

6/4/24 Tuesday

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China's Chang'e-6 Set to Return to Earth With Moon's Far Side Samples

Chang'e is named after the moon goddess in Chinese mythology - this is China's sixth mission to the moon.

China's Chang'e-6 probe is officially making its return journey back to Earth after leaving the far side of the moon, China's national space agency announced on Tuesday. State media says the probe of the Chang'e-6 craft lifted off at about 7:38 on [Tuesday](#) (23:38 GMT Monday) and started its journey back.

The probe completed its sample collection from June 2-3, possibly making China the first country to return samples from the far side of the moon. The probe landed on the moon on Sunday in one of the oldest craters on the moon - the South Pole-Aitken (SPA) - and then spent two days gathering rock and soil samples using its drill and robotic arm.

When the probe successfully completed its mission, a "Chinese national flag carried by the lander was unfurled for the first time on the far side of the moon", the China National Space Administration (CNSA) said. However, the container carrying the samples still needs to be transferred to a re-entry capsule that will then land in the deserts of China's Inner Mongolia region later this month.

"This is a very important achievement," said [Professor Martin Barstow](#) of the University of Leicester. "Only the US and Russia have recovered samples from the moon, landing and then taking off again. It demonstrates an impressive capability in China's space programme. It's a technical feat to take off from the moon at all but even more challenging when carried out on its far side."

The [far side of the moon](#) or the "dark" side is the section which faces away from Earth. The moon's far side and near side were once thought to be relatively similar, but scientific missions by robotic observers and Apollo astronauts in the last six decades have found the two sides' features are actually very different. The moon's far side has less craters caused by volcanic activity on the moon, for instance.

The far side is challenging to study due to its distance and difficult terrain. [Experts](#) believe the probe's samples could provide unprecedented insights into the moon's far side as well as the formation and evolution of the moon and solar system and maybe even provide clues as to how Earth came to sustain life.

"I do not know if they have any plans for sharing samples outside China, but I hope they have and that we in the UK would get an opportunity to work on these. This would fit very well with our plans for sample return from Mars," said Barstow.

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Study Shows Weight-Loss Drugs Could Fight Cancers

Researchers say there is increasing evidence that weight-loss drugs such as Ozempic could fight cancer in obese patients.

A [study](#) presented at the world's largest cancer conference found that patients who take weight loss drugs are 19% less likely to develop 13 obesity-related cancers, including ovarian, liver, colorectal, pancreatic, and breast cancer while halving the chance of developing bowel cancer in patients with type 2 diabetes. [Experts](#) are saying weight loss jabs from brands like Ozempic and Wegovy could potentially "delay" or even prevent cancer.

The Case Western Reserve University in the US state of Ohio led the study which looked at research involving 34,000 obese people. Over a 15-year period, the study compared cancer rates among patients who used the weight-loss jabs for at least a year to; those who had undergone bariatric surgery; to those who had no treatment.

They found that not only do the jabs play a potential role in preventing and treating cancer, but also found that patients were half as likely to die over a 15-year period compared to patients not taking weight loss drugs, or GLP-1 receptor agonists (RA). The research also found that those who had undergone bariatric surgery saw their risk of cancer fall by 19%, although those who used their jabs lost "significantly" more weight.

"Our findings are significant in that they could change the paradigm of obesity management by suggesting early intervention with GLP-1 RAs could delay or prevent obesity-related cancer development," said study co-authors Dr. Cindy Lin and Dr. Benjamin Liu.

The authors add that laboratory and mice research has shown that "GLP-1s cause the death of cancer cells and prevent them from multiplying" while other studies have suggested that they reduce inflammation. However, scientists also believe that other factors could play into their patients' good health including reducing a patient's desire to smoke or drink alcohol, and the prevention of inflammation.

"Obesity is a risk factor for nearly all cancers, in both men and women," said [Dr. Mitchell Lazar](#), the director of the institute for diabetes, obesity and metabolism at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. "Thus the revolution in the medical treatment of obesity has enormous potential to prevent new cancers, reduce the severity and growth rate of existing tumors, and synergise with new cancer-specific therapies."

In [May](#) of last year, it was reported that a small study conducted at Maynooth University in Ireland found that GLP-1 analogs like semaglutide could restore naturally occurring anticancer cells. These study authors explained that people with obesity are at a greater risk of developing cancer because their natural killer (NK) cells are rendered useless.

