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5/13/24 Monday

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Egypt to Join South Africa's Genocide Case Against Israel

Since the October 7 Al-Aqsa Flood operation by Hamas, Israel has killed more than 35,000 Palestinians in Gaza, mostly women and children according to Palestinian authorities. According to official Israeli numbers, roughly 1,100 Israelis were killed in the surprise Hamas attack.

Egypt says it will seek permission to join South Africa's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which accuses Israel of violating its obligations under the Genocide Convention, the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said on Sunday.

The announcement by Egypt marks the third country to ask to join the South African case, which was brought in January. Earlier this year, Colombia and Turkiye also asked the court to join the case.

In the announcement, Egypt blamed escalating aggression by Israel against Palestinian civilians.

"The submission… comes in light of the worsening severity and scope of Israeli attacks against Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip, and the continued perpetration of systematic practices against the Palestinian people, including direct targeting of civilians and the destruction of infrastructure in the Strip, and pushing Palestinians to flee," the statement reads.

Last week, Israel seized the Palestinian side of the Rafah border crossing, which sits between Gaza and Egypt and was the only entry port into Gaza that was not controlled by Israel and was the primary entry point for aid flowing into Gaza. According to Palestinian authorities, Israel has held up aid at that point since. Egypt's Ministry of Foreign Affairs called the action a "perilous escalation [and] a threat to the lives of more than one million Palestinians who majorly depend on that crossing."

However, the ministry also said that the decision to join South Africa's case was already being studied before Israel started preparing to invade Rafah against the warnings of several countries including Egypt and Jordan, two key strategic partners of Israel in the region.

Egypt was the first country to normalize relations with Israel in 1979, with Jordan following in 1994. Turkiye, while not considered an Arab state, has a majority Muslim population and has normalized relations with Israel since 1950. That two of those nations, Turkiye and Egypt, have now formally accused Israel of genocide is a major blow to Israel's diplomatic goals.

Speaking, to local media, Egyptian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ahmed Abu Zeid said that Israel's actions in Gaza "led to an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, creating unlivable conditions in the Gaza Strip, blatantly violating international law, international humanitarian law, and the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War."

South Africa brought its case against Israel in January, accusing Israel of committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. In a preliminary hearing, the ICJ ruled that there was enough

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evidence of a plausible risk of genocide to order Israel to take actions to prevent genocide, though it did not order an immediate ceasefire.

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Israeli Whistleblowers Reveal Disturbing and Inhumane Conditions Palestinians Are Held In

Palestinian prisoners were handcuffed for so long that their limbs died and had to be amputated, three Israeli whistleblowers who spoke to US media revealed, detailing a litany of alleged abuses against prisoners held by Israel in the Sde Teiman military base.

The whistleblowers quoted by CNN said that the base has two parts, one which includes "intense physical restraint" and the other acting as a field hospital where prisoners are strapped to beds, blindfolded, put in diapers and fed through a tube.

"We were told they were not allowed to move," one whistleblower said. "They should sit upright. They're not allowed to talk. Not allowed to peek under their blindfold."

Prisoners were routinely beaten by guards the whistleblowers say, but the torture wasn't a part of any kind of interrogation program, according to the news agency. "(The beatings) were not done to gather intelligence. They were done out of revenge," the whistleblower claimed. "It was punishment for what they did on October 7 and punishment for behavior in the camp."

A prisoner from the camp claimed that even talking to another prisoner was enough to earn a beating by Israeli guards.

Israel purportedly holds thousands of Palestinians in its custody, many of them are held under a recently amended law that allows them to be held indefinitely and without trial.

One released prisoner, Dr. Mohammed Al-Ran, said he was held for weeks after Israel cleared him of any connections with Hamas so that he could serve as a liaison and translator between guards and prisoners. The IDF has denied holding prisoners for longer than necessary.

The Palestinian doctor also described his experience of being brought to the facility, saying he was stripped down to his underwear, handcuffed, blindfolded and thrown on top of other nearly naked prisoners in the back of a truck.

Al-Ran and a whistleblower also claimed the guards unleashed large dogs on sleeping prisoners while performing routine searches and lobbed a sound grenade into the enclosure before entering.

"It was a special unit of the military police that did the so-called search," the whistleblower said. "But really it was an excuse to hit them. It was a terrifying situation."

Sde Teiman is one of three military facilities that Israel has admitted to converting into a detention camp for Palestinians. Satellite photos show that Sde Teiman has been significantly expanded since October 7. Civilian hospitals refuse to treat injured Gazans, according to US media.

"The problem is, Gazans who are brought in are labeled as terrorists," a whistleblower explained "and it is very popular opinion over here that terrorists deserve to die. So, they do not deserve the same medical care as everyone else."

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The field hospital has also gained a reputation as “a paradise for interns” because they are allowed to learn by using Palestinian prisoners as guinea pigs, the article claimed.
“I was asked to learn how to do things on the patients, performing minor medical procedures that are totally outside my expertise,” a whistleblower said, noting that the procedures frequently were performed without anesthesia. He also alleged that he was told not to fill out any medical forms while working there, a practice that helps authority figures at the hospital avoid accountability.
The accusations by the whistleblowers and prisoners match the accusations made in a letter addressed to top Israeli officials by an Israeli doctor who worked at the facility. He described a facility where limb amputations caused by consistent handcuffing were unfortunately “a routine event.”
The IDF said that it handcuffs prisoners until they are determined not to be a security threat.
Al-Ran said that before he left, a fellow prisoner asked him to find his family in Gaza and warn them that it is better to become a martyr than be captured and held at Sde Teiman.
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Biden Does Not Trust Poor Polling Numbers – Reports

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden and many of his closest advisers do not believe that polling data showing him lagging behind are accurate, Axios reported on Tuesday, citing sources familiar with the matter.

Biden and his team are sincere in their belief that polls do not provide an adequate picture just a few months before the presidential election, and it is not public spin, the report said.

Many people close to the president say that polling simply does not reflect the president's support, it added.

Biden is trying to assure everyone the situation is actually much better than the polls show. Despite this, the president is still well briefed on them and delves into them, the report noted.

"We run strongest among likely voters in the polling data. And while the national polls basically have us (among) registered voters up by four, (among) likely voters we're up by more," Biden was quoted in the report as telling his donors last week.

A set of surveys conducted by The New York Times, Philadelphia Inquirer and Siena College polls showed on Monday that former President Donald Trump leads Biden in five out of six battleground states as the current administration faces problems with the economy and conflict in the Middle East. About half of registered voters in Nevada, Georgia, Michigan and Arizona said they were ready to vote for Trump, while only 38-42% of people surveyed there chose

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Biden, according to the surveys. In Pennsylvania, Trump leads Biden 47-44%.

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Israel Killed or Injured 31 Aid Workers in Gaza, Despite Knowing Their Locations - HRW

(Adds details in paras 4-12, background in para 13)

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - Israel has killed or injured at least 31 aid workers in Gaza since October in at least eight strikes on coordinates that were provided by aid groups to Israeli authorities in advance, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said on Tuesday.

"Israeli forces have carried out at least eight strikes on aid workers' convoys and premises in Gaza since October 2023, even though aid groups had provided their coordinates to the Israeli authorities to ensure their protection," HRW said. "Israeli authorities did not issue advance warnings to any of the aid organizations before the strikes, which killed or injured at least 31 aid workers and those with them."

