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5/16/24 Thursday

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NY Times Admits Russian Success on Battlefield, Blames Congress Funding Delays

Throughout the article, the authors find little room for deep interrogation of the wisdom of the conflict or the US role in perpetuating it.

The New York Times published an article this week acknowledging Russia's upper hand in the conflict in the Donbass, although a convenient excuse was found to explain the struggles of the US-backed Ukrainian regime.

"White House Worries Russia's Momentum Is Changing Trajectory of Ukraine War" read the headline in the Tuesday edition of the controversial US newspaper. The authors identified a number of factors contributing towards Moscow's recent success, including advances in Russian technology and battlefield tactics. But the article focuses heavily on a delay in the provision of US aid to Kiev while Congress debated the wisdom of doubling down on America's support for the Zelensky regime.

The authors referenced the delay in support from Washington at least five times throughout the short article.

"A monthslong debate in Washington about whether to send Ukraine a $61 billion package of arms and ammunition created an opening that Russia has clearly exploited, even though Congress ultimately passed the legislation," the article reads. The authors also noted the Biden administration's increasing reliance on the talking point, characterizing Secretary of State Antony Blinken's comment that "there's no doubt there's been a cost" as an "understatement."

The article blames the funding delay for Russia's "huge artillery advantage," claiming Ukraine would be able to neutralize Russian airpower if it possessed more anti-aircraft weaponry.

However, the authors also conceded that Moscow has refined its strategy over the course of the war, allowing it to bring its "huge military infrastructure" and population advantage to bear.

Stephen J. Hadley, a national security advisor under former President George W. Bush, is quoted as recognizing that Russia often "finishes strong" in military conflicts, adapting its tactics along the way.

The article also acknowledges Russia's successful use of electronic warfare to disable drones and artillery provided by the West.

"In some cases, Russia has successfully deceived GPS receivers, throwing off the targeting of Ukrainian arms, including a variety of missiles shot from HIMARS launchers, which Mr. Biden began providing to Ukraine last year," the authors write.

Throughout the article, the authors find little room for deep interrogation of the wisdom of the conflict or the US role in perpetuating it.

Critics note that the US "newspaper of record" has played an instrumental role in upholding US imperialism, never failing to offer support for any Washington-backed coup or US war.

Self-critique simply is not part of The New York Times' mission statement. To question US foreign policy would be to risk undermining the manufacturing of consent that makes it possible.

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Palantir CEO Alex Karp summarized the risk thusly, explaining the threat of deep reflection on US global policy represented by ongoing protests in support of Palestine: “We think these things that are happening across college campuses are a sideshow. No, they are the show. If we lose the intellectual debate, you will not be able to deploy any army in the West, ever.”
Institutions like The New York Times are part of how elites win the intellectual debate or, preferably, prevent it from taking place. Any suggestion that the United States and its warfighting machine may be wrong, guilty, or even fallible cannot be allowed. People employed in the sacred work of spreading freedom and democracy must never second-guess themselves.

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Scott Ritter: Belousov's Appointment Signals 'Revolution' in Russian Military Affairs

Russia is integrating lessons from the conflict in Ukraine to write the military doctrine of the future, according to former UN weapons inspector Scott Ritter.
Russian President Vladimir Putin’s appointment of Andrei Belousov to serve as the country’s new Minister of Defense has provoked speculation in the West.
The Kremlin cited the need to appoint a civilian as a head for the Defense Ministry to foster an environment “open to innovations and advanced ideas” to explain Putin’s decision to reshuffle the ministry, Kremlin Spokesman Dmitri Peskov clarified. In addition, the official noted that it is very important to integrate the economy of the military bloc into the country's economy to match the dynamics.
Former US Marine Corps intelligence officer Scott Ritter claimed Belousov’s appointment “goes beyond simply trying to bring economic structure and discipline to an expansive and expanding military industrial base” in a post on the X social media platform. The former UN weapons inspector joined Sputnik’s The Critical Hour program Wednesday to discuss what he described as Russia’s “new revolution in military affairs.”
“What wins the war is the arsenal of democracy,” said Ritter, pointing to the Allied Forces’ victory in World War II. “The ability of the United States to kick in its industrial capacity to just produce tanks, produce aircraft, shipping an endless stream of military goods that gets fed into the meatgrinder of conflict and you basically out-produce your enemy. That helped us not just build up our military, but prop up the British.”
“This is the key to warfare, the ability to sustain the high intensity of modern warfare,” the analyst insisted. “Russia has stepped its defense industry into gear… Russians have come out and said they are in a de facto war, not just with Ukraine but with the collective West, which means they are in a conflict against the collective defense industrial capacity of Europe and the United States.”
Russia has invested significantly in arms and ammunition production over the last several years as Ukraine’s allies struggle to provide the country with sufficient weaponry. Observers have acknowledged the weakened state of Europe’s arms production capabilities as the continent fell into dependence on the US military presence after World War II. The military reliance on the United States has allowed Washington to shape European foreign policy in important ways.

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But concerns have been raised over US military capabilities as well, as a policy of military Keynesianism has geared arms production in the direction of private profit and economic stimulus. Additionally, the War on Terror has caused US armed forces to adapt to fighting irregular guerrilla armies in the Middle East rather than large state-sponsored militaries. The result is that two decades of technological development have left the country ill-equipped to combat a sophisticated foe such as Moscow.

However, Russia's military innovation carries its own set of concerns, warns Ritter, claiming the Soviet Union became overly-focused on its defense sector during the Cold War.

"This is the problem that the Soviet economy ran into in the 1970s, when the percentage of the economy that was dedicated to defense industry reached over 7.5%," said Ritter. "That was an imbalance that the Soviet economy couldn't sustain… You need to continue to have the defense industry churning along to produce what it's producing, but it has to be balanced with economic realities."

"You need to have a viable domestic economy," he explained. "Sergei Shoigu was good at getting the defense industry up and running… Had he remained in power as the minister of defense there's a chance that the [Russian] economy would've overheated from a defense standpoint. Enter Andrei Belousov."

"This is a man who knows the Russian economy inside and out," claimed Ritter. "He predicted the 2008 turn around, he predicted the 2012 dip. He has the ear of the president and the respect of everybody and he's being brought in to ensure that the defense industry keeps chugging along but it doesn't overheat, to find that balance with the civilian economy."

But Ritter claimed Belousov would focus not only on macroeconomic concerns, but also on innovation within Russia's defense industry: the "revolution in military affairs."

Ritter explained that Belousov would be tasked with integrating everything Russia has learned from the Ukraine conflict into its new military doctrine, taking note of both tactical and technological innovations. The realities of drone and electronic warfare will be fused with strategic insights to transform the country's approach to fighting conflicts, he claimed.

Russia will also adapt to an increasingly-belligerent NATO, said Ritter, responding to the expansion of the bloc to Sweden and Finland as well as the hostility of the Baltic states.

"One thing that we've learned about the West is that if they go to war against Russia, they'll run out of ammunition in seven to ten days," said the former weapons inspector. "Russia plans on never running out of ammunition. This is a lesson learned. Russia knows that having firepower supremacy on the battlefield is one of the guarantees of victory."

"Nobody else in the world is ready for the kind of revolution in military affairs that Russia is getting ready to unleash, and this is what makes Mr. Belousov the most dangerous man in the world as far as the West is concerned."

Scott Ritter: Andrei Belousov's appointment signals 'revolution' in Russian military affairs (Part 1)

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"This is a man who knows the Russian economy inside and out," said former US Marine Corps intelligence officer Scott Ritter of Russia's new defense minister Andrei Belousov. "He has the ear of the president and the respect of everybody and he's being brought in to ensure that the defense industry keeps chugging along but it doesn't overheat, to find that balance with the civilian economy."

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"Nobody else in the world is ready for the kind of revolution in military affairs that Russia is getting ready to unleash, and this is what makes Mr. Belousov the most dangerous man in the world as far as the West is concerned," said Ritter.

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New York Times admits Russian success on the battlefield

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"White House Worries Russia's Momentum Is Changing Trajectory of Ukraine War" read the headline of the article in the controversial US newspaper. The authors identified a number of factors contributing towards Moscow's recent success, including advances in Russian technology and battlefield tactics. But the article focuses heavily on a delay in the provision of US aid to Kiev while Congress debated the wisdom of doubling down on America's support for the Zelensky regime.

However, the authors also conceded that Moscow has refined its strategy over the course of the war, allowing it to bring its "huge military infrastructure" and population advantage to bear. Stephen J. Hadley, a national security advisor under former President George W. Bush, is quoted as recognizing that Russia often "finishes strong" in military conflicts, adapting its tactics along the way.

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receivers, throwing off the targeting of Ukrainian arms, including a variety of missiles shot from HIMARS launchers, which Mr. Biden began providing to Ukraine last year," the journalists highlight.

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'Before Oct 7, There Was an Oct 6': Student Protests Continue Despite Media Spins

The incident at Duke University is the latest in a series of student protests that are occurring across the country. The protests have resulted in nearly 2,900 arrests at 57 colleges and universities, AP News reported.

On Sunday, a small group of Duke University graduates protested pro-Israel comedian Jerry Seinfeld during their commencement in North Carolina. It was reported by AP News that about 30 students left their seats while chanting "free Palestine". Seinfeld, who was present to earn an honorary doctorate from the university, is a 70-year-old comedian and actor known for his namesake sitcom. The celebrity has also been publicly supportive of Israel since October 7.

On Thursday, Sputnik's The Critical Hour spoke to Esther Iverem, an artist, author and independent journalist, about the ongoing protests. Iverem noted what she calls a "media spin" regarding stories which cover the student protestors.

"To say that the protests are dwindling while at the same time you're showing student after student waving flags at graduations and flashing the camera with pro-Palestine signs and doing all these other acts of, what the article says, defiance. All these acts of defiance during graduation shows the continued militancy of the protest," Iverem explained.

"What else is this group of students to do? And as you said, over the summer they have a lot more time with finals over, with sometimes, for some of them, with diplomas over to really focus on this issue, which is the human rights issue of their time, the human rights issue of our time," the artist and author continued.

"[The student movement] has placed Palestine and Palestinians at the center of the worldwide cause for social justice and at the center of the anti-imperialist movement," she added.

Since the war between Israel and Hamas first broke out on October 7 more than 35,000 Palestinians in Gaza have died, a majority of which have been women and children, the Gaza Health Ministry has said. This month, the head of the United Nations World Food Program, Cindy McCain, said that Gaza had entered a "full-blown famine".

"These students are seeing this government try to take away their TikTok, willing to trash our First Amendment, Fourth Amendment, to pass these dangerous laws equating anti-Zionism with antisemitism, just totally tear down what pretense we have of democratic institutions, for what?" She asked. "To shield Israel from facing the consequences of the genocide? And the students see that."

Iverem then noted that Jerry Seinfeld's wife, Jessica Seinfeld, reportedlybankrolled a pro-Israel counterprotest at UCLA. Seinfeld says she donated money to the group before the "peaceful" demonstration turned violent.

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“To just say that you condemn Hamas without understanding that before October 7th, there was an October 6th. And 17 years of siege in Gaza and 75 years of this apartheid ethnic cleansing in Israel,” she added. “That is what's making the student movement so powerful because they're reclaiming all of that, and they're not letting the powers that be forget it.”

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.

Sputnik’s Wilmer Leon noted that mainstream media continues to address the student protestors as “pro-Palestinian” as opposed to “anti-genocide”.

