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5/20/24 Monday

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UN: Gaza Facing 'Apocalyptic' Famine

Earlier this month, Cindy McCain, the World Food Program (WFP) Executive Director said that parts of Gaza are experiencing "full-blown famine."
The UN under-secretary general for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief coordinator, Martin Griffiths, told the AFP that "apocalyptic" famine is coming to Gaza.
"If fuel runs out, aid doesn't get to the people where they need it. That famine, which we have talked about for so long, and which is looming, will not be looming anymore. It will be present," Griffiths said.
"And I think our worry, as citizens of the international community, is that the consequence is going to be really, really hard. Hard, difficult and apocalyptic."
Griffiths claimed that 50 aid trucks can reach the people of North Gaza through the recently reopened Erez crossing, but that fighting in the south and central parts of Gaza, combined with other border closings, means very little aid can reach the Palestinians in the southern city of Rafah where Israel has been bombarding with tanks and warplanes and seized the border crossing with Egypt earlier this month.
"So aid getting through land routes to the south and for Rafah and the people dislodged by Rafah, is almost nil. And we all said that very clearly, that a Rafah operation is a disaster in humanitarian terms, a disaster for the people already displaced to Rafah. This is now their fourth or fifth displacement," Griffiths said.
The floating pier off the Gazan coast constructed by the US opened days ago and some aid can travel through there, but Griffiths said that it cannot make up for land routes.
Israel has repeatedly claimed to be doing all it can to facilitate humanitarian aid to Gaza but aid organizations have repeatedly said they have been hampered by Israeli authorities.
For months, Israeli settlers have blocked aid going into Gaza, oftentimes as Israeli police and military forces stand by. Those incidents reached a fevered pitch last week with several violent incidents.
On Friday, Israelis reportedly attacked a commercial truck drive in Kochav Hashahar, an Israeli West Bank settlement that is considered illegal under international law. The Israelis attacked the driver, injuring him, according to the reports. Three IDF officers who arrived to treat the driver were also attacked and reportedly suffered minor injuries.
Last week, a truck was set on fire after Israeli settlers stopped an aid convoy and destroyed the loads of several trucks. Videos on social media depicted Israelis ripping up bags of flour and dancing on the now-empty truck beds.
Meanwhile, on Friday, the US State Department released a report on whether Israel was breaking humanitarian law by blocking aid or using US weapons in a way that is against humanitarian law.

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While the report noted “deep concerns” about Israel’s “actions and inactions” preventing humanitarian aid, it said that there was insufficient evidence to justify cutting off aid to Israel.
As of April, more than 250 aid workers have been killed in Gaza, including seven World Central Kitchen workers who were killed in what appeared to be a coordinated attack by Israel, hitting three identified aid vehicles while the organization was coordinating with Israel, providing their locations to the government, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).
“This was not just a bad luck situation where ‘oops’ we dropped the bomb in the wrong place,” the organization’s founder, Chef José Andrés said after the attack. “Even if we were not in coordination with the [IDF], no democratic country and no military can be targeting civilians and humanitarians.”

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US Rep Says Cutting Harvard's Federal Funding Over Protests Should Be ‘On The Table’

Protests have been rocking college campuses for months, with students demanding that a permanent ceasefire be called in Gaza, their schools divest from companies that support Israel and other demands.
Rep. Jake Auchincloss (D-MA) said during a televised interview that cutting federal funding to Harvard should be “on the table” in response to what he claims is antisemitism on the campus of the Ivy League school.
“It needs to be on the table,” Auchincloss, a Harvard graduate, said on Fox News Sunday. “Harvard and other universities have unfortunately become ransacked by antisemitism.”
The comments come as Pro-Palestine protests have sprung up at college campuses across the Nation, including Harvard and other Ivy League schools.
“[Universities] need to look at their culture from first principles and actually create a culture of open discourse, of free speech, of mutual respect, in which people can pursue truth, in which everybody, regardless of nation of origin, of sex, of race, can have a suitable learning environment,” Auchincloss said.
More than 70% of Democrats and 61% of all Americans support a permanent ceasefire in Gaza and
To support his assertion, Auchincloss pointed to the Anti-Defamation League’s (ADL) Campus Antisemitism Report Card which gave Harvard and 12 other top schools failing grades, judging them on three main criteria: “Jewish life on campus,” “incidents on campus” and“administrative actions and policies.”
Harvard’s report notes that it has a high Jewish student population, extensive Jewish groups and support for Religious activities, Kosher dining and an official anti-boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) policy.
The university nevertheless received an F from the ADL for what it describes as “high” levels of “Severe antisemitic and anti-Zionist incidents,” “Other antisemitic and anti-Zionist incidents,”

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"Hostile anti-Zionist student government activity," "Hostile anti-Zionist groups" and "Antisemitic speakers or programs on campus."
It did not mention which groups or speakers it considered antisemitic.
The ADL's report card of the school focuses almost entirely on anti-Zionist and Pro-Palestinian protests, referencing both an April 2022 protest against an event that included Israel's ambassador to the US Michael Herzog, as well as protests opposing Israel's campaign in Gaza. It also mentions the tearing down of posters depicting Israeli hostages and a 1960s political cartoon published by a Palestinian student group that the ADL said was antisemitic.
The protests at Harvard included many Jewish students and the Jewish Voice for Peace has been one of the principal organizers of the protests. Last week, the students agreed to end their protest after agreeing with the school's administration to have a meeting addressing the student's demands.
Since the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, during which roughly 1,000 Israelis were killed, more than 35,000 Palestinians have been killed, including more than 13,000 children.

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'Rot in jail': Assange granted appeal hearing while US drags its feet

After deferring a decision in March on whether Julian Assange could bring his case to another appeal hearing, on Monday he was granted permission by two judges to challenge his extradition to the US on espionage charges. Canadian activist Yves Engler joined Sputnik's Political Misfits to discuss prolonged legal troubles.

"[Letting] him rot in a British jail. This has dragged on for years and years and years and, you still see a situation where Julian Assange is not even necessarily mentioned when the Canadian government and other governments talk about political prisoners and freedom of the press. But, this is the message from the US empire. You don't reveal our secrets. If we can get you, we'll try to get you," said Engler.

"There is a faction that wants to make an example to punish Julian Assange. 'You're not going to reveal the secrets of the empire and think that you can, and we're gonna do what we can to make that hurt'", he added.

The decision by High Court judges Victoria Sharp and Jeremy Johnson came on Monday after Assange's lawyers argued that the US did not provide adequate assurances that he would have the same free speech protections as an American citizen were he to be extradited from Britain.

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France struggles to keep its colonies The French government deployed military units to New Caledonia after a state of emergency was declared in the French Island Territory amid violent mass protests. The unrest is a response to Paris-backed changes to local voting laws. The peace activist, writer and teacher, KJ Noh and analyst Steve Poikonen sat down with Sputnik's The Critical Hour and discussed the ongoing unrest in the island nation.

"We have to understand this in the larger global context, which is that this essentially is yet another signal of the rise of the multipolar world that is colonized countries taking out the colonizer," Noh said. "They no longer want to be colonial or neocolonial vassals of France, regardless of how the French characterize it. They want to shake off those colonial shackles."

Commenting on the French neocolonial ambitions Poikonen highlighted the recent fails of Paris in maintaining control over what used to be its overseas territories. "They got frog-marched out of Niger, and Mali and Burkina Faso. The nickel that they want from New Caledonia is just part of the green energy jam where they're trying to sell people a sustainable future built on, you know, harvesting all the rest of the minerals out of the ground and destroying the planet in the process," the analyst clarified.