The eight incidents include the attacks on the World Central Kitchen convoy on April 1, a Doctors Without Borders (MSF) convoy on November 18, a UNRWA guest house on December 9, an MSF shelter on January 8, an International Rescue Committee and Medical Aid for Palestine guest house on January 18, a UNRWA convoy on February 5, an MSF guest house on February 20, and a home sheltering an American Near East Refugee Aid Organization employee on March 8.

"Even if there had been military targets in the vicinity of some of the attack sites, given Israel's failure on each occasion to provide the civilians there with any kind of warning, these incidents highlight Israel's failure to protect aid workers and humanitarian operations, and larger disregard for their duty to minimize harm to civilians more generally," HRW said.

The eight attacks killed at least 15 people, and injured at least 16 others, according to HRW.

Aid workers have also been unable to leave Gaza since the closure of the Rafah crossing on May 7, the watchdog pointed out.

The watchdog said it has also found that Israel is using starvation as a method of warfare in Gaza.

"Pursuant to a policy set out by Israeli officials and carried out by Israeli forces, the Israeli authorities are deliberately blocking the delivery of water, food, and fuel, willfully impeding humanitarian assistance, apparently razing agricultural areas, and depriving the civilian population of objects indispensable to its survival," it said. "Children in Gaza have been dying from starvation-related complications."

HRW shared that it has requested specific information from Israel on the eight attacks in a letter sent on May 1, but has received no response.

Israel should make public the findings of investigations into attacks that have killed and injured aid workers, and into all other attacks that caused civilian casualties, HRW stressed.

In addition, HRW said, a group of recognized international experts should carry out an independent review of the humanitarian deconfliction process.

"Israel should give these experts full access to its processes, including the coordination and

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communications that occur before, during, and after such attacks as well as information regarding any alleged military target in the vicinity and any precautionary measures taken to mitigate harm," it said.

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 35,000 people have been killed so far by Israeli strikes in the Gaza Strip, local authorities said. More than 100 hostages are still believed to be held by Hamas in Gaza.

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US, UK Risk Complicity in War Crimes Unless Military Aid to Israel Suspended - HRW

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - The United States and the United Kingdom should stop providing military assistance to Israel or risk being complicit in war crimes, Human Rights Watch said on Tuesday.

Earlier in the day, HRW said that Israel has killed or injured at least 31 aid workers in Gaza since October in at least eight strikes on their convoys and premises, even though aid groups had provided their coordinates to the Israeli authorities in advance to ensure their protection.

"Israel's allies, including the United States and United Kingdom – both states sending the weapons parts apparently used in at least one of the documented attacks – should suspend military assistance and arms sales to Israel so long as its forces commit systematic and widespread laws-of-war violations against Palestinian civilians with impunity," HRW said.

Those governments that continue sending arms to Israel risk complicity in war crimes, the watchdog warned.

"They should also use their leverage, including through targeted sanctions, to press Israeli authorities to cease committing grave abuses and enable the provision of humanitarian aid and basic services in Gaza, in accordance with Israel's obligations under international law and recent International Court of Justice (ICJ) orders to Israel in the case brought by South Africa concerning alleged violations of the Genocide Convention," HRW said.

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Kennedy Jr. Organizes Rally in Austin, Number of Attendees Increased - Correspondent

AUSTIN, May 14 (Sputnik) - US presidential candidate Robert Kennedy Jr. held a rally in Austin, the capital of the US state of Texas, while the number of participants increased compared to his past events, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

With US primaries nearing the end, about 500 people attended the event on Monday, the correspondent reported, adding that earlier this year, Kennedy's campaign rallies gathered only about 60 participants.

Kennedy has challenged former US President Donald Trump to a debate at the Libertarian Party's national convention later this month, although Trump has yet to respond to the challenge.

Earlier this month, Kennedy's team published a new poll saying he would beat US President Joe Biden or Trump if they competed one-on-one.

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US House Panel to Direct Pentagon to Provide Report on Nuclear Detonations in Space

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - The US House Armed Services Committee in its fiscal year 2025 draft of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) directs the Defense Department to produce a report on the potential impact of nuclear weapons detonations in space intending to target US satellites.

"Therefore, the committee directs the Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Administrator for Nuclear Security, to provide a report to the House Committee on Armed Services not later than February 28, 2025, on the impacts of a detonation of a nuclear weapon in space," the draft text said on Monday.

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The committee is concerned about recent reports that Russia is developing a space-based capability to attack satellites in orbit using a nuclear weapon, the draft text said.
The committee also said it was concerned that such a blast would cause indiscriminate damage to US systems in orbit, the draft bill said.
The Defense Department would also be required to develop a new pilot project to start creating a "hybrid" space defense system that would integrate national security, commercial, civil and allied satellites in a single "mesh" network.
Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Moscow had always been categorically against deploying nuclear weapons in space and its position on this issue is clear and transparent. Russia's activities in space are no different from those of other countries, including the United States, and they know it, Putin added.

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Pentagon Declines to Comment on Recent Ukrainian Strikes on Belgorod

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - A US Defense Department official declined to comment on Ukraine's recent strikes targeting Belgorod and deferred to Ukrainian officials to speak on this matter.
"We will leave it to Ukrainian officials to comment on recent strikes they've conducted," the official told Sputnik on Monday.
The White House National Security Council did not respond to Sputnik's requests for comment on this matter.
The death toll from the collapse of a multi-story residential building in Russia's Belgorod due to Ukrainian shelling has risen to 19 as of Monday.
Earlier on Monday, the Russian Defense Ministry said that Russian air defense systems destroyed 12 Vilkha rockets and 12 drones over the Belgorod region, eight drones over the Kursk region, four air-launched Storm Shadow cruise missiles and seven drones over Crimea, while four more drones were intercepted over Lipetsk region.

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Biden Signs Bill Prohibiting US Imports of Russian Uranium - White House

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden has signed a bill that prohibits US imports of Russian uranium, the White House said in a press release.
"On Monday, May 13, 2024, the President signed into law...the 'Prohibiting Russian Uranium Imports Act,' which prohibits the importation of unirradiated, low-enriched uranium that is produced in the Russian Federation or by a Russian entity," the release said on Monday.
The US Congress recently passed the Prohibiting Russian Uranium Imports Act, sending it to

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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.

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Pentagon Concerned ULA Falling Short of US Demand to Counter China in Space - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - A senior US defense official recently expressed concern that United Launch Alliance, a joint venture between Boeing and Lockheed Martin, is falling short of living up to its expectations to meet US demands to counter China in space, the Washington Post reported, citing a letter it obtained.

The report said on Monday that US Air Force Assistant Secretary Frank Calvelli wrote in a letter to Boeing and Lockheed leadership that he is growing concerned with ULA's current inability to manufacture and launch its new Vulcan rocket at a rate that meets US national security needs.

Calvelli pointed out that there is currently a military satellite capability sitting on the ground due to delays with the Vulcan rocket program, the report said.

An Air Force spokesperson told Sputnik it could not provide a copy of the letter, adding that it was leaked to the Washington Post.

