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5/14/24 Tuesday

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'Nobody Wins': US Hikes Tariffs on China as Economic Tensions Continue to Rise

Previously, China had warned the White House not to politicize bilateral trade and to abide by the “basic norms” of the market economy.

On Tuesday US President Joe Biden imposed tariff hikes on electric vehicles (EVs), semiconductors and other Chinese imported goods - it is the latest move in the escalating trade war between China and the US.

KJ Noh, a journalist, political analyst, writer, and a teacher specializing in the geopolitics of the Asia-Pacific region, joined Sputnik’s The Final Countdown on Tuesday to discuss the escalating trade war between China and the US.

“What we see right now is that for the US geostrategic goals supersede economic goals or economic benefits, right? And so, [the US] is trying to see what [they] can do to cripple the Chinese economy, not just in the short term, but over the long term. And also, the larger story of this is that the US sees any supply chain dependency on China as a risk right now,” said Noh.

“They literally want to decouple, they want to revert to protectionism, neo-mercantilism, and they want to decouple as much as possible.”

“And so, what we're seeing right now is that the US is retreating from its Washington consensus. It's technically retreating from capitalism, as we understand it, in order to, you know, kneecap China,” he continued, adding that the US cannot compete with China and so they are “changing the rules.”

“The beating industrial heart of the global economy is China, and the US is going to suffer. Our people are going to suffer. The US economy is going to suffer. We are already heading into a depression and things are going to get worse. The ruling imperial elite, they're more concerned about their power than the direct economic effects that it will have on the masses," he added.

China is also making “big PR moves” that suggest the Chinese economy no longer needs to rely on the US, added Sputnik’s Angie Wong, who suggested that this concept is now becoming a reality.

During his five-day tour of Europe, Chinese Chairman Xi Jinping visited France, Serbia, and Hungary in a trip which focused primarily on trade, investments, and promoting a "new multipolar vision" of global politics. Despite their ideological differences, China and France were able to agree to an enhanced cooperation in agri-food, finance, aviation, civil nuclear energy and other fields, according to a recent report.

“This economic trade war is simply one dimension of a full spectrum hybrid war that the US is waging with China. And, certainly, one of the problems is that the US is not anticipating counter moves,” said Noh. “China will simply develop its own strength and it will develop more Global South partners. That's what some of the agreements with Hungary have to do with, and then it will also increase its dual circulation, its internal domestic capacity. And so, everybody loses. We're going down this route of lose-lose rather than win-win.”

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A recent poll from the New York Times shows former President Donald Trump leading President Biden in five important battleground states. The most crucial voters for the Democratic president - young voters and Black and Hispanic voters - appear poised to vote for Trump as discontent over the economy and the Gaza war continues to grow.

“And then, this current set of neocons who are complete ideologues, I can't see them getting off this Sinophobic crusade,” said Noh, referring to the Biden administration. “I really believe that they would rather destroy the US economy and damage the living standards of the US people rather than find some meaningful accommodation in a global system that requires cooperation and win-win development.”

“People are saying, ‘We don't want to be subject to the vagaries, the wins, and the dictatorial mandates of the US in the way that it manipulates its reserve currency, that it can be sanctioned, that its reserves can be taken away, that it can have lawfare waged against it,’” said Noh. “And simply the fact that, ‘We are tired of giving our hard-earned goods to the US for essentially receiving in return an IOU that can never be redeemed, essentially, in US paper, treasuries, or US dollars.’”

The Kremlin press service recently reported that Russian President Vladimir Putin will visit China after having been invited by Xi. The report added that the two world leaders will discuss issues of bilateral cooperation in trade, the economy, and humanitarian issues.

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'Yes', But Also 'No'

Egypt announced on Sunday that it would seek permission to join South Africa’s case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in which Israel has been accused of violating its obligations under the Genocide Convention. Earlier this year, Colombia and Turkiye also asked to join the case which was brought in January.

On Monday, the Biden administration stated that they do not believe Israel is committing “genocide” in the Gaza Strip, despite Palestinian authorities saying that over 35,000 Palestinians have been killed since the conflict first broke out in October.

“We believe Israel can and must do more to ensure the protection and wellbeing of innocent civilians,” said US National Security Advisor Jacob Sullivan. “We do not believe what is happening in Gaza is a genocide, we have been firmly on record rejecting that proposition.”

But Sullivan also admitted that the Palestinian civilians “caught in the middle of this war are in hell” during a press briefing. He added that the conditions in Gaza and the suffering of the Palestinian people are “on the president’s mind every day”. He then said that the US would “continue to lead international efforts to surge humanitarian assistance through the Gaza Strip.”

The statement was made just a day after US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he agreed with a preliminary State Department report that declared it is “reasonable to assess” that Israel has violated international humanitarian law.

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Blinken also admitted that Israel has killed more civilians than Hamas fighters in response to a reporter's question about the National Security Memorandum 20 which he submitted to Congress on Friday. In the interview, Blinken was asked if the US shares the Israeli assessment that more civilians have been killed than actual terrorists?" To which Blinken responded, "Yes, we do."

Since October 7, Israel has killed more than 35,000 Palestinians in Gaza, of which most have been women and children, Palestinian authorities say. This month, the head of the United Nations World Food Program, Cindy McCain, said that Gaza had entered a "full-blown famine".

On Monday, right-wing Israeli protestors blocked and aid convoys that were carrying food supplies into Gaza. The convoys were reportedly attacked and looted by an Israeli group called "Tsav 9" at the Tarqumiya checkpoint.

"It is a total outrage that there are people who are attacking and looting these convoys coming from Jordan going to Gaza to deliver humanitarian assistance," said Sullivan, in response to the looting. "We are looking at the tools we have to respond to this and we're also raising our concerns at the highest level of the Israeli government."

In a preliminary hearing in January, the ICJ ruled that there was enough evidence of a plausible risk of genocide to order Israel to take actions to prevent genocide, though it did not order an immediate ceasefire.

In their request to join South Africa's case against Israel at the ICJ, Egypt commented on 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."

Egyptian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ahmed Abu Zeid added that Israel's actions in Gaza have "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."

The White House's statement comes days after President Joe Biden announced that he would withhold offensive arms to Israel as Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government proceeds with their full-scale assault on Rafah. The offense does not include a plan to protect civilian lives, despite the roughly 1.3 million people sheltering there.

And following the assault on Rafah, nearly half a million Palestinianswere reportedly driven out of the city over the past week, the UN's agency for Palestinian refugees said.

Heading for reelection in November, Biden is now being confronted by his disastrous poll numbers as voters turn against him on issues including the economy and the war in Gaza. The US president threatened to withhold weapons from Israel should they pursue their offensive in Rafah, but two former Western ambassadors to Arab nations and an ex-CIA station chief believe it's all an election bluff, according to a recent Sputnik report.

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US is 'Hurting Itself': Washington Threatens Sanctions Against India in Response to Iran Deal

Over the past three years, the US has slapped Iran with more than 600 similar sanctions. During a US State Department briefing on Monday, US spokesperson Vedant Patel threatened India with sanctions should they choose to do business with Tehran. The announcement came hours after Iran and India signed a 10-year contact to develop and operate the Chabahar port.

"We are aware of these reports that Iran and India have signed a deal concerning the Chabahar Port," said Patel. "Any entity, anyone considering business deals with Iran, they need to be aware of the potential risk they are opening themselves up to, potential risk of sanctions."

On Tuesday, Dr. Mohammad Marandi, a professor of English literature and Orientalism at the University of Tehran, joined Sputnik's The Critical Hour to discuss the "potential risks" of sanctions imposed by the US.

"I think it's quite clear that the US has long ago passed the point where countries will tolerate its imposition of sanctions on different countries and entities. The US is trying to dictate terms to China, to Russia, to India, to Brazil, to Iran, to South Africa," said Marandi. "And, the more it does this - the more animosity it creates and the greater the incentive there is to create financial institutions and means of traded business that are not controlled by the US."

"In the long term, the US is hurting itself more than anyone else, because once the US dollar becomes less important, that means that there will be an excess of dollars and that inflation of US dollars that we see in the US - the constant printing of money - is going to be increasingly felt at home in the US," he added.

"By effectively attacking India in this manner [the US] is creating a wider gap between itself and that country at a time when we are approaching the next Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit and also the next BRICS summit. And, Russia, in particular, and China and Iran also, are very keen on using the coming months to coordinate with one another to create those institutions."

Sputnik's Garland Nixon suggested that the Americans who benefit from foreign policy decisions such as these are the "tiny group of billionaires". Adding that, however, such policies do not benefit the working majority.

"I think many people recognize it when we speak about the US, we're talking about these elites," said Marandi. "There's a sharp divide between what the Americans and what the regime in Washington wants. And you're absolutely correct - those who are benefiting. And they're not benefiting anymore from these sanctions, through these sanctions, by the way, that era is gone."

"The US is a brutal and barbaric regime that will not give up. It will not let go. It wants to bring down the government, and by doing so it's willing to make people suffer as much as they possibly can," he added. "This is the nature of the US, this is the nature of the regime in Washington. And ordinary Americans are increasingly seeing through this, some because of the decline of the US, obviously. They see that the livelihood that their parents had no longer exists in the world today. But I think many young Americans, they are, they're highly principled."

India's shipping ministry announced the penned $370 million deal between the Indian Ports Global Limited (IPGL) and the Port & Maritime Organization (PMO) of Iran on Monday. India first entered an agreement to develop the port in 2016, but the process was stalled for two years by US sanctions that were reimposed after Washington's unilateral withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran.

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In 2018, India agreed to take over operations of the port, allowing an open transit route for Indian goods to reach Afghanistan and Central Asia while avoiding the land route of Pakistan. Thus far, a total of 2.5 million tonnes of wheat and 2,000 tonnes of pulses have been successfully transported from India to Afghanistan through the port.

"I think that the US and Europe are moving towards greater despotism and greater control over their populations. But, I think that, simultaneously, there's a huge awakening across the world and especially in the US and Europe, and they do not have the power to control events beyond Europe and the US," the professor added.

"And I think they're also having problems at home. So, they have a lot - the regimes - have a lot on their plates. And I think that it's going to be very difficult for them to keep these young Americans and Europeans in check," said Marandi. "I'm optimistic about the future, but I also recognize that the months and years ahead are going to be very challenging."

The sanctions imposed by Washington on Tehran will stay in effect and be upheld with no exemption for New Delhi, the US spokesperson said. India has not responded to the US threats, but Tehran has said that Washington is "addicted" to imposing sanctions.

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Putin Visiting Beijing as Biden 'Bogged Down' in Efforts to Undermine Russia, China

Moscow and Beijing have moved from strength to economic strength as US attempts to confront its adversaries militarily and economically have been undermined by the realities of a newly-multipolar world.

Newly-reelected Russian president Vladimir Putin is set to visit Chinese leader Xi Jinping later this week at the invitation of Beijing, it was announced today.

The diplomatic trip – the first of Putin's new term as president – signifies the close relationship between the two leaders; Xi also made Moscow his first stop after beginning his third term as Chinese president in 2023. The United States has criticized ongoing ties between the two nations, recently sanctioning Chinese companies it claims are contributing to Russia's special military operation through the trade of "dual use" products, but Beijing has insisted on its sovereign right to continue economic cooperation with the country.

The partnership reflects a growing global trend, according to CGTN host and reporter Anna Ge, with countries around the world reaping the benefits of trade and cooperation with Beijing. Ge appeared on Sputnik's Fault Lines program Tuesday to discuss how both countries are overcoming Washington's attempts to impose isolation.

"According to announcements from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Kremlin, during this visit the two leaders will plan to sign a lot of bilateral agreements, mainly on economic and cultural exchanges," said Ge, a political commentator who discusses issues related to China in mainstream media throughout Asia and Africa. "The most urgent regional issues today will include the situation in Ukraine and the Middle East."

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“Washington has been trying to sell the false narrative that China is assisting Moscow… to force a connection between China and Russia, with the aim to tarnish, isolate and suppress both countries - both China and Russia,” she added.

