal (CITT). The latter will begin a preliminary probe to determine whether the imports indeed harm Canadian producers. A decision is expected to be issued by July 2.

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DC Highschool Student Struck by Stray Bullet While Inside Classroom - Police Chief

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - DC Police are investigating a shooting that took place in Northwest DC that injured a student who was struck by a stray bullet that went through a window of Dunbar High School, DC Police Chief Pamela Smith said on Friday.

"This was not a shooting that was directed at Dunbar High School...I want everyone to know that our students are secure and they are safe," said Smith during a press conference.

Assistant Chief Leslie Parson added that the shooting, which grazed a 17-year-old-girl, took place just after 10 am when people inside a car traveling down Kirby Street Northwest decided to drive the wrong way down the street, and that there may have been a shootout between two groups of people.

"We believe there was an exchange of gunfire in that block amongst individuals, however, the motive remains unknown," Parson said.

The wounded student has been taken to a local hospital where her minor injuries are being treated, Parson added.

The investigation is active and ongoing, and so far no arrests have been made.

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Congressman Cuellar Says He's Innocent of Forthcoming Federal Indictment

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Henry Cuellar said on Friday that he is innocent of federal charges that are expected to be announced against him soon.

"I want to be clear that both my wife and I are innocent of these allegations," Cuellar said in a press release. "Everything I have done in Congress has been to serve the people of South Texas."

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US prosecutors are expected to unveil an indictment against Cuellar later on Friday, media reported.

Although it's unclear what Cuellar is being accused of, the report notes that Cuellar's home and campaign office in Texas were raided in January 2022 as part of a federal investigation into Azerbaijan and a group of US businessmen who have ties to the country.

Cuellar at one-time served as co-chair of the Congressional Azerbaijan Caucus.

Cuellar further said in his statement on Friday that he sought to schedule a meeting with federal prosecutors about his case but they declined.

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US Lifts Anti-Russian Sanctions Against Emperor Aviation - Treasury Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - The United States lifted the anti-Russian sanctions imposed on Emperor Aviation, an aircraft management company based in Malta and Russia and allegedly associated with the family of entrepreneur and senator Suleiman Kerimov, the US Treasury Department said in a notice on Friday.

"The following deletions have been made to OFAC's [Office of Foreign Assets Control] SDN [Specially Designated Nationals] List: EMPEROR AVIATION LTD," the notice said.

The Treasury Department also removed sanctions imposed on seven business airplanes with registration numbers 9H-AMN; 9H-ARK; 9H-EAA; 9H-MAO; 9H-SIS 9H-SSK and 9H-TIO.

The US government designated Emperor Aviation and its eight business jets in November 2022 for being linked to Kerimov's company. Last January, the US government lifted the sanctions on one of the airplanes with registration number 9H-OKO.

The Treasury Department did not immediately provide any details about its decision.

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US Joins Germany in Blaming Russia for 2023 Cyber Attack

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - The United States on Friday joined Germany in pinning the blame on Russia for an alleged 2023 cyber attack and urged Moscow to stop its "malicious cyber activities" in Europe.

"The United States strongly condemns the malicious cyber activity by Russia's General Staff Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU), also known as APT28, against Germany, Czechia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Sweden," State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said in a statement. "We join Germany in attributing specific malign activity carried out by APT28 that targeted a German political party."

Miller said that the US Department of Justice assisted Germany in remediating a network of

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hundreds of small routers that ATP28 allegedly used to conceal and carry out malicious cyber activity.

Earlier on Friday, the Russian Embassy in Berlin said that the German Foreign Ministry summoned Russia's charge d'affaires in Germany to protest in connection with the allegedly proven cyberattack on the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in 2023.

The embassy has dismissed the accusations of the involvement of Russian state structures in the attack and the activities of the ART 28 group in general as unfounded and groundless. Russia sees the German Foreign Ministry's demarche as "another unfriendly step aimed at fomenting anti-Russian sentiments in Germany and leading to further destruction of Russian-German relations," the mission said.

The West has on many occasions accused Moscow of interference in internal affairs and various cyberattacks. The Russian authorities, for their part, have denied any involvement in cyberattacks, expressing readiness to cooperate in the fight against hackers and conduct dialogue on cybersecurity.