“The thing I really appreciate about the students who I've interviewed and who I've heard speak is that they want to keep the focus on Gaza. They want to keep the focus on the genocide and not on them,” said Iverem.

“If you have the leaders of the country openly calling for genocide, if you have a mob openly declaring their beliefs that the people in Gaza should be wiped out, openly cheering the death of babies and children and pregnant women, then what else can you call it?” She asked. “But, obviously, that's a red line in terms of how they want to depict protesters.”

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‘Talking About This for Years’: Ukraine’s Corruption is Partly Responsible for Their Defeat

According to a CBS news report from 2022, just 30 - 40% of supplies sent to Ukraine reaches its final destination, though the source they cited has claimed the situation has improved since then.

Sputnik’s Jamarl Thomas reported on Thursday that Ukraine’s loss of territory and inability to build a defense is the result of them embezzling funds. Meanwhile, Ukraine President Vladimir Zelensky has criticized the West for hesitating to send aid to his regime, and has cited it as the reason for his military failures.

On Thursday, Andrii Telizhenko - a Ukrainian whistleblower and a former diplomat - joined Sputnik’s Fault Lines to discuss the corruption in Ukraine.

“We've been talking about this for years - about the corruption in the high-level Ukrainian government, and we've talked for the last two years how the Kiev regime under Zelensky is stealing and basically making money on this war - together with the military industrial complex in Washington,” said Telizhenko. “And the fortification of the Kharkov region and Sumy region, which is now basically losing a couple of kilometers every hour and it has not been built. The money was lost.”

“You know what they were building? They were building roads. They're not building fortifications. They're officially building roads that border Russia,” he continued. “That's where they're [using] money, because building roads can make much more money than you can make on fortifications.”

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Kiev previously allocated almost 38 billion hryvnia ($960 million) to build a multi-layered network of fortifications yet Ukrainian troops testified that those lines of defense do not exist, according to a recent Sputnik report which cited the Associated Press.

“The Biden administration put in the wrong guys. And there's now information coming out from the Congress that there's $175 million which was not accounted for in one case, then there's $300 million not accounted for in another case,” he added.

This week, a chairwoman for the Ukrainian anti-corruption group Mezha reported that Kharkov's Department of Housing and Community Services in regional military administration had 7 billion hryvnias, or $176.5 million, to build fortifications to hold back the Russian advance. She found that much of this money was embezzled.

“Multi-million contracts for the construction of fortification structures, for which a total of 7 billion hryvnias [roughly $176 million] was spent, were [transferred] by the Kharkov Regional State Administration to dummy companies,” said Martina Bougslavets.

“The rich are not fighting this war. This is the war of the poor. Because only the poor get sent to the front lines,” the former diplomat explained. “Only the poor are dying. Only the poor in Ukraine are sent to fight and are being killed, and they're not being paid anything for this.”

“There's no morale on the Ukrainian front lines right now. The moral is: 63% of Ukrainians don't want to fight because they know how you cannot get your body back, you're not going to get compensated, how you are going to lose your life and that's it. Your family is going to be on their own. That's why the men are not going to go fight, because there's corruption in Ukraine,” said Telizhenko.

On Tuesday, it was reported that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Ukraine will hold elections when all Ukrainians, including those who now live in Russia, decide to participate. A recent article from RT suggests that doing so essentially permits Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky to postpone a vote unless Ukrainian territories are recaptured. Ukraine was scheduled to hold a presidential election on March 31, but Zelensky canceled the vote last year citing martial law and the ongoing conflict with Russia.

“Our men are being just drafted as animals taken off the street and thrown on the front line. The people are fed up with this. Zelensky's term ends on May 20th. He's not the president by the Constitution of Ukraine after that, by the act of Article 103. So the people are raising up to change Zelensky,” Telizhenko said.

“They hate him and they hate what he's becoming. And because of the losing of the front lines, in Ukraine, today, they understand they lost. This war should have never happened.”

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Take It Outside - Cartoon

Previously, US President Joe Biden said he would be “happy” to debate former President Donald Trump before the November election, in response to a question from Howard Stern during an hour-long interview.

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On Wednesday, Biden challenged Trump to a debate in a video posted to X. The president's inciting statements mocked Trump for being "free on Wednesdays", which makes light of the former president's ongoing hush money trial.

"Donald Trump lost two debates to me in 2020, and since then he hasn't shown up for a debate. Now he's acting like he wants to debate me again," said Biden in the video. "Well make my day, pal. I'll even do it twice. So let's pick the dates, Donald. I hear you're free on Wednesdays."

The Biden campaign offered up two dates for the presidential debates, one in late June and the other in September. Later on Wednesday, Bidenannounced on social media that he had received and accepted an invitation for a CNN-hosted debate on June 27 in Atlanta, which Trump said he will attend. The second debate will be hosted on September 10 by ABC News and both presidential contenders have reportedly accepted the invite.

"I am Ready and Willing to Debate Crooked Joe at the two proposed times in June and September," Trump posted. "I would strongly recommend more than two debates and, for excitement purposes, a very large venue, although Biden is supposedly afraid of crowds – That's only because he doesn't get them. Just tell me when, I'll be there. 'Let's get ready to Rumble!!!'"

But there's a catch - Biden's campaign team has pressed for several conditions to be applied to the debates. The team sent a letter to the Commission on Presidential Debates (CPD), revealing their requests. Firstly, they want the debate to take place in a television studio with just the candidates and the moderator president, meaning: no audience.

"The debates should be conducted for the benefit of the American voters, watching on television and at home — not as entertainment for an in-person audience with raucous or disruptive partisans and donors, who consume valuable debate time with noisy spectacles of approval or jeering. As was the case with the original televised debates in 1960, a television studio with just the candidates and moderators is a better, more cost-efficient way to proceed: focused solely on the interests of voters," Biden's campaign wrote.

The campaign also does not want a third party candidate to participate in the debate, including Robert F. Kennedy Jr. US Democrats fear independent candidates will draw votes away from their party. Biden's team has cited their exclusion of Kennedy by suggesting that only candidates with "statistical chance[s] of prevailing in the Electoral College" should participate and that debate time should not be squandered on candidates with "no prospect of becoming President."

"Forty-three percent of Americans identify as independents," said Kennedy in response. "If Americans are ever going to escape the hammerlock of the two-party system, now is the time to do it. These are the two most unpopular candidates in living memory."

During the 2020 debates between Trump and Biden, the Biden campaign struck out at the CPD for allowing extensive crosstalk and interruptions. They are requesting "firm time limits" for answers and that a "candidate's microphone should only be active when it is his turn to speak."

While Trump has said for months that he would debate Biden, the president has been more reluctant to give into his predecessor's wishes until he suggested otherwise in April. Biden is also one of three presidents who have given few interviews and press conferences in the last century, according to a New York Times.

And it will be the first debate for the Oval Office that Trump has participated in this election season. The former president skipped all of the GOP debates in 2023, excusing his decision on

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his substantial polling. Instead, the former president hosted events and participated in interviews, all while battling his endless legal troubles.

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Severe Storms in Southern US Leave 4 People Dead, 1Mln Without Power

WASHINGTON, May 17 (Sputnik) - At least four people have died in the Texas city of Houston with almost 1 million remaining without power as severe storms hit the southern part of the United States.

"We have had, unfortunately, four fatalities," Houston Mayor John Whitmire told reporters.

Local authorities said early Friday that they continue to assess the situation.

"City employees are conducting damage assessments and clearing debris following the deadly storm. Fallen trees, power lines and broken glass have made some areas impassable," the Houston government said on X.

Over 920,000 customers in the southern US still have no power. More than 788,000 of them live in Texas, 132,000 in Louisiana, and over 11,000 in Mississippi, according to the poweroutage.us web portal.

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Aid Starts Arriving in Gaza Via US-Built Temporary Pier - CENTCOM

WASHINGTON, May 17 (Sputnik) - First trucks carrying humanitarian assistance began arriving in Gaza on Friday via a temporary pier built by the United States on the enclave's coast, the Central Command (CENTCOM) said.

"Today at approximately 9 a.m. (Gaza time), trucks carrying humanitarian assistance began moving ashore via a temporary pier in Gaza," CENTCOM said via X. "No U.S. troops went ashore in Gaza."

CENTCOM noted that this was part of an ongoing international effort to deliver assistance to Gazans via a maritime corridor that is "entirely humanitarian in nature." It will involve donations made by several countries and humanitarian organizations.

On Thursday, CENTCOM announced that it had successfully installed a temporary pier in the Gaza Strip for the delivery of humanitarian aid to the Palestinian enclave.

Later that day, CENTCOM deputy commander Vice Adm. Brad Cooper announced that close to 500 tonnes of humanitarian assistance had been loaded onto ships and were ready to be delivered to Gaza in the coming days. Once ashore, their distribution would only take a matter of hours, he said.

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Plunge in Price of Critical Minerals Masks Future Supply Risks - IEA

WASHINGTON, May 17 (Sputnik) - The sharp decline in prices of critical minerals is masking future supply strains anticipated in these materials and greater and diversified investment will be needed to meet energy and climate objectives, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said in a report.

The IEA's Global Critical Minerals Outlook 2024 updates the Paris-based agency's inaugural review last year of the critical minerals market and offers new medium- and long-term outlooks for the supply and demand of important energy transition materials such as lithium, copper, nickel, cobalt, graphite and rare earth elements.

As supply outpaced demand, price pressures for critical minerals eased in 2023 for the raw materials that went into electric vehicles, wind turbines, solar panels and other clean energy technologies, the IEA said in its updated outlook report.

"The world's appetite for technologies such as solar panels, electric cars and batteries is growing fast - but we cannot satisfy it without reliable and expanding supplies of critical minerals," IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol said in the report.

While Birol acknowledged that the recent investment boom in critical minerals had boosted the global availability of such materials, he said more needs to be done to ensure resilient and diversified supply.

Forecasting future demand and supply, the IEA said combined market size of key energy transition minerals was set to more than double to $770 billion by 2040 in a pathway to net zero emissions by mid-century.

The IEA said detailed project-by-project analysis suggests that announced projects were sufficient to meet only 70% of copper and 50% of lithium requirements in 2035 in a scenario where countries worldwide met their national climate goals.

Markets for other minerals look more balanced, but only if projects come through as scheduled, the report said.

Concentration of supply in particular countries - China, for instance - also heightened the risk for those requiring such materials elsewhere, the report said.

Following two years of increases, critical minerals' prices fell sharply in 2023, returning to levels last seen before the coronavirus pandemic. Materials used to make batteries saw particularly significant decreases, with the price of lithium dropping by 75% and the prices of cobalt, nickel and graphite falling by between 30% and 45% - helping drive battery prices 14% lower.

With demand growth remaining robust, these declines were mostly driven by a strong increase in global supply - helping offset the steep price increases in 2021 and 2022.

"While lower prices for critical minerals in the past year have been good news for consumers and affordability, they have also provided a headwind for new investment," the report said. "Some $800 billion of investment in mining is required between now and 2040 to get on track for a 1.5C scenario. Without the strong uptake of recycling and reuse, mining capital requirements would need to be one-third higher."

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In 2023, investment in critical minerals mining grew by 10% and exploration spending rose by 15% - a healthy increase, but slower than in 2022.

The IEA report noted that lithium and copper were most vulnerable to supply and volume risks, while graphite, cobalt, rare earths and nickel face more substantial geopolitical risks.

For graphite in particular, the current project pipeline indicates that the available supply outside of the dominant player meets only 10% of the requirements in 2030, making announced diversification goals highly challenging to achieve.