ULA launched the Vulcan rocket for the first time this year and needs to fly it a second time before it can begin flying US national security and intelligence missions, the report said, adding that the US aerospace firm hopes that the second certification launch will happen later this year.

Calvelli highlighted that the United States is especially concerned about this shortcoming as it faces an unprecedented strategic competitor in China, including in space.

"We have seen exponential growth of in-space activity, including counterspace threats, and our adversaries would seek to deny us the advantage we get from space during a potential conflict," Calvelli said.

ULA initially secured 60% of the Pentagon's contracts to launch national security payloads into space under a current contract known as Phase 2. SpaceX is responsible for the remaining 40% of US national security launches, but has dramatically outpaced ULA's capability. ULA launched three rockets last year using other rocket programs while SpaceX launched almost 100 using its reusable Falcon 9 rocket, mostly to build its Starlink internet satellite constellation. The companies are now competing for the next round of Pentagon contracts worth billions of dollars over several years, the report noted.

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US House Subcommittee Wants Army to Set Up Separate Drone Force - Draft 2025 NDAA Bill

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - The US House Subcommittee on Tactical Air and Land Forces has inserted a provision in its draft version of the fiscal year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that would give the Army its own separate branch to operate unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or drone forces.

The new Drone Corps would be independent of the Army's current 22 branches and would be responsible for "programs, projects, and activities involving small and medium unmanned aircraft; unmanned aircraft systems that include such aircraft; and counter-UAS systems," the subcommittee's version of the bill said.

The new Drone Corps would also be in command and control of systems to counter UAVs fielded by adversaries.

The US Army currently trains its UAV operators at the Maneuver Center of Excellence, the Joint Counter Small Unmanned Aerial Systems University and in regular combat brigades.

A mark-up of the subcommittee's bill, along with the draft versions of the other subcommittes, is expected by the full House Armed Services Committee on May 22.

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CORRECTION - US House Subcommittee Backs Pentagon Plan to Create Space Reserve - Draft NDAA Bill

(corrects to read Authorization Act, not Appropriations Act in lede)

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - The US House Strategic Forces Subcommittee has given its backing to a new Defense Department proposal to create a "Space Reserve" of civilian-use satellites that can be co-opted and switched to warfighting capabilities in the event of a conflict, a draft version of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2025 said.

"The Secretary of Defense may establish and carry out a program to be known as the 'Commercial Augmentation Space Reserve' (CASR) program," the draft NDAA bill said.

Under the proposal, the Defense Secretary would be authorized to include in a contract for the procurement of space products or services one or more provisions under which a qualified contractor had to agree to provide additional space products or services to the military on an as-needed basis.

The draft 2025 NDAA language would limit participation in CASR to US firms and US citizens.

A mark-up of the bill by the full House Armed Services Committee is expected on May 22.

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CORRECTION - US House 2025 NDAA Draft to Reduce Purchases of F-35 Jets From 58 to 48

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WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - The US House Armed Services Committee has inserted instructions in the next fiscal year's authorization bill that will limit the Defense Department to buying 48 new F-35 jets instead of the 58 initially authorized until the Pentagon can provide credible programs for fixing most of the troubled aircraft's many problems, a draft text of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2025 said.

"This section would permit the Secretary of Defense to accept delivery of only 48 of 58 F-35 aircraft authorized for procurement during fiscal year 2025," a section of the draft text, dubbed Limitation on Procurement of F-35 Aircraft Pending Certification on Improvements and Correction of Deficiencies, said.

The additional ten aircraft would be withheld until Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin submitted to the Congressional Defense Committees corrective action plans and acquisition strategies to alleviate many of the F-35 jet's continuing problems, the draft bill said.

Congress was requiring Austin to produce programs that would "improve research, development, testing, evaluation and production issues and deficiencies identified across multiple areas within the F-35 program enterprise," the draft text said.

The US Marines' variant of the jet is still failing to meet its minimum performance goals by 45% and the two other versions of the aircraft are also at least 13% below minimum performance requirements, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) said in a report earlier this month.

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PARP Founder Criticizes San Francisco for Spending $20Mln on Alcoholic Drinks for Homeless

SAN FRANCISCO, May 14 (Sputnik) - The city of San Francisco could have funded 60 drug treatment beds instead of spending $20 million on free alcoholic beverages for some two hundred homeless people, Pacific Alliance for Prevention and Recovery (PARP) founder Tom Wolf told Sputnik.

"It's not a good idea, not when you consider the fact that, over the last four years, San Francisco spent $20 million to basically service a total of a couple of hundred people… by giving them free vodka and beer. For that amount of money, we could have funded 60 drug treatment beds instead," Wolf said on Monday.

According to reports, San Francisco's Managed Alcohol Program (MAP) provided free alcoholic beverages like vodka and beer to several hundred homeless individuals despite offering medications and therapy to help reduce alcohol cravings.

San Francisco initiated MAP in 2020 in an effort to help vulnerable homeless individuals who are heavy drinkers and frequently require emergency services.

The program had started with ten beds and has expanded to 20, serving 55 clients and

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operating from a former hotel in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco.

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Blair Says Current Circumstances Not Right to Send 'NATO Boots' to Ukraine

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) – Canadian Minister of National Defense Bill Blair said that the circumstances for sending "NATO boots" to Ukraine were not right at the time but that he supported the establishment of a Ukraine NATO mission.

"One of the things that we have had a discussion … It was actually an idea floated by the United States, but it has been adopted by the Secretary-General [Jens Stoltenberg], which I support, is the establishment of a Ukraine NATO mission," Blair said.

The minister said the mission would not necessarily be located in Ukrainian territory due to issues that could result from it, but it would bring support and training assistance closer to the country. Blair however dismissed the possibility of sending NATO troops into Ukraine for the time being and instead said that for such a thing to happen, the circumstances would need to be different.

"There have been discussions as to whether or not we would deploy troops in Ukraine, but quite frankly, I think the circumstances would have to be substantially different than they are today," he said.

The minister nonetheless said he remained opened to collaborating with partners and allies in finding the best ways to address Ukrainian needs on the battlefield.

Western countries have been providing massive military and financial aid to Kiev since the start of Russia's military operation in Ukraine in February 2022. The Kremlin has consistently warned against continued arms deliveries to Kiev, saying it would lead to further escalation of the conflict. In April 2022, Russia sent a diplomatic note to all NATO countries on the issue of arms supplies to Ukraine. Acting Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov warned that any cargo containing weapons for Ukraine would become a legitimate target for Russia.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) -

WESTERN MILITARY AID TO UKRAINE

* The United States and its allies started moving air defenses into Ukraine and plan to deploy more air defense units in the country, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Monday.

* The United States will announce a new military aid package for Ukraine in the coming days as

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it seeks to accelerate the tempo of such deliveries, Sullivan said.
* Canada has committed more than C$14 billion (US$10.2 billion) in overall assistance to Ukraine but "must do more," Canadian Minister of National Defense Bill Blair said.