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US Central Command Says Paused Gaza Aid Pier Construction Due to Sea Conditions

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - The US Central Command (CENTCOM) said on Friday that it temporarily halted work on constructing a humanitarian aid pier for the Gaza Strip due to environmental conditions at sea.

"Yesterday, [CENTCOM] temporarily paused offshore assembly of the floating pier in the vicinity of Gaza due to sea state considerations. Forecasted high winds and high sea swells caused unsafe conditions for Soldiers working on the surface of the partially constructed pier," CENTCOM said in a statement.

The pier and associated military vessels were transferred to the Port of Ashdod, where work will continue until the pier is fully assembled, the statement said.

On Tuesday, White House National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby said the pier would be ready to receive humanitarian goods in a matter of days.

The United States announced its plans to build the pier off the coast of Gaza to help facilitate the flow of aid into the Palestinian enclave.

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Canada Provides $48Mln in Humanitarian, Development Assistance to Lebanon - Global Affairs

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government has allocated C$65 million (US$48 million) in humanitarian and development assistance to Lebanon, Global Affairs Canada said on Friday.

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"Today, the Honorable Ahmed Hussen, Minister of International Development … announced that Canada is providing $65 million in international assistance funding, including $27 million [US$19.7 million] in humanitarian assistance funding and $38 million [US$27.7 million] in development assistance funding to Lebanon," Global Affairs Canada said in a statement.

The assistance funds will be shared between the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the UN Development Program (UNDP) and UN Women, the statement said.

The FAO will receive C$20 million (US$14.6 million) to improve the performance and organizational capacities of farmers, farmers' groups and micro, small and medium-size enterprises in selected fruit and vegetable value chains, to enhance value chain resilience and food security, the statement said.

UNDP will receive C$13 million (US$9.5 million) to improve the economic security, stability and prosperity of women-led micro, small and medium-size enterprises in sectors with high growth and export potential, the statement said.

UNDP and UN Women will receive C$5 million (US$3.6 million) to address constraints hindering women's participation and representation in decision-making processes and leadership positions in Lebanon, the statement added.

The Canadian government has provided Lebanon with more than C$475 million (US$347.3 million) in funding since 2016.

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US Marks World Press Day But Does Not Mention Journalist Gonzalo Lira Killed in Ukraine

UNITED NATIONS, May 3 (Sputnik) - US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said on Friday that the United States mourns on World Press Day journalists that have been killed in the line of duty and remembers those who are detained, specifically mentioning US reporters in the Gaza Strip, Syria and Russia, but failed to mention those, like Gonzalo Lira, who have been killed in Ukraine.

"The work of journalists has never been more crucial - for people around the world and for informing my work with the United Nations Security Council," Thomas-Greenfield said in a statement. "Today, we pause to mourn the dozens of journalists killed in Gaza and remember the hundreds more who have been unjustly detained around the world - including US citizens Evan Gershkovich, Austin Tice and Alsu Kurmasheva."

The United States calls on every nation to do more to protect journalists, Thomas-Greenfield said.

In February, the Russian Foreign Ministry said that the US government seems to consider the death of opposition blogger Alexey Navalny more important than the death of Lira. The latter, a dual US and Chilean citizen, was imprisoned and tortured in Ukraine for criticizing the US-backed regime of Volodymyr Zelenskyy and subsequently died in a Ukrainian prison.

Lira was arrested by the Ukrainian Security Service on May 5 on charges of justifying Russia's military operation in Ukraine and allegedly disseminating pro-Russian propaganda. Lira was released in July and later arrested again after he attempted to leave Ukraine by crossing the

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border with Hungary on a motorcycle.

The United Nations has declared May 3 to be World Press Day to raise awareness of the importance of freedom of the press as well as remind governments of their duty to respect the right to freedom of expression enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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US Adds 175,000 Jobs in April, Nearly Half From Month Ago, Boosting Rate Cut Hopes

(Adds details, context and comments in paras 5-17)

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - The United States reported a jobs growth of 175,000 for April, nearly half of what it did for the prior month and more than a quarter below forecasts, in a move that analysts said could expedite interest rate cuts by the Federal Reserve.

"Total nonfarm payroll employment increased by 175,000 in April, and the unemployment rate changed little at 3.9 percent," the US Bureau of Labor Statistics said.

Job gains occurred in health care, social assistance, and transportation and warehousing.