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The IEA's Global Critical Minerals Outlook 2024 updates the Paris-based agency's inaugural review last year of the critical minerals market and offers new medium- and long-term outlooks for the supply and demand of important energy transition materials such as lithium, copper, nickel, cobalt, graphite and rare earth elements.

As supply outpaced demand, price pressures for critical minerals eased in 2023 for the raw materials that went into electric vehicles, wind turbines, solar panels and other clean energy technologies, the IEA said in its updated outlook report.

"The world's appetite for technologies such as solar panels, electric cars and batteries is growing fast - but we cannot satisfy it without reliable and expanding supplies of critical minerals," IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol said in the report.

While Birol acknowledged that the recent investment boom in critical minerals had boosted the global availability of such materials, he said more needs to be done to ensure resilient and diversified supply.

Forecasting future demand and supply, the IEA said combined market size of key energy transition minerals was set to more than double to $770 billion by 2040 in a pathway to net zero emissions by mid-century.

The IEA said detailed project-by-project analysis suggests that announced projects were sufficient to meet only 70% of copper and 50% of lithium requirements in 2035 in a scenario where countries worldwide met their national climate goals.

Markets for other minerals look more balanced, but only if projects come through as scheduled, the report said.

Concentration of supply in particular countries - China, for instance - also heightened the risk for those requiring such materials elsewhere, the report said.

Following two years of increases, critical minerals' prices fell sharply in 2023, returning to levels last seen before the coronavirus pandemic. Materials used to make batteries saw particularly significant decreases, with the price of lithium dropping by 75% and the prices of cobalt, nickel

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and graphite falling by between 30% and 45% - helping drive battery prices 14% lower.

With demand growth remaining robust, these declines were mostly driven by a strong increase in global supply - helping offset the steep price increases in 2021 and 2022.

"While lower prices for critical minerals in the past year have been good news for consumers and affordability, they have also provided a headwind for new investment," the report said. "Some $800 billion of investment in mining is required between now and 2040 to get on track for a 1.5C scenario. Without the strong uptake of recycling and reuse, mining capital requirements would need to be one-third higher."

In 2023, investment in critical minerals mining grew by 10% and exploration spending rose by 15% - a healthy increase, but slower than in 2022.

The IEA report noted that lithium and copper were most vulnerable to supply and volume risks, while graphite, cobalt, rare earths and nickel face more substantial geopolitical risks.

For graphite in particular, the current project pipeline indicates that the available supply outside of the dominant player meets only 10% of the requirements in 2030, making announced diversification goals highly challenging to achieve.

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US House Oversight Panel Advances Contempt Resolution Against Garland Over Audio Files

WASHINGTON, May 17 (Sputnik) - The US House Oversight Committee advanced a resolution to hold US Attorney General Merrick Garland in contempt of Congress for defying a congressional subpoena seeking audio recordings related to US President Joe Biden's classified documents case.

The panel advanced the resolution in a 24-20 vote late Thursday night.

Earlier in the day, the House Judiciary Committee also advanced a contempt resolution against Garland. The measures are expected to eventually make their way to the full House floor for consideration.

Garland refused to provide the Republican-led House committees with recordings from Special Counsel Robert Hur’s interview with Biden in October as part of his investigation into the US president's mishandling of classified documents. Biden invoked executive privilege to reject the subpoena for the recordings.

In February, Hur released a report on his year-long investigation into Biden's mishandling of classified documents, which concluded that although Biden willfully retained and disclosed classified materials, it was not worth initiating a criminal case against him because a jury may view him as a "sympathetic, well-meaning" elderly man with poor memory.

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Конгрессмены "устроили разборки" на голосовании по обвинениям в адрес генпрокурора США

ВАШИНГТОН, 17 мая - РИА Новости. Голосование в надзорном комитете палаты представителей США пошло не по плану, когда ряд конгрессменов вступили в словесную перепалку и обменялись оскорблениями, трансляция заседания велась на сайте комитета.

В четверг в комитете проходило голосование о привлечении к ответственности за неуважение к конгрессу генерального прокурора США Меррика Гарланда. Обвинения против него со стороны республиканцев были выдвинуты из-за его отказа предоставить аудиозаписи бесед президента США Джо Байдена со спецпрокурором.

Заседание пришлось прервать уже в самом начале после того, как известная своим эпатажным поведением конгрессвумен Марджори Тейлор Грин упрекнула коллегу Жасмин Крокетт за внешний вид.

"Я думаю, ваши накладные ресницы мешают вам читать", - обратилась Грин к Крокетт, чем вызвала немедленную реакцию со стороны другой конгрессвумен.

"Как ты смеешь наезжать на внешность другого человека... детка, даже не начинай свои игры", - обратилась к Грин Александрия Окасио-Кортес.

Накал страстей вынудил председателя комитета Комера по крайней мере дважды прерывать заседание и даже провести с Грин отдельную беседу о регламенте поведения в конгрессе. Несмотря на попытки Комера урегулировать ситуацию, Грин отказалась приносить извинения за свои высказывания.

Еще один перерыв случился вскоре после того, как один из конгрессменов уведомил председателя о том, что в зале заседания распивают спиртные напитки люди, не являющиеся членами комитета.

Обвинения против Гарланда со стороны республиканцев были выдвинуты из-за его отказа предоставить аудиозаписи бесед президента США Джо Байдена со спецпрокурором Робертом Хёром, по итогам которых Хёр заявил о проблемах с памятью у американского лидера.

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US House Panel Vote on Garland Contempt Measure Derails After Lawmakers Hurl Insults

WASHINGTON, May 17 (Sputnik) - A US House Oversight Committee meeting to hold Attorney General Merrick Garland in contempt for defying a congressional subpoena has derailed and turned into a disaster as lawmakers hurled insults and engaged in other disorderly behavior.

The meeting on Thursday night began to derail after Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene told Congresswoman Jasmine Crockett, "I think your fake eyelashes are messing up your reading."

Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez immediately lashed out at Greene from across the room.

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"How dare you attack the appearance of another person ... girl, baby girl, don't even play," Ocasio-Cortez told Greene.

Crockett also fired off on Republicans after she was told to calm down.

"Don't tell me to calm down, you all talk noise and then can't take it. If I come and talk shit about her [Greene], then you all gonna have a problem," Crockett said.

House Oversight Committee Chairman James Comer had to pause the meeting at least two times and, at one point, pulled Greene aside to speak to her privately amid the fiasco.

Greene repeatedly declined to apologize to Crockett and later praised herself for having a nice body for a woman of her age.

Aside from this dispute, another lawmaker notified the committee that there were lawmakers who were not part of the committee inside the room "drinking," which prompted the live feed of the hearing to be immediately cut off.

At another point during the firestorm, a lawmaker on the panel was using his laptop to watch a National Hockey League (NHL) playoff game taking place Thursday night.

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Russia, China Embracing Entente 'Nurtured' by Hostile US Policies - Former US Ambassador

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WASHINGTON, May 17 (Sputnik) - Russia and China are now partners in a warm and deepening entente relationship forging close economic ties that will last over the long term amid hostile US policies, former senior State Department official Chas Freeman told Sputnik commenting on Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to China, in his first foreign trip after reelection.

"They are not allies but they have embraced entente - a limited partnership that hostile American policies have nurtured and steadily expanded," Freeman, who served as President Richard Nixon's personal translator during his first state visit to China in 1972, said.

Freeman noted that while the current global conflicts, including the conflict in Ukraine which Kiev "is now undeniably losing" were on the two presidents' agenda, the Beijing summit was not primarily about current events.

"Faced with an American policy of dual containment aimed at blighting the future of both Russia and China, it is hardly surprising that their governments have come together to defend themselves against the United States and those powers aligned with it," he explained.

Cooperation between Russia and China now embraces agriculture (the "Land Grain Corridor"), education and culture, industry, science and technology, and the military, Freeman observed.

"Bilateral trade between the two is booming. The contrast with the deteriorating relationships [that] both have with the United States is stunning," he said.

The relationship between Moscow and Beijing was now long-established and the heads of the two countries remained focused on building institutions and close partnerships that would endure for decades or even generations, Freeman pointed out.

"This is a relationship that both sides are building in the expectation that it will last," he said.

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President Putin described Russian-Chinese cooperation in world affairs as "one of the main stabilizing factors in the international arena" after his meeting with President Xi Jinping, emphasizing that the two countries jointly uphold the principles of a fair and democratic world order that reflects the rise of global multipolarity.

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US Military Pays 29 Companies $710Mln for Global Port Operations, Logistics - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 17 (Sputnik) - The US Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM) is paying 29 companies $710 million to carry out logistics and port operations around the world for six US military regional commands, the Defense Department announced.

"[The companies will provide] commercial seaport operations and transport services (stevedoring and related terminal services) at all OCONUS seaports located within one of six designated regions (US Africa Command, US Central Command, US European Command, US Indo-Pacific Command, US Southern Command, and US Northern Command OCONUS, and US territories)," the Defense Department said in a press release on Thursday.

Some of the companies identified in the release include Al Jazy Shipping and Forwarding in Amman, Jordan; APL Ceva Government Logistics in Arlington, Virginia; ARC Logistics in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida; Depth Logistics Pty. in Coolangatta, Australia; and Dongwon Loex Company in Seoul, South Korea.

The contract is scheduled to last five years with an expiration date of May 31, 2029, the release said.

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Hunger Being Used as 'Weapon of War' Against People of Gaza - Russian Diplomat

UNITED NATIONS, May 17 (Sputnik) - Israel's actions in Gaza indicate that "hunger" is being wielded as a weapon of war against the people of Gaza, Russian diplomat of the Mission to the UN George Barsukov said during the US organized Arria on Hamas-held hostages following October 7.

"...supplies of essential goods (including fuel, water and food) to the densely populated area have been hindered (sporadic admissions of 20 truckloads do not count as compared to 200 per day that used to pass before)," Barsukov said on Thursday. "Everything that is happening points to the use of hunger as a weapon of war."

The Israeli military has in this conflict not only engaged in indiscriminate shelling but also in the deliberate destruction of internationally protected sites, he added.

On May 6, the Israel Defense Forces launched a limited military operation in Rafah and took control of the Gaza side of the Rafah border crossing. On Friday, Israeli media reported that

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Israel's military cabinet had approved expanding the ground operation. Israeli authorities say the operation is aimed at eliminating the remaining battalions of 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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US Congressman Massie Says Introduced Bills to Abolish, Audit Federal Reserve

WASHINGTON, May 17 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Thomas Massie announced that he introduced legislation to audit and abolish the Federal Reserve and related institutions, citing their contribution to inflation in the United States.

Massie introduced the bill, dubbed the Federal Reserve Board Abolition Act, on Thursday. The legislation abolishes Federal Reserve banks and the institution’s board of governors.

The bill also repeals the 1913 Federal Reserve Act, which created the Federal Reserve System.

"Americans are suffering under crippling inflation, and the Federal Reserve is to blame," Massie said in a statement on the bill. "By monetizing the debt, the Federal Reserve devalued the dollar and enabled free money policies that caused the high inflation we see today."

The Federal Reserve Abolition Act was first introduced by former US Congressman Ron Paul in 1999 and has not been reintroduced since 2013, the statement said.

The bill is cosponsored by 20 other US House Republicans, including Andy Biggs, Matt Gaetz, Paul Gosar, Chip Roy and Marjorie Taylor Greene.

Additionally, Massie introduced the Federal Reserve Transparency Act, which would audit the Federal Reserve; the bill was also initially introduced by Ron Paul in 2009.