"And Macron knows that but he lost what 70% of France's uranium when they got kicked out of Niger. They're losing contracts. The thing that they're ultimately fighting over, I think, is to maintain some sort of international influence as far as shipping lanes are concerned. And, other than that, save face and try not to look like they're getting spanked everywhere they go, everywhere they are," Poikonen added. Boost us! | Subscribe to @geopolitics_live

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The UN under-secretary general for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief coordinator, Martin Griffiths, told the AFP that "apocalyptic" famine is coming to Gaza.

"If fuel runs out, aid doesn't get to the people where they need it. That famine, which we have talked about for so long, and which is looming, will not be looming anymore. It will be present," Griffiths said.

"And I think our worry, as citizens of the international community, is that the consequence is going to be really, really hard. Hard, difficult and apocalyptic."

Israel has repeatedly claimed to be doing all it can to facilitate humanitarian aid to Gaza but aid organizations have repeatedly said they have been hampered by Israeli authorities.

For months, Israeli settlers have blocked aid going into Gaza, oftentimes as Israeli police and military forces stand by. Those incidents reached a fevered pitch last week with several violent incidents. On Friday, Israelis attacked a commercial truck drive in Kochav Hashahar, an Israeli West Bank settlement that is illegal under international law. The Israelis reportedly attacked the driver, injuring him. Three IDF officers who arrived to treat the driver were also attacked and reportedly suffered minor injuries.

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At other incidents of Israelis blocking or destroying aid, the police and military can be seen standing by.

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Rep. Jake Achuincloss (D-MA) said during a televised interview that cutting federal funding to Harvard should be “on the table” in response to what he claims is antisemitism on the campus of the Ivy League school.

“It needs to be on the table,” Achuincloss, a Harvard graduate, said on Fox News Sunday. “Harvard and other universities have unfortunately become ransacked by antisemitism.”

To support his assertion, Achuincloss pointed to the Anti-Defamation League’s (ADL) Campus Antisemitism Report Card which gave Harvard and 12 other top schools failing grades, judging them on three main criteria: “Jewish life on campus,” “incidents on campus” and “administrative actions and policies.”

While the report noted good services for Jewish students on Harvard’s campus, it nevertheless received an F from the ADL, largely due to the protests on campus which were attended and in some cases led by Jewish organizations.

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'Rot in Jail': Assange Granted Appeal Hearing While US Drags Its Feet

In May 2019, the US government indicted Assange on 18 charges over WikiLeaks' publication of classified documents. Prosecutors claimed he “conspired” with US army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning to “hack” into a Pentagon computer.
After deferring a decision in March on whether Assange could bring his case to another appeal hearing, on Monday he was granted permission by two judges to challenge his extradition to the US on espionage charges. The WikiLeaks founder has been fighting various legal challenges for more than a decade, and currently faces 17 Espionage Act charges and a charge of conspiracy to commit computer intrusion.
On Monday, Canadian activist Yves Engler joined Sputnik’s Political Misfits to discuss prolonged legal troubles.
Sputnik’s Michelle Witte opened the interview by noting that in March, the UK had required the US government to provide assurances to London that if Assange - who is Australian - was extradited, he would not face the death penalty and would be allowed a full defense. She adds

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that while Assange will not be taken to a supermax prison, he will have to remain in Belmarsh Prison - which is located in southeast London - while the Biden administration drags their feet on the issue.

“There is a faction that wants to make an example to punish Julian Assange. ‘You’re not going to reveal the secrets of the empire and think that you can, and we're gonna do what we can to make that hurt’ - that's one element,” Engler told Political Misfits. “And the other element is that this is astoundingly embarrassing for a self-described liberal, democratic government to be doing this.”

“[Letting] him rot in a British jail. This has dragged on for years and years and years and, you still see a situation where Julian Assange is not even necessarily mentioned when the Canadian government and other governments talk about political prisoners and freedom of the press. But, this is the message from the US empire. You don't reveal our secrets. If we can get you, we'll try to get you,” he added.

Witte noted that the US has not made any promises that Assange will be permitted a First Amendment defense. The decision by High Court judges Victoria Sharp and Jeremy Johnson came on Monday after Assange’s lawyers argued that the US did not provide adequate assurances that he would have the same free speech protections as an American citizen were he to be extradited from Britain.

“The UK government had all kinds of moments where they should have dropped this and let him go and in fact given him an award, celebrated Julian for his contribution to humanity, and for revealing dangerous truths that the public deserves to know,” said Engler. “But the UK government is going along with the charade for its own reasons as well. And I don't know what the final result will be before, but, let's hope that Washington just ultimately drops it.”

“It seems like the tactic of the Biden administration and maybe any Democratic administration is just to drag this out procedurally until Julian Assange dies in prison,” Witte added, before asking Engler how a potential presidency under former President Donald Trump could affect Assange.

“Like I said, the Canadian government, which goes on about these press awards, has a whole agreement with this initiative with the UK government about freedom of the press around the world, and they have events not far from the Belmarsh prison and they never mention the fact that Assange is rotting away. And, as you pointed out, he didn't even show up at the court because he is in such ill health,” he added.

“It's unlikely that Trump would pardon [Assange] because Trump seems to - whoever replaces [former CIA director and US secretary of state Mike] Pompeo for him if he wins is going to have the same kind of nasty, nasty attitude,” said Engler.

It was reported in 2017 that WikiLeaks’ Twitter account was communicating with Donald Trump Jr. - the former president’s son - during which WikiLeaks urged the Trump campaign to reject the 2016 presidential election results if Trump were to lose. The following year, the Democratic National Committee filed a multimillion-dollar lawsuit in Manhattan against Russia, the Trump campaign, WikiLeaks and Julian Assange on alleged conspiracy theories.

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US Disregards ICC's Authority on Arrest Warrant Against Netanyahu

Both Netanyahu and US President Joe Biden have lambasted the charges against the Israeli leader, with Biden calling the decision “outrageous” and Netanyahu referring to it as a “farce” and antisemitic.

Karim Khan, the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) announced on Monday that he is seeking arrest warrants against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Hamas leader Yehiya Sinwar. They are charging the two leaders, who are at the heart of the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip, of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

On Monday, the US human rights lawyer, writer and activist Dan Kovalik joined Sputnik's The Critical Hour to discuss the charges against the two leaders and the decision's possible fallout.

“They have jurisdiction because why? Not because Israel ratified the Rome Statute of the ICC nor did the US, but because Hamas did. They're actually the ones who care more about international law than either the US or Israel, which is interesting,” Kovalik suggested.

“I think these warrants are a good move by the ICC. I'm surprised, honestly, that they're going after high-ranking officials of Israel, a very important ally to the US. This really is off-script for the ICC. And I think this maybe shows that there's some force of international law left in the world. I hope so. The warrants are totally proper, to say the least,” he added.

Sputnik’s Garland Nixon addressed the irony of US politicians suggesting that the ICC does not have authoritative power over the US nor Israel; however, last year they had urged the ICC to hold Russian President Vladimir Putin and his “enablers” accountable for aspects of the ongoing war in Ukraine.

“Israel is fighting a just war for survival, and the ICC is attempting to equate Israeli officials to the evil terrorists who perpetrated the October 7th massacre,” US House Speaker Mike Johnson said in a statement on Monday. “In the absence of leadership from the White House, Congress is reviewing all options, including sanctions, to punish the ICC and ensure its leadership faces consequences if they proceed.”

“This whole notion that the US is above the law and that it's shocked that somehow the ICC could come looking for it. It's just amazing,” said Kovalik. “It just shows how the US sees itself positioned in the world, and that is that it can do whatever it wants in its view, but everyone else has to follow the law. And that's not how the law works. So, yes, the ICC may come calling on people like Joe Biden and Antony Blinken, and that would be a good thing.”