“The reality is China has constantly sought peaceful negotiations acceptable to both sides in the Ukraine crisis. Actually, China's special representative for Eurasian affairs has initiated another round – this is the third round of shuttle diplomacy to explore possibilities for peace talks between Kiev and Moscow, along with other major parties in the region.”

China unveiled a 12-point peace plan to resolve the crisis between Russia and Ukraine last year, criticizing the eastward expansion of NATO as the origin of the conflict. “The security of a country should not be pursued at the expense of others,” stated the document. “The security of a region should not be achieved by strengthening or expanding military blocs.”

While a “peace conference” set to be held in Switzerland in June continues the trend of Western-led negotiations that exclude Russia, China has insisted on the need for a solution that takes Moscow’s security concerns into consideration. “The legitimate security interests and concerns of all countries must be taken seriously and addressed properly,” the document concludes.

“Both China and Russia or any [other] countries like Turkiye, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, etcetera have the right to conduct a normal economic and trade cooperation with Russia without interference or restrictions, even though they disagree with… Washington's values on this matter,” Ge insisted. “They still have the right to connect and communicate with Russia.”

US President Joe Biden has attempted to discourage other countries from deepening ties with China and Russia, especially since the escalation of the crisis in the Donbass in 2022. But shifting realities have created a world where the economic might of the two countries cannot be ignored, with the Russia and China-led BRICS economic bloc overtaking the G7 in purchasing power parity (PPP) this year.

Ge said countries that have resisted Washington’s pressure campaign and pursued cooperation with Beijing have reaped rewards from economic cooperation with the country.

“China has been advocating the concept of win-win cooperation,” noted the reporter. “Notable projects such as the Hungary-Serbia Railway and the Smederevo steel mill in Serbia have been launched through partnerships with China.”

“[As] for Hungary, it's the first European country to sign up for the Belt and Road Initiative,” she added. “In 2023, bilateral trade volume between China and Hungary exceeded $13 billion and China's direct investment in Hungary reached €7.6 billion, accounting for nearly 60% of the total foreign direct investment in the country and creating more than 10,000 jobs in Hungary.”

“China is using the win-win cooperation concept and these kinds of economic relationships to better promote their relations with other countries, hoping to bring benefits to both countries.”

Hungary and Serbia are among the European countries with the closest relationships with China, but Ge noted that Western allies like France and Germany are seeking to pursue cooperation in various fields, as well. Although such Western European countries have participated in US-led attempts to sanction Russia they’ve been unable to cut economic ties with Moscow completely, reportedly purchasing over €1 billion worth of Russian oil through third countries such as India.

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"There are a lot of discussions in European countries to review their strategy and their policy towards Ukraine," noted Ge, suggesting that attempts to isolate Russia may be abandoned in the near future.

Western foreign policy hawks barely disguised their delight when Russia tanks rolled into the Donbass in 2022, openly selling support for Ukraine as a way to lure Moscow into becoming "bogged down" in a conflict similar to the Soviet-Afghan war of the 1980s. But the realities of a newly-multipolar world suggest it is in fact the West that is becoming bogged down in a hopeless endeavor, wreaking economic damage on itself as its adversaries grow in military and economic strength.

"Washington's deeper and deeper immersion in the hybrid war against Russia will turn into a loud and humiliating fiasco for the United States such as Vietnam," said Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova recently, claiming the country would continue to meet hostility with "an unconditional and resolute response."

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Putin visits Beijing as Biden 'bogged down' in efforts to undermine Russia, China

Newly-reelected Russian leader Vladimir Putin is set to visit Beijing this week, the first diplomatic trip of his new term as president. The partnership reflects a growing global trend, according to reporter Anna Ge, as US attempts to confront its adversaries militarily and economically have been undermined by the realities of a newly-multipolar world.

"Washington has been trying to sell the false narrative that China is assisting Moscow… to force a connection between China and Russia, with the aim to tarnish, isolate and suppress both countries," said the journalist on Sputnik's Fault Lines program. "The reality is China has constantly sought peaceful negotiations acceptable to both sides in the Ukraine crisis."

While the Biden administration has sought to discourage cooperation with Moscow and Beijing, Ge noted countries that have ignored the advice have reaped economic rewards.

"China has been advocating the concept of win-win cooperation," she said. "Notable projects such as the Hungary-Serbia Railway and the Smederevo steel mill in Serbia have been launched through partnerships with China… In 2023… China's direct investment in Hungary reached €7.6 billion, accounting for nearly 60% of the total foreign direct investment in the country and creating more than 10,000 jobs in Hungary."

Hungary and Serbia are among the European nations with the closest relationships with China, but Ge noted that Western allies like France and Germany are seeking to pursue cooperation in various fields, as well. Meanwhile Western European countries have been unable to cut economic ties with Moscow completely, reportedly purchasing over €1 billion worth of Russian oil through third countries such as India.

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Trump Says He's 'Ready to Go' After Biden Proposes Two Debates in June, September

WASHINGTON, May 15 (Sputnik) – Former US President Donald Trump said on Wednesday that he would accept President Joe Biden's challenge to hold two presidential debates in June and September.

"I'm ready to go. The dates that they proposed are fine. Anywhere. Anytime. Any place. Let's see if Joe can make it to the stand-up podium," Trump told Fox News.

Trump said the proposed June and early September dates are fully acceptable to him, and he is ready to provide his own transportation.

In a separate message on Truth Social, Trump called Biden the worst debater who cannot connect two sentences.

"I am Ready and Willing to Debate Crooked Joe at the two proposed times in June and September. I would strongly recommend more than two debates and, for excitement purposes, a very large venue, although Biden is supposedly afraid of crowds," he said.

Trump also expressed a desire to discuss Biden's policies on migration, inflation, taxes and foreign affairs during the debates.

Biden earlier on Wednesday challenged Trump to two debates, but his campaign said he would not participate in the three general-election debates sponsored by the nonpartisan Commission on Presidential Debates on September 16, October 1 and October 9. The commission has organized all US presidential debates since 1988.

Biden also wants the debates to be held in a studio with only the two candidates, a moderator and no audience, according to his campaign.

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US, Ukraine to Sign Bilateral Security Agreement in a Matter of Weeks - Blinken

(Adds background in paras 3-5)

WASHINGTON, May 15 (Sputnik) - The United States and Ukraine will sign a bilateral security agreement in the coming weeks, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday.

"We've done very good productive work between our teams on this. We're gonna finalize the text, I think very, very shortly, but the heavy lifting has been done. And we're there and I imagine that we'll be able to sign that agreement in a matter of weeks," Blinken said during a joint press conference with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba in Kiev.

The US is among 32 countries that are pursuing long-term bilateral security arrangements with Ukraine. To date, nine of those countries, including Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and Finland, have completed negotiations and signed such agreements.

Ongoing talks between Washington and Kiev would seal a 10-year security agreement, which

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would include military, financial and political aid.

Western countries have been providing 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 they would only prolong the conflict but would not change the situation on the ground.

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Biden Says He Is Ready to Do Two Debates With Trump

WASHINGTON, May 15 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden said on Wednesday that he is ready to participate in two presidential debates with his Republican rival former President Donald Trump.

"I will even do it twice. So let's pick the dates," Biden said in a video message on X.

The Biden team has suggested holding the two debates in late June and early September, the New York Times reported on Wednesday, citing a letter that his campaign chair Jennifer O'Malley Dillon sent to the Commission on Presidential Debates.

Biden in his video message said that Trump lost two debates to him in 2020. "Now he is acting like he wants to debate again," he added.

Biden urged Trump to pick the debate dates. "I hear you are free on Wednesday," he said.

The Biden campaign proposed the first debate date in late June because by this time Trump's criminal trial New York will have concluded and Biden will have returned from the G7 summit, according to the report.

Meanwhile, early September is "the start of the fall campaign season, early enough to influence early voting, but not so late as to require the candidates to leave the campaign trail in the critical late September and October period," the letter said.

The letter also stated that Biden will not participate in the three general-election debates sponsored by the nonpartisan Commission on Presidential Debates on September 16, October 1 and October 9, according to the report. The commission has organized all US presidential debates since 1988.

Biden also wants the debates to be held in a studio with only the two candidates and a moderator and no audience, according to the letter cited in the report.

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US Consumer Prices Grow Slower First Time in 3 Months, Bolstering Rate Cut Hopes

WASHINGTON, May 15 (Sputnik) - US consumer prices grew 3.4% in the year to April, easing for the first time in three months and in line with Wall Street forecasts that boosted hopes that the Federal Reserve might be amenable to an interest rate cut in the not too distant future.

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The US Consumer Price Index, or CPI, a key inflation indicator, had one of its slowest growth in January, expanding at an annualized rate of just 3.1% from December's 3.4%. But it edged higher again over the next two months, touching 3.2% in February and 3.5% in March. The Fed intends to cut interest rates that are at two-decade highs but wary of doing so with inflation still stronger than the central bank desires.

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US Has Not Encouraged Ukraine to Strike Inside Russia, Kiev Makes Own Decisions - Blinken

(Adds background in paras 3-6)

WASHINGTON, May 15 (Sputnik) – The United States has not encouraged or enabled Ukrainian attacks inside Russia, but it is up to Kiev to make their own decisions, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday.

"We have not encouraged or enabled strikes outside of Ukraine. But ultimately, Ukraine has to make decisions for itself about how it's going to conduct this war … We will continue to back Ukraine with the equipment that it needs to succeed, that it needs to win," Blinken said during a joint press conference with his Ukrainian counterpart, Dmytro Kuleba, in Kiev.

Earlier in the day, Politico reported, citing sources, that Ukraine is pressing the Biden administration to lift the ban on using US-supplied weapons to strike inside Russian territory amid the advance of the Russian armed forces in the Kharkiv region. The ban has reportedly deterred Kiev from attacking Moscow's positions, but Ukraine is allegedly seeking to hit Russian military supply depots across the border, the report said.

Earlier in May, UK Foreign Secretary David Cameron said that Kiev had the right to use UK-supplied weapons to attack Russian territory.

The Russian Foreign Ministry called Cameron's remarks confirmation of London's increasing involvement in military actions on Kiev's side.

Moscow has warned that it could target "any UK military facilities and equipment on the territory of Ukraine and beyond" in case Ukraine attacks Russia with UK-supplied weapons.

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Patriot Systems for Kharkiv 'Priority,' US Urgently Working on It - Blinken

(Adds background in paras 4-5)

WASHINGTON, May 15 (Sputnik) – The United States and Ukraine see the provision of Patriot air defense systems for their deployment in the Kharkiv region as an "urgent priority" and are actively working on it, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday.

"As I mentioned, we are intensely focused on Patriots and other forms of air defense and making sure that we can find them, bring them to Ukraine. Kharkiv of course, is one urgent

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priority," Blinken said during a joint press conference with his Ukrainian counterpart, Dmytro Kuleba, in Kiev.

The secretary added that the issue was discussed in detail during his visit to Ukraine and both sides are "urgently working" on it.

On Monday, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said that he has secured an ally's commitment to provide a Patriot air defense system to Ukraine. The official further noted that the US was also seeking other systems aiming to leverage allied capabilities to meet broader air defense needs while potentially assisting those allies in return.

The Kremlin has consistently warned against continued arms deliveries to Kiev, saying it would lead to further escalation of the conflict. Russian officials have said that any cargo containing weapons for Ukraine would become a legitimate target for Moscow.

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blinken on deployment of patriot systems in kharkiv: we discuss it in detail and are urgently working on it

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US to Provide Additional $2Bln in Military Financing for Ukraine - Blinken

WASHINGTON, May 15 (Sputnik) -The United States will provide an additional $2 billion in foreign military financing for Ukraine, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday.
"We will provide an additional $2 billion in foreign military financing for Ukraine, and we put this together in a first of its kind Defense Enterprise Fund," Blinken said during a joint press conference with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba in Kiev.
The fund has three components: one is to provide Ukraine with weapons today; second is to invest in the country's defense industrial base to produce what it needs for itself and also for others; and three is to help it purchase weapons from other countries too, Blinken added.