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Trump Says Does Not Care if RFK Jr. Joins Debates But Now Not Qualified to Participate

WASHINGTON, May 17 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump said he does not care if Independent presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. joins the upcoming presidential debates, but pointed out that Kennedy is currently not eligible to participate.

Trump and President Joe Biden are scheduled to have debates on June 27, September 10 and October 2.

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"I don't care if Junior [Kennedy] joins the debate, but right now his polling numbers are very low, he is not properly qualified in the states, and he seems to be on a downward path. Junior' needs more than his name to get on the 'stage!'" Trump said on Thursday.

However, Trump also said he thinks Kennedy would be a political threat to Biden in the debates.

On Wednesday, Kennedy said that Trump and Biden are colluding to keep him off of the debate stage, but later admitted that he does not qualify and hopes he will meet the required criteria before the June 20 deadline to participate in the debate on June 27.

The Trump campaign expects key topics in the debates will be inflation, border security and foreign policy matters related to ongoing conflicts.

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US Solicits Contract Bids for $3.4NBln in Domestically Produced Uranium After Russia Ban

WASHINGTON, May 17 (Sputnik) - The United States is seeking bids on contracts for at least $3.4 billion in domestically produced nuclear reactor fuel following Washington's ban on Russian uranium imports, the US Department of Energy (DOE) announced in a notice.

The document explained that the Department of Energy is seeking to buy low enriched uranium (LEU) and aims to ensure that a commercial domestic capacity would be available in case of a supply disruption.

"To accomplish this, DOE intends to acquire LEU from new domestic enrichment capacity to support the commercial availability of LEU for US commercial nuclear energy companies," the notice said on Thursday. "The anticipated contract ceiling including all Task Orders is $3,400,000,000."

The anticipated posting date for solicitation was marked as June, according to the notice.

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Texas Gov. Pardons Army Sergeant Serving 25Yrs for Killing BLM Protestor in 2020

WASHINGTON, May 17 (Sputnik) – Texas Governor Gregory Abbott issued a proclamation that grants a full pardon to US Army Sergeant Daniel Perry, who has been serving a 25-year term in prison for killing a Black Lives Matter (BLM) protester in 2020.

"The Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles conducted an exhaustive review of U.S. Army Sergeant Daniel Perry's personal history and the facts surrounding the July 2020 incident and recommended a Full Pardon and Restoration of Full Civil Rights of Citizenship," the proclamation said on Thursday. "I thank the Board for its thorough investigation, and I approve their pardon recommendation."

In July 2020, Perry fatally shot BLM demonstrator Garrett Foster, a 28-year-old US Air Force

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veteran, at a racial justice rally in Austin, Texas.

On the night of July 25, 2020, Perry was working as a ride-share driver and had just dropped a person off close to the rally when he shot Foster. Perry's lawyers argued that the shooting was in self-defense because Foster came to his car with an assault-style rifle. But prosecutors said Perry triggered the fatal encounter by running a red light and driving toward the crowd of demonstrators.

After in May 2023, the court sentenced Perry to 25 years in prison, Governor Abbott announced that he would seek a full pardon for Perry and asked the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles to begin an expedited review of the case.

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US House Passes Bill to Compel Delivery of Withheld Weapons to Israel

WASHINGTON, May 17 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives passed a bill to compel the provision of certain arms to Israel withheld by the Biden administration over a prospective large-scale military operation in the Gaza Strip city of Rafah.

House lawmakers passed the bill, dubbed the Israel Security Assistance Support Act, on Thursday in a vote of 224 in favor and 187 opposed.

The legislation condemns US President Joe Biden's decision to pause the weapons shipments and withholds funds from the State Department, Defense Department, and National Security Council until the arms are delivered.

However, the White House said that Biden would veto the bill if it reaches his desk; US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said on Wednesday that the legislation is "not going anywhere" in Congress.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, May 17 (Sputnik) -

PUTIN-XI TALKS

* Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday that his talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping were intense and meaningful.

* The Russian-Chinese partnership is constantly improving and diversifying due to the new areas of cooperation, Putin said.

* Xi Jinping said during a meeting with Putin that Beijing will support holding a peace conference on Ukraine that will be recognized by both Moscow and Kiev and held at an appropriate time, Xinhua reported.

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* Russia and China will continue deepening their military cooperation, expanding joint military exercises and patrol missions, a joint statement published by the Kremlin read.
* Russia and China have agreed to continue strengthening their strategic energy cooperation, the joint statement said.

HUMANITARIAN AID TO GAZA
* Some 500 tonnes of humanitarian assistance have been loaded on ships and are ready to be delivered to the Gaza Strip in the coming days, US Central Command deputy head Brad Cooper said on Thursday.
* Humanitarian aid deliveries to Gaza should not be dependent on the US-constructed floating dock given that working land routes are required to meet the needs of the residents, United Nations spokesperson Farhan Haq told Sputnik.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE
* Pentagon spokesperson Sabrina Singh said on Thursday that she is not aware of any plans to send US trainers to Ukraine.
* The International Atomic Energy Agency said its experts have not observed any heavy weapons or indications of drone launches from the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant.
* NATO expects that the situation regarding ammunition for the Ukrainian military will improve in the near future, NATO Military Committee Chair Adm. Rob Bauer said.
* The Russian military used an Iskander missile to destroy a Ukrainian command post in the Kharkiv region, and the enemy lost approximately 50 servicepeople, the Defense Ministry said.

ATTACK ON SLOVAKIA PRIME MINISTER
* US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke by telephone with his Slovak counterpart Juraj Blanar following the assassination attempt on Prime Minister Robert Fico, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Thursday.
* NATO Secretary-General Jens Stolternberg said that he had discussed with Slovak Deputy Prime Minister Robert Kalinak the assassination attempt on Fico.
* Opposition Progressive Slovakia party has invited other political parties to avoid steps leading to the polarization of society for 100 days amid the assassination attempt on Fico.
* Fico remains in critical condition, President-elect of Slovakia Peter Pellegrini said.

MIDDLE EAST
* The League of Arab States calls for the deployment of United Nations peacekeepers in Palestine before the implementation of a two-state solution, according to a declaration adopted after the Manama summit on Thursday.
* Israel has announced the planned deployment of additional armed forces to the city of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip as part of the military operation, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said.

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

US Coerces Switzerland to Evict Chinese Hotel Owners Over F-35 Spying Concerns - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - The United States coerced once neutral Switzerland to evict a Chinese family who owned a historic hotel in the picturesque Alps due to suspicions that they would be spying on the F-35 fighter jets expected to be stationed nearby, the Wall Street Journal reported on Thursday.

Hotel Rossli, purchased by the Wang family in 2018, is located only 100 yards from the runway, where the first F-35 fighters ordered by Switzerland would arrive in a matter of several years, the report said.

In the summer of 2023, after the Swiss Federal Police raided the hotel and took the Wang family for questioning, a notice was placed on the hotel's door indicating that the facility was closed.

Despite the Wangs' assurances that their hotel was not a center for spying on US fighter jets, Switzerland succumbed to pressure from the US and UK intelligence services and forced the family to go back to China.

The report cited a spokesperson at the Chinese embassy in Washington as saying that the episode is another example of the United States' attempts to discredit and suppress China.

In September 2022, Switzerland sealed a deal with the United States to order 36 F-35A combat aircraft to be delivered from 2027-2030. It was later reported that the deliveries of the jets would start in 2026.

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US Lawmakers Urge Johnson to Set Vote on Bill That Aids People Hurt by US Atomic Activity

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - A bipartisan group of US lawmakers on Thursday urged House of Representatives Speaker Mike Johnson to schedule a vote on legislation that would extend and expand funding that compensates people who have been harmed by US atomic weapon testing.

In December, US lawmakers removed the Radiation Exposure and Compensation Act (RECA) amendments from the US defense policy bill, which would have addressed health and environmental issues associated with uranium mining and atomic weapons testing in the United States. The RECA fund is set to expire next month.

"I stand here today with my colleagues who are fighting the very important fight to make sure that we get the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act expanded and extended," US Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernandez said during a press conference. "We stand with community members from across the United States ... who share a common bond of hardship, of death and of illness that came about because of the nation's program to build and test atomic weapons."

Members of the Navajo Nation Washington Office said during the press conference that they

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met with Johnson's office to lobby him to bring the legislation to the House floor for a vote.
The United States carried out nearly 200 atmospheric nuclear weapons development tests from 1945 to 1962. Uranium mining and processing, which was carried out by tens of thousands of workers, was also considered essential to the nation's nuclear weapons development.
Numerous lawsuits were filed against the US government for its alleged failure to warn of exposures to known radiation hazards from atmospheric nuclear weapons testing and uranium mining and testing, but these suits were dismissed by appellate courts.
Congress passed the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act in 1990 and broadened it over the years to address these issues.

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US Approves $100 Million Sale of Sustainment Equipment to Ukraine - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) — The United States has granted preliminary approval for a $100 million sale of sustainment support for US Army systems to Ukraine, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency said on Thursday in a statement.
"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Ukraine of Blanket Order Sustainment of US Army Supplied Systems and related equipment for an estimated cost of $100 million. The Defense Security Cooperation Agency delivered the required certification notifying Congress," the statement said.
According to the statement, Ukraine requested to buy equipment and services to sustain vehicles and weapons systems supplied by the US Army. The purchases would be made through Blanket Orders, a Cooperative Logistics Supply Support Arrangement (CLSSA) and/or Simplified Non-Standard Acquisition Program (SNAP).
"Ukraine has an urgent need to strengthen local sustainment capabilities to maintain high operational rates for US-provided vehicles and weapon systems. This sustainment support will directly contribute to Ukraine's battlefield effectiveness through improved logistics and will contribute to more resilient and rapid repair cycle times," the statement said.
The statement added that the proposed sale of this equipment and support would not alter the military balance in the region, the principal contractors will be chosen from approved vendors, and no additional US Government or contractor representatives would be assigned to Ukraine.
Western countries have provided hundreds of billions of dollars worth of aid to Ukraine since the start of Russia's special military operation in February 2022. Aid shipments began in 2022 with artillery munitions and training and have escalated to include tanks, advanced air-defense systems, missiles and cluster munitions. The Kremlin has consistently warned against the West's continued arms deliveries to Ukraine, saying that they only prolong the conflict.

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Canada to Provide $48Mln in Humanitarian Aid for Palestinians - Foreign Ministry

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - Canada will provide C$65 million ($48 million) in funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and other regional partners amid the ongoing Israeli war in Gaza, the Canadian Foreign Ministry said on Thursday.

"Today, the Honourable Ahmed Hussen, Minister of International Development, announced that Canada will provide $65 million in total funding for the urgent humanitarian crisis in Gaza," Global Affairs Canada (GAC) said in a statement.

C$25 million are part of recurring payments to UNRWA announced by Ottawa in June 2023. The funding also includes an additional C$40 million for UNRWA, the Canadian Red Cross and other "trusted" Canadian non-governmental organizations, the statement added.

The funding's purpose is to support the provision of food, water, emergency medical assistance, protection services and other life-saving aid throughout the region, the statement continued.

On March 8, the Canadian government announced that it will resume funding to the UN Palestinian refugee agency after it had been paused in connection with Israel's claims that some of the agency's staff were involved in the October 7 Hamas attack.