CHANGES IN RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT
* Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu will oversee the work of the Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation, but will not become its head, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Monday.
* The lower house of the Russian parliament approved Alexander Novak as deputy prime minister.
* The State Duma, the lower house of the Russian parliament, approved Denis Manturov as the first deputy prime minister.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE
* One person was killed and three others were injured after Ukraine attacked Russia's Kursk Region with drones, the regional government said on Monday.
* Three people were killed and four others were injured as a result of Ukraine shelling the city of Sorokyne, also known as Krasnodon, in the Luhansk People's Republic (LPR), LPR head Leonid Pasechnik said.
* Switzerland believes that Russia needs to be involved in the Ukraine peace process, as reaching peace without Moscow is impossible, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Pierre-Alain Elchinger told Sputnik.
* Ukraine lost 1,000 soldiers in the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) in the past 24 hours in battles with the Russian armed forces, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

MIDDLE EAST
* The Ministry of Health in the Gaza Strip on Monday warned of the imminent collapse of the healthcare system due to lack of fuel supplies amid constant shelling by Israel.
* The White House believes a hostage deal between Israel and Hamas is possible though the timing remains uncertain, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said.
* A United Nations vehicle was struck in the Gaza Strip on Monday, leaving one employee dead and another one seriously injured, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said.

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New Submarine Fleet to ‘Inevitably’ Take Canada Over NATO’s 2% Commitment – Blair

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) – Acquiring a new fleet of submarines would “inevitably” bring Canada beyond its two percent spending commitment to NATO, Canadian Minister of National Defense Bill Blair said on Monday.
In early April, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Canada was looking into the types of submarines, including nuclear-capable ones, that might be the most appropriate to patrol and

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protect the Arctic.

"I've got work to do and we're doing that work now. I think the investments in, for example, a new submarine fleet will inevitably take Canada well beyond 2% of our GDP spending," Blair said at an event hosted by the Atlantic Council at the Canadian embassy in Washington.

Blair made the remarks in reply to a question on Canada's long-time failure to meet its two percent defense spending commitment under NATO at a time when states such as Poland have even gone well beyond the initial pledge.

The minister further expressed his full support for the spending pledge Canada made to NATO, one that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has publicly committed to reach. However, Blair noted that it was difficult to convince the population that it was necessary.

"It's very difficult sometimes to convince governments or even your citizenry to meet a mathematical formula," Blair said. "So, what I've tried to do is articulate … the why."

In mid-April, the Ministry of National Defense released its defense policy update "Our North, Strong and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada's Defense." which responds to the significant global shifts that have occurred since Canada's comprehensive defense policy was announced in 2017.

Under the update, Canada plans to invest C$8.1 billion over the next five years, and C$73 billion over the next 20 years. The increased spending would bring the country's defense budget to 1.76% of its GDP by 2029-2030.

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Biden Prohibits China-Linked Company From Buying Property Near Air Force Base - Order

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden on Monday issued an order prohibiting the purchase of real estate property in the vicinity of a US Air Force base in the state of Wyoming by four companies, including MineOne Partners Limited, owned by Chinese nationals.

The Biden administration concluded that MineOne Partners Limited; British Virginia Islands-based MineOne Cloud Computing Investment LLP; Delaware-based MineOne Data Center LLC; and MineOne Wyoming Data Center LLC intended to use the real estate they acquired in June 2022 to conduct cryptocurrency mining within one mile of the Warren Air Force Base without obtaining special permission from the US government, according to the order.

"The proximity of the foreign-owned Real Estate to a strategic missile base and key element of America's nuclear triad, and the presence of specialized and foreign-sourced equipment potentially capable of facilitating surveillance and espionage activities, presents a national security risk to the United States," the order said. "The Transaction is hereby prohibited."

The order prescribes the purchasers of the property to divest from it no later than 120 days after the date of the order.

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

Canada Has Not Authorized Any Military Equipment Exports to Israel in 2024 - Defense Chief

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - Canada has not authorized the transfer of any military equipment to Israel this year but will follow a rigorous vetting regime if Ottawa decides to do so, Canadian Minister of National Defense Bill Blair said on Monday.

"Since the beginning of this year, Canada has not issued any new export permits for military equipment to Israel. We are also watching very carefully as the conflict continues there to ensure compliance with our very rigorous export regime before we resume any future assistances," Blair told reporters during his visit to Washington.

Earlier on Monday, Blair met with his US counterpart Lloyd Austin and discussed the situation in the Gaza Strip. Blair reiterated the two countries' shared vision to increase the humanitarian aid to Gaza as well as help civilians find a safe place ahead of Israel's potential major military ground operation in Rafah.

The United States has been the primary supplier of military aid to Israel, facilitating its military operation in Gaza since October 8.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said earlier on Monday that the United States does not prevent the transfer of any weapons to Israel with the exception of some types of bombs.

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Blinken Will Travel to Ukraine This Week - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will travel to Ukraine later this week, Politico reported on Monday, citing sources familiar with the matter.

The report said that although it's unclear when Blinken will arrive in Ukraine, one source noted that several roads in Kiev will be blocked off on Tuesday and Wednesday.

The State Department did not immediately respond to Sputnik's request for comment on this matter.

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OpenAI Announces Upgrade to ChatGPT That Enhances Use, Capability - Statement

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - US tech company OpenAI announced on Monday that it made a significant upgrade to the software of its artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot product Chat GPT, which will enhance its capability for users.

"GPT-4o is a step towards much more natural human-computer interaction — it accepts as

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input any combination of text, audio, and image and generates any combination of text, audio, and image outputs," the company said in a statement.

GPT-4o can respond to audio inputs in as little as 232 milliseconds, with an average of 320 milliseconds, which is similar to human response time in a conversation, according to the company.

The company said it is barely "scratching the surface" of exploring what this new model can do and its limitations.

Open AI's ChatGPT gained popularity after its launch in November 2022, attracting its first million users in less than a week. In January 2023, Microsoft said it would invest "billions of dollars" in the US tech firm.

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Sullivan Says Ally Agrees to Supply Patriot System to Ukraine

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) — White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Monday that he has secured an ally's commitment to provide a Patriot air defense system to Ukraine.

"One of the things I do every single day is talk to at least one ally, if not multiple, about getting more Patriot batteries into Ukraine and I think we recently had some good news from an ally about getting one in," Sullivan said.

Sullivan added that the US is not only seeking additional Patriot systems but is also exploring other defense systems, aiming to leverage allied capabilities to meet broader air defense needs while potentially assisting those allies in return.

Last week, US President Joe Biden authorized the drawdown of up to $400 million in defense items for Ukraine. The package includes munitions for Patriot air defense systems and additional High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS).

The package comes following the passage of a multi-billion-dollar Ukraine aid bill by the US Congress last month.

The Kremlin has consistently warned against continued arms deliveries to Kiev, saying it would lead to further escalation of the conflict. In April 2022, Russia sent a diplomatic note to all NATO countries on the issue of arms supplies to Ukraine. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov warned that any cargo containing weapons for Ukraine would become a legitimate target for Russia.

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US Death Rate Projected to Exceed Births in 2040 - CBO

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WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - The death rate in the United States is projected to exceed the number of births in 2040, Director of the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) Phillip Swagel said on Monday.

"In CBO projections, deaths exceed births beginning in 2040," Swagel said during a discussion at the American Enterprise Institute.

As a result of this process, the US population would shrink thereafter without a "support" of immigration, Swagel said.

Net immigration and birth rates are to decrease between 2024 and 2029, according to CBO data.