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us, ukraine to sign bilateral security agreement in a matter of weeks - blinken

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Putin Says Russia Wants Comprehensive, Sustainable Settlement of Ukraine Conflict

MOSCOW, May 15 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said he is open to resolving the conflict in Ukraine through dialogue but seeks a settlement that will be comprehensive and sustainable.

"We are seeking a comprehensive, sustainable, and just settlement of this conflict through peaceful means," Putin said in an interview with Chinese news agency Xinhua, the text of which is also published on the Kremlin's website. "We are open to a dialogue on Ukraine, but such negotiations must take into account the interests of all countries involved in the conflict, including Russia's."

Any peace settlement must also involve a substantive discussion on global stability and reliable security guarantees for Russia's opponents and for Russia itself, Putin added.

"That is where the main problem is, since we are dealing with states whose ruling circles seek to substitute the world order based on international law with an 'order based on certain rules,' which they keep talking about but which no one has ever seen, no one has agreed to, and which, apparently, tend to change depending on the current political situation and interests of those who invent these rules," Putin added.

The Russian president said Moscow "stands ready for negotiations" and recalled that Russia had engaged in negotiations with Ukraine in Turkey's Istanbul in 2022.

"On April 15, 2022, in Istanbul, together with the Ukrainian delegation, we drafted a peace agreement, taking into account the demands of the Ukrainian side, including those on future security guarantees for Ukraine. Moreover, the head of the Ukrainian delegation ... [initiated] the main provisions of the draft document," Putin said.

However, the president said, instead of signing the peace agreement then, Kiev "suddenly announced the cessation of negotiations," with Ukrainian officials saying that "they had done so, inter alia, because their Western allies had recommended that they continue hostilities and apply joint efforts to achieve Russia's strategic defeat."

Russia launched its military operation in Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Russian and Ukrainian delegations held several rounds of peace talks in the early days of the conflict, including in Turkey in 2022.

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Russia, China Advocate for Sustainable Global, Regional Security - Putin

(Adds additional details in para 4, specifies attribution in lede)

MOSCOW, May 15 (Sputnik) - Russia and China always advocate for equal and sustainable security at the global and regional levels, Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview with the Chinese news agency Xinhua, the text of which is also published on the Kremlin's website.

"We advocate for the primacy of international law, equal, indivisible, comprehensive and sustainable security at both the global and regional level with the United Nations' central

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coordinating role," Putin said. "We also reject Western attempts to impose an order based on lies and hypocrisy, on some mythical rules no one knows whose making."

Putin added that the US-led Western elites seek to retain their global dominance by pressuring other nations on whom they can and cannot cooperate with, disregarding other countries' sovereign interests. Western nations seek to ensure their well-being at the expense of other states, resorting to neo-colonial methods, Putin added.

The Russian president added that "neither Russia nor its partners are happy with this state of affairs," saying that "we have actively contributed to launching multilateral associations and mechanisms that are independent of the West and are successfully operating," which build their work "on the principles of equality, justice, transparency, respect and consideration of each other's interests." The president named the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the BRICS bloc of countries as examples of "key pillars of the emerging multipolar world order" and "such mutually beneficial cooperation."

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Putin Says Russia Wants Comprehensive, Sustainable Settlement of Ukraine Conflict

(Adds more details in paras 4-7, background information in para 8, specifies attribution in para 2)

MOSCOW, May 15 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said he is open to resolving the conflict in Ukraine through dialogue but seeks a settlement that will be comprehensive and sustainable.

"We are seeking a comprehensive, sustainable, and just settlement of this conflict through peaceful means," Putin said in an interview with Chinese news agency Xinhua, the text of which is also published on the Kremlin's website. "We are open to a dialogue on Ukraine, but such negotiations must take into account the interests of all countries involved in the conflict, including Russia's."

Any peace settlement must also involve a substantive discussion on global stability and reliable security guarantees for Russia's opponents and for Russia itself, Putin added.

"That is where the main problem is, since we are dealing with states whose ruling circles seek to substitute the world order based on international law with an 'order based on certain rules,' which they keep talking about but which no one has ever seen, no one has agreed to, and which, apparently, tend to change depending on the current political situation and interests of those who invent these rules," Putin added.

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Russia launched its military operation in Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Russian and Ukrainian delegations held several rounds of peace talks in the early days of the conflict, including in Turkey in 2022.

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Putin Says Ukraine, West Not Ready to Engage in Honest Dialogue with Russia

(Adds background information after para 3, specifies attribution in lede)

MOSCOW, May 15 (Sputnik) - Ukraine and its Western allies are not ready to engage in open and honest dialogue with Russia to end the conflict, Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview with Chinese news agency Xinhua, the text of which is also published on the Kremlin's website.

"Unfortunately, neither Ukraine nor its Western patrons support these initiatives," Putin said. "They are not ready to engage in an equal, honest and open dialogue based on mutual respect and consideration of each other's interests."

Ukraine and its Western allies are reluctant to discuss the underlying causes, the very origins of the global crisis, Putin added.

Former US Under Secretary for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland said on Saturday that Ukraine has not been and is still not in a strong enough position to begin negotiations with Russia to end the Ukraine conflict.

Swiss Foreign Ministry spokesman Pierre-Alain Eltschinger told Sputnik on Monday that Bern believes that Russia needs to be involved in the Ukraine peace process, as reaching peace without Moscow is impossible.

Switzerland will host the high-level conference on Ukrainian peace at the Buergenstock resort outside of Lucerne from June 15–16. The event is expected to bring together more than 160 delegations from around the world. Russia is not on the guest list. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the peace conference is clearly not result-oriented, as it is impossible to have effective talks on Ukraine without Russia's participation.

Russia launched its military operation in Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Russian and Ukrainian delegations held several rounds of peace talks in the early days of the conflict, including in Turkey in March 2022.

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Putin Says Western Elites Working to 'Punish' Russia, Illegally Trying to Seize Its Assets

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MOSCOW, May 15 (Sputnik) - Western elites are working to punish and weaken Russia, including to illegally seize its frozen assets stored abroad, Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview with Chinese news agency Xinhua, the text of which is also published on the Kremlin's website.
"Western elites are stubbornly working to 'punish' Russia, isolate and weaken it, supplying the Kiev authorities with money and arms," Putin said. "They have imposed almost 16,000 unilateral illegitimate sanctions against our country. They are threatening to dismember our country. They are illegally trying to appropriate our foreign assets."
A European source told RIA Novosti on Tuesday that the Council of the European Union plans next week to finally approve a decision on using proceeds from frozen Russian assets for military assistance to Ukraine.
US Secretary of State Antony Blinken during remarks in Kiev said the United States intends to use an authority recently approved by Congress to seize frozen Russian assets.
The G7 group of nations led by the US and the EU have 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 take its money as an act of stealing and a violation of international laws. The European Central Bank has warned that seizure poses reputational risks to the euro in the long term.

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Russia Open to Work With Partners Around The World, Especially China - Putin

(Adds additional details after para 2, specifies attribution in lede)
MOSCOW, May 15 (Sputnik) - Russia is open to working with partners around the world, especially China, Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview with Chinese news agency Xinhua, the text of which is also published on the Kremlin's website.
"We are willing to work together with our partners worldwide, including China, our good neighbor and trusted friend," Putin said.
The Russian president expressed confidence that Moscow will implement "all the strategic plans we have set" while working with partners, including those outlined in Putin's address to the Russian upper house on February 29, 2024, namely "addressing demographic problems, increasing the birth rate, providing support to families with children, fighting poverty and inequality" and many other goals in the economy and the social sphere.
Putin added that Moscow recognizes the scale of these challenges and can provide solutions to them.
"To do this we will rely on the consolidated will of our people, the necessary resources and capabilities, and the rich experience of interaction between the state, businesses and the civil society," the president said.
Putin noted "tremendous work" to establish an effective economic management system that has been done over the past few years in Russia, adding that Russia " will continue with this

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work and seek to improve the efficiency of long-term planning and the implementation of programmes and national projects."

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Putin Says BRICS, SCO 'Key Pillars of Emerging Multipolar World Order'

(Adds additional details after para 2, specifies attribution in lede)
MOSCOW, May 15 (Sputnik) - The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS have become key pillars in the emerging multipolar world order, Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview with Chinese news agency Xinhua, the text of which is also published on the Kremlin's website.
"The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS have well established themselves as key pillars of the emerging multipolar world order," Putin said. "They have come to be reputable and dynamic international platforms whose participants build constructive political, security, economic and humanitarian interaction."
The Russian president said Moscow and its partners "actively contributed to launching multilateral associations and mechanisms that are independent of the West and are successfully operating," adding that they work to "build on the principles of equality, justice, transparency, respect and consideration of each other's interests."
Putin added that Moscow and Beijing have "similar or coinciding positions on key issues on the international agenda" and advocate "for the primacy of international law, equal, indivisible, comprehensive and sustainable security at both the global and regional level with the UN's central coordinating role." Both Russia and China also reject the West's "attempts to impose an order based on lies and hypocrisy, on some mythical rules of no one knows whose making."

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US Senator Criticizes Blinken for Performing During Ukraine Visit Amid Gaza Hostage Crisis

WASHINGTON, May 15 (Sputnik) - US Senator Rick Scott criticized Secretary of State Antony Blinken for performing with a local music band while in Ukraine at a time when Americans - and others - remain hostages in the Gaza Strip.
"While the world burns and Americans spend their 221st day trapped as Hamas hostages in Gaza, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is off performing in Ukraine on a taxpayer-funded trip," Scott said on Tuesday.
Earlier in the day, Blinken arrived in Kiev in order to demonstrate the United States' unwavering support for Ukraine.
Blinken said he was planning to discuss with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy how the United States' newly allocated military aid package will be channeled as the aid is expected to

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help the Ukrainian military "take back the initiative 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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Boeing Subject to US Charges For failing to Improve Safety After Fatal Mishaps - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 15 (Sputnik) - The US aerospace company Boeing is subject to federal criminal charges after failing to improve its safety protocols following two fatal 737 Max aircraft crashes, CNN reported, citing the US Justice Department.

The report said on Tuesday that the Justice Department notified Boeing that it breached a 2021 agreement reached between the two parties to avoid criminal charges for the two fatal 737 Max crashes.

Under the agreement, Boeing paid $2.5 billion in penalties and vowed to improve its safety and compliance protocols.

However, the Justice Department notified Boeing that it is now subject to criminal prosecution after going through a series of safety mishaps this year, including a door plug that blew off an Alaska Airlines flight shortly after takeoff.

The Justice Department told Boeing that it has determined the company breached its obligations in multiple parts of the 2021 deal by failing to design, implement and enforce a compliance and ethics program to prevent and detect violations of the US fraud laws throughout its operations.

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Biden Moves Forward with $1 Bln in New Weapons for Israel - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 15 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration told Congress on Tuesday that it is moving forward with more than $1 billion in new weapons deals for Isreal less than a week after the US paused a shipment of weapons to the country over their military operation in Rafah, the Wall Street Journal reported, citing US and congressional officials.

“This is just another example of them muddying their message and undermining any real strength behind the hold,” expert in US weapons sales Seth Binder is quoted as saying in the report.

Though the weapons in this package may only be delivered years from now, Israel could

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interpret the administration's willingness to proceed with the deals as a positive sign of support for the country's actions in Gaza, Binder added.

The new package will include the potential transfer of $700 million in tank ammunition, $500 million in tactical vehicles, and $60 million in mortar rounds, the report said, citing officials. The new weapons could potentially restock what Israel lost since its last weapons deal with the US in October of last year.

The decision comes less than a week after Biden said in an interview that the United States will go as far as to stop the flow of weapons to Israel should the Netanyahu war cabinet decide on a major military operation in the Gaza Strip.

US officials have been vocal about the administration's opposition to a major military operation in Rafah due to its likelihood of massive civilian casualties and its unlikelihood of furthering Israel's major goal of defeating the terrorist group Hamas, the report said. However, the US has only materialized this opposition through the pause of a single shipment of 2,000lb bombs, arguing that the weapons shouldn't be used in densely populated areas.