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US House Panel Advances Bill to Sanctions People Endangering Safety, Integrity of ZNPP

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - The US House Foreign Affairs Committee on Thursday advanced legislation to impose sanctions on foreign persons who endanger the safety or integrity of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (ZNPP).

The committee advanced the bill, dubbed the Sanction Russian Nuclear Safety Violators Act, in an en bloc vote of 37 in favor and two opposed.

The legislation requires the US president to impose sanctions on any person who has endangered ZNPP or undermined Ukrainian operational control of the facility.

The bill provides an exception for people seeking to reestablish Ukrainian control of ZNPP and the surrounding area.

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US Approves $250Mln Sale of Alliance Ground Surveillance Program Equipment to NATO

WASHINGTON. May 16 (Sputnik) - The United States has approved a $250.2 million sale of Alliance Ground Surveillance Program equipment to NATO, the Defense Security Cooperation

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Agency (DSCA) said on Thursday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the NATO Support and Procurement Agency of Alliance Ground Surveillance program equipment and support and related equipment for an estimated cost of $250.2 million," the DSCA said in a statement.

The DSCA delivered earlier on Thursday the required certification notifying Congress of the possible sale, the statement said.

The equipment will improve NATO's ability to meet current and future threats by improving and sustaining allied intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities, the statement added.

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US House Panel Advances Bill to Sanction Houthis, Backers for Maritime Attacks

WASHINGTON, April 15 (Sputnik) - The US House Foreign Affairs Committee advanced legislation on Thursday to impose sanctions on Yemen's Houthi group and its supporters for attacks on vessels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

The panel passed the bill, dubbed the Combating Houthi Threats and Aggression Act, in an en bloc vote of 37 in favor and two opposed.

The bill requires the US president to impose sanctions on parties responsible for or complicit in Houthi attacks on international shipping. The legislation also mandates sanctions against parties who materially contribute to the Houthis or their operations.

The bill also requires the president to submit reports to lawmakers on the Houthis' capabilities and related risks to the United States' national security and foreign policy objectives.

Moreover, the bill requires a report from the president on any violations or attempted violations of a UN arms embargo against Yemen. The bill also establishes as official policy that the US will work with allies to safeguard maritime security in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

Houthis have been launching attacks on commercial and military vessels in the region for months, in response to Israel's military operation in the Gaza Strip. The attacks prompted the US to form a multinational coalition to protect shipping in the area, as well as to strike Houthi targets on the ground.

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US House Panel Advances Bill to Sanction Russia's Rosatom

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - The US House Foreign Affairs Committee advanced legislation on Thursday to sanction Russian state atomic energy corporation Rosatom.

The panel advanced the bill, dubbed the Rosatom Sanctions Enforcement Act, in an en bloc

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vote of 37 in favor and two opposed.

The legislation requires the president to impose sanctions on Rosatom and related people and entities, as well as any person linked to activities at Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant since the launch of Russia's special military operation on February 24, 2022.

The bill also requires the president to submit a regular report to Congress on a strategy to replace Rosatom and other Russian nuclear suppliers with entities based in the United States or US allies and partners.

Earlier this week, the US State Department announced that a US ban on Russian uranium will take effect on August 12. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that the ban is not a critical matter for Russia's nuclear industry.

Russian Ambassador to the US Anatoly Antonov also said that the ban will hit the US economy harder than Russia's.

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US Air Force Now Has Funding to Develop AI Intel For Real Time Targeting - General

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - For the first time, Congress has approved a five-year funding stream for the US Air Force to develop comprehensive analytical data-sifting capabilities using Artificial Intelligence (AI) for targeting in real-time in battlefield conditions, USAF Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance and Cyber Effects Operations Lieutenant General Leah Lauderback said on Thursday.

"We haven't had a consistent funding stream to develop these capabilities until Fiscal Year 2024. Then we got a five-year funding commitment," Lauderback told a Defense One podcast. "There is 2025 funding to create this digital infrastructure to do targeting in real-time and understand what will happen before it happens."

The Air Force is developing a disposition of forces turbo tool that will allow an analyst to sift through all available databases far more rapidly and effectively, Lauderback said.

"Battlefield usable intelligence is about prediction and understanding intentions. ...For targeting, we need automation: We need to be successful in developing this infrastructure," she said.

US Air Force Intelligence planners were also developing much more advanced capabilities in the active cyber measures area, Lauderback added. That was certain to be a "growth area" for later expansion and deployment, she said.

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Canada Sanctions 4 Israelis Over Extremist Violence in West Bank - Foreign Ministry

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government has imposed sanctions on four Israeli individuals over their involvement in extremist settler violence in the West Bank, Global

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Affairs Canada (GAC) said on Thursday.

"Today's measures represent a significant step in Canada's response to this ongoing [settler] violence. The individuals listed below have engaged directly or indirectly in violence and violent acts against Palestinian civilians and their property. These measures will impose a prohibition on dealings related to the listed individuals and render them inadmissible to Canada under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act," GAC said in a statement.

Canada sanctioned David Chai Chasdai, Yinon Levi, Zvi Bar Yosef, and Moshe Sharvit. This is the first time Ottawa has taken measures to list extremist Israeli settlers, GAC said.

Attacks by extremist settlers have "alarmingly escalated" in recent months, leading to a situation that undermines Palestinians' human rights and prospects for a two-state solution. It also poses a significant risk to regional security, GAC added.

In early February, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said that Ottawa was mulling imposing sanctions to hold accountable people that engage in settler violence in the West Bank. Trudeau said such violence was unacceptable and endangered the prospects for peace and stability as well as the path toward an "absolutely essential" two-state solution to the conflict.

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US Woman, Ukrainian Man Charged in Job Fraud Scheme Linked to North Korea - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - US prosecutors have charged an Arizona woman, a Ukrainian man and three other foreign nationals in an alleged scheme to help overseas information technology (IT) workers get remote jobs at US companies and raise revenue for North Korea's nuclear program, the Justice Department said in a press release on Thursday.

"The charges describe a years' long campaign by the North Korean government to infiltrate U.S. job markets through fraud in an effort to raise revenue for the North Korean government and its illicit nuclear program," the release said.

The release identified only two of the alleged perpetrators, 49-year-old Arizona resident Christina Marie Chapman and 27-year-old Oleksandr Didenko of Kiev, Ukraine.

"Chapman and her co-conspirators committed fraud and stole the identities of American citizens to enable individuals based overseas to pose as domestic, remote IT workers. ... These crimes benefited the North Korean government, giving it a revenue stream and, in some instances, proprietary information stolen by the co-conspirators," Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Nicole Argentieri said in the statement.

According to the release, Chapman, Didenko and three other co-conspirators allegedly stole more than 60 American identities over the multi-year long scheme and used them to get remote IT jobs at American Fortune 500 companies, where they were compensated as though they were present in the country.

The release alleges that Chapman hosted a 'laptop farm' at her residence that hosted the IT workers' computers so it appeared that they were living in the US, and also received checks and direct deposits of the IT workers' wages from US companies into her US bank accounts.

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Chapman and Didenko are charged with conspiracy to defraud the US, conspiracy to commit wire fraud, bank fraud, aggravated identity theft, and unlawful employment of aliens, among other charges, the release said.

Separately on Thursday, the US State Department said in a release that it was offering a reward of up to $5 million for information on North Korean IT workers using aliases Jiho Han, Chunji Jin, and Haoran Xu, and their manager Zhonghua.

The State Department said the individuals engaged in a scheme that allowed the three IT workers to obtain illicit remote employment with US companies using the identities of more than 60 American persons, generating at least $6.8 million for North Korea.

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Pentagon Says Not Aware of US Plans to Send American Trainers to Ukraine

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - US Defense Department spokesperson Sabrina Singh said on Thursday that she is not aware of any US plans to send American trainers to Ukraine.

Earlier in the day, The New York Times reported that Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Charles Brown said that a NATO deployment of trainers to Ukraine appeared inevitable. For now, he said, an effort inside Ukraine would put "a bunch of NATO trainers at risk."

"I'm not aware of sending any trainers to Ukraine," Singh said during a press briefing.

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White House Says Sees Nothing New on Russia-China Statement During Putin's Visit

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - The United States views the Russia-China statement issued during President Vladimir Putin's visit as nothing new, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Thursday.

"We don't see anything new with this. We've seen this before," Jean-Pierre said during a White House press briefing.

President Putin is on a state visit to China from Thursday to Friday, in his first foreign trip after reelection.

Earlier in the day, Putin held extensive talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing, discussing a range of issues related to strategic cooperation, identifying key areas for further development of ties, as well as exchanging views on the most pressing international and regional issues.

Later on the same day, Moscow and Beijing released a joint statement.

Among other things, the statement condemns the deployment of US missile systems in the Asia-Pacific region and Europe and describes it as a threat to the security of Russia and China. They also voiced concerns about US attempts to create a global missile shield and deploy its

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elements across the globe and also in space.
In addition, the two countries urged the US to stop putting the security of "small groups" of countries above regional security.

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India's Strong Growth is Also Caused by Russia's Oil Exports - UN Official

UNITED NATIONS, May 16 (Sputnik) - Russia's oil exports to India are one of the crucial factors helping the Indian economy to expand and grow stronger, Director of the UN Economic Department's Analysis and Policy Division Shantanu Mukherjee said on Thursday.
"… [Finally], that oil price and special import arrangements that India has with the Russian Federation, that is also helping India tremendously in terms of keeping the import cost down," Mukherjee said during a UN briefing when launching his division's latest report, called "World Economic Situation and Prospects as of mid-2024."
In addition, he said that India is also benefiting from investments from the West as fewer foreign investments are going into China, becoming an alternative source for investments.
The UN experts believe that Indian inflation has come down significantly and that means the fiscal position is not as limiting as in other countries. According to the report, India's economy is forecasted to grow by 6.9 percent in 2024 and 6.6 percent in 2025. The report also says the whole South Asia region's projection "remains strong."

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pentagon says not aware of us plans to send american military trainers to ukraine

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Trudeau Says Stands for 'Peace, Prosperity' Despite Declining Voter Support Amid Gaza War

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Thursday that he stands for "peace and prosperity" despite the challenges posed by falling support from Jewish and Muslim voters over his stance on the Gaza war.
"We're going to make sure we stay on the side of Canadians, and of peace and prosperity for the long term, not short-term political gain," Trudeau said. "That's where I stand and that's where I will continue to stand."
The prime minister also said his government's position includes ensuring that all Canadians feel safe, respected and supported in a country where citizens stand up for one another.

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Trudeau made the remarks in response to a question about how he intended to bring back the lost support of Muslim and Jewish voters. Many influential Muslim donors have left the Liberal Party due to Canada's stance on what they say has been a genocide of Palestinians in Gaza. Meanwhile, many Jews have expressed discontent over the government's soft stance on pro-Palestinian protests.

From the onset of Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel, Trudeau has attempted to maintain an allegedly balanced approach, but his ambiguous position has left many Canadians, including lawmakers of his own party, unhappy.

In rejection of Trudeau's policies, several protests have been held on a nation-wide scale in the past several months in which civil society, lawmakers and other societal actors have taken part, demanding that Canada ends its support for Israel.

On the other hand, Jewish-Canadian communities, including Liberal lawmakers have expressed concern over a rise in antisemitism across Canada.

Trudeau has continued to maintain that long-term peace in the region can only be reached through a two-state solution where the right to security and self-determination of Israel and Palestine are taken into account.

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US House Panel Advances Report Recommending Contempt of Congress Charge Against Garland

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - The US House Judiciary Committee on Thursday advanced a report recommending contempt of Congress charges against Attorney General Merrick Garland for failing to comply with a congressional subpoena.