Sputniks’ Wilmer Leon noted that the ICC is prosecuting the two world leaders for war crimes related to the events of October 7th. But not only did Israeli and US officials lie about details of the Hamas attack on Nova musical festival attendees, Israel has been occupying the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and has been leading its occupation with repression, institutionalized discrimination and the systematic abuses of Palestine peoples’ rights for over 50 years, said the Human Rights Watch in an article from 2017.

“The ICC warrants don't cover the time period before October 7th, and also they don't cover the more serious crime of genocide. They don't, the ICC has jurisdiction to charge people with genocide and they've chosen not to do that - not yet anyway,” Kovalik explains.

“Moreover, as you say, of course, Israel, it is correct as the occupying power does not have the right of self-defense vis-a-vis the Palestinians,” he continues. “You don't have the right of self-defense against people you occupy, right? Just like a slave holder doesn't have a right of

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self-defense against a slave uprising, right? And of course, the US and Israel don't see it that way, but I think that is the correct way to see it."
Regarding Netanyahu and how he is expected to conduct himself following the ICC's criminal charges, Kovalik suggested that most countries would be "inclined to have him arrested pursuant to these warrants". He added that the US may be a safe place, as the US government has suggested that they will not honor the warrants.
"The US Congress has made it clear that they don't believe the ICC has any authority over the US or its allies, only against its enemies, which, again, is obscene and ridiculous from a legal point of view," the lawyer said. "That is not the rule of law. And now we're finally seeing that maybe the rule of law is asserting itself. And it took this horrible, horrible genocide in Gaza for that to happen."
"I think Hamas [would go to court]. Again, they said they would turn people over to the ICC for prosecution if the ICC decided to prosecute them," said Kovalik. "And I think Israel will be hard-pressed to make the proof on many of their allegations against Hamas, and things will come out that are not favorable to Israel, and that is that many of the deaths on October 7th are attributable to the Israeli Defense Forces themselves, who we know fired upon their own people."
Hamas launched a large-scale attack against Israel on October 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people and abducting some 240 others. Following the attack, Israel launched retaliatory strikes, ordered a complete blockade of the Gaza Strip. Over 35,400 people have been killed so far by Israeli strikes in the Gaza Strip, local authorities said.

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Milei Blazes Trail of Diplomatic Destruction in Spain Following Visit This Weekend

Spain is Argentina's second largest foreign investor.
Argentina President Javier Milei is facing backlash after he described Begoña Gómez, the wife of Spain's Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, as corrupt and described socialism as "cursed and carcinogenic." Milei made his comments during a rally in Madrid that was organized by Spain's far-right Vox party.
Following the president's explosive comments, Spain recalled its ambassador from Buenos Aires for consultations. Meanwhile, the Spanish opposition, which is led by the People's Party, suggested that Sánchez was wrong to raise the personal conflict to a diplomatic level.
Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares says he expects an apology from Milei, but his spokesperson said in an interview late on Sunday that he would not apologize, and instead suggested that Spanish officials should apologize for insults they made against him.
"With his behavior, Milei has brought the relationship between Spain and Argentina to its most serious state in recent history," Albares said. "To this hospitality and good faith, he responded with a frontal attack on our democracy, on our institutions and on Spain."

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In April, a court in Madrid opened a preliminary investigation into Gómez on suspicion of "influence peddling and corruption". The case's claims were made by a right-wing anti-corruption group. Sánchez has described himself and his wife as victims of rightwing "mudslinging".
A group of business executives met with Milei on Saturday, including those from BBVA and Telefónica, but were forced to do damage control following Milei's comments. They said they agreed with a statement that was put out by the head of CEOE, Antonio Garamendi. The head said "we emphatically reject" Milei's comments, which were "out of tone against the prime minister and his wife."
In April, the US said it would allocate $40 million to support defense modernization of Argentina, which has declared its intention to become one of NATO's global partners, according to the US Embassy in Buenos Aires.
Through its partnership with the US, Argentina will be able to purchase defense products, training services, and F-16 fighter jets. Milei, who was elected to the position in December 2023, has rejected the idea of peacefully working with BRICS partners including China, Brazil and Russia, and has instead pushed for a foreign policy that relies on a partnership with the US and Israel.

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RPT - Ex-Trump Officials Met Netanyahu on Monday, Not at Trump's Request - Source

WASHINGTON, May 21 (Sputnik) - The former Trump administration officials met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday to discuss internal issues the prime minister is facing, but the meeting did not take place at the request of former President Donald Trump, a source familiar with the matter told Sputnik.
The source said on Monday that former Trump national security adviser Robert O'Brien, former US Envoy to the United Arab Emirates John Rakolta, and former US Envoy to Switzerland Ed McMullen met with Netanyahu.
"[O'Brien] He and Ambassadors Ed McMullen and John Rakolta did meet with PM [Prime Minister] Netanyahu," the source said. "The trip has been planned for several months and was not at the request or direction of President Trump."
The purpose of the trip was to show support for Israel, to see firsthand what happened on October 7, and to understand from Israeli leadership how its military operation in Gaza has been progressing, according to the source.
On October 7, 2023, Palestinian movement Hamas launched a large-scale rocket attack against Israel and breached the border, attacking both civilian neighborhoods and military bases. Nearly 1,200 people in Israel were killed and some 240 others were 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 35,200 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

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Hamas in Gaza.

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Inviting Russia to Normandy Landing Anniversary Would Be Goodwill Gesture - US Veteran

WASHINGTON, May 21 (Sputnik) - Extending an invitation to Russia to participate in the events marking the 80th anniversary of the allied troops landing in Normandy would be a goodwill gesture even though Soviet troops did not participate in that military operation, but such a move is not likely to happen this year, World War II veteran from the United States, Frank Cohn, told Sputnik.

"It would be friendly to offer an invitation, but that certainly won't happen this year," Cohn said.

However, Cohn also said US and Russian war veterans can extend such invitations because they know the price and importance of friendship between soldiers, and can help heal current political tensions.

"I think the veterans have a special mission to help repair the political damage. Veterans are much respected in Russia and when I wear my World War II hat, I get a lot of consideration here, too," Cohn said.

However, Cohn emphasized that more efforts are needed to overcome the current negative political climate.

"Things will have to simmer down before we can all get pleasant again," Cohn said.

Cohn, a 98-year-old retired US Army colonel, participated in the legendary meeting between US and Soviet troops at the Elbe River in Germany in April 1945. He said he now plans to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Normandy landings. The ceremony in honor of the landing of the allied forces in Normandy, France, will take place there in June.

Cohn said he did not participate in the Normandy invasion itself because he was still in training camp at that time. However, he arrived there just three months later and saw all the circumstances of the battle.

"I came in at the Utah Beach in Normandy in September of 1944 and saw the residue of the battle. It was still a big mess on the beach," he said.

The veteran also stressed that the Normandy invasion became the most significant battle for the Allied forces during the war.

The D-Day invasion was the largest ever naval, air, and land operation conducted in history when nearly 7,000 Allied naval vessels and more than 132,000 Allied troops landed on five beaches in Normandy.

More than 4,414 allied troops were killed during the landings on June 6, 1944, including 2,501 US troops. Overall, some 73,000 allied troops were killed during the operation, code-named Overlord, which opened a second front against Nazi Germany in the west.

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US Lawmakers Say Biden 'Delusional' For Removing Cuba From Anti-Terror Blacklist

WASHINGTON, May 21 (Sputnik) - US House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul and House House Homeland Security Committee Chairman Mark Green said in a joint statement that President Joe Biden is delusional for declaring the Cuban government to be compliant with US counterterrorism efforts.

Last week, the Biden administration removed Cuba from its short list of countries it alleges do not fully cooperate with the United States on counterterrorism efforts.

"Only a completely delusional administration would determine that such a brutal, anti-American, and tyrannical regime is supporting US efforts to counter global terrorism," the lawmakers said in the statement on Monday.