Last Monday, the IDF launched what it called a counterterrorist operation in the east of Rafah, on the border with Egypt, and took control of the Gaza side of the border crossing. On Friday, Israeli media reported that Israel's military cabinet had approved expanding the ground operation. Israeli authorities say the operation is aimed at eliminating the remaining battalions of Palestinian movement Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

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 35,100 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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Missile Defense Agency Boosts Georgia Tech Engineering Contract by $339Mln - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 15 (Sputnik) - The US Missile Defense Agency (MDA) has almost quadrupled its original $121 million contract with the Georgia Tech Applied Research Corporation to deliver more engineering and research, the Defense Department announced.

"Georgia Tech Applied Research Corporation [of] Georgia Tech Research Institute (GTRI), Atlanta, Georgia is being awarded a $339 million extension to ... [an existing] contract," the release said on Tuesday.

Under the terms of the extension, the contract ceiling value will increase from $121 million to $460 million, the release said.

"This extension will provide continuity in engineering and technical support in systems engineering, test and evaluation, advanced concepts and technologies, simulation, modeling and operations analyses, readiness assessments, and technical direction across a broad

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spectrum of ballistic missile defense system technologies," the release said.
Work on the contract extension will cover a five year period from September 28, 2026 to September 28, 2031, the release added.

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US Army Pays Northrop Grumman on Missile Defense Command System For Poland - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 15 (Sputnik) - Northrop Grumman Defense Systems was awarded an almost $50 million US Army modification contract for the Integrated Air and Missile Defense Battle Command System for Poland, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.
"Northrop Grumman Defense Systems Sector [of] Huntsville, Alabama was awarded a $49,029,408 modification ...contract for the Integrated Air and Missile Defense Battle Command System," the release said on Tuesday.
Work on the extended contract will be performed in Huntsville, Alabama over the coming year with an estimated completion date of March 31, 2025, the Defense Department said.
"Fiscal 2024 Foreign Military Sales (Poland) funds in the amount of $49,029,408 were obligated at the time of the award," the Defense Department said.
The US Army Contracting Command based in Redstone Arsenal, Alabama will oversee work on the project as its contracting activity, the Defense Department said.

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Russia Remembers, Appreciates China’s Contribution to Victory Over Nazism - Putin

MOSCOW, May 15 (Sputnik) - Russia remembers and appreciates China's contribution to the victory over Nazism, Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview with the Chinese news agency Xinhua, the text of which is also published on the Kremlin's website.
"We remember and value the contribution of the Chinese people to the common victory. It was China that held back major forces of Japanese militarists, making it possible for the Soviet Union to focus on defeating Nazism in Europe," Putin said. "And, of course, we are grateful to our Chinese friends for their careful attitude to war memorials, to the memory of Soviet citizens who had fought for the liberation of China and supported the revolutionary struggle of the Chinese people, their righteous fight against the invaders."

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Putin Says BRICS, SCO 'Key Pillars of Emerging Multipolar World Order'

MOSCOW, May 15 (Sputnik) - The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS have become key pillars in the emerging multipolar world order, Russian President Vladimir Putin said.

"The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS have well established themselves as key pillars of the emerging multipolar world order," Putin said. "They have come to be reputable and dynamic international platforms whose participants build constructive political, security, economic and humanitarian interaction."

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Russia, China Advocate for Sustainable Global, Regional Security - Putin

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"We advocate for the primacy of international law, equal, indivisible, comprehensive and sustainable security at both the global and regional level with the United Nations' central coordinating role," Putin said. "We also reject Western attempts to impose an order based on lies and hypocrisy, on some mythical rules no one knows whose making."

Putin added that the US-led Western elites seek to retain their global dominance by pressuring other nations on whom they can and cannot cooperate with, disregarding other countries' sovereign interests. Western nations seek to ensure their well-being at the expense of other states, resorting to neo-colonial methods, Putin added.

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Yellen Says China Tariffs Unlikely to Raise US Consumer Prices

WASHINGTON, May 15 (Sputnik) — US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said during an interview with PBS News that she does not believe American consumers will see any meaningful increase in prices due to the new China tariffs.

"I don't believe that American consumers will see any meaningful increase in the prices that they face," Yellen said on Tuesday.

Yellen added the tariff increases aim to protect firms and workers supported by the incentives in the Semiconductor and Chips Act, and the Inflation Reduction Act.

On Tuesday, the Biden administration announced tariffs on $18 billion worth of Chinese imports, including electric vehicles, solar panels and steel.

Later in the day, a spokesperson for the Chinese embassy in Washington, Liu Pengyu, said that the United States accusing China of overcapacity represents a false narrative aimed at

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hindering Beijing's pursuit of high-quality development.

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BRICS Will Discuss Cooperation on Finance, Energy During Russia's Chairmanship - Putin

MOSCOW, May 15 (Sputnik) - Countries in the BRICS intergovernmental group will discuss bolstering cooperation in areas such as finance, energy, biotechnology, and space during Russia's chairmanship of the organization, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Wednesday.

"Russian agencies, business, and public circles have prepared an extensive agenda for the Chairmanship. This includes a wide range of areas for enhancing interaction, including finance, agriculture, energy, intellectual property, healthcare, education, and space exploration. Moreover, such niche and knowledge-intensive topics as nanotechnology, nuclear medicine and biotechnology are being discussed by experts in relevant fields," Putin said in an interview with Xinhua News Agency.

Another primary goal of Russia's chairmanship of BRICS will be the seamless integration of new members into the group, Putin said.

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Russia Open to Work With Partners Around The World, Especially China - Putin

MOSCOW, May 15 (Sputnik) - Russia is open to working with partners around the world, especially China, Russian President Vladimir Putin said.

"We are willing to work together with our partners worldwide, including China, our good neighbor and trusted friend," Putin said.

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Putin Says Western Elites Working to 'Punish' Russia, Illegally Trying to Seize Its Assets

MOSCOW, May 15 (Sputnik) - Western elites are working to punish and weaken Russia, including to illegally seize its frozen assets stored abroad, Russian President Vladimir Putin said.

"Western elites are stubbornly working to 'punish' Russia, isolate and weaken it, supplying the Kiev authorities with money and arms," Putin said. "They have imposed almost 16,000 unilateral illegitimate sanctions against our country. They are threatening to dismember our country. They

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Putin Says Ukraine, West Not Ready to Engage in Honest Dialogue with Russia

MOSCOW, May 15 (Sputnik) - Ukraine and its Western allies are not ready to engage in open and honest dialogue with Russia to end the conflict, Russian President Vladimir Putin said.
"Unfortunately, neither Ukraine nor its Western patrons support these initiatives," Putin said. "They are not ready to engage in an equal, honest and open dialogue based on mutual respect and consideration of each other's interests."
Ukraine and its Western allies are reluctant to discuss the underlying causes, the very origins of the global crisis, Putin added.

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Russia Aiming to Become One of Top Four Largest Economies in World - Putin

MOSCOW, May 15 (Sputnik) - The Russian Federation is striving to become one of the top four largest economies in the world, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Wednesday.
"Today, Russia is one of the world's top five countries in terms of purchasing power parity. Now we are aiming for the top 'four' largest economies on the planet," Putin said in an interview with Xinhua News Agency.
Putin said that the goals outlined in his February 2024 address to the Russian Federal Assembly are objective and essential. The Kremlin recognizes the scale of the challenges and is ready to provide solutions, Putin said.

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Putin Says Russia Wants Comprehensive, Sustainable Settlement of Ukraine Conflict

MOSCOW, May 15 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said he is open to resolving the conflict in Ukraine through dialogue but seeks a settlement that will be comprehensive and sustainable.
"We are seeking a comprehensive, sustainable, and just settlement of this conflict through peaceful means," Putin said. "We are open to a dialogue on Ukraine, but such negotiations must take into account the interests of all countries involved in the conflict, including Russia's."
Any peace settlement must also involve a substantive discussion on global stability and reliable

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security guarantees for Russia's opponents and for Russia itself, Putin added.

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US, EU Cannot Reach Agreement on Plan to Seize Frozen Russian Assets - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 15 (Sputnik) - The United States and European Union have been unable to reach an agreement on a plan to seize frozen Russian assets that would be used to fund aid provided to Ukraine, the New York Times reported.

The report said on Tuesday that the Europeans want to transfer the Russian funds to Ukraine once or twice a year, while the United States prefers a plan to get more money to Ukraine faster.

The United States and its close partners aim to reach an agreement on a plan by the time of the G7 summit in Italy next month.

A European source told RIA Novosti on Tuesday that the Council of the European Union plans next week to finally approve a decision on using proceeds from frozen Russian assets for military assistance to Ukraine.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken during remarks in Kiev said the United States intends to use an authority recently approved by Congress to seize frozen Russian assets.

An estimated $300 billion in Russian central bank assets are frozen in Western accounts. The Kremlin has maintained that any attempts to confiscate Russian assets would violate international law.

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Putin Says Russia-China Relations Have Reached Highest Level Ever, Continue to Strengthen

MOSCOW, May 15 (Sputnik) - Relations between China and the Russian Federation are stronger than ever and continuing to strengthen, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Wednesday.

“Today, Russia-China relations have reached the highest level ever, and despite the difficult global situation continue to get stronger,” Putin said in an interview with Xinhua News Agency, ahead of a state visit to China.

Putin said that the unprecedented level of strategic partnership between Russia and China contributed to his decision to choose China for his first state visit after his most recent inauguration as President of the Russian Federation.

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Putin says Russia-China relations have reached highest level ever, continue to get stronger despite difficult global situation

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White House Says Biden Would Veto US House Bill Compelling Delivery of Withheld Israel Aid

WASHINGTON, May 15 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden would veto legislation from the House of Representatives to compel the delivery of Israel aid withheld by the administration over a prospective large-scale operation in the Gaza Strip city of Rafah, the White House Office of Management and Budget said in a statement.

"The bill would undermine the President's ability to execute an effective foreign policy," the statement said on Tuesday. "If the President were presented with [the bill], he would veto it."

House lawmakers are set to consider the bill, dubbed the Israel Security Assistance Support Act, later this week.

The legislation condemns Biden's decision to pause certain aid and withholds funds from the State Department, Defense Department and National Security Council until the aid is delivered.

"We must hold the President accountable for his dangerous intimidation tactics that put the safety of our ally and the Israeli people at risk by emboldening Hamas," House Majority Leader Steve Scalise said in a statement on the bill.

The bill raises serious concerns about infringement on the president's constitutional authorities, the White House said. The legislation is a misguided reaction to a deliberate distortion of the administration's approach to Israel, the White House said.

Moreover, the bill could lead to unintended consequences, such as prohibiting the United States from adjusting its security assistance posture with respect to Israel, the White House said.

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White House Says Biden Would Veto US House Bill Compelling Delivery of Withheld Israel Aid

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UPDATE- US, Taiwan Held Secret Navy Drills in Pacific in April - Reports

(Updates with details in paras 5-9)
WASHINGTON, May 15 (Sputnik) - The US and Taiwanese navies held joint exercises conducted in secret in the Pacific while China continues to oppose the military cooperation between Washington and Taipei, Reuters reported.
The joint exercise took place in the Western Pacific in April and to date has not been officially confirmed by either participating navy, the report said on Tuesday.
About half a dozen navy ships from both countries took part in the exercises, including frigates and supply and support vessels, which practiced communications, refueling, and resupply.
One of the cited sources in the report said the US and Taiwanese navies also practiced tactical maneuvering, including searching for underwater targets.
The US Navy declined to comment on the matter.
Pentagon Press Secretary Maj. Gen. Patrick Ryder told reporters that he is aware of the reporting but had no comment to offer on specific operations.
"We have a long-standing one-China policy. And consistent with the Taiwan Relations Act, the US makes available to Taiwan defense articles and services necessary to enable it to maintain a self-defense capability. So beyond that, nothing further to provide," Ryder said.
The Chinese Embassy in Washington told Sputnik that it urges the United States to avoid having military contact with Taiwan in accordance with the one-China principle.
"China is firmly opposed to the US's military contact with Taiwan," Chinese Embassy spokesperson Liu Pengyu said. "This position is consistent and unequivocal. We urge the US to earnestly abide by the one-China principle and the three China-US joint communiqués and stop its wrong behavior of having military contact with Taiwan. We also have a clear message for the DPP authorities: seeking 'Taiwan independence' and resisting reunification with force is bound to fail. They can be assured of that."
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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NTSB Reports Dali Vessel Experienced Blackout Before Baltimore Departure - Report

WASHINGTON, May 15 (Sputnik) — The Dali vessel experienced a blackout during in-port maintenance about 10 hours before leaving Baltimore, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) said in a Marine Investigation Preliminary Report.
"On March 25, about 10 hours before leaving Baltimore, the Dali experienced a blackout (loss of electrical power to the HV and LV buses) during in-port maintenance," the report said on Tuesday.