Swagel also said that higher-than-expected migration became the major driver of the labor force i the United States.

The CBO has increased its projection of the size of the labor market in 2033 by 5.2 million people from last year, Swagel added.

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RFK Jr. Files Lawsuit Against Meta Alleging Election Interference - Court Documents

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - Independent presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. filed a lawsuit against US social media company Meta (banned in Russia for extremism) and its founder Mark Zuckerberg over alleged interference in the US election, court documents revealed on Monday.

"In violation of the First Amendment, of civil rights law dating back to the Civil War, and of the American people's fundamental right to a presidential election decided by voters, not by trillion-dollar corporations, the social media giant Meta Platforms is brazenly censoring speech by and supportive of Independent presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., and lying to the public about it," the lawsuit stated.

The lawsuit alleges that Meta recently censored a film put out by American Values 2024, a political action committee supporting Kennedy's candidacy. The film is about Kennedy's life, his environmental activism, and his reason for running for US president.

Meta users could not share or post the film on Facebook or Instagram after it was released on May 3, according to the lawsuit.

The lawsuit adds that when Meta users were trying to post about the film, they were warned and threatened with adverse consequences for posting about or sharing it.

Kennedy and the political action committee seek compensatory and punitive damages, and also an injunction barring Meta from continuing to interfere with the sharing and posting of the film titled "Who is Bobby Kennedy?"

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Assistance for Ukraine Must Bring Kiev Closer to Peace, Not to Wider Conflict - Blair

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - NATO member states ought to do more in support of Ukraine but ensure that additional assistance brings Kiev closer to peace and not into a wider conflict, Canadian Minister of National Defense Bill Blair said on Monday.

"There is a pretty important discussion taking place about how we could do more and the fact that we must do more, but we're also making sure that what we do does not bring us into wider conflict, but leads us closer to peace," Blair said at an event hosted by the Atlantic Council at the Canadian embassy in Washington.

When questioned on whether there was anything more NATO could do to immediately assist Ukraine, Blair replied that there a constant necessity to find "better and more urgent" ways to address what Kiev needs in support of its war effort.

Since the onset of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, Canada has committed more than C$4 billion (US$2.9 billion) in military aid to Ukraine. The aid includes the deliveries of Leopard 2 main battle tanks, armored combat support vehicles, anti-tank weapons, drones as well as M777 howitzers and associated ammunition, among other items.

The Kremlin has consistently warned against continued arms deliveries to Kiev, saying it would lead to further escalation of the conflict. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has warned that any military cargo will be a legitimate target for Russia.

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White House Says Israel-Hamas Hostage Deal Achievable, Uncertain When

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - The White House believes a hostage deal between Israel and Hamas is possible though the timing remains uncertain, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Monday.

"I believe we can achieve that [hostage deal]. I cannot tell you when," Sullivan said during a press briefing.

Last week, the Israeli military started a military operation in the eastern parts of Rafah and took control of the Gaza side of the Rafah crossing with Egypt. Hamas said it had agreed to the provisions of a ceasefire deal proposed by Egypt and Qatar mediators, but Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the truce deal unacceptable. Over a million people are believed to be sheltering in the city.

While Hamas is demanding a complete ceasefire and the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the enclave, Israel says it is ready for a temporary ceasefire but still plans to achieve all its military goals, including the elimination of Hamas' military and political potential.

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US Vice President Harris Uses Expletive in Remarks to Asian Pacific Americans

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Kamala Harris used an expletive during remarks to young people at an Asian Pacific American Institute summit on Monday.

"We have to know that sometimes people will open the door for you and leave it open. Sometimes they won't, and then you need to kick that f***ing door down," Harris said.

Harris subsequently asked the audience to excuse her vulgar language.

Nevertheless, the moderator of the discussion suggested making t-shirts with Harris' statement.

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Canada Committed Over $10Bln in Aid for Ukraine But 'Must Do More' - Defense Minister

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - Canada has committed more than C$14 billion (US$10.2 billion) in overall assistance to Ukraine but "must do more," Canadian Minister of National Defense Bill Blair said on Monday.

Blair made the comment during an event hosted by the Atlantic Council at the Canadian embassy in Washington.

"We will continue to support Ukraine in its historic fight. Canada has committed nearly C$14 billion in total aid to Ukraine, but we must keep going and we must do more," Blair said.

Ottawa would continue to support Kiev in what he said was a defense of their "sovereignty and democracy."

Canada will find ways to address the Ukrainian military's "urgent requirements" for artillery ammunition and air defense systems, he added.

On Friday, Blair announced that Canada would contribute C$76 million (US$55.6 million) to the German-led Immediate Action on Air Defense for Ukraine. In early March, the minister said Ottawa would invest C$4.4 million (US$3.3 million) in three ammunition manufacturers to ramp up the production of 155mm artillery shells in support of NATO and Ukraine.

Since the onset of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, Canada has committed more than C$4 billion (US$2.9 billion) in military assistance to Ukraine. The Kremlin has consistently warned against continued arms deliveries to Kiev, saying it would lead to further escalation of the conflict. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has warned that any military cargo will be a legitimate target for Russia.

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Sullivan Calls Ukraine's Speculations About Russian Gov't Changes 'Not Unreasonable'

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - The speculations by the Ukrainian government that the

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changes in the Russian government show Moscow's plans to reconfigure its economy for defense needs are "not unreasonable," US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Monday.

"I've seen that speculation from the Ukrainians. It's not unreasonable, but I can't draw any conclusions at this point. We'll have to see what unfolds," Sullivan said during a press conference.

On Sunday, Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed appointing Deputy Prime Minister Andrei Belousov as minister of defense. Belousov is to replace current Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, who was appointed the position chief of Russia's Security Council.

"It's an opaque system. It's run by one man Vladimir Putin. He calls the shots, he may move around professionals into various roles," Sullivan said. "But at the end of the day, he seems bound and determined to continue to try to inflict a brutal war of aggression on Ukraine."

Sullivan added that the United States and its allies will take whatever support comes in for Ukraine and "see what happens."

Ukraine National Security and Defense Council Secretary Alexander Litvinenko called Belousov an experienced manager who could ensure a long-term war of attrition against Ukraine.

In addition, Litvinenko said that Belousov has "serious connections" in Russian intelligence.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said with respect to the fact that Belousov is a civilian that he has headed the Russian Ministry of Economic Development for years and also served as Putin's councilor on economic issues.

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US Justice Department Says Will Pursue Tougher Sentences for Crimes Committed With AI

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - The US Justice Department will seek tougher sentences against people who commit crimes with the assistance of artificial intelligence (AI) technology, Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco said on Monday.

"Over the past several years, our democratic process and the public servants who protect it have been under attack like never before, as threats evolve and spread," Monaco said during remarks ahead of an Election Threats Task Force meeting. "So, in these cases, where threat actors use advanced technology — like artificial intelligence — to make crimes more dangerous and more impactful, the Department of Justice will seek enhanced sentences."

Advanced tools like AI provide criminal actors with new ways to hide their identities and obscure sources of violent threats, Monaco said.

AI also provides criminal actors with new means to misinform and threaten voters using so-called deepfakes, cloned audio and altered video, Monaco said.

The Election Threats Task Force is adapting and will meet new challenges head on, Monaco said.