The panel advanced the recommendation in a vote of 18 in favor and 15 opposed.

The report found that Garland refused to produce recordings from Special Counsel Robert Hur's impeachment inquiry into US President Joe Biden for mishandling classified materials.

Earlier on Thursday, Biden invoked executive privilege to reject the subpoena for the recordings.

However, the "last-minute" invocation of executive privilege does not change the fact that Garland failed to comply with the subpoena, House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jim Jordan said.

In February, Hur released a report on his year-long investigation into Biden's mishandling of classified documents.

Hur concluded that although Biden willfully retained and disclosed classified materials, it was not worth initiating a criminal case against him because a jury may view him as a "sympathetic, well-meaning" elderly man with poor memory.

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Blinken After Fico Assassination Attempt Says Condemns Political Violence in All Forms

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has held a phone conversation with his Slovak counterpart Juraj Blanar following the assassination attempt on Prime Minister Robert Fico, spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Thursday.

"The Secretary expressed solidarity with Slovakia and his wishes for the Prime Minister's speedy recovery," Miller said in a readout. "Secretary Blinken underlined the enduring bonds between the American and Slovak people. He condemned political violence in all its forms."

Fico was shot on Wednesday after a government field-meeting in the city of Handlova located 190 kilometers (118 miles) northeast of Bratislava. The prime minister was taken to a hospital in a life-threatening condition and underwent a surgery. He remains in a stable but serious condition.

The shooter, Juraj Cintula, 71, was detained immediately following the attack and charged with attempting to commit a premeditated murder. The Slovak Interior Ministry said the attack was politically motivated as Cintula did not agree with the actions of the government, in particular, he was against stopping the supply of weapons to Ukraine.

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China Cannot Bolster Ties to Europe While Concurrently Supporting Russia - US State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - China cannot bolster its ties to European countries and support Russia at the same time, US State Department deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Thursday.

"The People's Republic of China cannot have its cake and eat it too. You can't have it both ways; you can't want to have good, further, stronger, deepened relationships with Europe and other countries, while simultaneously continuing to fuel the biggest threat to European security in a long time," Patel said during a press briefing.

Earlier on Thursday, Chinese President Xi Jinping reportedly said in a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin that Beijing will back a peace conference on Ukraine that both Kiev and Moscow can support at an appropriate time.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov also said on Thursday that Moscow appreciates China's vision of peace prospects and welcomes any such initiative.

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Trudeau Says 'Three Amigos Summit' to Be Held in 2024 Despite US, Mexican Elections

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WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) – Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Thursday that the North American Leaders' Summit (NALS), also known as the “Three Amigos Summit,” will still be held in 2024 despite the coming elections in Mexico and the United States.

“We know that getting together to work on common issues is a huge priority. We continue to work bilaterally on a number of issues. But, of course, with Mexico having their presidential elections this year as well as the American presidential elections it’s a little more challenging to pull together the Three Amigos Summit, but we still intend to hold it in 2024,” Trudeau said during a press conference.

The Canadian Premier made the remarks in response to a question on why his government had been unable to set a date for the Summit ahead of the coming US and Mexican elections.

The NALS is a trilateral summit that takes places at irregular intervals between the leaders of the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The latest one was held on January 10, 2023, in Mexico City and mainly touched upon issues related to immigration and trade.

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NVIDIA Signs Deal With Northrop to Provide Artificial Intelligence Software - Statement

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - Northrop Grumman has concluded an agreement with the Artificial Intelligence (AI)-developing company NVIDIA to use its software in advanced engineering projects, the US aerospace giant announced in a press release on Thursday.

"Northrop Grumman announced today an agreement for access and use of NVIDIA AI software to accelerate development of some of the most advanced systems," the release said.

The new agreement, facilitated by Future Tech Enterprise, gives Northrop Grumman access to NVIDIA’s extensive portfolio of AI and generative AI software, its platforms, and frameworks, including NVIDIA Omniverse, the release explained.

The agreement also opens research and development pathways, enabling Northrop Grumman to quickly apply advanced AI technologies across its portfolio of capabilities while also increasing operational efficiency, the release added.

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Software, Hardware Problems Delay Delivery of Upgrades to F-35s Until 2025 - Report

(Adds details in paras 6-10)

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - Continuing problems with both the hardware and software of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter's TR-3 upgrade program delay the delivery of the new system and its installation in existing aircraft until next year, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) said in a report on Thursday.

"The F-35 program is facing a range of issues due to the late deliveries of TR-3 hardware and

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software," the report said. "These challenges, collectively, will delay the full delivery of TR-3 with new capabilities into 2025."

The report said, citing Lockheed Martin, that the supplier that produces the integrated core processor is delivering this component late and with quality issues.

On the software front, issues with aircraft software supporting the radar and electronic warfare systems "have been especially prevalent, with some test pilots reporting that they had to reboot their entire radar and electronic warfare systems mid-flight to get them back online."

As a result, TR-3 software with new capabilities will not be delivered until 2025, two years later than originally planned, according to the report.

As of January 2024, Lockheed Martin expects to deliver a less capable version of TR-3-enabled software for flight testing in April 2024, which is nine months behind its original plan, and to start installing it on the fleet in June 2024, the GAO said.

The F-35 program also has not yet determined how to modernize the thermal management subsystems that provide cooling to the aircraft, the report continued.

"Some F-35 canopies have experienced delamination of the external coating, which affects the pilots' ability to see clearly through the canopy and can reduce mission effectiveness ... [Also] Some newer aircraft are again experiencing blast skin cracking on a redesigned area next to the F-35A internal gun ... Undetected crack growth could result in part of the panel breaking off, with material potentially going into the engine," the GAO warned.

The On-Board Inert Gas Generating System provides nitrogen enriched air to the fuel tanks. Within the module, a fiber bundle has been separating from the unit's core, affecting the amount of nitrogen being produced and degrading the "inerting" of the aircraft fuel tanks. This degradation increases the risk of explosion in the event of a lightning strike or hit from a weapon, the report said.

In addition, the F-35's Electro-Optical targeting system does not work when there is too much sand or dust and the aircraft's landing gear drag brace which ensures that the gear remains extended during landing is experiencing more force during landings than it was originally designed to take, potentially threatening future crashes, the GAO advised.

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US, Chinese Defense Chiefs to Meet Later This Month After 2 Year Hiatus - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - A meeting between the US and Chinese defense leaders will take place at the end of this month for the first time in two years, the Financial Times reported on Thursday.

The United States and China restored bilateral military communications after a summit between President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping last November as a means to improve their competitive relationship and avoid any unintended miscalculations.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Chinese Defense Minister Dong Jun will reportedly meet at the Shangri-La Dialogue defense forum that will be held in Singapore from May 31 to June 2.

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A US Defense Department spokesperson told Sputnik they do not have any specific meetings to announce at present, but highlighted a recent meeting between US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Ely Ratner and China's Director of the Central Military Commission Office for International Military Cooperation Maj. Gen. Li Bin.

"As you saw just this morning with ASD Ratner, we are committed to delivering on the President's direction to increase military to military communication," the spokesperson said. "The Department will continue to engage in active discussions with PRC [People's Republic of China] counterparts about future engagements between defense and military officials at multiple levels."

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

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US Immigration Official Says Migrant Crisis 'Crushing' Border Patrol, Must End

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - The ongoing crisis on the US border with Mexico must be solved because it is crushing US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents, acting US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Director Patrick Lechleitner said on Thursday.

"I think we need to stop these overwhelming numbers at the border, that's really crushing our partners with CBP," Lechleitner said during a press conference.

Republican Congressman Paul Gosar, who represents the area that includes the US southern border in the state of Arizona, said in a release that President Joe Biden's border policies have failed and created a "border invasion" that is costing American taxpayers $451 billion each year.

Some 11 million illegal aliens have surged across the US-Mexico border since Biden took office in January 2021, Gosar said.

"Criminals are pouring across the border, destroying communities and straining law enforcement," Gosar said. "Alarmingly, 330 terrorists on the watchlist have now entered the United States in the past three years, including at least 80 this year."

Illegal migration on the US southern border has gone through three consecutive record-breaking years since Biden took over the White House in January 2021, according to publicly available CBP data.

Since October 2023, an estimated 1.5 million migrants have been apprehended for illegally crossing into the United States on the southern border, CBP data shows.

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ICE Chief Says Concerned About Dramatic Increase of Chinese Migrants on US Southern Border

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WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - The dramatic increase of Chinese migrants arriving at the US southern border intending to enter the United States is concerning and being reviewed, acting US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Director Patrick Lechleitner said on Thursday.

"Yes, absolutely it does raise concerns whenever there's a large increase in numbers, [we're] concerned with who these individuals are and what they're doing," Lechleitner said during a press conference. "We're working closely with the interagency and looking into this."

Lechleitner recently told US lawmakers that China was a difficult partner to work with on arranging deportation flights of Chinese migrants who illegally entered the United States.

The United States continues to work closely with China to make deportations flights more frequent, Lechleitner told reporters at the press conference.

The Chinese embassy in Washington told Sputnik that Beijing opposes illegal immigration and has adopted various measures to stop illegal exits from China, while cracking down on criminals who organize smuggling and other illegal immigration activities.

"Illegal immigration is an international problem that needs cooperation of the relevant countries," Chinese Embassy spokesperson Liu Pengyu said. "China has good cooperation with some countries on repatriating illegal immigrants, and is willing to further strengthen such cooperation. We oppose making irresponsible remarks on this issue."

US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) data shows that the number of Chinese migrants apprehended at the US southern border has increased dramatically since 2023.

Some 24,314 Chinese migrants were caught on the US-Mexico border in fiscal year 2023, and about 27,700 Chinese migrants have been apprehended so far this fiscal year, according to CBP. In 2021 and 2022, US immigration enforcement apprehended a combined 2,626 Chinese migrants on the US-Mexico border.

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Russian Military in Ukraine Proves Capable of Correcting Mistakes to Move Forward - EUCOM

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - The Russian military has proven itself to be able to correct its mistakes and move forward amid its special military operation in Ukraine, US European Command chief Gen. Christopher Cavoli said on Thursday.

"The Russian military has proven itself to be an organization that is prepared and able to correct its mistakes and to move forward and has demonstrated a certain amount of resilience in that regard," Cavoli said during a press briefing.

While Russia has been able to successfully resolve some problems after initial setbacks on the battlefield in Ukraine, there are still issues it was unable to improve, Cavoli stated.

In April, US Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell said that Russia has managed to almost completely reconstitute and retool its military despite the initial setbacks on the battlefield in Ukraine.

Russia launched its special military operation in Ukraine in February 2022. Russian President Vladimir Putin has said on several occasions that Moscow is not going to attack NATO

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countries. Russia does not threaten anyone, but will not ignore actions that are potentially dangerous to its interests, the Kremlin has said.

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DOD Report Shows Decline in Military Sexual Assault for First Time in Eight Years - Austin

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) — The Department of Defense released the Fiscal Year 2023 Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military, showing progress in reducing sexual assault and harassment for the first time in over eight years, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said on Thursday.

"Today the Department of Defense released our Fiscal Year 2023 Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military. Its findings demonstrate that the Department is making progress to prevent sexual assault and harassment in the military. This is the first time that the Department has seen a decrease in the prevalence of sexual assault in more than eight years," Austin said in a statement.

According to the statement, over the past three years, the Department of Defense has taken unprecedented steps to address the issue by implementing the Independent Review Commission's recommendations and establishing the Offices of Special Trial Counsel.