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According to the report, a crewmember mistakenly closed an exhaust damper while working on the scrubber system, causing Dali's engine to stall and a power outage to occur.

However, vessel power was restored when crewmembers manually closed the electrical power switches, but the generator soon failed again due to insufficient fuel pressure, leading to a second blackout, the report added.

Earlier, the port of Baltimore announced that a milestone was achieved with the successful detonation of controlled explosives to break apart the collapsed Francis Scott Key bridge and begin dislodging the stuck cargo ship Dali.

In March, the commercial Singapore-flagged cargo ship Dali hit the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore soon after it departed. The bridge collapsed and six people died in the incident.

US media reported earlier that the insured loss from the bridge collapse could reach $4 billion, making it the most expensive ship collision incident in modern history.

In April, the Baltimore city authorities filed a legal claim against the owner and operator of the Dali that rammed into the Francis Scott Key Bridge, accusing them of negligence as the vessel was unseaworthy, according to court documents.

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US Judge Sides With SEC to Compel Musk to Give New Testimony About Twitter Deal - Filing

WASHINGTON, May 15 (Sputnik) - A US judge sided with the US Securities and Exchange Commission's (SEC) efforts to compel billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk to provide new testimony to the federal agency related to his $44 billion deal to take over Twitter, court documents revealed.

Last week, Musk's lawyers urged the judge to block the SEC's subpoena. The SEC wants to force Musk to testify as part of its probe into his 2022 purchase of Twitter.

"The Court therefore ENFORCES the SEC's subpoena, though it limits the SEC to 5 hours of questioning to occur within 60 days of this order," US judge Jacqueline Scott Corley said in the court document on Tuesday.

Moreover, the court expects both parties to decide on a date and location for Musk's deposition by May 30.

The SEC is trying to get additional testimony from Musk after he provided the agency with new documents related to this purchase. The SEC is looking into whether Musk violated federal securities laws when he acquired Twitter, which he now renamed as X.

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US, Taiwan Held Secret Navy Drills in Pacific in April - Reports

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The joint exercise took place in the Western Pacific in April and to date has not been officially confirmed by either participating navy, the report said on Tuesday.

About half a dozen navy ships from both countries took part in the exercises, including frigates and supply and support vessels, which practiced communications, refueling and resupply.

One of the cited sources in the report said the US and Taiwanese navies also practiced tactical maneuvering, including searching for underwater targets.

Earlier on Tuesday, Chinese Embassy in Washington spokesperson Liu Pengyu said that Beijing is urging the United States to stop arming Taiwan - a message it has repeatedly sent to Washington amid increased tensions.

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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White House Drug Policy Director Warns of Rising Synthetic Drug Crisis

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - The drug addiction problem in the United States is likely to get far worse with a new generation of easy-to-produce totally synthetic deadly drugs that are cut with other more traditional addictive and killer substances like cocaine, making them even more lethal, White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) Director Dr. Rahul Gupta said on Tuesday.

"The era of highly potent synthetic drugs has clearly begun," Gupta told a podcast meeting at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

From 2019 to 2021, cocaine-involved deaths in the United States rose nearly 54% to 24,486 per year, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). In many of these cases even the deadly cocaine was rendered far more potent "because of synthetic drugs cut into it," Gupta explained.

This crisis was also spreading to Europe, Gupta observed. Fentanyl was appearing "more and more in European countries. ....The United Kingdom is seeing more and more drugs like fentanyl but more potent," he said.

Also, increased yield from cocaine crops across Latin America has led drug traffickers to send more of the surplus production to Europe, expanding the cocaine addiction crisis across that continent and generating unprecedented violence in and around European ports as gangs compete to seize and dominate the supply chain, Gupta warned.

Overall, US drug overdose deaths rose from 2019 to 2022 with 107,941 drug overdose deaths reported in 2022, according to NIDA figures. Deaths involving synthetic opioids other than

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methadone (primarily fentanyl) continued to rise with 73,838 overdose deaths reported in 2022, the institute said.

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Zelenskyy, His Clique Should Be Sent to Dustbin of History to Stop Meat Grinder - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, May 15 (Sputnik) - Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his clique should be sent to the dustbin of history in order to stop the pointless killing of innocent Ukrainians, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said.

"[O]rdinary Ukrainians are being thrown into this pointless meat grinder, contrary to their will, contrary to the interests of their country. It is possible to stop this merely by sending away Zelenskyy and his clique and the entire Maidan authorities, put them where they deserve to be - namely in the dustbin of history," Nebenzia said during a UN Security Council meeting on Ukraine on Tuesday.

Nebenzia emphasized that this revelation and stopping the meat grinder is Russia's goal.

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, saying it would lead to a further escalation of the conflict. In April 2022, Russia sent a diplomatic note to all NATO member states 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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Eight TikTok Creators Sue US Government Over Platform Ban - Court Documents

WASHINGTON, May 15 (Sputnik) - Eight TikTok creators are suing the US government over the new federal law that bans the social media platform in the United States if it is does not divest from its Chinese-owned parent company within a year, court documents showed.

"[The law] bans an entire medium of communication and all the speech communicated through that medium, even though, at the very least, the vast majority of that speech is protected," the creators said in the lawsuit.

The suit argues that the law violates the creators' rights under the First Amendment to the US Constitution given that it cuts off access to the service, which they argue "provides them a unique and irreplaceable means to express themselves and form community," according to the court documents.

The creators in the lawsuit come from eight different US states and include a Texas cattle rancher, an air force veteran and a college football coach.

The lawsuit comes after TikTok and its parent company ByteDance filed a petition in US federal

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court last week challenging the law and seeking to overturn the congressional ban of their application.

On April 26, President Joe Biden signed into law a bill that would ban TikTok if ByteDance does not sell its US business within nine months. The law allows the US president to extend the deadline to one year.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, May 15 (Sputnik) –

NEW RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT FORMATION

* Russian President Vladimir Putin congratulated members of the government during a meeting on Tuesday after signing decrees on the composition of the new cabinet of ministers.
* Putin signed decrees on the composition of the new cabinet of ministers.
* Newly appointed members of the Russian government will accompany President Vladimir Putin during his visit to China and participate in negotiations, Kremlin aide Yury Ushakov said.
* The Federation Council, the upper house of the Russian parliament, on Tuesday approved Boris Kovalchuk as the head of the Accounts Chamber, according to a live broadcast.
* The lower house of the Russian parliament approved Oksana Lut for the post of Minister of Agriculture.
* The State Duma, the lower house of the Russian parliament, on Tuesday approved Anton Alikhanov, who previously served as the governor of the Kaliningrad Region, as the new trade and industry minister.

MIDDLE EAST

* The United States in the coming days will begin delivering humanitarian aid into Gaza through a maritime corridor the United States constructed off the coast of the enclave, Pentagon Press Secretary Patrick Ryder said on Tuesday.
* US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan plans to travel to Saudi Arabia and Israel this coming weekend in an attempt to dissuade Israeli officials from launching an offensive operation in Rafah, Axios reported on Tuesday, citing sources familiar with the matter.
* UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is appalled by the ongoing military actions of the Israeli forces in and around Rafah, United Nations spokesperson Farhan Haq said.
* The UN International Court of Justice (ICJ) announced that it will hold hearings on May 16-17 on South Africa's request for measures against Israel over the situation Rafah.

US-CHINA RELATIONS

* US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that he does not believe the tariffs he imposed on Chinese products will lead to international conflict.
* The United States announced that the new tariffs it has imposed on Chinese products are a response to China's decades-long economic policy, rather than an escalation in trade relations, US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said.
* Biden said after imposing new tariffs on China that he wants fair competition and does not

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seek a conflict with Beijing.

WESTERN MILITARY AID TO UKRAINE

* The UN Security Council will hold a meeting on Monday on the supply of weapons to Ukraine by the collective West, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said.

* The United States is set to use the power given by Congress to seize frozen Russian assets to give them to Ukraine, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

* The United States is working relentlessly to procure more air defense systems for Ukraine, Blinken said.

* Blinken during a visit to Ukraine said that "much more" military support will be delivered to the battlefield in Ukraine in the coming days.

SITUATION IN GEORGIA

* The United States will be required to review US aid provided to Georgia if Tbilisi views Washington as an adversary under a proposed foreign agents law, US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs James O'Brien said on Tuesday.

* The United States expects Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili to veto a bill on foreign agents in the country, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said.

* Zourabichvili said that she plans to veto the bill on foreign agents, adopted by the parliament earlier in the day.

* UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is calling for restraint regarding the escalation of the situation in Georgia and urges for independent investigations of any ill-treatment, United Nations spokesperson Farhan Haq said.

PUTIN'S VISIT TO CHINA

* Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping will discuss at talks in Beijing the international cooperation, including at the UN and within BRICS, Kremlin aide Yury Ushakov said on Tuesday.

* Putin and Xi Jinping will discuss important issues, including sensitive topics, at narrow-format talks in Beijing, Ushakov said.

* During the visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin to Harbin in China he will be accompanied by Chinese Vice President Han Zheng, Kremlin aide Yury Ushakov said.

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Canadian Authorities Issue Wildfire Evacuation Order in Wood Buffalo Area of Alberta

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo in the Canadian province of Alberta issued a wildfire evacuation order on Tuesday for several areas.

"Due to the approaching wildfire, interfacing communities are being evacuated to allow for fire suppression efforts. All residents and businesses in these areas must leave the area by 4 p.m.," the order said.

The order is in effect for Beacon Hill, Abasand, Prairie Creek and Grayling Terrace. Other areas in the municipality are under an evacuation alert as well.

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The municipality is home to the Athabasca oil sands deposits, which is one of the world's largest sources of unconventional oil.

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Powell Says Has Diminished Confidence in US Inflation Moving Down Quickly

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said on Tuesday his confidence in the central bank scoring a fairly quick win against inflation has diminished, adding that annual price growth in the United States will return to 2% at some point though it was hard to say when.

"I expect that inflation will move back down on a monthly level," Powell said during a panel discussion at the Foreign Bankers' Association's annual general meeting in Amsterdam.

Powell, however, added: "My confidence in inflation moving back down is lower than it was, having seen these readings in the first three months of the year."

The US Consumer Price Index (CPI), a key inflation indicator, grew at an annualized rate of 4% in December but it declined to 3.1% in January yet edged higher again over the next two months, touching 3.2% in February and 3.5% in March.

April's reading for the CPI is due Wednesday, with Wall Street forecasting an annual rate of 3.4%.

On Tuesday, another inflation gauge called the US Producer Price Index (PPI) showed a 2.2% year-on-year increase in April versus the March rate of 2.1%.

Powell played down the impact of that data.

"I wouldn't call the PPI reading hot, but sort of mixed," Powell said.

In its bid to fight inflation, the Fed has left US interest rates at two-decade highs over the past ten months. The so-called restrictive policy is working to bring inflation toward the central bank's long-term 2% per year target, Powell said.

"I'm confident we'll get there," Powell also said, adding that the current range for rates may take longer than expected to do its work.

Inflation surged to a four-decade high in the aftermath of the 2020 coronavirus breakout, with the CPI growing as much as 9.1% a year by June 2022.

The Fed, In response, hiked interest rates 11 times since March 2022, bringing them to a range of between 5.25% and 5.5%. Prior to those increases, rates stood at between zero to 0.25%.