The Republican lawmakers claim that the Biden administration's decision to declare the Cuban government compliant with US counterterrorism efforts will embolden other US adversaries to engage in malign activity.

The lawmakers said that Cuba has been caught spying at the highest levels of the US government, allegedly hosts a Chinese espionage base in Cuba, and allegedly sends its citizens to fight for Russia in Ukraine.

Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel, following Washington's decision to remove the Caribbean country from the shirt list of countries deemed not cooperating fully in its fight against terrorism, has called on the United States to go further and remove it from the list of state sponsors of terrorism.

Cuba was first added to the list of state sponsors of terrorism by the State Department in 1982 during the presidency of Ronald Reagan. The US removed Cuba from the list of state sponsors of terrorism during the Obama administration in 2015 as part of efforts to normalize relations with Havana. However, the island nation was re-added to the list during the Trump administration when the US accused Cuba of harboring American fugitives and Colombian rebels.

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US Judge Orders New Sentencing Hearing for Pelosi Attacker Due to 'Clear Error' - Filing

WASHINGTON, May 21 (Sputnik) - US District Judge Jacqueline Scott Corley scheduled a new sentencing hearing for Paul Pelosi attacker David DePape due to the court's failure to give him a chance to speak at the previous hearing, according to a court order filed over the weekend.

On Friday, Corley sentenced DePape to 30 years in prison for attacking Pelosi with a hammer at his San Francisco residence. However, the court failed to give DePape a chance to speak at the hearing, in violation of court procedure.

"Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure 32(i)(4)(A)(ii) requires the Court, prior to imposing a

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sentence, to 'address the defendant personally in order to permit the defendant to speak or present any information to mitigate the sentence.' At the May 17, 2024 sentencing proceeding, no party brought to the Court's attention that it had not done so. Nonetheless, it was the Court's responsibility to personally ask Mr. DePape if he wanted to speak. As the Court did not do so, it committed clear error," Corley said in an order filed on Saturday.

The court will reopen the sentencing to permit DePape to speak should he wish to do so, the order said. Corley scheduled a new sentencing hearing for May 28, the order said.

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Biden Says Amid ICC Allegations Israel Not Conducting Genocide in Gaza

WASHINGTON, May 21 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said during a press conference that despite the ICC prosecutor's application for arrest warrants against Israeli leaders, Israel is not carrying out genocide in Gaza.

"Israel must do all it can to ensure civilian protection, but let me be clear, contrary to allegations against Israel made by the International Criminal Court of Justice, what's happening is not genocide, we reject that," Biden said on Monday.

Earlier in the day, ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan said that he had filed requests for arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, as well as for the leader of the Palestinian movement Hamas in the Gaza Strip, Yahya Sinwar, Hamas' military wing head Mohammed Diab Ibrahim Masri and Hamas political bureau head Ismail Haniyeh.

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Ex-Trump Officials Met Netanyahu on Monday, Not at Trump's Request - Source

WASHINGTON, May 21 (Sputnik) - The former Trump administration officials met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday to discuss internal issues the prime minister is facing, but the meeting did not take place at the request of former President Donald Trump, a source familiar with the matter told Sputnik.

The source said on Monday that former Trump national security adviser Robert O'Brien, former US Envoy to the United Arab Emirates John Rakolta, and former US Envoy to Switzerland Ed McMullen met with Netanyahu.

"[O'Brien] He and Ambassadors Ed McMullen and John Rakolta did meet with PM [Prime Minister] Netanyahu," the source said. "The trip has been planned for several months and was not at the request or direction of President Trump."

The purpose of the trip was to show support for Israel, to see firsthand what happened on October 7, and to understand from Israeli leadership how its military operation in Gaza has been

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progressing, according to the source.

On October 7, 2023, Palestinian movement Hamas launched a large-scale rocket attack against Israel and breached the border, attacking both civilian neighborhoods and military bases. Nearly 1,200 people in Israel were killed and some 240 others were 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 35,200 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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Sanctions on Russia to Increase Usage of Chinese Yuan, Affect US Dollar - Federal Reserve

WASHINGTON, May 20 (Sputnik) - Sanctions imposed on Russia and Chinese efforts to bolster usage of the renminbi can affect the international use of the US dollar as a store of value, Federal Reserve Governor Christopher J. Waller said in remarks prepared for delivery at the Third Conference on the International Roles of the US Dollar and published on Monday.

"Rising geopolitical tensions, sanctions against Russia, China's efforts to bolster usage of the renminbi, and economic fragmentation all can affect the international use of the dollar, most visibly as a store of value and reflected in its use in official foreign exchange reserves," Waller said.

The listed factors can also have an impact on the US dollar’s role as a medium of exchange, including its use in trade invoicing, global banking and foreign exchange transactions, Waller added.

According to data compiled by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), nearly 59% of the global foreign exchange reserves are nominated in US dollars, while nearly 88% of all foreign exchange transactions are also taking place in the US dollar. Only slightly over 2% of the global foreign exchange reserves are in Chinese yuan.

In an interview with Tucker Carlson in February, Russian President Vladimir Putin called the US's use of the dollar as a foreign policy tool one of the biggest strategic mistakes by the US leadership. Even American allies are now downsizing their US dollar reserves, with more countries shifting to national currencies in bilateral trade, Putin said.

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Nebenzia:'Hypocritical' States Reject Russia's Space Arms Draft Citing Lack of 'Consensus'

UNITED NATIONS, May 21 (Sputnik) - Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia slammed UNSC member states who voted against the Russian text on the

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non-deployment of weapons in space, calling their explanation “hypocrisy."

Earlier on Monday, the US and six other Council members voted against the Russia-drafted resolution on the non-deployment of weapons in space, saying their concerned were not addressed in the Russian version.

"What is particularly cynical and hypocritical are their attempts to justify their actions with the allegedly nonconsensual nature of our draft," Nebenzia told the UN Security Council members following the vote.

In addition, he said that these same states want to discuss space within specialized UN forums while at the same time, this is what they criticized Russia for.

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US Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation Chairman Says Will Step Down

WASHINGTON, May 21 (Sputnik) - Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) Chairman Martin Gruenberg said in a statement that he will step down from the leadership role as soon as a replacement is confirmed.

“Throughout that time I have faithfully carried out the critically important mission of the FDIC to maintain public confidence and stability in the banking system. In light of recent events, I am prepared to step down from my responsibilities once a successor is confirmed,” the statement said on Monday.

Last month, a special review committee found that FDIC failed to provide a workplace safe from sexual harassment, discrimination and other interpersonal misconduct.

Gruenberg said that he will continue to fulfill his duties until a replacement is confirmed, including work to transform the FDIC’s workplace culture.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, May 21 (Sputnik) –

ICC ARREST WARRANTS FOR ISRAELI, HAMAS LEADERS

* The Palestinian movement Hamas demanded on Monday that the International Criminal Court (ICC) overturn the decision to issue an arrest warrant for the leaders of the movement and arrest all the Israeli leadership.

* US President Joe Biden called the ICC prosecutor’s application for arrest warrants against Israeli leaders “outrageous” and promised that the United States would stand with Israel.

* The United States rejects the ICC Prosecutor's announcement of applying for arrest warrants

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for senior Israeli officials and Hamas members, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.
* The decision of the ICC to demand arrest warrants for Israeli officials is an example of "new anti-Semitism," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said.
* The United States Congress is exploring all options, including sanctions, to punish the ICC if it proceeds with arrest warrants for Israeli officials amid the war in Gaza, House Speaker Mike Johnson said.