The Fed has said it will be encouraged to expedite rate cuts if US inflation, middling at 2.5% to 3.5%, came closer to its 2% target or jobs growth slowed significantly from monthly growth of some 200,000 to 300,000.

April's job additions were the smallest since November, when the number of new positions created were just 150,000. Historical non-farm payrolls show monthly jobs growth since then averaging at above 200,000 and reaching as high as 353,000 in February.

April's unemployment rate also rose, for the first time in four months, to 3.9% from 3.8% in March. That, however, did not change the country's "maximum employment" status — defined by the 4% standard set by the Fed and in force since December 2021.

Even so, money market traders ratcheted up bets for a 25 basis point-rate cut by September — after previously pushing forth such action till November — and wagered on another reduction before the end of the year.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell said earlier this week the one thing that could prod the central bank to ease rates in an inflationary environment was a meaningful slowdown in monthly jobs growth.

While job numbers on their own do not influence Fed rate decisions, they are a crucial indicator to the spending ability of Americans in an economy made up by more than 70% by consumer spending.

Economist Adam Button drew attention to April's 3.9% unemployment rate, saying it could move up and beyond the Fed's closely-watched 4% target, if jobs growth continued to underwhelm after this.

"Rises in the unemployment rate have historically run much higher once we get the kind of … rise we've had so far," Button said in a reaction to the April numbers posted on the ForexLive forum. "That's likely why Powell highlighted the unemployment rate on Wednesday, saying that it would take 'more than a couple' of ticks higher to get them to react. Well, this is one tick higher and we still have two more reports before the July FOMC and four more reports before the Sept [Fed decision on rates]."

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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 can't seem to easily reach its 2% target, with each update on price growth coming in a tick higher than expected.

The 5.25%-5.5% range for rates has been in place since July 2023. It represents the highest level rates have been in more than two decades.

Reinforcing the notion that it will take more than a modest slowdown in jobs to force a change in Fed rates, Michelle Bowman, one of the central bank's seven governors, said on Friday: "I remain willing to raise rate[s] at a future [Fed] meeting should the incoming data indicate that progress on inflation has stalled or reversed."

Bowman added that restoring price stability — Fed speak for lower inflation — should go hand-in-hand with its maximum employment target.

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ANALYSIS - US Cutoff of Russian Uranium Imports Viable But Costly to Replace

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - The United States' move toward banning imports of Russian uranium will be viable but replacing that supply will be costly to fund the necessary investment needed to meet the growing demand, a leading US uranium firm and expert told Sputnik.

The US Senate on Tuesday passed the Prohibiting Russian Uranium Imports Act, sending it to President Joe Biden's desk to be signed into law. The legislation bans US imports of unirradiated low-enriched uranium that is produced in Russia or by a Russian entity, and it includes measures to close loopholes. However, the legislation allows waivers should the United States determine that no alternative viable source of low-enriched uranium is available to sustain the continued operation of a US nuclear reactor or nuclear energy company, or if it also determines the importation of uranium is in the national interest. Any waiver issued by the US Energy Department must terminate by January 1, 2028, while the ban itself expires on December 31, 2040.

Scott Melbye, executive vice president of Uranium Energy Corporation and president of Uranium Producers of America, told Sputnik that the ban will absolutely mean the United States will boost uranium production in the coming years, but also noted that significant new investment will be needed for that to happen.

"The United States and its close allies have sufficient mineral resources, technologies and companies to regain this level of leadership, however, significant capital needs to be deployed to make that a reality," Melbye said.

The combination of the Prohibiting Russian Uranium Imports Act and the US Nuclear Fuel

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Security Act can provide the support and market certainty needed to encourage new investment to expand Western uranium production to include conversion and enrichment, he said.

"We are already beginning to see the revitalization of the American uranium industry with 5 members of the Uranium Producers of America having restarted operations, or are in the process of commencing production," Melbye said.

US uranium production has dropped significantly since 2000, reaching a high of nearly 5 million pounds of uranium concentrate produced in 2014, but dropping to about 27,000 pounds in 2023, according to the US Energy Information Agency (EIA). Uranium production in the United States was nearly non-existent in 2020 and 2021, data shows. By the end of 2023, there were only five plants in the United States producing uranium concentrate.

Melbye pointed out that while the United States works on ramping up its uranium production, Western allied nuclear energy programs will rely on each other to meet the current and growing demand for nuclear fuel.