The current range for rates, at between 5.25% and 5.5% has been in place since July 2023. The Fed has an opportunity to revise this at the conclusion of its next policy meeting on June 12.

Even so, Powell has all but ruled out a rate cut at this point. He said he did not expect an upward adjustment in rates either from the pick-up in inflationary pressure since the start of the year.

"It's not likely based on the data we have that the next move will be a rate hike," Powell said. "It's more likely that we would hold the policy rate where it is."

Should the Fed pass on its June 12 decision on rates, it has four more opportunities to make a

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change this year: July 31, September 18, November 7 and December 18.
Wall Street is, meanwhile, wagering on the possibility of the first post-pandemic rate cut occurring in 2025.

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China Urges US to Stop Arming Taiwan - Embassy Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - China is urging the United States to stop arming Taiwan and preserve bilateral ties, Chinese Embassy in Washington spokesperson Liu Pengyu said on Tuesday.
"On US armed sales to Taiwan region, we urge the US side to stop arming Taiwan and its provocative moves of using Taiwan to contain China," Liu said. "The US side needs to take concrete actions to preserve the overall as well as military-to-military bilateral ties between China and the United States and safeguard regional piece and stability."
Liu warned that China will not hesitate to take strong and resolute measures to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity.
China will strive for the prospect of peaceful reunification with the utmost sincerity and utmost efforts, he said.
"In the meantime, we'll not allow anyone to separate Taiwan from China by any means. That is our red line. No one should underestimate China's determination, resolve and capability to safeguard its sovereignty and integrity," Liu added.
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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US Expanding Production of Bombs Designed to Penetrate Nuclear Bunkers - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - The United States is expanding the production of 30,000-pound bombs that are capable of penetrating underground nuclear facilities allegedly present in North Korea and Iran, Bloomberg reported on Tuesday.
An expansion of McAlester Army Ammunition Plant in southeast Oklahoma will triple the monthly production of the 30,000-pound Massive Ordnance Penetrator bombs, also known as bunker-penetrators, which can only be dropped from a B-2 stealth bomber, the report said.
The plant is located in an area of 70 square miles (181 sq. km.) and will reportedly be able to produce between six and eight bombs of this size per month.

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The expansion of the plant is expected to be completed by late spring to early fall with an opening ceremony scheduled on July 30.

The report also cited retired US Central Command head Gen. Frank McKenzie as saying that the 30,000-pound bomb ensures that the United States can target extremely well-protected underground facilities and at the same time contributes significantly to the US ability to achieve deterrence against nations such as Iran.

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Chinese Embassy Says US Accusations About Overcapacity 'False Narratives'

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - The United States accusing China of overcapacity represents a false narrative aimed at hindering Beijing's pursuit of high-quality development, spokesperson for the Chinese embassy in Washington Liu Pengyu said on Tuesday.

Earlier in the day, the Biden administration announced tariffs on $18 billion worth of Chinese imports, including electric vehicles, solar panels and steel.

"The US has been accusing China of overcapacity. Some people say that China's government subsidies in new energy sectors have led to overcapacity, distorted global prices and production pattern and undercut the interest of US companies and workers," Liu told reporters. "We believe these are the false narratives. They are made to hinder China's pursuit for high quality development and scapegoat China for their own problems."

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US to Begin Aid Deliveries to Gaza Via Maritime Corridor 'In Coming Days' - Pentagon

(Updates with details in paras 3, 4)

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - The United States will begin delivering humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip in the coming days through a maritime pier that the United States constructed off the coast of the Palestinian enclave, Defense Department spokesperson Patrick Ryder said on Tuesday.

"In the coming days, the United States as part of an international effort in coordination with the United Nations and the World Food Program will begin facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Gaza via the Cyprus maritime corridor," Ryder said during a press briefing.

US naval vessels will provide security to US personnel and partners working to deliver aid through the maritime pier, Ryder noted.

The maritime corridor operation will cost the United States about $320 million to operate over a three month period, according to Ryder.

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US Approves $340Mln Sale of AIM-9X Sidewinder Missiles to Romania - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - The US State Department approved the possible $340 million sale of AIM-9X Sidewinder missiles to Romania, the US Defense Department said on Tuesday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Romania of AIM-9X Sidewinder Block II Missiles and related equipment for an estimated cost of $340.8 million," the Defense Department said in a press release.

Romania has requested to buy up to 300 AIM-9X Sidewinder missiles, the release noted.

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us accusations about china overcapacity are false narratives - Chinese embassy in Washington

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US in Coming Days Will Begin Delivery of Aid to Gaza Via Maritime Corridor - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - The United States in the coming days will begin delivering humanitarian aid into Gaza through a maritime corridor the United States constructed off the coast of the enclave, Pentagon Press Secretary Patrick Ryder said on Tuesday.

"In the coming days, the United States as part of an international effort in coordination with the United Nations and the World Food Programme will begin facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Gaza via the Cyprus maritime corridor," Ryder said during a press briefing.

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UN Chief Sends Letter to Putin After Reelection as President of Russia - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, May 14 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has sent a letter to Russian President Vladimir Putin following his inauguration, spokesman Farhan Haq told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"Yes, the letter has gone out. I don't have it to share, but this is part of our standard practice

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when a government takes office or has a new mandate," Haq said.

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UN Security Council to Vote on Russian Draft Resolution on Space Security May 20 - Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, May 14 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council will vote on a Russian draft resolution on security in space on May 20, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Tuesday.

"And at 15.00 on the same day (May 20), a vote is scheduled on the draft Security Council resolution submitted by Russia on preventing an arms race in outer space. All three meetings will be broadcast on the telegram channel of the Permanent Mission and on UN WebTV," Polyanskiy said in a statement via Telegram.

Russia will also organize a UN Security Council meeting on Western weapons supplies to Ukraine earlier on May 20.

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us in coming days will begin delivery of humanitarian aid to gaza in coordination with un, world food program - pentagon

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Biden Says Does Not Think Tariffs on Chinese Products Will Lead to International Conflict

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that he does not believe the tariffs he imposed on Chinese products will lead to international conflict.

"Well, I'm sure China will talk a lot about it, but the fact is China already is what you might say, way over their skis on this. What they'll do, I don't think it'll lead to any international conflict or anything like that," Biden said in an interview with Yahoo Finance.

Biden also said that he thinks China will likely try to raise tariffs on unrelated US products.

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US Believes Mechanisms Still Exist to Modify Georgia's Transparency Law – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) – The United States continues to believe that there are mechanisms and avenues to modify the Georgian transparency law to make it consistent with the Georgian people's alleged aspirations and values, US State Department deputy principal spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Tuesday.

"We continue to believe there are mechanisms and avenues that they [the governing Georgian Dream political party] can produce to make this law less inconsistent with the aspirations and values that they themselves are saying that they're committed to through their constitution and through their own public posturing," Patel said during a press briefing.

Earlier on Tuesday, the Georgian parliament adopted a bill on foreign agents to limit the influence of entities receiving funding from abroad. The bill has sparked mass protests in Tbilisi since mid-April and backlash from Western countries warning that it could derail Georgia's path to becoming a member of the European Union.

Following the bill's passage, US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs James O'Brien said that the United States would review US aid provided to Georgia if Tbilisi views Washington as an adversary under the proposed foreign agents law.

The White House said that it expects the president of Georgia to veto the bill.

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US Trade Representative Says Discussing Tariffs on Chinese EVs If Produced in Mexico

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said on Tuesday that the United States is discussing tariffs on electric vehicles produced in Mexico, separate from tariffs recently imposed on Chinese imports.

"That will require a separate pathway … What you're talking about would be imports from Mexico — equally important, something that we are talking to our industry, our workers and our partners about," Tai said during a White House press briefing, when asked about electric vehicles produced in Mexico. "I would just ask you to stay tuned."

Earlier on Tuesday, the Biden administration announced tariffs on $18 billion worth of Chinese imports, including electric vehicles, solar panels and steel.

Chinese electric vehicle manufacturer BYD is reportedly set to build a factory in Mexico.

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PM Trudeau to Visit Philadelphia for SEIU Convention, Strengthen US-Canada Ties -Statement

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) — Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced on Tuesday in a statement he will travel to Philadelphia on May 21, 2024, to attend the Service

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Employees International Union (SEIU) Quadrennial North American Convention and promote the Canada-US relationship.

"The Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, today announced he will travel to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on May 21, 2024, to participate in the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Quadrennial North American Convention and promote the Canada-US relationship, including cross-border trade," the statement said.

According to the statement, while in Pennsylvania, the Prime Minister will meet with US business leaders to explore opportunities for commercial, investment, and trade collaboration, highlighting Pennsylvania as one of Canada's largest trading partners.

"In 2023, Pennsylvania exported US$14.3 billion to Canada, more than a quarter of Pennsylvania's exports to the world. Canada has an extensive footprint in Pennsylvania, with US$13.6 billion in exports to the state. Canadian-owned companies also employ over 25,000 workers in the state," the statement said.

Furthermore, the Prime Minister will highlight Canada's efforts in job creation, worker opportunities, and healthcare improvement and emphasize the strong Canada-US partnership and the role of organized labor, the statement added.

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White House Says Vice President Harris Used Expletive Due to Personal Passion

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Tuesday that US Vice President Kamala Harris' use of an expletive during recent remarks is a result of her passionate personality.

On Monday, Harris used an expletive word during remarks at an Asian Pacific American Institute summit, sparking criticism of such vulgarity from a government official.

"For those of you who have covered the vice president, know the vice president, she's passionate about what she fights for," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing, when asked about the incident.

Jean-Pierre said that she is proud to look up to Harris as vice president of the United States.

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UNSC to Hold Meeting on Western Supply of Weapons to Ukraine on May 20 - Polyanskiy

UNITED NATIONS, May 14 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council will hold a meeting on Monday on the supply of weapons to Ukraine by the collective West, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said.

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"On May 20, at 10.00 New York time (17:00 Moscow time), a meeting on the supply of Western weapons to Ukraine will begin," Polyanskiy said in a statement via Telegram on Tuesday.

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Sullivan to Visit Saudi Arabia, Israel This Weekend Amid Concerns on Rafah - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan plans to travel to Saudi Arabia and Israel this coming weekend in an attempt to dissuade Israeli officials from launching an offensive operation in Rafah, Axios reported on Tuesday, citing sources familiar with the matter.

The report said the United States had reached an agreement with Israel that any operation in Rafah would not be significantly expanded before Sullivan's visit and they hope this commitment will remain until a high-level meeting can take place between US and Israeli officials in Washington days after Sullivan's trip.

Moreover, the report said Sullivan will also attempt to make progress toward a US-brokered deal that could normalize relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel.

The White House cannot confirm the trip at this time, spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said during a briefing on Tuesday.

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US Would Consider Major Israeli Operation in Rafah 'Strategic Error' - State Department

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - The United States would consider a major Israeli military operation in Rafah a "strategic error," State Department Principal Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Tuesday.

"We would consider a major Israeli operation in Rafah a strategic error," said Patel during a press conference.

Patel added that a major operation into Rafah would not be beneficial for Israel's security or for reaching Israel's ultimate goal of defeating Hamas.

Last week, US President Joe Biden said Washington would restrict the supply of weapons to Israel if the latter launched a major military incursion into Rafah, and the United States paused one shipment of weapons for Israel. 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.

Last Monday, the IDF launched what it called a counterterrorist operation in Rafah, on the border with Egypt. The IDF initially invaded the city's east and took control of the Gaza side of the Rafah border crossing. On Friday, Israeli media reported that Israel's military cabinet had

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approved expanding the ground operation. Israeli authorities say the operation is aimed at eliminating the remaining battalions of Palestinian movement Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

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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biden says does not think china tariffs will lead to any international conflict or anything like that

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US May Review Aid to Georgia if Tbilisi Seen Not as Partner But Adversary - Official

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - The United States will be required to review US aid provided to Georgia if Tbilisi views Washington as an adversary under a proposed foreign agents law, US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs James O'Brien said on Tuesday.

"The US has about $390 million in assistance that we are planning to spend with Georgian authorities ... all that has to be under review if we are now regarded as an adversary and not a partner," O'Brien said.