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

US to Announce New Military Aid Package for Ukraine in Coming Days - White House

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - The United States will announce a new military aid package for Ukraine in the coming days as it seeks to accelerate the tempo of such deliveries, White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said on Monday.

"We are going to have another, what we call PDA Presidential Drawdown Authority package, just in the coming days because we're trying to really accelerate the tempo of the deliveries," Sullivan said during a press briefing.

Last week, the United States announced an additional $400 million aid package for Ukraine. The United States was unable to send Ukraine any military assistance over the last six months after funding ran out in December and Republicans in the US House of Representatives delayed approval of new funding. However, new funding was eventually approved in late April.

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US and Allies Have Started Moving Air Defenses to Ukraine, Intend to Move More - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - The United States and its allies started moving air defenses into Ukraine and plan to deploy more air defense units into the country, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Monday.

"We have started moving air defense to them, we intend to move more," Sullivan said during a press briefing.

Sullivan, without getting into specifics, added that some military equipment from recently announced US aid packages is already on the battlefield.

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US Continues to Send Military Aid to Israel, New Funding Despite Pause - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - The United States continues to send military assistance to Israel and will ensure it receives the $17 billion approved in a new US foreign aid package despite a temporary pause on US shipments of certain bombs, White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said on Monday.

"We are continuing to send military assistance and we will ensure that Israel receives the full amount provided in the supplemental," Sullivan said during a press briefing. "We have paused the shipment of 2,000 pound bombs because we do not believe they should be dropped in densely populated cities."

Sullivan added that the Biden administration is talking to the Israeli government about its

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concerns, reiterating that it still believes it would be a mistake to launch a major military operation into Rafah because of the risk to a large civilian population in the area.

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OpenAI Announces Upgrade to ChatGPT That Enhances Use, Capability - Statement

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The company said it is barely "scratching the surface" of exploring what this new model can do and its limitations.

Open AI's ChatGPT gained popularity after its launch in November 2022, attracting its first million users in less than a week. In January 2023, Microsoft said it would invest "billions of dollars" in the US tech firm.

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US Army Major Says Resigning in Protest of 'Unqualified' US Support for Israel

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - US Army Major Harrison Mann said on Monday that he is resigning from his position in protest of the United States' support for Israel, amid its military operation in the Gaza Strip.

Mann was assigned to the Defense Intelligence Agency's Middle East and Africa Regional Center, according to his public resume.

"I have great admiration for the work this center does to help policymakers make the best-informed decisions possible… But this office does not only inform policy, it facilitates, and at times, directly executes policy. And the policy that has never been far from my mind for the past six months is the nearly unqualified support for the government of Israel, which has enabled and empowered the killing and starvation of tens of thousands of innocent Palestinians," Mann said in a resignation letter posted to professional networking platform LinkedIn.

Mann said that his work at the Defense Intelligence Agency has caused him shame and guilt. It became difficult to defend the outcomes of the US' Israel policy, Mann said.

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Mann said that as a descendent of European Jews, he was raised in an unforgiving moral environment as it relates to bearing responsibility for ethnic cleansing, where the inadequacy of the excuse of “just following orders” was often repeated.

Mann’s resignation comes in the wake of a large-scale attack on Israel by Palestinian organization Hamas on October 7, 2023. Nearly 1,200 Israeli civilians and military personnel were killed and some 240 others abducted in the attack.

Israel subsequently launched a military operation in the Gaza Strip, which has killed more than 35,000 people in the Palestinian enclave, according to local authorities. The US has provided support to Israel during the conflict, although US President Joe Biden paused the delivery of certain weapons to Israel over its prospective operation in the Gaza Strip city of Rafah.

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UPDATE-Nebenzia Says Israeli Operation in Rafah Will Have Negative Impact on Red Sea

(updates paras 4-5)

UNITED NATIONS, May 13 (Sputnik) -Israel’s planned operations in Rafah could harm the situation in the Red Sea, Russian Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said on Monday.

"… Knowing the fundamental position of the Houthis condemning Israeli actions against Palestinian civilians, there is no doubt that this will have an impact on the situation in Yemen's surrounding waters," Nebenzia said in the UN Security Council chamber during a meeting on Yemen.

In addition, Nebenzia said that Russia is in favor of "free and safe" navigation.

Nebenzia also said that Western states disregard international law by advancing their agendas purely based on profit.

"Through their actions, they are just bolstering their reputation as total wheeler-dealers, who have no compunction about trampling on international law if it prevents them from making a profit or implementing their mercenary, geopolitical agenda," Nebenzia said in the UN Security Council chamber during a meeting on Yemen.

Last week, Houthi military spokesman Yahya Saree said the movement was ready to attack any ships heading to Israel from the Mediterranean Sea, as well as expand operations in the Red and Arabian Seas and the Indian Ocean against ships linked to Israel or bound for its ports if the Jewish state launches an offensive in the city of Rafah.

Yemen's Houthi rebels vowed in November 2023 to attack any ships associated with Israel until it halts military actions in the Gaza Strip. The attacks prompted the US to form a multinational coalition to protect shipping in the area, as well as to strike Houthi targets on the ground.

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Taiwan Should Increase Security Preparation, Economic Integration – Representative to US

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) – Taiwan's new de facto ambassador to the United States acknowledged on Monday that Taiwan needed to increase its security preparations against a possible Chinese invasion while noting that global economic integration was also an important defense.

"We are well aware that we need to increase our security preparations against any eventual or possible Chinese aggression, but also it's important to be integrated economically in the world…[the more] integration we do with the world, the better we are protected against mainland Chinese aggression," said Alexander Yui Tah-ray, representative of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the US.

Yui added that despite the limited formal recognition of Taiwan as the Republic of China, the democratic self-governing island's "presence in the world is felt." He said that the effects of a war in Taiwan on "the world economy, to world trade, and to the world as a whole" would be "far more reaching than what is happening in Ukraine now."

He reiterated Taiwan's interest in joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF), and noted that Taiwan has just concluded the second stage of negotiations with the US on the US-Taiwan Initiative on 21st Century Trade.

Taiwan has been governed independently of mainland China since 1949. Beijing views the island as its province, while Taiwan — a territory with its own elected government — maintains that it is an autonomous country but stops short of declaring independence. Beijing opposes any official contact of foreign states with Taipei and considers Chinese sovereignty over the island indisputable.

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UK Selects 90 Organizations to Compete for Hypersonic Support Contracts - Defence Ministry

MOSCOW, May 13 (Sputnik) - The UK Defence Ministry's Defence Equipment and Support agency said on Monday that it selected 90 organizations to compete for contracts in support of the United Kingdom's development of hypersonic capabilities.

"Ninety organisations – large and small – from across industry and academia have secured a place on a £1 billion [approximately $1.256 billion] transformational Hypersonic Technologies and Capability Development Framework (HTCDF) agreement set up to rapidly develop advanced hypersonic missile capabilities for the UK," the agency said in a statement.

The organizations are now eligible to bid for contracts, the awarding of which will be managed by commercial experts at the agency, the statement said. The HTCDF agreement was designed to provide a responsive, agile path to market to facilitate capability realization at pace, the statement said.