"These early findings are encouraging, and I am grateful for the leadership of many across the Department who have committed the time and made the investments to produce these promising results. However, we have far more work to do," Austin added.

According to a separate statement released by the Department of Defence later today, the report contains data on sexual assault and harassment from the 2023 Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Military Members, summarizes efforts to implement prevention reforms, and highlights compliance with laws and policies at Military Service Academies.

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F-35 Jet Total Cost Soars by $300Bln to $2Trln - Government Accountability Office Report

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - The eventual estimated total cost of the Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter, the most expensive military program in history, is estimated to increase by another $300 billion to more than $2 trillion, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) said in a new report on Thursday.

"The Department of Defense is in its sixth year of a hardware and software modernization effort known as Block 4 and is considering other modernization efforts," the report said. "The Defense Department estimates that these development efforts - as well as the costs to maintain and operate the 2,470 planned aircraft through 2088 - will exceed $2 trillion."

That figure is $300 billion more than their previous overall figure of $1.7 trillion that has been

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repeatedly used in both official and US media reports.
Some 91% of the F-35 jets that were scheduled to be delivered last year were delivered late and a full 100% of the Pratt & Whitney F135 engines to power the aircraft were also delivered behind schedule, the report said.
Also, the Joint Office of Lockheed Martin and the US Air Force charged with developing the aircraft have not yet produced any development contract to modernize the F-35 jet engine and other subsystems, the report added.

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UNSC Mandate, Proper Conditions Required to Deploy UN Peacekeepers to Gaza - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, May 16 (Sputnik) - Deploying UN peacekeepers to Gaza is dependent on the approval and mandate from the UN Security Council, UN Spokesman Farhan Haq said on Thursday.
"Creating peacekeeping missions depends on a variety of things. One of them… is a mandate from the Security Council," Haq said during a press briefing. "Then of course, there need to be conditions on the ground including acceptance by the parties of a UN presence, and that too is something that would need to be established."
Earlier on Thursday, the League of Arab States called for the deployment of United Nations peacekeepers in Palestine before a two-state solution is implemented to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
The League of American States also called for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Rafah to allow much needed humanitarian aid to enter Gaza.

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Nebenzia Says Iraqi People Fully Able to Take Ownership of Their Political Future

UNITED NATIONS, May 16 (Sputnik) - Russia believes that Iraq can deal now with its matters on its own and we should encourage them to do so, the Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said on Thursday.
“We are convinced that the Iraqi people are fully able to take ownership for the political future of their country and our common task is to respect their choice and help them to do so,” Nebenzia told the rest of the UN Security Council members during a meeting on Iraq.
Russia also views the current status of Iraq rather positively and views its governmental institutions as functioning, he added.
Earlier in the meeting, the UN Special Representative for Iraq Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert said that the United Nations is hopeful that progress will be unlocked in Iraq despite existing

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obstacles.
In April, Iraq's supreme military commission and the US-led coalition forces operating in the country agreed that Iraqi security forces are capable of neutralizing the threat posed by the Islamic State terrorist group (IS, banned in Russia) on their own.
The assessment meant work will continue on developing a timeline for the transition to a bilateral partnership between Iraq and the United States.

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Delivery Pier for Aid Delivery to Gaza Not Sufficient, Land Routes Needed - UN Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, May 16 (Sputnik) - Humanitarian aid deliveries to Gaza should not be dependent on the US-constructed floating dock given that working land routes are required to meet the needs of the residents, United Nations spokesperson Farhan Haq told Sputnik.
"However, getting aid to people in need to and across Gaza cannot and should not depend on a floating dock far from where needs are most acute. Land routes are the most viable, effective and efficient delivery method, which is why we need all crossing points to be opened," Haq said.
On Wednesday, the United States said it expects the Gaza humanitarian aid pier to become operational within the coming several days.

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Biden Blocks Special Counsel Hur's Tapes, Afraid Americans Will Hear Them - Johnson

WASHINGTON, May 15 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden blocked Special Counsel Robert Hur's tapes to prevent the American people from hearing why prosecutors considers him an elderly man with poor memory who should thus not be criminally charged, US House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Thursday.
"The American people will not be able to hear why prosecutors felt the president of the United States was in Special Counsel Robert Hurs words, quote 'an elderly man with a poor memory and thus shouldn't be charged,'" Johnson said during a press briefing.
Earlier on Thursday, Biden exercised executive privilege to reject congressional subpoenas to hand over audio and video recordings of Hur's investigation into Biden's alleged mishandling of classified materials.
Johnson said Biden is afraid that Americans will likely confirm Hur's findings if they hear the tapes, because the recordings will show that he is using his presidential authority for his own political purposes.
Earlier this year, two congressional committees issued a subpoena demanding that US Attorney General Merrick Garland provide all documents related to Hur's investigation into

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Biden's mishandling of classified information.

The committees requested the materials on February 12, three days after Hur issued his final report that found Biden willfully mishandled classified materials. However, Hur also said that a jury would likely consider Biden to be a well-meaning old man with a poor memory and thus should not be criminally charged.

In March, US House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jim Jordan and Oversight Committee Chairman James Comer set an April 8 deadline for Garland to submit the subpoenaed audio recordings and transcripts from Hur's interviews with Biden.

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Software, Hardware Problems Delay Delivery of Upgrades to F-35s Until 2025 - Report

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - Continuing problems with both the hardware and software of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter's TR-3 upgrade program delay the delivery of the new system and its installation in existing aircraft until next year, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) said in a report on Thursday.

"The F-35 program is facing a range of issues due to the late deliveries of TR-3 hardware and software," the report said. "These challenges, collectively, will delay the full delivery of TR-3 with new capabilities into 2025."

The report said, citing Lockheed Martin, that the supplier that produces the integrated core processor is delivering this component late and with quality issues.

On the software front, issues with aircraft software supporting the radar and electronic warfare systems "have been especially prevalent, with some test pilots reporting that they had to reboot their entire radar and electronic warfare systems mid-flight to get them back online."

As a result, TR-3 software with new capabilities will not be delivered until 2025, two years later than originally planned, according to the report.

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Harris Accepts Invitation to US Vice Presidential Debate, Opponent Unknown - Campaign

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Kamala Harris accepted an invitation to a vice presidential debate hosted by CBS News sometime this summer, Harris' campaign communications director Brian Fallon said on Thursday.

"We look forward to the Trump campaign accepting one of these dates so that the full debate calendar for this campaign can be set," Fallon said in a statement, as quoted by CBS News.

The news organization proposed July 23 and August 13 as potential dates for the debate.

However, former US President Donald Trump has yet to announce his vice presidential pick.

On Wednesday, Trump and US President Joe Biden agreed to a June 27 CNN debate and a

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September 10 ABC debate.

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US Factless Claims of Russian Election Interference Part of Information War - Antonov

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) The US government does not provide a single fact when it alleged that Russia meddles in its elections and such insinuations are part of Washington's aggressive information war against Moscow, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said on Thursday.

Antonov made the comment in response to a statement by US National Intelligence Director Avril Haines that Russia remains the most active foreign threat to US elections. Haines claimed that Russia's influence operations aim to erode trust in US democratic institutions, worsen sociopolitical divisions and degrade Western support for Ukraine.

"Such insinuations are part of the aggressive information war of the United States against Russia," Antonov said. "In all of their own problems, they paranoically try to see the 'hand of the Kremlin.' The evidence base is empty. The intelligence services do not have a single fact [to support the claim]."

Antonov also said while the United States blames Russia and others, it itself has intensified hostile operations by using information and communication technologies.

"The Americans have themselves stopped communicating with us," Antonov said. "In these circumstances, our good advice to Washington is to pay attention to the recent launch, at Russia's initiative, of a global intergovernmental registry of contact points for information exchange on computer attacks."

Antonov explained that the purpose of this mechanism is to promote professional interaction between countries in identifying the sources of malicious actions in the information space.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said that Russia does not interfere in any elections and will work with any elected US president.

Last year, then-National Security Agency chief Paul Nakasone said that the agency had not seen evidence of attempts by Russia or China to affect the 2024 US presidential election.

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Wall Street's Dow Jones Index Breaks Above 40,000 Points First Time Ever

NEW YORK, May 16 (Sputnik) - The Dow Jones Industrial Average, the broadest barometer for stocks, hit on Thursday a record high above 40,000 points for the first time ever as the rally in US equities driven by interest rate cut expectations continued.

At 11:25 a.m. ET (15:25 GMT), the Dow Jones Industrial Average was at 40,013 after a hitting

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an all-time high of 40,051 points earlier.

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IMF Mission Will Begin Review of Ukraine's Financing Program in Coming Weeks -Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) – The International Monetary Fund (IMF) mission will begin a review of Ukraine's financing program in the coming weeks, IMF spokesperson Julie Kozack said on Thursday.

"With respect to the next review of the Extended Fund Facility (EFF), we do expect a mission to take place in the coming weeks. And we expect them to be able to bring that review to our executive board by the end of June," Kozack told reporters.

She stressed the remarkable resilience of the Ukrainian economy but warned that the outlook remains highly uncertain.

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Decisions on Frozen Russian Assets Should Not Undermine Global Monetary System - IMF

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - The West should ensure that its plans to use frozen Russian sovereign assets for Ukraine do not threaten the global monetary system, International Monetary Fund spokesperson Julie Kozack said on Thursday.

"What is important for the fund is that any action that is taken has sufficient legal underpinnings and does not undermine the functioning of the international monetary system," Kozack told reporters.

The IMF's position on the issue remains "unchanged," she added.

"It is for the relevant courts and jurisdictions to determine [the fate of the assets]," Kozack stated.

Russian officials have on multiple occasions said they view the seizure of Russian assets as outright theft and a financial weapon against the country.

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Fed Needs to be Cautious About Moving on Rate Cuts in Coming Months - IMF

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - The US Federal Reserve needs to be cautious when deciding on whether to cut interest rates in the coming months, as recent inflation data are

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higher than it would like to see, IMF spokesperson Julie Kozack said on Thursday.
"The recent inflation data are overall higher than we would like to see, and this is a reminder, of course, that there are going to be bumps in the road as the US brings inflation back to target. And this reinforces the need for the Fed to be cautious and data dependent in deciding policy in the coming months" Kozack told reporters.

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Venezuela 'Deeply Rejects' Latest US Sanctions Imposed on Nicaragua - Foreign Minister

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - The Venezuelan government "deeply rejects" the latest sanctions imposed by the United States on two Nicaraguan gold mining companies and on a Russian military training center in Managua, Foreign Minister Yvan Gil said on Thursday.
"Venezuela expresses its deepest rejection to the new aggression perpetrated by the government of the United States against the government of Nicaragua, by imposing this day, unilateral coercive measures on two mining companies operating on Nicaraguan territory, as well as on a Training Center of the Interior Ministry of the Russian Federation located in Managua," Gil said in a communique via X.
Caracas denounces the permanent campaign through which the United States and its allies seek to undermine by any means Nicaragua's patriotic and anti-imperialistic iron will, the communique said.
Venezuela exhorts the international community to condemn Washington's "retrograde" and interventionist actions that aim to injure the right to economic freedom and people's self-determination, the communique added.
On Wednesday, the US government imposed a new round of anti-Nicaragua sanctions targeting a Russian military training center and two gold mining companies.
The US government designated the three Nicaragua-based entities, claiming that they allegedly support repressive activities by the Nicaraguan national police in prosecuting political opponents and two generate revenue and enrich the existing government.