O'Brien added that if the legislation becomes law and there is violence against "peaceful protesters," then the United States will consider imposing financial and travel restrictions on the individuals deemed responsible for those actions.

Earlier on Tuesday, the Georgian parliament adopted a bill on foreign agents aimed at limiting the influence of entities receiving funding from abroad. The bill has sparked mass protests in Tbilisi since mid-April and backlash from Western countries warning that it could derail Georgia's path to become a member of the European Union.

The White House said it expects the president of Georgia to veto the bill.

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US Consumer Spending Seen Dampened By Weaker Incomes - Fitch

NEW YORK, May 14 (Sputnik) - Waning income growth among Americans is likely to slow US consumer spending by one-third of a percentage point this year, with the decline setting in particularly after June, Fitch Ratings cautioned Tuesday.

Annual consumer spending growth is projected at 1.9% in 2024, versus 2.2% in 2023, it said, citing sticky inflation and deteriorating consumer sentiment among other factors.

"Much of the slowdown is expected to kick in during 2H24 as income growth decelerates further, the boost from pandemic savings dissipates and higher real interest rates persist," Olu Sonola, head of US economic research at Fitch, said in a report issued by the rating agency.

Consumer spending growth is waning amidst sticky inflation, weaker income growth, and deteriorating consumer sentiment, setting the stage for below-trend consumer spending growth, Fitch said.

Household nominal disposable income increased by 4.3% in the first quarter, supported by strong employment and nominal wage growth.

Real household disposable income growth was 1.7% year-over-year during the quarter, a notable downshift from approximately 4.1% in the prior two quarters.

Real labor income, the biggest contributor to total income, steadied at 2.7% during the quarter.

"A cooling labor market will likely contribute to a further weakening of labor income growth in 2H24," Fitch added.

Year-over-year wage growth for all private industry employees is declining, but still elevated, with key measures of wage growth ranging between 4.3% and 4.7%, data shows.

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US Expects Georgian President to Veto Foreign Agent Legislation - White House

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - The United States expects Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili to veto a bill on foreign agents in the country, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said on Tuesday.

"We're deeply troubled by Georgia's Kremlin-style foreign agents legislation," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing. "We expect the president to veto it."

The legislation would move Georgia further away from the values of NATO and the European Union, Jean-Pierre said.

The United States would have to fundamentally reassess its relationship with Georgia if the parliament overrides the anticipated veto, Jean-Pierre added.

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US Imposed Tariffs on China in Response to Beijing's Longstanding Policies - Trade Rep.

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - The United States announced that the new tariffs it has imposed on Chinese products are a response to China's decades-long economic policy, rather than an escalation on trade relations, US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said on Tuesday.

"What we [the US] are doing today should by no means be a surprise to our counterparts in Beijing. We have made clear this is not about escalation. This is about the consequences of decades of economic policy and the need for the United States to defend our rights," Tai said during a press briefing.

Earlier on Tuesday, the White House announced that President Joe Biden had increased US tariffs on $18 billion worth of Chinese imports, including electric cars, solar panels and steel, to protect domestic businesses from China's alleged unfair trade practices. China vowed to take all the necessary measures to pr

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Us may review Aid To Georgia If us Regarded As An Adversary, Not A Partner – US Assistant Secretary Of State O'brien

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Powell Says Has Diminished Confidence in US Inflation Moving Down Quickly

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said on Tuesday his confidence in the central bank scoring a fairly quick win against inflation has diminished, adding that annual price growth in the United States will return to 2% at some point though it was hard to say when.

"I expect that inflation will move back down on a monthly level," Powell said during a panel discussion at the Foreign Bankers' Association's annual general meeting in Amsterdam.

Powell, however, added: "My confidence in inflation moving back down is lower than it was, having seen these readings in the first three months of the year."

The US Consumer Price Index (CPI), a key inflation indicator, grew at an annualized rate of 4% in December but it declined to 3.1% in January yet edged higher again over the next two months, touching 3.2% in February and 3.5% in March.

April’s reading for the CPI is due Wednesday, with Wall Street forecasting an annual rate of 3.4%.

On Tuesday, another inflation gauge called the US Producer Price Index (PPI) showed a 2.2% year-on-year increase in April versus the March rate of 2.1%.

Powell played down the impact of that data.

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"I wouldn't call the PPI reading hot, but sort of mixed," Powell said.

In its bid to fight inflation, the Fed has left US interest rates at two-decade highs over the past ten months. The so-called restrictive policy is working to bring inflation toward the central bank's long-term 2% per year target, Powell said.

"I'm confident we'll get there," Powell also said, adding that the current range for rates may take longer than expected to do its work.

Inflation surged to a four-decade high in the aftermath of the 2020 coronavirus breakout, with the CPI growing as much as 9.1% a year by June 2022.

The Fed, In response, hiked interest rates 11 times since March 2022, bringing them to a range of between 5.25% and 5.5%. Prior to those increases, rates stood at between zero to 0.25%.

The current range for rates, at between 5.25% and 5.5% has been in place since July 2023. The Fed has an opportunity to revise this at the conclusion of its next policy meeting on June 12.

Even so, Powell has all but ruled out a rate cut at this point. He said he did not expect an upward adjustment in rates either from the pick-up in inflationary pressure since the start of the year.

"It's not likely based on the data we have that the next move will be a rate hike," Powell said. "It's more likely that we would hold the policy rate where it is."

Should the Fed pass on its June 12 decision on rates, it has four more opportunities to make a change this year: July 31, September 18, November 7 and December 18.

Wall Street is, meanwhile, wagering on the possibility of the first post-pandemic rate cut occurring in 2025.

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NASA, Boeing Postpone 1st Crew Starliner Flight to Space Station for May 21- Release

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - NASA and Boeing have once again postponed the first manned launch of the Starliner spacecraft with US astronauts Barry "Butch" Wilmore and Sunita "Suni" Williams to the International Space Station (ISS) for May 21, due to ongoing technical challenges, Boeing announced in a press release on Tuesday.

"NASA, Boeing, and ULA (United Launch Alliance) teams continue working [on] remaining open tasks in preparation for the agency's Boeing Crew Flight Test to the International Space Station," the release said. "The teams now are targeting a launch date of no earlier than 4:43 pm EDT [[Eastern Daylight Time] on Tuesday, May 21, to complete additional testing."

On May 11, the ULA team successfully replaced a pressure regulation valve on the liquid oxygen tank on the Atlas V rocket's Centaur upper stage and also performed re-pressurization and system purges, and tested the new valve, which performed normally, the release noted..

"Starliner teams are working to resolve a small helium leak detected in the spacecraft's service module traced to a flange on a single reaction control system thruster," Boeing said.

The first manned Starliner flight was previously scheduled for July 2023 but has been repeatedly postponed since then as parts have failed to function properly during tests. Boeing

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has received more than $5 billion in contracts to build the much-troubled spacecraft.

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Biden After Imposing New Tariffs on China Says Does Not Seek Conflict

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said after imposing new tariffs on China that he wants fair competition and does not seek a conflict with Beijing.
"I want fair competition with China and not conflict, and we're in a stronger position to win that economic competition in the 21st century against China than anyone else because we're investing in America again and American workers," Biden said during a press conference.
Earlier on Tuesday, the White House announced that Biden increased US tariffs on $18 billion worth of Chinese imports, including electric cars, solar panels and steel, to allegedly protect domestic businesses from Beijing's "unfair trade practices." Beijing vowed to take all the necessary measures to protect its interests from the adverse effects of the tariff hikes.

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UN Chief Calls for Restraint, Dialogue Following Escalation in Georgia - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, May 14 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is calling for restraint regarding the escalation of the situation in Georgia and urges for independent investigations of any ill treatment, United Nations spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Tuesday.
"He [Guterres] calls for restraint and dialogue between the authorities and civil society, as well as prompt investigation of all allegations of ill treatment during or after protests or in detention," Haq said during a press briefing.

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UN Chief 'Appalled' by Israeli Actions, Military Escalations in Rafah - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, May 14 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is appalled by the ongoing military actions of the Israeli forces in and around Rafah, United Nations spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Tuesday.
"The Secretary-General is appalled by the escalation of military activity in and around Rafah by the Israeli Defense Forces," Farah said in a statement. "These developments are further impeding humanitarian access and worsening an already dire situation. At the same time, Hamas goes on firing rockets indiscriminately. Civilians must be respected and protected at all

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times, in Rafah and elsewhere in Gaza. For people in Gaza, nowhere is safe now."

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US Says Security, Prosperity Dependent on Maintaining Peace in Indo-Pacific - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - The US State Department said on Tuesday that the United States' security and prosperity was dependent on peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

"America's own security and prosperity is dependent on the maintenance of peace and stability across the Indo-Pacific region," Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific affairs Daniel Kritenbrink at an event at the Brookings Institution.

Kritenbrink noted that Taiwan played a critical role in the global economy and was one of the United States' top trading partners, with half of the global container traffic passing through the Taiwan Strait and about 90% of high-end chips produced in Taiwan.

Kritenbrink said the United States had the right policy and approach, while China had increased its use of pressure and coercion toward Taiwan.

This situation meant that the United States had to use its powers under the Taiwan Relations Act and partnership with allies in the region to maintain peace and stability, Kritenbrink added.

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US Says North Korea Unresponsive to Diplomacy – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) – The US Department of State said on Tuesday that the North Korean government has been unresponsive to its overtures of diplomacy.

“What we've tried to do is demonstrate our commitment to the security of our allies and partners in the region and our commitment to countering the growing threat posed by the North Korean nuclear and missile programs. Now, we've simultaneously indicated that we remain open to diplomacy with Pyongyang, diplomacy without conditions. Unfortunately, the only response we've received thus far from the DPRK has been more missile launches,” Daniel Kritenbrink, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, said at a Brookings event.

Kritenbrink said that while the US remained open to diplomacy, it had “no choice but to double down on our security arrangements,” particularly with South Korea and Japan, in addition to working with other international partners to enforce sanctions against North Korea.

He said that North Korea was “one of the most significant” challenges the US faced in the Indo-Pacific region.

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US Set to Use Power Given by Congress to Seize Frozen Russian Assets for Ukraine- Blinken

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - The United States is set to use the power given by Congress to seize frozen Russian assets to give them to Ukraine, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said during his visit to Ukraine.

"There is one more crucial step that we can take making Russia pay for Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction," Blinken said on Wednesday. "Our Congress has given us the power to seize Russian assets in the United States, we intend to use it."

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US Relentlessly Working With Allies to Procure More Air Defense for Ukraine - Blinken

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - The United States is working relentlessly to procure more air defense systems for Ukraine, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said during his visit to Kiev.

"We are working relentlessly with our allies and partners to procure more air defense and to do it fast ," Blinken said on Wednesday.

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ICC Complicit in Destruction of Libya, Gave Impunity to Perpetrators - Russian Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, May 14 (Sputnik) - The International Criminal Court (ICC) has been complicit in the destruction of Libya by letting the perpetrators escape justice, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Tuesday.

"The bottom line for the Security Council should be the fact that the ICC has become complicit in the destruction of Libyan statehood and the impunity of the perpetrators of that crime, which has had serious consequences for the peace and security of the entire region," Nebenzia said.

The Russian ambassador made the comment during a meeting at the UN Security Council on Libya with the ICC representative, Imran Khan, being present to provide an assessment of the situation in the country.

Nebenzia said Russia sees no point in having the ICC representative at the UN Security Council meeting given that he purely serves the interests of the Western states.

Russia has repeatedly accused the West of using Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi's case at the ICC to invade the country in 2011. At the end of 2023, Russia suggested that the UN Security Council should question whether it is worth continuing meetings on the ICC reports

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about the country given the lack of results.

Libya has been grappling with multiple crises after the Western military intervention in 2011 led to the overthrew and murder of the country's longtime leader, Muammar Gaddafi. The Western aggression created a power vacuum that split Libya into rival factions. The United Nations has been struggling to fill in the void by helping Libyans hold a general election, although internal divisions led it to cancel the vote set for 2021.