The agreement will re-open to new suppliers every six to 12 months to ensure that the Defence Ministry can continue to draw upon new technologies and emerging market capabilities, the

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statement said.
Hypersonics will be a “landmark capability” of the future, UK Defence Procurement Minister James Cartlidge said in the statement. It is essential that the UK keep pace with the developments of its adversaries, Cartilage added.

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Palestine GA Resolution Shows Security Council at Odds With Intl Community - Turkish Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, May 13 (Sputnik) - The UN General Assembly's vote on Palestinian membership in the world body shows that the Security Council is increasingly at odds with the international community, Türkiye's permanent representative to UN Ahmet Yildiz said on Monday.
“The adoption of this resolution not only marks a significant milestone in Palestine’s pursuit of statehood but also highlights the growing disparity between the Security Council and the collective voice of the international community ,” Yildiz said.
On Friday, the UN General Assembly voted 143-9 in favor of a resolution that expanded the rights of Palestine in the world body and recommended that the Security Council reconsider its request for full membership.
The vote came after the United States in April vetoed an Algerian resolution at the UN Security Council recommending that the General Assembly admit Palestine to the UN. The United Kingdom and Switzerland abstained, while the remaining members of the UN Security Council voted in favor of the resolution.
Palestine has held permanent observer status at the UN since 2012, while Israel has been a full member of the organization since 1948.

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Nebenzia Says Israeli Operation in Rafah Will Have Negative Impact on Red Sea

UNITED NATIONS, May 13 (Sputnik) - Israel’s planned operations in Rafah could harm the situation in the Red Sea, Russian Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said on Monday.
“… Knowing the fundamental position of the Houthis condemning Israeli actions against Palestinian civilians, there is no doubt that this will have an impact on the situation in Yemen's surrounding waters,” Nebenzia said in the UN Security Council chamber during a meeting on Yemen.
In addition, Nebenzia said that Russia is in favor of “free and safe” navigation.
Last week, Houthi military spokesman Yahya Saree said the movement was ready to attack any ships heading to Israel from the Mediterranean Sea, as well as expand operations in the Red and Arabian Seas and the Indian Ocean against ships linked to Israel or bound for its ports if the

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Jewish state launches an offensive in the city of Rafah.

Yemen's Houthi rebels vowed in November 2023 to attack any ships associated with Israel until it halts military actions in the Gaza Strip. The attacks prompted the US to form a multinational coalition to protect shipping in the area, as well as to strike Houthi targets on the ground.

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Yellen Says China Will Hopefully Not Respond to US Tariffs But Admits Response Possible

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - The United States hopes China will not resort to a tit-for-tat over upcoming Biden administration actions to counter Chinese overcapacity in strategic industries, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Monday.

“Hopefully we will not see a significant Chinese response, but that's always a possibility,” Yellen told Bloomberg Television when asked if there was a likelihood of Beijing retaliating to any US moves.

The Biden administration is reportedly set to quadruple tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles from roughly 25% to 100%. Yellen did not confirm the Biden administration's plans to unveil the tariffs, but said, "anything we do should be targeted to our concerns and not broad-based.”

Yellen’s remarks built upon those she made during a trip to China in April, where she said the United States "will not accept" underpriced Chinese goods flooding the global market.

She said Biden had no intent to let China dominate strategic industries such as semiconductors and clean energy via overwhelming output.

“President Biden finds it unacceptable, as I do, to be completely dependent on China in these areas and he wants to make sure [of that], given that China is really not playing by the rules, in the sense they have enormous subsidies in critical areas of advanced manufacturing that has resulted in overcapacity,” Yellen said.

The Biden administration has floated the idea of enhancing anti-dumping tariffs against China for some time, while it looks for ways to provide targeted stimulus to its own industries via the so-called Inflation Reduction Act. Biden has gone as far as calling for a tripling of tariffs on Chinese steel and aluminum.

Responding to reports of impending US tariffs, China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian on Friday said tariffs previously imposed by the US on China had severely disrupted normal trade and economic exchanges between China and the US.

He said that rather than correcting these "wrong practices," the US was continuing to "politicize trade issues," and also warned that China would "take all necessary measures to defend its rights and interests."

US-owned Tesla and China’s BYD are currently the world's largest electric-vehicle makers, becoming direct competitors in the Chinese market as well as much of the world outside the United States. Other EV startups from China, such as Nio, Li Auto and Xpeng, are also gearing up for a slice of the global market. The rivalry comes as Tesla is already losing sales momentum in the United States — it delivered fewer cars in the first-quarter of this year than even the most bearish estimates of Wall Street analysts despite its own price cuts.

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Biden has insisted that his administration was not at a trade war with Beijing despite the punitive new tariffs proposed on Chinese steel and aluminum. China reportedly accounts for about half of global steel production, while exporting the metal at a significantly lower cost than US prices. The average US tariff on Chinese steel and aluminum is now 7.5%.

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US Heading to Fiscal 'Train Wreck' in 2025 Due to Large Debt, Spending Surges - Malpass

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) – The large national debt and excessive spending policies of the US government could lead to a fiscal "train wreck" as soon as 2025, former World Bank President David Malpass said on Monday.

"All signs point to a fiscal train wreck in 2025 when the debt limit is triggered, spending surges, and tax rates jump," Malpass said in a post on LinkedIn.

Malpass noted that the explosion of US government debt is draining and concentrating global resources into a narrow set of US government priorities and beneficiaries.

The key problems of the American economy are the lack of new investment amid a huge growth in public spending resulting in an unprecedented debt-to-GDP ratio as well as short-term financing crowding out small businesses, the post said.

According to the International Monetary Fund, the US public debt will exceed 123% of GDP in 2024 and reach nearly 134% in 2029.

The US debt currently exceeds $34.5 trillion.

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Ex-World Bank President Says Global Institutions, US Failing Due to Their Weakness

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) – The weakness of global institutions and the United States is leading to economic decline and allegedly to the surrender of sub-Saharan Africa to Islamic fundamentalists, China, and Russia, former World Bank President David Malpass said on Monday.

"US weakness worldwide is leading to the surrender of sub-Saharan Africa to Islamic fundamentalists, China, and Russia," Malpass said in a post on LinkedIn. "Global institutions and the US role in them are failing in terms of the reversals in development and the increase in conflicts."

According to Malpass, the past months have been "a disastrous time" for economics, geopolitics, and global institutions, with the United States and its allies letting down their partners who depend on them, including Niger in Africa.

The US weakness stems primarily from Washington's flagrant tax-and-spend policy, which

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creates an affordability crisis, Malpass noted.

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IMF, Argentina Reach Staff-Level Agreement on Loan Review - Statement

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) – The International Monetary Fund announced on Monday that it has reached a staff-level agreement with Argentina on the eighth review of the country's $44 billion loan program.

"IMF staff and the Argentine authorities have reached a staff-level agreement on the eighth review under Argentina's EFF [Extended Fund Facility Arrangement] arrangement. Subject to approval by the IMF Executive Board, Argentina would have access to disbursement in line with the program," the statement said.

IMF's mission chief, Luis Cubeddu, said that the two sides reached an agreement based on Argentina's better-than-expected performance in the first quarter. The IMF Executive Board will consider it in the coming weeks.

"Program targets and conditionality have been updated to reflect positive recent developments, a new economic forecast, and progress on structural reforms. Financing assurances are also being secured from official creditors," Cubeddu said.