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Hunter Biden's Court Case Kicks Off, Jurors Asked About Addiction and Gun Laws - Report

This is the first time that the son of a sitting president has faced a criminal trial. Hunter Biden's three charges are related to his alleged false statements in the purchase of a firearm and he faces up to 25 years in prison if convicted on the charges, according to the court documents.

First son Hunter Biden's criminal trial kicked off in Delaware on Monday. The trial is on felony charges related to his efforts to obtain a .38 revolver from a gun shop in 2018 while allegedly battling drug addiction. Prosecutors allege that in October 2018, the president's son visited StarQuest Shooters & Survival Supply in Wilmington to purchase the gun but say he lied about his drug addiction.

The younger Biden is now facing charges of false statement in purchasing of a firearm, false statement related to information required to be kept by federal firearms licensed dealer, and possession of a firearm by a person who is an unlawful user of or addicted to a controlled substance.

The court heard from more than 60 potential jurors, and by late Monday afternoon, 12 jurors and four alternatives had been selected, [Fox News](#) reported. The jurors are made up of six men and six women. During the jury selection, a "majority" of potential jurors told the court they have personally experienced addiction issues through their friends and family, Fox added.

Jurors were also asked about firearms, with a handful of jurors telling the court that they are legal concealed carry holders for self-defense purposes while some said they disagree with current gun laws and hope to see stricter gun legislation. Jurors with impartial views on gun laws were excused from the court.

Opening arguments for the trial were held on Tuesday. Fox reported that prosecutors' first witness will be FBI Special Agent Erica Jensen.

The 54-year-old pleaded not guilty last October after he was indicted by special counsel David Weiss and has denied the charges. During the trial, Biden was accompanied by first lady Jill Biden, his wife Melissa Cohen Biden and his sister, Ashley Biden. US [President](#) Joe Biden issued a personal statement on Monday offering support for his son and said he was a father as well as the president.

In September, the president's son will reportedly face a criminal tax trial in California after he was charged with three felonies and six misdemeanors regarding owed taxes. Biden has pleaded not guilty and said that the taxes have been paid.

The trial comes on the heels of [Trump's](#) own criminal trial, the conclusion of which found the former president guilty of 34 felonies in New York City, making him the first president in US history to be criminally convicted. The Manhattan case focused on a hush money payment Trump made to adult film actress Stormy Daniels with whom the former president allegedly had an affair.

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Milei's Hobby-Like Interest in Judaism Strikes Fear in Argentina's Jewish Community - Report

Although the eccentric leader was born and raised Roman Catholic, he has reportedly shown a public interest in Judaism and even expressed a desire to convert.

As Israel faces increasing isolation and condemnation from the world for its military invasion and assault on the Gaza Strip, President Javier Milei of Argentina has shown unrelenting support of the Israeli government, [AP News](#) reported. But his favoritism for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government differs sharply from that of the rest of Latin America.

On Wednesday, Brazil withdrew its ambassador to Israel following months of tensions between the two countries regarding Israel's war in Gaza.

And in late [October](#), Bolivia severed diplomatic ties with Israel in response to Israel's assault on the Gaza Strip. Their South American neighbors Colombia and Chile also recalled their ambassadors at the time for consultations and lambasted Israel's attacks on Gaza, as well as condemned the killings of Palestinian citizens.

But Milei's surprising devotion to Israel and Judaism is now provoking tension amongst his country's neighbors.

In [February](#), Milei met an Orthodox rabbi who first introduced him to Judaism three years prior. While praying, the unconventional president "appeared to be in a spiritual trance" according to the AP News report. When he pulled back from his prayer at the base of the sacred Western Wall in Jerusalem's Old City, he reportedly broke down into tears and hugged Rabbi Shimon Axel Wahnish while crying onto his shoulder.

"In that moment, I felt proud that we have such a determined leader, with such deep spiritual values," Wahnish told AP.

At an event commemorating the 81st anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising last month, Milei spoke to a group of Jewish community leaders. His remarks seemed to be a criticism of those turning their support from Israel in response to their violence against Palestinians; "Among great nations that should be pillars of the free world, I see indifference in some and fear in others about standing on the side of truth."

According to the AP report, Milei's fascination with the Jewish community first rose to the surface in 2021 when he was accused of harboring pro-Nazi sympathies. After connecting with Wahnish (who was recently appointed Argentina's ambassador to Israel) to have a "chat that was supposed to last 10 minutes and ended two hours later," according to Wahnish, Milei began his education on Judaism.