HELICOPTER CRASH IN IRAN

* The United States was unable to provide the assistance requested by Iran to search for a helicopter carrying President Raisi due to logistical reasons, Spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday during a press briefing.
* The cause of the helicopter crash that took the lives of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, and several other officials is unclear to the United States, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said.
* An allegation that US sanctions played a role in the helicopter crash that killed Raisi, Amir-Abdollahian, and several other senior officials is groundless, Kirby said.
* The United States expresses its official condolences after a helicopter crash killed Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and other members of his delegation in northwestern Iran, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said.
* The farewell ceremony and funeral of Raisi will be held in Mashhad on May 23, Iranian Vice President Mohsen Mansouri said.
* UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is saddened by the death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.

WESTERN MILITARY SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE

* The United States, the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Romania, Belgium, and Lithuania will supply equipment and missiles to the Ukrainian military as part of the German Air Defense initiative (IAAD), the German Defense Ministry said on Monday.
* Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr. said that he is confident Ukraine has not used US-supplied ATACMS missiles to attack the territory of Russia.
* US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said that he opposes the expanded use of US-supplied Ukrainian weapons for strikes into Russian territory.

RUSSIAN ENERGY

* The Russian government has suspended the temporary ban on gasoline exports until June 30, but the ban will continue to be in effect on July 1- August 31, the Russian Cabinet said on Monday.
* Gross oil production in Russia amounted to 195.7 million tonnes in 2024, which is 1.8% less than one year earlier, Russian President Vladimir Putin said.
* Gas production in Russia amounted to 246.4 billion cubic meters in January-April, which is 8% more than one year earlier, Putin said.

RUSSIA-CHINA COOPERATION

* China is ready to work with Russia to implement the agreements reached by the leaders of the two countries and bring the bilateral relations to a new level, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said on Monday.
* China has the right to have economic relations with Russia and the United States should not interfere with such ties, Chinese Deputy Ambassador to the UN Geng Shuang said.

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* Russian President Vladimir Putin has expressed confidence in a telegram to Chinese President Xi Jinping that the detailed negotiations between Moscow and Beijing will contribute to the further strengthening of the bilateral relations.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said on Monday that it had held an impartial investigation and found no leaks of nuclear materials at all Ukrainian nuclear power plants, nor at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (ZNPP).

* Russian forces took full control of the village of Bilohorivka in the Luhansk People's Republic, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

* The situation with the legitimacy of Volodymyr Zelenskyy as Ukraine's president does not affect the course of the special military operation, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

UK HIGH COURT DECISION ON ASSANGE

* The UK's High Court of Justice in London has ruled in favor of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, granting his application for the right to challenge the decision on his extradition to the United States, Sky News reported on Monday.

* The latest decision of the UK's High Court of Justice in London in the case of Assange granting him the opportunity to challenge the extradition to the US can hardly be called one in favor of the journalist, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told Sputnik.

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Some UNSC States Seek Leeway to Use Outer Space for Military Purposes - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, May 20 (Sputnik) - Some UN Security Council member states voted against the draft resolution on non-placement of weapons in outer space because they want to have a leeway to use space for military purposes, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Monday.

"You simply wish to keep, to maintain your leeway to use outer space for military purposes and to place in outer space any forms of weapons," Nebenzia said after the vote on the draft resolution.

Earlier in the day, the United States and six other UN Security Council member states voted against the Russian draft resolution on non-deployment of weapons in space because Russia allegedly did not include their concerns in the draft.

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ICC's Decision to Seek Arrest Warrants for Israeli Officials 'Reprehensible' - Schumer

WASHINGTON, May 20 (Sputnik) - The International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor's decision to seek arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense

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Minister Yoav Gallant is unfair and reprehensible, US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said on Monday.

"The ICC prosecutor's decision seeking arrest warrants for Israeli leaders alongside Hamas terrorists is not only profoundly unfair, but it is reprehensible," Schumer said during remarks on the Senate floor.

ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan also filed requests for arrest warrants for leaders of Palestinian organization Hamas. Neither the United States nor Israel are parties to the treaty establishing the ICC.

US Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell called the ICC a "rogue, kangaroo court," and criticized Khan for seeking arrest warrants for Israeli leaders.

Earlier on Monday, US House Speaker Mike Johnson said that lawmakers are exploring options, including sanctions, to punish the ICC if it proceeds with arrest warrants for Israeli officials.

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UNSC Fails to Adopt Russian Resolution on Averting Arms Race in Space - Correspondent

UNITED NATIONS, May 20 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council on Monday failed to adopt a Russia-drafted resolution on preventing an arms race in space, a Sputnik correspondent reported on Monday.

The resolution was rejected in a 7-7 vote with one member country abstaining. The United States and the United Kingdom were among those who voted against.

The draft resolution would have urged member nations "to take urgent measures to prevent for all time the placement of weapons in outer space and the threat or use of force in outer space, from space against Earth and from Earth against objects in outer space."

The document would also have called on member states to "seek through negotiations the early elaboration of appropriate reliably verifiable legally binding multilateral agreements."

Prior to the vote, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said that the West's refusal to support the resolution would expose its desire to maintain the freedom to act when it comes to the accelerated militarization of space.

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Sullivan Holds Meetings With Israeli, Palestinian Officials on Gaza - White House

WASHINGTON, May 20 (Sputnik) – US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan held separate meetings with Israeli and Palestinian officials to discuss the situation in Gaza as Israel is readying for a major ground military operation in Rafah, the White House said on Monday.

"Today in Israel, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan met with Israeli Leader of the Opposition Yair Lapid, Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant, Chief of Defense Herzi Halevi, and War Cabinet members Benny Gantz, and Gadi Eizenkot to discuss the situation in Gaza and the United States' unwavering support for Israel," the White House said in a press release.

Gallant and Halevi briefed Sullivan on new alternative approaches to defeat Hamas as Washington continues to oppose Israel's major ground operation in refugee-flooded Rafah, according to the release.

During the meetings in Israel, Sullivan also emphasized the importance of Israel and Egypt concluding talks to reopen the Rafah crossing as soon as possible, the release added.

"On Sunday, May 19, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan met with Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) Secretary General Hussein Al Sheikh and Palestinian Authority (PA) Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa," the White House said in a separate press release.

Sullivan and Palestinian officials discussed the PA government reform and the importance of the international community providing financial support to enable the new government to succeed, the release said.

Earlier in the day, the International Criminal Court's (ICC) Prosecutor Karim Khan said he had filed requests for arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Gallant, as well as for Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip Yahya Sinwar, Hamas political bureau head Ismail Haniyeh and the leader of Hamas's military wing, Mohammed Diab Ibrahim Masri over alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity committed since October 2023 based on evidence collected and examined by his office.

US President Joe Biden called the fact that ICC issued requests for arrest warrants against Israeli officials outrageous.

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Patriot PAC-3 Shoots Down Cruise Missile Using Container Launch Platform - Lockheed

WASHINGTON, May 20 (Sputnik) - A Patriot PAC-3 air defense missile has shot down a targeted cruise missile after being launched for the first time from a containerized launch platform, Lockheed Martin announced in a press release on Monday.

"In partnership with multiple Department of Defense Services and Components, Lockheed Martin launched a PAC-3 Missile Segment Enhancement (MSE) interceptor from an MK-70 containerized launch platform to engage a cruise missile target in flight," the release said.

The test marked the first time that any PAC-3 MSE was launched in this configuration, utilizing the Virtualized Aegis Weapon System, to intercept a live target, the release said.

“These systems could deliver a proven, Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD) capability with growing capacity to the U.S. to help defend against advanced, maneuverable threats,” Lockheed Martin Vice President of Strategy and Naval Programs Tom Copeman said in the release.

Lockheed Martin is working to deliver enhanced IAMD capability to defend against simultaneous advanced air, surface, and missile threats, the release said.