The industry executive noted that the United States, Canada, Japan and the United States have plans to mobilize $4.2 billion to promote a reliable global nuclear energy supply chain, which presents strong export opportunities for American uranium.

The EIA notes that during 2022, 3% of the uranium loaded into US civilian nuclear power reactors was US-origin uranium and 97% was foreign-origin uranium. The United States purchased a total of 32.1 million pounds of uranium concentrate from abroad in 2022.

In 2022, Russia supplied almost a quarter of the enriched uranium used to fuel America's fleet of more than 90 commercial reactors.

Princeton University Professor Frank Von Hippel, who has served as the US Assistant Director for National Security in the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, also believes the plan is possible, but will require Western nuclear utilities to spend more.

"It would require the Western nuclear utilities to buy more uranium and to pay more for enrichment work," Von Hippel told Sputnik. "The US utilities, at least, are notoriously sensitive to even small cost increases. That is why it has taken two years for Congress to get to this point. And... they are allowing escape clauses if any utility really gets desperate."

The legislation is meant to cut off a source of revenue to Russia amid its special military operation in Ukraine, but Von Hippel said he does not expect it to make much of a difference considering Russia gets most of its foreign exchange from selling oil and gas.

Russian nuclear company Rosatom could be expected to lose some reactor sales and some fuel sales in some other countries because of the ban, but other countries that have already signed contracts for new reactors, and have them under construction, are locked in, Von Hippel added.

OPPOSITION FROM ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS

Sarah Fields, program director for environmental group Uranium Watch, said that although her group supports cutting off revenue to Russia, they also urge the United States to end its reliance on nuclear power.

"The United States should end its reliance on nuclear power, which is not a viable solution to climate change," Fields told Sputnik. "Uranium Watch does not support the expansion of uranium fuel production in the United States. With no national repository for long-term care and disposal of spent nuclear fuel, it is irresponsible and foolish to continue to extend the lives of existing nuclear reactors and support the development of new reactors."

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Fields further said that uranium mining is the least regulated part of the nuclear fuel chain and continues to pollute land, air, and water as well as expose rural and Indigenous communities to radiological emissions and contamination.

Melbye argues that much of the environmental opposition towards uranium mining is mistakenly based on observations of the deficient health, safety and environment practices of the 1950's to the 1970's, but that today's American uranium mining industry has no resemblance to that historical period.

"The green energy transition runs on mined minerals like nickel, cobalt, lithium, copper and uranium," Melbye said, adding that he's confident the United States will ensure it uses safe and responsible mining practices.

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Over 2,000 People Arrested at Pro-Palestinian Campus Protests in US - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) - More than 2,000 people have been arrested across the United States in the last three weeks at pro-Palestinian protests on college campuses, according to a tally compiled by NBC News.

At least 2,100 people were arrested from April 17 to Thursday evening, the report said.

In some cases, those arrested were current or former students. In other cases, they were not affiliated with the campuses in question, the report added. Faculty members were also among those arrested.

Numerous pro-Palestine demonstrations have rocked college campuses across the United States in recent days as protesters call for halt in 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 injuring 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 programs of study abroad at Israeli universities, among other demands.

President Joe Biden said on Thursday that anti-Semitism and hate speech have no place on US college campuses, but defended the right to peaceful protest.

Independent US Sen. Bernie Sanders has said that protests criticizing Israeli government policy and actions in the Gaza Strip do not constitute anti-Semitism.

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Almost 40% of Americans Says US Doing Too Much to Support Israel – Poll

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Sputnik) – Almost 40% of Americans think that the United States provides too much support for Israel in its war against Hamas, a new ABC News-Ipsos poll

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showed on Friday.

The poll found that almost four out of every 10 US citizens think the US is doing too much to support Israel in its war against Hamas, an increase from about three in 10 in January.

Approximately one-third of those polled said that Washington is doing too little to support Israel.

Only 29% of Republicans said that the US is doing too much in the conflict, while among Democrats this number grows up to 40%.

The poll also found that Americans believe former President Donald Trump is the best person to solve the Middle East conflict: 37% of Americans said they trust him, while 29% preferred Biden. However, one-third said they did not support either candidate on the issue.

The survey was conducted among 2,260 adults nationwide on April 25-30.

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