But the Argentinian president's religious interests are reportedly making the country's Jewish population nervous. Argentina's Jewish community, which is one of the biggest in the world, is still deeply scarred by lethal bombings that targeted Israel's embassy in 1992 and the Argentine Jewish Mutual Association (AMIA) in 1994. While Iran and Lebanon's Hezbollah were accused of the attacks no one has been officially held responsible.

"Milei has a messianic mind, and this is quite dangerous," said Diana Malamud, whose husband was among the 85 people killed in the AMIA attack. "His policies can not only stoke conflicts at the international level... but also generate anti-Semitism within our country."

Prior to Milei's presidency, almost 4,000 Argentine Jewish members signed a petition that voiced concern over Milei's "political use of Judaism." And while Netanyahu has referred to Milei as a "great friend", Hamas has labeled him "a partner of the Zionist occupier."

And for the first time last month Argentina denied recognition of Palestinian statehood when Milei's government joined the US and Israel in [a vote against Palestinian membership at the UN](#).

"If Milei's supposed defense of Israel is an attack on Palestinian rights, it puts the Jewish community in Argentina at risk," said Héctor Shalom, director of Argentina's Anne Frank Center. "The decades of impunity for past attacks show our vulnerability."

Thus far an estimated 36,439 Palestinians have been killed in the Gaza Strip and 82,627 wounded since October 7, according to the Palestinian enclave's Health Ministry. The World

Health Organization (WHO) stated that practically no health services remain in Rafah after the al-Helal al-Emirati hospital closed, Sputnik reported on [Sunday](#).

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Threat to Arrest Russian Journalists Signals Growing Political Persecution in West

Western governments are increasingly turning towards overt methods of repression as they lose their grip on control of the masses.

The Clooney Foundation for Justice (CFJ) has been forced to disavow comments by a legal director with the organization calling for the arrest of Russian journalists after intense backlash. Anna Neistat, who leads the foundation's The Docket project, claimed Thursday that her team is [urging international authorities](#) to prosecute Russian reporters.

"We want them to travel to other countries and be arrested there," said Neistat, revealing that she is pressuring the European Union and International Criminal Court to pursue the matter. Neistat made the comments during an interview with the US state-backed propaganda outlet Voice of America.

The organization has since backpedaled on the provocative claim with a [statement](#) asserting that "someone in our foundation misspoke," but observers see the proposal as yet another sign of the West's growing authoritarianism and intolerance of dissenting voices.

Author and political analyst Caleb Maupin joined [Sputnik's The Critical Hour program Monday](#) to discuss the incident.

"There's a lot of things to keep in mind in reaction to this news story," said the author and reporter. "The first of which is that the European Union has basically already outlawed all Russian media within the EU space, right? You can't watch RT. Websites are suppressed, blocked, and it's pretty hard to look at Russian media in the EU."

"RT France has been shut down. You can't watch RT in Belgium, you can't watch RT in EU countries," he continued. "What is a little bit different, though, about this is that this was specifically aimed at journalists who would report in Russian, for Russian audiences, but would do so from EU countries. And the idea was that they would be charged, and what's interesting also is that the warrants for their arrest would be secret."

"They would be arrested upon arrival and it would be a way to basically just kidnap these reporters and journalists and hold them hostage. And, if you look at it, it's a particularly nasty proposal. And that's probably why I noticed that George Clooney is now backing away from it and saying, 'oh, people from our foundation misspoke, we didn't mean this,' etcetera."

European countries have made increasingly aggressive attempts in recent years to restrict media and control the flow of information across the continent. The EU has outright [banned](#) Russian media outlets from broadcasting within the 27-nation bloc, but measures have been taken against third-party platforms, as well. The video sharing website Rumble was [forced](#) to block French users from accessing the platform after refusing to comply with government demands to block Russian content.

Politicians in the UK have also [explored](#) blocking the website, and the country recently detained journalist Kit Klarenberg at an airport in London, [questioning](#) him for five hours about his political views.

Across the Atlantic, the United States has famously condemned journalist Julian Assange to 12 years of effective confinement after the Wikileaks founder published leaked material revealing US war crimes in Iraq. Former CIA director and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made [plans](#) to kidnap and murder the firebrand transparency activist, it was recently revealed.