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UNSC does Not Adopt Russia-drafted Resolution on Preventing Placement of Weapons in Space - Correspondent

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Congress Considering Sanctions on ICC Over Arrest Warrants for Israeli Officials - Johnson

WASHINGTON, May 20 (Sputnik) - The United States Congress is exploring all options, including sanctions, to punish the International Criminal Court (ICC) if it proceeds with arrest warrants for Israeli officials amid the war in Gaza, House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Monday.

"In the absence of leadership from the White House, Congress is reviewing all options, including sanctions, to punish the ICC and ensure its leadership faces consequences if they proceed," Johnson said in a statement.

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US Says Was Unable to Provide Assistance to Iran in Search for Helicopter Carrying Raisi

WASHINGTON, May 20 (Sputnik) — The United States was unable to provide the assistance requested by Iran to search for a helicopter carrying President Raisi due to logistical reasons, Spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday during a press briefing.
""We [The US] were asked by the Iranian government for assistance. We said that we would be willing to assist, something that we would do with respect to any government in this situation. Ultimately, largely for logistical reasons, we weren't able to provide that assistance," Miller said.

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Cause of Helicopter Crash That Killed Iranian Leaders Not Clear to US - White House

WASHINGTON, May 20 (Sputnik) - The cause of the helicopter crash that took the lives of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and several other officials is unclear to the United States, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Monday.
"The cause of the crash of course isn't clear, at least not clear to us," Kirby said during a briefing. "It's not surprising, sadly, but not surprising that the Iranian regime once again finds the way to try to blame the United States for problems of its own making."

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Claim Sanctions Were Cause of Crash That Killed Iranian Leaders 'Baseless' - Kirby

WASHINGTON, May 20 (Sputnik) - An allegation that US sanctions played role in the helicopter crash that killed Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and several other senior officials is groundless, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Monday.
"As for this claim about US sanctions being responsible, it's utterly baseless," Kirby said during a briefing.

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Priest on Ukraine Destroying Orthodox Kiev Chapel: Scary to Even Think of Retribution

WASHINGTON, May 20 (Sputnik) - It is "scary" even to think about what will happen to the people who destroy churches and persecute believers, Russian Church Abroad (ROCOR)

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Synod of Bishops Chancellor Archpriest Serafim Gan told Sputnik, commenting on Ukrainian authorities dismantling the chapel of the Tithes monastery in Kiev.

Ukrainian authorities demolished the chapel of Sts. Vladimir and Olga of the Tithes monastery in Kiev during the night from Thursday to Friday.

"It is scary not only to say but even to think what will happen with those who destroy shrines and persecute believers," Gan said.

The priest said that he could not comprehend how anyone could harm a temple of God, especially during challenging times when people are in dire need of spiritual healing.

"The news of the destruction of the Tithes Church resonated with severe pain in the heart," Gan said.

The priest pointed out that the Church urges Orthodox Christians to pray for persecuted believers and their persecutors so that both receive God's mercy.

"And we try to do just that so as not to become bitter," he added.

The Tithes church, which belonged to the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), was built in 2007 close to the site of the first stone Orthodox cathedral of Kievan Rus.

The chapel was dismantled under the cover of the night after a court ruled last year that it had been illegally erected on the territory of the National Museum of History of Ukraine.

The move came as part of the Ukrainian authorities' ongoing campaign of persecution against the UOC. The crackdown includes opening criminal investigations into activities of its clergies, conducting searches and seizing properties. Local authorities in various regions of Ukraine have banned the activities of the UOC by accusing the church of ties to Russia. Last year, the Ukrainian parliament passed the first reading of a bill that would ban the canonical UOC.

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iran asked us for assistance in searches of helicopter that was carrying president raisi, us was unable to provide it - state dept

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UN Has Not Yet Appointed Delegation for Ukraine Peace Talks in Switzerland - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, May 20 (Sputnik) - The United Nations has still not yet decided who will represent the world body during the high-level conference on peace in Ukraine organized by Switzerland, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Monday.

"As soon as I have something I will share that with you," Dujarric said during a briefing when asked if UN Secretary-General antonio Guterres will attend the conference in Switzerland.

Earlier on Monday, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said that any country trying to act as a mediator in the Ukraine conflict should bear in mind that Volodymyr Zelenskyy lacks the legitimacy to sign documents as his presidential tenure expires on May 20.

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

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Canadian Govt. Unveils National Action Plan to Curb Auto Theft Amid Rise in Criminal Trend

WASHINGTON, May 20 (Sputnik) – The Canadian government unveiled on Monday its National Action Plan on Combatting Auto Theft amid a significant increase in the criminal trend throughout the country, Public Safety Canada said.

"The Action Plan is focused on disrupting, dismantling, and prosecuting the organized crime groups involved in auto theft. It identifies various measures and initiatives that can be implemented by the federal, provincial, and territorial governments and their partners, in keeping with their respective roles, priorities, and responsibilities," the statement said.

Accordingly, the action plan builds on the National Summit on Combatting Auto Theft convened by the federal government in February, and more recent actions that have led to the seizure of hundreds of stolen cars.

Ottawa intends to take "immediate" action in the areas that fall under its jurisdiction, the statement said. Among them, making legislative and regulatory changes that could even include amendments to the Criminal Code; enhancing intelligence and information sharing between all levels of domestic police and their international counterparts; and improving the Canada Border Services Agency's ability to intervene.

In 2022, the Insurance Bureau of Canada estimated a record C$1.2 billion in theft claims were paid out. The auto-theft crisis prompted the federal government to convene a National Summit on Combatting Auto Theft in early February, which notably resulted in enhanced screenings of containers at the country's major ports from where they are more commonly exported to Africa and the Middle East.

According to official data, the rates of vehicle theft rose by 50% in Quebec, 48.3% in Ontario, 34.5% in Atlantic Canada, and 18.35% in Alberta in 2022, as compared to the previous year. In addition, 1800 vehicles were intercepted in 2023, and 1025 since the beginning of the current year.

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Top US General Says Confident US-Supplied ATACMS Have Not Been Used to Attack Russia

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WASHINGTON, May 20 (Sputnik) - Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr. said on Monday that he is confident Ukraine has not used US-supplied ATACMS missiles to attack the territory of Russia.

"I am confident the ATACMS that we have provided have not been used in Russia, they have been used for targets in Ukraine," Brown said during a press briefing.

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Chairman of Joint Chiefs Says No Plans at Present to Deploy US Trainers Into Ukraine

WASHINGTON, May 20 (Sputnik) - The United States has no plans at present to deploy US trainers into Ukraine, US Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Charles Brown said on Monday.

"Right now there are no plans to bring US trainers into Ukraine," Brown said alongside Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin after a virtual Ukraine Defense Contact Group meeting with US allies.

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Pentagon Chief Says Opposes Use of US-Supplied Ukrainian Weapons for Strikes Inside Russia

WASHINGTON, May 20 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said on Monday that he opposes the expanded use of US-supplied Ukrainian weapons for strikes into Russian territory.

"In my view, their [Ukraine] focus ought to be on the close fight and making sure that they're servicing those targets that will enable success in the close fight ... that'll be my view going forward," Austin said during a press briefing.

Austin responded to a question about ex-State Department official Victoria Nuland suggesting in a recent interview that the United States should provide Ukraine with the capability to hit bases inside Russian territory.

US Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Charles Brown added that he is confident long-range ATACMS missiles provided by the United States have not been used by Ukraine to hit targets inside Russia.