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IMF to Consider Feasibility of Restructuring Ukraine Debt to Creditors - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) will consider the feasibility of restructuring Ukraine's debt to creditors, IMF spokesperson Julie Kozack said on Thursday.
"It is going to be in the context of that review in the coming weeks that the team will of course assess all economic developments," Kozack told reporters.
The IMF will provide an updated macroeconomic framework and an updated debt sustainability

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analysis, Kozack also said.
"That debt sustainability analysis will be published," Kozack added.

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IMF on New US Tariffs on China: US Would be Better Served by Keeping Open Trade Policies

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - The United States would be better served by maintaining open trade policies that have been crucial to its economy, International Monetary Fund (IMF) spokesperson Julie Kozack said on Thursday, commenting on Washington's move to increase tariffs on $18 billion worth of Chinese imports.
"The US would be better served by maintaining open trade policies that have been vital to its economic performance," Kozack said during a briefing.
The IMF urges the US and China to work together toward a solution that addresses the underlying concerns that have exacerbated trade tensions between the two countries, she added.

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imf mission will begin review of ukraine's financing program in coming weeks - spokesperson

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US Watchdog Says 12% of US Aid to Ukraine in 2nd Quarter 'Delinquent or Unaccounted For'

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - Some 12% of US security aid provided to Ukraine from January 1 through March 31 was delinquent or unaccounted for, the US Defense Department Inspector General said in a quarterly oversight report of US support for Ukraine on Thursday.
"Based on information provided by the ODC-Kyiv [US Office of Defense Cooperation], at the end of the quarter, 88 percent of defense articles were compliant and 12 percent were ‘delinquent’ or unaccounted for," the report said.
However, the latest data represents a 13% increase in the compliance rate compared to the previous quarter, the report said.
The Defense Department Inspector General said it continues to conduct an ongoing series of evaluations regarding compliance with the requirements for tracking end-use monitoring of US-supplied equipment in Ukraine.
Western countries have provided hundreds of billions of dollars worth of military and other aid to Ukraine since the start of Russia's special military operation in February 2022. Aid shipments

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have included artillery; tanks and other armored vehicles; air-defense systems; missiles; cluster and other munitions, among others.

Russia has consistently warned against the collective West's continued arms deliveries to Ukraine, saying that they only prolong the conflict.

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US Imposes North Korea-Related Sanctions on 2 Russians, 3 Russian Entities - Treasury Dept

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - The United States imposed sanctions on two Russian nationals and three Russian entities for allegedly facilitating weapon transfers between North Korea and Russia, the US Treasury Department said on Thursday.

"Today, the US Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) is imposing sanctions on two Russian individuals and three Russia-based entities for facilitating weapons transfers between Russia and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK)," the Treasury said in a press release.

The two Russian nationals include Rafael Gazaryan and Aleksey Budnev, and the three Russian entities targeted are Rafort Limited Liability Company, Trans Kapital Limited Liability

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Company, and Tekhnologiya, OOO, the release noted.
The United States is trying to disrupt deepening military cooperation between Russia and North Korea that allegedly helps enable the special military operation in Ukraine.

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Senior US, Chinese Military Officials Discuss Bilateral Defense Ties - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Ely Ratner held a video call with China's Director of the Central Military Commission Office for International Military Cooperation Maj. Gen. Li Bin to discuss issues of mutual concern, the US Department of Defense said on Thursday.
"Dr. Ely Ratner, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs, spoke by video teleconference today with People's Republic of China (PRC) Major General Li Bin, Director of the Central Military Commission Office for International Military Cooperation, to discuss issues of mutual concern," the department said in a press release.
During the discussion, the officials highlighted the importance of maintaining open lines of communication in defense channels to reduce the risks of miscommunication amid high tensions across the Indo-Pacific region.
Additionally, Ratner shared the US's "serious concern" over China's alleged support for Russia's defense industrial base amid the conflict in Ukraine, according to the release.

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UN Hopeful 'Progress Will Be Unlocked for All Iraqis' Despite Obstacles - Official

UNITED NATIONS, May 16 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is hopeful that progress will be unlocked in Iraq despite existing obstacles, UN Special Representative for Iraq Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert said on Thursday.
"[T]he Iraq of 2024 is evolving - and fast. And while it is true that the road ahead will be laden with obstacles, we are hopeful that further progress will be unlocked for all Iraqis - whatever their affiliation, faith, background or ethnicity," Hennis-Plasschaert said during a meeting of the UN Security Council.
The UN special representative emphasized that it is essential for Iraqi leaders to put the country's success as a priority in their work.
In April, Iraq's supreme military commission and the US-led coalition forces operating in the country agreed that Iraqi security forces are capable of neutralizing the threat posed by the Islamic State terrorist group (IS, banned in Russia) on their own.
The assessment meant work will continue on developing a timeline for the transition to a

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bilateral partnership between Iraq and the United States.

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Ukraine Remains One of Least Accountable Governments in Europe - US Watchdog

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - Ukraine remains one of the least accountable governments in Europe as it continues to deal with cases of corruption exploiting the ongoing conflict with Russia, the US Defense Department Inspector General said in a quarterly oversight report of US support for Ukraine on Thursday.

"Perception of corruption in Ukraine has declined significantly since 2013, but it still remains one of the least accountable governments in Europe," the report said.

"The ongoing war with Russia has created new opportunities for corruption, including bribes, kickbacks, and inflated procurement costs within the Ministry of Defense, particularly for procurements of lethal items where there is limited transparency due to classification level of these purchases," it added.

The US government has provided technical assistance and training to Ukrainian investigators and prosecutors to address these issues, and these respective agencies recently hired more staff and brought more prosecutions, the report noted.

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US Hybrid Fleet Facilitates Ukraine's Battle With Russian Black Sea Ships - Navy Secretary

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - The US-supplied hybrid manned-unmanned fleet has enabled Ukraine to fight Russia's Black Sea ships amid the ongoing conflict, Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro said on Thursday.

"The assistance provided to Ukraine by U.S. Naval Forces Europe has demonstrated how to deliver combat power with a hybrid fleet in battle with Russia's Black Sea Fleet," Del Toro said in a written testimony prepared for delivery to the Senate Armed Services Committee.

In January, while speaking at the Surface Navy Association's 36th National Symposium, Del Toro noted that the United States prioritizes hybrid systems enabling the US Navy "to dominate the battlespace in every way."

According to Del Toro, there are already 10 unmanned Saildrones operating in the Caribbean Sea following the deployment of four first unmanned ships to Japan in the summer of 2023.

Earlier on Thursday, the Russian Defense Ministry said that the forces of Russia's Black Sea Fleet have destroyed five unmanned boats of the Ukrainian armed forces off the coast of Crimea amid Ukraine's repeated attempts to attack the Crimean Peninsula and the Crimean Bridge.

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US Announces New Actions to Protect Solar Producers From Chinese Competitors - White House

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - The United States has unveiled new measures to safeguard its solar manufacturing from Chinese competitors, the White House said in a fact sheet on Thursday.

"Bifacial solar panels generally used in utility-scale solar projects are not currently subject to safeguard tariffs under Section 201 of the Trade Act of 1974," the White House said. "Today, the Biden-Harris administration is announcing that it plans to imminently remove this exclusion, which will offer US solar manufacturers increased Section 201 tariff protection from unfair imports."

As President Joe Biden has previously committed, the bridge will end as scheduled on June 6 and producers in Southeast Asia that have been found to be circumventing antidumping and countervailing duties on solar manufacturers from China will be subject to those duties, the White House said.

The new measures also include requirements on the Energy and Commerce departments to monitor import surges and oversupply, the White House said.

Imports of solar modules from Southeast Asia, where Chinese manufacturers have been found to be circumventing antidumping and countervailing duties, have surged over the last year, the White House said.

Chinese companies have recently built new capacity in these countries, targeting the US market, the White House said.

Moreover, the Treasury Department will issue new guidance on how US clean energy developers can receive a tax credit, the White House added.

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

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 hindering China's pursuit of high-quality development.

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Biden Exercises Executive Privilege Over Hur Interview Recordings – White House Counsel

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) – US President Biden has exercised executive privilege to reject congressional subpoenas to hand over the audio and video recordings of Special Counsel Robert Hur's investigation into his mishandling of classified materials, according to a letter on

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Thursday from his lawyer.

"As you know, yesterday the Attorney General requested that the President assert executive privilege over the audio recordings of his and Mark Zwonitzer's interviews with Special Counsel Robert Hur, which had been subpoenaed by the House Judiciary and Oversight Committees. Because of the President's longstanding commitment to protecting the integrity, effectiveness, and independence of the Department of Justice and its law enforcement investigations, he has decided to assert executive privilege over the recordings," Counsel to the President Edward Siskel wrote in the letter to the ranking members of the House Judiciary and Oversight committees, per a copy published by The Washington Post.

Siskel noted that Biden did not assert executive privilege over Hur's final report and the Department of Justice also permitted Hur to testify publicly.

He also noted that the department had already provided the transcripts of the interviews that Hur conducted with Biden and Mark Zwonitzer, arguing that along with other documents, the transcripts "more than satisfy your articulated needs for this information."

Siskel reiterated the attorney general's warning that the disclosure of the recordings risked harming future law enforcement investigations by making it less likely that witnesses in high-profile investigations would voluntarily cooperate.

He argued that the committees' goal in subpoenaing the audio recordings was to "chop them up, distort them, and use them for partisan political purposes."

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US Claims Russia Launched Research Spacecraft for Anti-Satellite Nuke Weapon in 2022 – WSJ

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - US officials claim that Russia launched a research spacecraft into space in February 2022 that is intended to test components for a potential nuclear anti-satellite weapon, The Wall Street Journal reported on Thursday.

The satellite, identified as Cosmos-2553, went into orbit on February 5, 2022, just weeks before Russia started its special military operation in Ukraine, and is still traveling around the Earth, the report said.

The Russian Defense Ministry reported in February 2022 that they launched a new satellite, Cosmos-2553, from the Plesetsk Cosmodrome.

The spacecraft does not carry a nuclear weapon, but it is linked to Russia's alleged nuclear anti-satellite program, US officials told the Journal.

If deployed, the weapon would enable Moscow to destroy satellites in low-Earth orbit with a nuclear blast, the report said.

The spacecraft has been secretly operating as a research and development platform for nonnuclear components of the new weapon system, which Russia has yet to deploy, other US officials said.

In February 2024, the United States claimed that Russia is developing a space-based anti-satellite weapon that poses a serious threat to US national security.

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

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US CENTCOM Says to Move 500 Tonnes of Aid Into Gaza in Coming Days

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) – Some 500 tonnes of humanitarian assistance have been loaded on ships and are ready to be delivered to the Gaza Strip in the coming days, US CENTCOM deputy commander Vice Adm. Brad Cooper said on Thursday.

Earlier in the day, CENTCOM announced that it has installed a temporary pier in the Gaza Strip for the delivery of humanitarian aid to the enclave.

"We've got thousands of tons in the pipeline, to be more precise … we have about 500 tons of humanitarian assistance loaded on ships," Cooper said during a briefing on the Gaza pier. "We'll look to move this initial tranche of 500 tons in the coming days, which is pretty substantial, and then more to follow behind it."

Cooper confirmed that the pier was successfully affixed earlier on Thursday to the beach in Gaza. Once the aid reaches the shores, their distribution should be done in only a matter of hours. The official said that the pier's sole purpose was to deliver aid to Gazans.

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