The uproar over the CFJ's comments comes as Sputnik contributor Scott Ritter was [denied travel to speak at a conference](#) in Russia Monday, having his passport confiscated by authorities on apparent orders from the US State Department. Free speech concerns have also been raised over police crackdowns on campus pro-Palestine encampments, [a move demanded](#) by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"I will say, though, that the Ukrainians have been saying this from the beginning," said Maupin of the calls to arrest Russian journalists. "I mean, they have this list of 'information terrorists' – which I'm proudly on, by the way, I'm listed by the Ukrainian government as an 'information terrorist' – and they have been calling for the assassination and murder of journalists, and they've done it since the war has begun."

"This is not a change for Ukraine. What's changed here is that the Clooney Foundation made such a statement and wanted to enlist EU governments in carrying it out."

Western governments are usually more subtle in their attempts to control information, noted Maupin, typically relying more on efforts to influence popular narratives rather than outright censorship. The move towards more overt repression may be seen as a response to the increased transparency allowed by the Internet, or perhaps another sign of the West's loss of power as a multipolar world order comes into view.

"They like subtly bringing up points they like," Maupin noted. "Finding people who say things that they agree with and boosting them rather than saying it themselves. This is how the intelligence world works, and a huge amount of what the American intelligence apparatus does is construct media narratives and insert ideas into media discourse."

"A lot of what the intelligence apparatus does is just boost certain messages and try to control the conversation in a subtle way to advance US foreign policy goals."

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Is US Hegemony a Paper Tiger?

Economist Radhika Desai questions notions of an all-encompassing Western dominance, pointing out that there has always been objection to imperial rule.

The global image of NATO – and the United States, by extension – has taken a beating as Moscow appears on the cusp of victory in its conflict with Ukraine. The West's most sophisticated weaponry, as well as a barrage of propaganda alleging a struggle of democracy versus "authoritarianism," have failed to turn the tide as Russian troops gain ground near the city of Kharkov.

What's more, a series of increasingly severe US sanctions have failed to hasten the predicted downfall of Russia's economy. The country has, on the contrary, become more resilient in the face of the aggression, [growing at a faster rate](#) than the G7 nations imposing the restrictions – a fact frequently noted by President Vladimir Putin on the campaign trail earlier this year.

The dramatic turn of events has led observers to claim the era of US dominance is definitively over as President Joe Biden watches the failure of his administration's signature foreign policy prerogative.

However, Dr. Desai says US hegemony has not fallen, but that it never truly existed. The author made the claim Tuesday on [Sputnik's The Critical Hour program](#) as hosts Wilmer Leon and Garland Nixon discussed China's refusal to attend de facto Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's [upcoming "peace conference"](#) in Switzerland.

"One of the things that Garland and I say on this show repeatedly, particularly about Presidents Xi and President Putin, is people need to listen to what these leaders are saying," insisted Leon, reading from [China's 12-point peace plan](#) for the conflict in the Donbass. "When you listen to what they're saying, such as, 'the legitimate security interests and concerns of all countries must be taken seriously and addressed properly,' that makes nothing but sense."

The document, released in early 2023, also rejected "unilateral sanctions and maximum pressure," urged dialogue, and criticized NATO expansion.

"It's one thing to say that the West should listen to Presidents Xi and Putin, but I would suggest to you that the West has long lost the ability to do so," responded Desai. "They have for the last I don't know how many decades essentially taken an extremely undiplomatic, non-negotiating route. It's 'my way or the highway.'"

"So if you basically take the position that you do not wish to convert your economy into an open playground for our corporations, and if you don't do so, then we will consider you an autocrat, a dictator, a violator of our rules-based international order. Basically, you have no negotiating position. Negotiation involves give and take. The West has long given up on give and take. It is always 'take, take, take,' and no give."

Countries that have attempted to operate their economies outside of the control of the Western-led global economic order, such as Bashar al-Assad's Syria and Muammar Gaddafi's Libya, have repeatedly become targets of US regime change operations.

Gaddafi, a charismatic and ambitious leader, famously proposed a unified gold-backed currency to replace the use of the US dollar and French CFA franc in trade between African nations.

Observers [suggest](#) the plan helped spur the successful effort to topple him in 2011, but dollar hegemony has still declined since the Libyan revolutionary's overthrow as nations throughout the world increasingly seek trade denominated in their own domestic currencies.

A report issued by China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs around the same time as its Ukraine peace plan, entitled ["US Hegemony and Its Perils,"](#) sharply criticized the role of the United States in the world after World War II.

"The United States has acted more boldly to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, pursue, maintain and abuse hegemony, advance subversion and infiltration, and willfully wage wars, bringing harm to the international community," read the document.