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US Expresses Official Condolences Over Death of Raisi, Delegation - State Department

WASHINGTON, May 20 (Sputnik) - The United States expresses its official condolences after a helicopter crash killed Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and other members of his delegation in

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northwestern Iran, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday
"The United States expresses its official condolences for the death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, Foreign Minister Amir-Abdollahian, and other members of their delegation in a helicopter crash in northwest Iran. As Iran selects a new president, we reaffirm our support for the Iranian people and their struggle for human rights and fundamental freedoms," Miller said in a statement.
Raisi and his delegation, including Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian, died on Sunday in a helicopter crash in northwestern Iran on their way back from a visit to Azerbaijan

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Biden Calls ICC Prosecutor's Application For Arrest Warrants Against Israel 'Outrageous'

WASHINGTON, May 20 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden on Monday called the International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor's application for arrest warrants against Israeli leaders "outrageous" and promised that the United States will stand with Israel.
"The ICC prosecutor's application for arrest warrants against Israeli leaders is outrageous. And let me be clear: whatever this prosecutor might imply, there is no equivalence — none — between Israel and Hamas. We will always stand with Israel against threats to its security," Biden said in a statement.
Earlier in the day, ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan said that he had filed requests for arrest warrants for Netanyahu and Gallant, as well as for the leader of the Palestinian movement Hamas in the Gaza Strip, Yahya Sinwar, Hamas' military wing head Mohammed Diab Ibrahim Masri and Hamas political bureau head Ismail Haniyeh.

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Pentagon Says Has No Insight Into Cause of Helicopter Crash That Killed Iranian President

WASHINGTON, May 20 (Sputnik) - The United States has no insight into the cause of the helicopter crash that killed Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi on Sunday but will continue to monitor the situation, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said on Monday.
"We continue to monitor the situation but we don't have any insights into the cause of the accident," Austin said during a press briefing. "I know the Iranians are investigating or will investigate and so we'll see what the outcome is."

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US Rejects ICC's Arrest Warrants for Israeli Officials, Hamas Members - Blinken

WASHINGTON, May 20 (Sputnik) — The United States rejects the International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor's announcement of applying for arrest warrants for senior Israeli officials and Hamas members, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Monday.

"The United States fundamentally rejects the announcement today from the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) that he is applying for arrest warrants for senior Israeli officials, together with warrants for Hamas terrorists. We reject the Prosecutor's equivalence of Israel with Hamas," Blinken said in a statement.

Blinken added that this decision "does nothing to help" and could jeopardize ceasefire efforts to release hostages and deliver humanitarian aid.

Earlier this month, the White House said the ICC has no jurisdiction over Israel and does not support its investigation.

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West Bank Economy 'Cratered' Due to Movement Restrictions - UNRWA

WASHINGTON, May 20 (Sputnik) - The economy in the West Bank has suffered as a result of movement restrictions in the Palestinian territory, United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) Washington office chief William Deere said on Monday.

"The West Bank is equally in terrible shape. The economy has cratered in the West Bank because of the movement restrictions," Deere said at a Stimson Center event.

Following the October 7, 2023 attack on Israel by Palestinian organization Hamas, Israeli authorities increased movement restrictions in the West Bank. In 2023, Israeli policing operations in the West Bank were the deadliest since 2005, according to Amnesty International.

Last month, the US State Department said in its annual human rights report that the United States condemns record levels of violence in the West Bank, including attacks by Israeli extremist settlers on Palestinian civilians.

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US, Allies Will Ensure Ukraine Can Defend Infrastructure 'Far From Frontlines' - Austin

WASHINGTON, May 20 (Sputnik) - The United States and its allies will continue to push to ensure that Ukraine owns its skies and can defend its citizens and infrastructure "far from the frontlines," US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said on Monday.

"We will continue to push to ensure that Ukraine owns its skies and can defend its citizens, and civilian infrastructure far from the frontlines," Austin said during a press briefing following a

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virtual meeting of the Ukraine Contact Group. "The United States and our allies and partners worldwide remain laser-focused on Ukraine's near-term requirements in Kharkiv and elsewhere."

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US, allies will continue to push to ensure that ukraine owns its skies and can defend its citizens and infrastructure far from frontlines - austin

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Ex-Attorney Cohen Admits to Stealing $30,000 From Trump - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 20 (Sputnik) - Former Trump attorney Michael Cohen during a court testimony on Monday admitted to stealing $30,000 from the Trump Organization that was meant for a tech company that rigged polls in former President Donald Trump's favor, CNN reported.
"Yes, sir," Cohen told Trump's legal team when asked if he stole the money from the Trump Organization.
Cohen was initially supposed to pay Red Finch $50,000 for their services out of his own pocket, but he only paid them $20,000.
The Trump Organization was under the impression Cohen paid Red Finch $50,000 and later reimbursed him the full amount.
Cohen's testimony is part of Trump's "hush-money" case involving adult actress Stormy Daniels.
Trump is accused of falsifying business records related to an alleged hush money payment to cover up purported relations with Daniels. Trump has denied both the charges and the relations.
Trump has characterized the case as a form of election interference amid the 2024 US presidential race.

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us rejects ICC announcement on applying for arrest warrants for senior Israeli officials, along with warrants for hamas terrorists - Blinken

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Majority of US Voters Prefer Pro-Deportation Candidate Over Pro-Amnesty Candidate - Poll

WASHINGTON, May 20 (Sputnik) - A majority of likely voters in the United States would prefer a candidate who favors deporting illegal immigrants over one who favors amnesty, according to a Rasmussen Reports poll released Monday.

A majority of respondents, 52%, would prefer a candidate who backs deportations, the poll report said.

Thirty-six percent (36%) of respondents prefer a candidate who supports granting amnesty to illegal immigrants, the poll report said.

The poll surveyed 1,072 likely US voters from May 12-14. The poll maintains a margin of error of plus-or-minus three percentage points with a 95% confidence level.

Illegal migration at the United States' southern border has experienced three consecutive record-breaking years since US President Joe Biden took office in January 2021, according to US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) data.

Last week, acting US Immigration and Customs Enforcement Director Patrick Lechleitner said that the migration crisis is "crushing" CBP agents.

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Nebenzia Warns Signing Any Documents With Illegitimate Zelenskyy Against Common Sense

UNITED NATIONS, May 20 (Sputnik) - Any country trying to act as a mediator in the Ukraine conflict should bear in mind that Volodymyr Zelenskyy lacks the legitimacy to sign documents as his presidential tenure expires May 20, Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said on Monday.

"Any potential mediator has to take that particular factor into account, because discussions of any questions and in particular the signing of any documents with a leader who is no longer legitimate, really runs counter to common sense," Nebenzia told a UN Security Council meeting on Ukraine.

Any potential talks on Ukraine also need to take into account Russia's security concerns and new territorial realities, Nebenzia said.

He called a Ukraine peace conference to be hosted by Switzerland in June "a continuation of previous failed meetings" that resulted in "no added value."

Russia is not on the guest list of the peace conference. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the meeting is clearly not results oriented, as it is impossible to have effective talks on Ukraine without Russia's participation.

Ukraine was due to hold a presidential election on March 31, but it was called off due to martial law and a general mobilization. Zelenskyy, who was sworn into office in May 2019, said it was "not the right time" for elections.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said last week that the question of Zelenskyy's legitimacy as the president of Ukraine should be answered by the political and legal system of Ukraine itself. The issue is important for Russia since when it comes to signing any consequential documents,

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Russia wants to sign them with legitimate authorities, Putin added.

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China Will Not Provide Arms, Profit From Ukraine Conflict Like US Does - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, May 20 (Sputnik) - China will not do what the United States is doing by providing weapons to Ukraine and thus prolonging the conflict there and profiting from it, Chinese Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Geng Shuang said on Monday.
"China is not the creator or a party to the Ukraine crisis, nor have we provided lethal weapons to any party to the conflict," Geng told the UN Security Council. "We have not and will not do what the United States has been doing which is deliberately prolonging the fighting, we will not do that and we will not profit from the crisis."

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China Has Right to Have Economic Relations With Russia Without US Interference - Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, May 20 (Sputnik) - China has right to have economic relations with Russia and the United States should not interfere with such ties, Chinese Deputy Ambassador to the UN Geng Shuang said on Monday.
"China has right to carry out normal economic and trade cooperation with all countries in the world, including Russia, and such cooperation should not be interfered with or undermined," Geng told a UN Security Council meeting on Ukraine.