He also pointed out that ongoing and carefully sequenced micro-level reforms and deregulation are expected to underpin the projected economic recovery, as well as unlock bottlenecks to productivity, private investment, and formal employment.

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Canada's Joly to Visit Cyprus, Lebanon, Turkey, Greece - Foreign Ministry

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) – Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs Melanie Joly will depart for a five-day trip to Cyprus, Lebanon, Turkey, and Greece where she is set to discuss regional matters, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) said on Monday.

"The Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Foreign Affairs, today announced that she will be travelling to Cyprus, Lebanon, Türkiye and Greece from May 13 to 17, 2024," GAC said in a statement.

In Cyprus, Joly will meet with her counterpart, Constantinos Kombos to exchange views on shared priorities such as regional security and increasing supplies of humanitarian assistance to Gaza, GAC said. The minister will also mark the 60th anniversary of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) and Ottawa's contribution to it, the ministry added.

While in Lebanon, Joly will meet with senior government officials and stakeholders, GAC said. She will also reaffirm Ottawa's support for Lebanon, its people and the challenges facing them, according to the statement.

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In Turkey, the minister will meet with Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan to explore avenues for enhanced cooperation between both countries, GAC said. Joly will hold talks with government officials about "long-term peace and regional stability in the South Caucasus."

After Turkey, Joly will head to Greece to meet with her counterpart Giorgos Gerapetritis, GAC said. Both ministers will seek to deepen the long-standing bilateral relation and build on the achievements made during the recent visit to Canada by Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, the ministry said.

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US Death Rate Projected to Exceed Births in 2040 - CBO

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - The death rate in the United States is projected to exceed the number of births in 2040, Director of the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) Phillip Swagel said on Monday.

"In CBO projections, deaths exceed births beginning in 2040," Swagel said during a discussion at the American Enterprise Institute.

As a result of this process, the US population would shrink thereafter without a "support" of immigration, Swagel said.

Net immigration and birth rates are to decrease between 2024 and 2029, according to CBO data.

Swagel also said that higher-than-expected migration became the major driver of the labor force i the United States.

The CBO has increased its projection of the size of the labor market in 2033 by 5.2 million people from last year, Swagel added.

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ANALYSIS - Veteran Diplomats Say Biden Only Bluffing in Threat to Halt Weapons Flow to Israel

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden's threat to withhold weapons from Israel if it goes ahead with a major offensive in Rafah is an election bluff to prevent defections from the Democratic Party amid plunging public support for the Gaza war, two former Western ambassadors to Arab nations and an ex-CIA station chief in Syria told Sputnik.

Last week, Biden said Washington would restrict the supply of weapons to Israel if the latter launched a major military incursion into Rafah. The warning came as the Israeli army started a military operation in the eastern parts of Rafah and took control of the Gaza side of the Rafah crossing with Egypt.

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The US has also paused one shipment of weapons for Israel consisting of 1,800 2,000-pound bombs and 1,700 500-pound bombs. A State Department report published on Friday found that it is "reasonable to assess" that US-provided defense articles have been used by Israeli security forces since October 7 "in instances inconsistent with its IHL obligations or with established best practices for mitigating civilian harm," but stopped short of reaching any definitive conclusion.

POLITICAL STUNT

"[Biden's warning] must be seen as a political stunt rather than a change in policy," former US ambassador to Saudi Arabia Chas Freeman said. "This is part of a slow administration retreat from all-out support for the genocide in Gaza, but it is limited to certain particularly inhumane weapons, tentative, temporary, and offset by continuing grants of military aid of other sorts to Israel," Freeman said.

Biden recognized the erosion of his support over the Gaza issue but had acted too little and too late to end or reverse that process, Freeman observed.

"The retreat is a half-hearted and grudging response to the rising demands of young voters and other previous constituents for an end to the US enablement of genocide in Palestine," he said.

Significant portions of the Democratic Party base had already been alienated from President Biden, Freeman pointed out.

Nor would Biden's actions succeed in influencing or restraining Israeli policy, Freeman predicted.

"Few imagine that will have a serious effect on Israeli policies aimed at eliminating the Palestinian presence in Palestine," he said.

CHANGES NOTHING

Former UK Ambassador to Syria and veteran diplomat Peter Ford agreed that Biden's maneuvers in reality changed nothing.

"The move to restrict military supplies to Israel is cosmetic, a fake gesture by a flailing and failing President. Its aim is more to buy off a US public increasingly revolted by the US-supported savagery they see with their own eyes, than to restrain America's Middle East attack dog," he said.

The practical effect on the Israeli military of withholding 2,000-pound bombs will be negligible, Ford pointed out.

"Israel has stockpiles enough of bombs not to need more of a vile US weapon for which causing massive civilian suffering is not a flaw but a feature. It also has phalanxes of tanks ready to flatten what is left of East Rafah after the waves of bombing," he said.

Biden had taken no action to restrain the Israeli military when they had inflicted thousands of civilian casualties in their previous operations in Gaza City and Khan Yunis, Ford pointed out.

INCREASING OUTRAGE

However, now Biden is reacting not to Israel but to the rapidly changing political conditions and increasing outrage over the war back in the United States, Ford pointed out.

"What has changed? What's changed is the student revolt across America, putting Biden's already dim re-election prospects into even deeper doubt," he said.

Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu were in reality cooperating in a balancing act to satisfy their conflicting domestic constituencies, Ford believes.

"The deal seems to be this: Biden gets to look like he is trying to restrict Israel, without actually doing so, while Netanyahu gets to look tough with salami slicing tactics - East Rafah today,

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West Rafah tomorrow, then Al Mawasi," he said

Operating in that incremental way could allow Netanyahu to fall short of the "major incursion" that the US government has portrayed as some sort of red line, without saying what the consequence would be for crossing it, Ford noted.

"No, nothing ever really changes in the way the United States indulges its Middle East partner in crime," he said.

IT'S ALL ABOUT ELECTION

"I think this is a scam with Biden pretending to do something to satisfy those in his party and the electorate who are disgusted with what is going on in Gaza while at the same time continuing the secret flow of whatever Israel wants [and] needs to Netanyahu," Philip Giraldi, CIA's former Damascus station chief and chair of the Council for the National Interest, said.

Giraldi also assessed Biden's maneuvers as a ploy to maintain a credible base for his reelection campaign this fall.

"It is little more than a gesture that is really all about the upcoming election!" he said.

Veteran Middle East analyst Sam Husseini agreed with the former diplomats and intelligence officer that Biden had not dared to change US policy toward Israel in any significant way.

"I don't think this is a serious move. US government support for Israel is still overwhelming," he said.

Husseini agreed that Biden was simply maneuvering tactically in order to continue supporting Israel fully while pretending to the American public that he was not.

"This may be an election maneuver given how deeply unpopular Biden's backing of Israel's genocide is with the public and esp among Democrats. He has to pretend to distance himself from Netanyahu," he said.

However, the move might also be the start of a more complex US maneuver to allow Israel to ultimately destroy Gaza, Husseini suggested.

"It may even be more insidious. It may be an attempt by the US government to try to pretend to be a mediator to try to get Hamas to fork over the captives so that Israel can more completely destroy Gaza," Husseini said.

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