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NATO at July Summit to Take Tangible Steps to Build Capable Ukraine's Force - Blinken

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - At the forthcoming NATO summit in Washington this July, the military alliance will take tangible steps to increase its role in building a resilient and capable Ukrainian force, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday.

"When we hold the Washington summit in July, we'll take tangible steps to increase NATO's role in building resilient capable Ukrainian force, supporting its ongoing reforms that are integrating Ukraine into the alliance," Blinken said during his visit to Kiev.

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Ukraine's Invitation, Accession to NATO Will Be 'Swift and Smooth' - Blinken

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - Ukraine will swiftly and smoothly join the NATO alliance once the country meets prerequisite conditions, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday during remarks in Kiev.

"The moment conditions are met, and allies agree, Ukraine's invitation and accession to the alliance will be swift and smooth," Blinken said.

Ukraine's bridge to NATO will be reinforced with bilateral security agreements, Blinken added.

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Blinken Says Much More Military Aid Coming to Ukraine Battlefield in Coming Days

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken during a visit to Ukraine on Tuesday said that "much more" military support will be delivered to the battlefield in Ukraine in the coming days.

"One minute after Congress approved our massive aid package, President [Joe] Biden sent munitions, armored vehicles, missiles and air defenses to Ukraine. Much more will be delivered

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to the battlefield in the coming days," Blinken said.

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Port of Baltimore Says Achieved Milestone by Detonating Explosives to Free Cargo Ship Dali

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - The port of Baltimore announced on Tuesday that a milestone was achieved with the successful detonation of controlled explosives to break apart the collapsed Francis Scott Key bridge and begin dislodging the stuck cargo ship Dali.

"Significant milestone achieved tonight with controlled explosives successfully detonated helping to break apart the bridge and start to free the Dali vessel," the port of Baltimore said in a statement via the social media platform X.

The Unified Command, including the US Coast Guard and US Army Corps of Engineers of Baltimore, performed very well, the release said.

In March, the commercial Singapore-flagged cargo ship Dali hit the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore soon after it departed. The bridge collapsed and six people died in the incident.

US media reported earlier that the insured loss from the bridge collapse could reach $4 billion, making it the most expensive ship collision incident in modern history.

In April, the Baltimore city authorities filed a legal claim against the owner and operator of the Dali that rammed into the Francis Scott Key Bridge, accusing them of negligence as the vessel was unseaworthy, according to court documents.

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US to 'Imminently' Open Embassy in Vanuatu - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) – The Department of State said on Tuesday that it will "imminently" open an embassy in Vanuatu.

"We will open an embassy imminently in the next few weeks in Vanuatu, and we're working to open in Kiribati as well," Daniel Kritenbrink, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, said at a Brookings event.

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Biden Admin. Weaponizes US Judicial System Against Trump - Speaker Johnson

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) – The Biden administration has weaponized the US judicial system against former President Donald Trump to interfere with his election campaign, House

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Speaker Mike Johnson said on Tuesday.

"The judicial system in our country has been weaponized against President Trump," Johnson told reporters outside the New York court hearing the "hush money" case. "These are politically motivated trials and they are a disgrace. It is election interference."

Johnson added that he is working with House Oversight Committee Chairman James Comer and House Judiciary Committee chief Jim Jordan on measures "to rein in" the abuses of Special Counsel Jack Smith, who is investigating Trump's role in the January 6 Capitol riot and the classified documents case.

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

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

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US Ban on Russian Uranium to Start on August 12 - State Department

(Updates with more details, background in paras 4-10)

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - The US ban on Russian uranium will take into effect on August 12, the US State Department announced on Tuesday.

"This bipartisan legislative action prohibits the import of Russian uranium products into the United States as of August 12, 2024, while enabling a waiver process with the Department of Energy, in consultation with the Departments of State and Commerce, through January 1, 2028, consistent with the law," the State Department said in a release.

On Monday, US President Joe Biden signed the Prohibiting Russian Uranium Imports Act, which bans the imports of Russian uranium until 2040.

The State Department explained that the ban supports the United States' ongoing effort to reduce and ultimately eliminate US dependence on Russian uranium for civil nuclear power reactors.

"Russia continues to use its military-industrial base in its war against Ukraine and to undermine international and U.S. national security, in part, with proceeds from its uranium exports," the release said.

The State Department also said that Russian entities responsible for uranium exports are part of Rosatom and any proceeds would risk boosting Russia's nuclear weapons program.

"The Russian Federation has also proven by its actions that it is willing to weaponize economic relationships, which makes the continued reliance on Russian uranium products a threat to US energy and economic security through dependence on an insecure source or supply of uranium

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needed for domestic nuclear energy," the release said.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Tuesday that the Biden administration's ban on uranium imports is not critical for Russia's nuclear industry,

Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said on Monday that the ban will hit the US economy harder than the Russian economy, and the Biden administration's sanctions policy has not brought about the desired results,

The bill envisages limiting the import of low-enriched uranium produced in Russia or Russian-based companies, but also authorizes the US energy secretary in coordination with the secretary of state and the commerce secretary to lift the ban if other sources of uranium supplies are unavailable or the import of Russian nuclear fuel is in the national interests of the United States.

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US Congressman Introduces Bill to Require US-Africa Summit Every 4 Years - Statement

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - US House Foreign Affairs Committee Ranking Member Gregory Meeks said on Tuesday that he introduced a bill to require the United States to hold a US-Africa Leaders Summit (ALS) every four years.

"This legislation marks a pivotal step in making US-Africa cooperation a sustainable and impactful pillar of US foreign policy. Following the significant advances from the summits initiated by President Obama in 2014 and continued under President Biden in 2022, this bill institutionalizes the ALS so that future administrations are able to leverage these summits to strengthen America's relationship with African countries," Meeks said in a statement.

The bill directs the US Secretary of State to hold an ALS at least once every four years, the statement said. The legislation also urges the Secretary of State to hold city summits focused on subregional cooperation and to establish an implementation office to ensure that collaborative efforts with African countries translate into tangible outcomes, the statement said.

The United States should continue to take actions that reflect a meaningful commitment to African partners, the statement added.

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New US Tariffs on China to Undermine Global Economy, Push China Closer to BRICS - Sachs

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - The US government's decision to substantially increase tariffs on $18 billion worth of goods from China will likely undermine the global economy and push Beijing closer to world trade groups such as BRICS, Jeffrey Sachs, a world-renowned economist and president of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, told Sputnik

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on Tuesday.

Earlier in the day, the White House announced that President Joe Biden increased US tariffs on $18 billion worth of Chinese imports, including electric cars, solar panels and steel, to protect domestic businesses from China's alleged unfair trade practices. China vowed to take all the necessary measures to protect its interests from the adverse effects of the tariff hikes.

"These steps are likely to undermine the global economy, divide the world increasingly into economic blocs, and heighten geopolitical tensions," Sachs said. "China's response will be to intensify its outreach to the BRICS, G77 and the Non-Aligned Movement."

China will also likely intensify programs such as the Belt and Road Initiative and the New Development Bank in response to the Biden administration's decision, Sachs said.

Under the newly imposed measures, tariffs on steel and aluminum products from China will increase from 0-7.5% to 25% this year, while the tariff rate on semiconductors made in China will double in 2025. In addition, the tariff rate on electric vehicles from China is expected to grow from 25% to 100% this year as well.

"All in all, this is further drift into heightened global tensions and uncertainty," Sachs said regarding the US tariffs. "The policies will not give any significant boost to the US economy."

Sachs pointed out that the United States is turning overtly protectionist and abandoning the World Trade Organization framework.

The US government's decision may be driven by three main factors: the politics of the swing states in the industrial Midwest, where workers seek protection from imports, and where Democrats and Republicans compete for votes; the attempt to reindustrialize after 30 years of offshoring industrial production; and the attempt to hinder China's economic development, he said.

Sachs also said he expects China will try to maintain some openness of trade with the European Union (EU), but noted that the EU is also becoming increasingly protectionist.

European Commission trade spokesman Olof Gill said the European Union has taken note of the United States' decision to increase tariffs on imports of certain goods from China and is closely studying the measure's possible impact on the bloc.

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House Democrats Launch Probe Into Trump's Dinner With US Oil Executives - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - Democrats in the House of Representatives have started a probe into former President Donald Trump's meeting with US oil executives at his Florida residence in April to reportedly ask them to funnel $1 billion into his presidential campaign, The Washington Post reported on Tuesday.

On Thursday, the newspaper reported that during a dinner with the top US oil executives at his Mar-a-Lago residence in April, Trump promised to immediately scrap - if re-elected - nearly a dozen of the Biden administration's environmental rules, including ending Biden's ban on new liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports, in exchange for $1 billion steered to his presidential campaign.

A group of Democrat lawmakers from the House Oversight Committee, including Rep. Jamie Raskin, sent out letters on Monday evening to nine oil executives, asking them to provide information about their participation in the meeting, the report said.

The lawmakers sent letters to the CEOs of Cheniere Energy, Chesapeake Energy, Chevron, Continental Resources, EQT Corporation, ExxonMobil, Occidental Petroleum, Venture Global and the head of the American Petroleum Institute.

The letters ask the CEOs to provide a copy of any draft executive orders that their companies have prepared for Trump or his campaign, among other things.

While President Joe Biden has called climate change an "existential threat," enacting many new regulations to reduce air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, toxic chemical use and to conserve land and water resources, Trump has dismissed the claim as being a hoax.

As of April 22, the US oil and gas industry has donated nearly $7.3 million to Trump's presidential election campaign, according to the data compiled by OpenSecrets.

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US Imposes Sanctions Related to Alleged Sanctions Evasion by Deripaska – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) – The United States imposed sanctions on Tuesday related to alleged sanctions evasion by Russian businessman Oleg Deripaska, according to a release.

"The United States is today designating one Russian individual and three Russia-based companies involved in an attempted sanctions evasion scheme connected to Russian oligarch Oleg Vladimirovich Deripaska, who was previously sanctioned by the United States, Australia, Canada, the European Union, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom," the release stated.

The sanctions list includes Dmitrii Beloglazov, Joint Stock Company Iliadis, Rasperia Trading Limited, and Limited Liability Company Titul, according to a Treasury notice.

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Biden Admin. Should Put Tariffs on Many More Chinese Products Other Than EVs - Trump

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that the Biden administration should impose tariffs on many more Chinese products than just on electric vehicles as China is "eating our lunch."

"He [President Joe Biden] wants to put big tariffs, which is the suggestion that I said. Where have you been for 3.5 years, you should have done it a long time ago. But, they also have to do it on electric vehicles and they have to do it on a lot of other products, because China is eating our lunch right now," Biden said. "They have to do it on much more than electric vehicles and they have to get going fast but it should have been done 3.5 years ago."

Earlier on Tuesday, the White House said Biden was increasing tariffs on Chinese imports, including on electric cars, solar panels and steel, to protect domestic businesses from China's alleged unfair trade practices.

China vowed to take all the necessary measures to protect its interests from the adverse effects of the tariffs.

The United States has on many occasions accused China of implementing non-market policies. However, China has said that it firmly supports the multilateral trading system and pointed to the US practice of bullying and imposing sanctions to suppress other countries' companies.

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Estonia Mulling Dispatching Troops to Western Ukraine - National Security Advisor

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - Estonia is considering sending troops to western Ukraine to take up indirect combat roles in order to free up Ukrainian forces to fight on the frontlines, Breaking Defense reported on Monday, citing Estonia’s national security advisor to the president.

Madis Roll was quoted in the report as saying that "discussions are ongoing" in the executive branch and Estonia "should be looking at all the possibilities."

Roll also said that Estonia would prefer to get involved as part of a NATO mission, even though he did not rule out the possibility of participating in a smaller coalition.

The national security advisor added that it was not impossible for NATO members who were opposed to being involved to change their minds down the line.

The head of Estonia’s defense forces, Gen. Martin Herem, told Breaking Defense last week that there had previously been talks about sending troops to western Ukraine to help with

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medical services, logistics, or air defense, but the idea attracted too much public controversy.

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