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US Lawmakers to Seek Sanctions on ICC After Netanyahu Arrest Warrant - Senator Graham

WASHINGTON, May 20 (Sputnik) – US lawmakers will work "feverishly" to impose sanctions on the International Criminal Court over its decision to seek arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, a senior Republican senator said on Monday.
"I will feverishly work with colleagues on both sides of the aisle in both chambers to levy damning sanctions against the ICC," Senator Lindsey Graham, who is on Russia's list of extremists and terrorists, said via X.
Earlier in the day, ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan said he had filed requests for arrest warrants for Netanyahu and Gallant, as well as for the leader of Palestinian movement Hamas in the Gaza

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Strip, Yahya Sinwar, Hamas' military wing head Mohammed Diab Ibrahim Masri and Hamas political bureau head Ismail Haniyeh.

Graham said the ICC was decision "outrageous," calling it is a slap in the face to the independent judiciary in Israel.

He also emphasized that the US is not a member of the ICC.

Graham stressed that he and other US lawmakers had engaged with the ICC several weeks ago and received reassurance that the court would conduct discussions with Israel before taking any actions.

"Instead of the ICC following through with scheduled consultations with Israel, they announced the warrants. I feel that I was lied to and that my colleagues were lied to," Graham said.

Twelve US senators, not including Graham, sent a letter to Khan earlier in May warning of severe sanctions if the court pursues arrest warrants against Israeli officials for their actions in the Gaza Strip.

Hamas launched a large-scale attack against Israel on October 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people and abducting some 240 others. Following the attack, Israel launched retaliatory strikes, ordered a complete blockade of the Gaza Strip, and started a ground incursion into the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages. Over 35,400 people have been killed so far by Israeli strikes in the Gaza Strip, local authorities said.

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US Congressman Says Countries Tired of Inflation Tax, Could Abandon US Dollar

WASHINGTON, May 20 (Sputnik) - Countries are growing weary of the US dollar and could abandon the currency due to inflation, US Congressman Thomas Massie said on Monday.

"The whole world is holding dollars, so when we devalue the dollar, we're not just taxing our own people, we're taxing the entire world," Massie said in an interview with Glenn Beck. "The rest of the world is getting tired of being used that way… and when they start using alternate forms of money to do their transactions, or holding different assets in their own sovereign wealth funds, then we're not going to be able to do that trick on anybody except for US citizens."

Last week, Massie introduced bills to audit and abolish the Federal Reserve, citing their contribution to inflation. The Federal Reserve devalued the dollar and enabled free money policies that caused high inflation, Massie said.

The legislation to end the Federal Reserve now has over 20 cosponsors in the House of Representatives, Massie said.

In December, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin said that Russia and China achieved nearly complete dedollarization in their bilateral transactions.

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Yellen to Urge G7 to Find Way to Use Russian Assets for Ukraine's Benefit - Statement

WASHINGTON, May 20 (Sputnik) - During her visit to Germany later this week, US Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen plans to urge the Group of Seven (G7) partners to collectively find a way to use Russian sovereign assets for the benefit of Ukraine, according to a written statement prepared for and published by the department on Monday.

"I believe it's vital and urgent that we collectively find a way forward to unlock the value of Russian sovereign assets immobilized in our jurisdictions for the benefit of Ukraine. This will be a key topic of conversation during G7 meetings this week," the statement reads.

According to the statement, Yellen will again call upon US allies and partners to continue imposing Russia-related sanctions, including on third parties, and sensitive goods originating in the United States and Europe.

The treasury secretary is expected to deliver her statement on Tuesday at the Frankfurt School of Finance and Management in Frankfurt, Germany.

Yellen is set to travel to Frankfurt from May 21-23 for a series of engagements and will then depart for Stresa, Italy, to participate in the G7 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors meeting from May 23-25.

Members states of the G7 are reportedly "making progress" toward reaching a consensus on the plan to harness Russia's frozen sovereign assets in favor of Ukraine, media reported citing an official with knowledge of Yellen's trip.

The G7 led by the United States and the European Union have been discussing ways to confiscate Russian assets since the start of Russia's military operation in Ukraine in February 2022. Moscow has criticized the efforts to take its money as an act of stealing and a violation of international laws. The European Central Bank has warned that seizure poses reputational risks to the euro in the long term.

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UNSC Observes Minute of Silence Following Death of Iranian President Raisi - President

UNITED NATIONS, May 20 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council members observed a minute of silence at the beginning of the session on Ukraine to mourn the death of the Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, Mozambique Ambassador to the United Nations Pedro Comissario Afonso, who presides over the UN Security Council this month, said on Monday.

The members stood up around the table at the UN Security Council and maintained silence for one minute.

Yesterday, a helicopter which carried the Iranian president and other members of the government, crashed on their return from Azeerbaijan. The president and the officials were

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pronounced dead after the crash.

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UN Chief 'Saddened' by Death of Iranian President Raisi - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, May 20 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is saddened by the death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Monday.

"The Secretary-General is saddened by the death of H.E. Mr. Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, H.E. Mr. Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, Minister for Foreign Affairs and their colleagues in a helicopter accident on 19 May. The Secretary-General expresses his sincere condolences to the families of the deceased and to the Government and people of the Islamic Republic of Iran," Dujarric said in a statement.

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At Request of Russia, China and Algeria, UNSC Holds Moment of Silence Iranian Leaders Killed in Helicopter Crash - Sputnik Correspondent

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US Sees No Evidence of Foul Play in Crash That Killed Iranian President Raisi - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 20 (Sputnik) - The United States see no evidence of foul play in the helicopter crash that took the lives of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and several other officials, NBC News reported on Monday, citing a senior Biden administration official.

Earlier on Monday, Iranian Vice President Mohsen Mansouri confirmed media reports that Raisi and his delegation, including Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, died in a helicopter crash in northwestern Iran on Sunday.

The official pointed out that he agrees with comments made by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer's on Sunday that there seems to be no evidence of foul play.

The Biden administration is closely monitoring the situation and is watching for reports where the Iranian government would try to pin the blame on the United States and Israel, the official also said.

Such comments were made earlier on Monday by former Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif who blamed US sanctions on the a scarce availability of aviation parts and for the crash

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itself.

However, no significant changes to US-Iran relations are expected after the accident.

On Sunday, a helicopter carrying Raisi, Amir-Abdollahian and their companions crashed in northwestern Iran as the delegation was returning from a visit to Azerbaijan. First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber will serve as head of state for the next 50 days until a new presidential election is held.

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GM Defense Says Will Integrate Mistral's Loitering Munition With Its Tactical Vehicle

WASHINGTON, May 20 (Sputnik) - General Motors subsidiary GM Defense LLC announced in a statement on Monday that it will integrate France's Mistral loitering munition and other technology with its light tactical utility vehicle to enhance its capability.

"GM Defense, a subsidiary of General Motors, and Mistral Inc., a provider of high-performance, reliable and innovative solutions to US defense and federal agencies, announced the integration of the innovative UVision and Mistral's Hero-120 loitering munition with GM Defense's light tactical utility vehicle," the statement said.

Combining GM Defense's expertise in military mobility with Mistral's munition and technology would enable support for the tactical needs of a "modernized force," the statement said.

Key features of the collaboration include enabling the vehicle to endure sustained operations in an austere environment; effective maintenance and customization that would allow several adaptations to meet general purpose and special operations forces requirements, the statement said.

The presence of the Hero-120 would also allow for rapid and effective launch of multiple munitions, the statement added.

Such integration would further enhance the soldiers' operational scope and combat effectiveness, according to the statement.

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