"The United States has developed a hegemonic playbook to stage 'color revolutions,' instigate regional disputes, and even directly launch wars under the guise of promoting democracy, freedom and human rights," alleged the report. "Clinging to the Cold War mentality, the United

States has ramped up bloc politics and stoked conflict and confrontation. It has overstretched the concept of national security, abused export controls and forced unilateral sanctions upon others.”

The document identifies the end of the Second World War – after which most of the Western world lay in ruins – as the point at which the United States established global hegemony. But Desai claimed that US hegemony, as it’s typically characterized, has been vastly oversold. “That hegemony has already ended, and it didn’t end, as some might think, recently,” said the economist. “My argument has always been in various books that I have argued, including my book Geopolitical Economy, it’s never existed. What you’ve seen since the end of the Second World War, and even earlier in the 20th century, is a series of attempts on the part of the United States to impose its weight on the rest of the world.”

“But none of these attempts have ever succeeded,” she claimed. “We portray the Bretton Woods system as a US-created entity. When we do that, we forget that the United States actually wanted a far more free market world than what it got in 1945. By free market, I mean a world open to US corporations. It failed to get this... And the United States military has actually not won a single war.”

“As a Kenyan official put it: every time China visits we get a hospital; every time Britain visits we get a lecture,” reads a famous tweet that has since been [immortalized in meme form](#). Military might has played an important role in upholding the Western-led economic order. But various detractors, from 20th century Russia to 21st century China, have consistently won support for an alternate vision based on good will, solidarity, and global cooperation.

“Countries need to respect each other and treat each other as equals,” urged the Chinese foreign ministry’s 2023 report. “Big countries should behave in a manner befitting their status and take the lead in pursuing a new model of state-to-state relations featuring dialogue and partnership, not confrontation or alliance. China opposes all forms of hegemonism and power politics, and rejects interference in other countries’ internal affairs.”

“The United States must conduct serious soul-searching. It must critically examine what it has done, let go of its arrogance and prejudice, and quit its hegemonic, domineering and bullying practices.”

Kremlin mulls response as NATO enables Kiev’s terrorism against Russian civilians

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Ukraine has increasingly resorted to terrorist attacks in residential areas and against Russian civilians as the chances of its victory on the battlefield grow ever more remote. Shelling of a town in Russia’s Belgorod region over the weekend left six people injured, with a local official tragically dying as a result of detonation of ammunition during the attack.

Security analyst Mark Sleboda joined Sputnik’s The Critical Hour program to examine President Vladimir Putin’s options amid repeated Western escalation of the proxy conflict against Russia.

"This game that NATO and its member states can punch Russia through the sock puppet of their proxy putsch regime in Ukraine continues," Sleboda observed. "And [NATO Secretary-General Jens] Stoltenberg does not fear Russian threats – that's a problem."

"Russia is not clearly setting red lines and then dictating consequences and carrying through with them on NATO countries," the expert argued. "Now, they may not feel that they have had to thus far in this conflict because they are winning on the battlefield... They just keep on carrying on what they're doing and winning the battle on the battlefield in Ukraine, and don't wish to potentially escalate this directly against NATO in a way that could spin out of their and anyone's control. But here's the problem, it's that this type of response does create an Overton window where NATO now feels complete impunity with escalations."

Sleboda pointed out that Russia has enjoyed considerable success in disabling NATO weaponry via electronic warfare, even earning plaudits in Western media for its technological supremacy. But going forward, the analyst said Russia would need to consider how to effectively respond to Ukrainian aggression, balancing the desire to react proportionally with the need to create deterrence.

Whatever Moscow's response, the analyst noted that Ukraine's provocations "certainly won't result in a change in the endgame of this conflict."

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Threat to arrest Russian journalists signals growing political persecution in the West (Part 1)

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Anna Neistat, who leads the foundation's The Docket project, claimed Thursday that her team is urging international authorities to prosecute Russian reporters. "We want them to travel to other countries and be arrested there," said Neistat, revealing that she is pressuring the European Union and International Criminal Court to pursue the matter. Neistat made the comments during an interview with the US state-backed propaganda outlet Voice of America.

The organization has since backpedaled on the provocative claim with a statement asserting that "someone in our foundation misspoke," but observers see the proposal as yet another sign of the West's growing authoritarianism and intolerance of dissenting voices. Author and political analyst Caleb Maupin joined Sputnik's The Critical Hour program to discuss the incident.

"There's a lot of things to keep in mind in reaction to this news story," said the author and reporter. "The first of which is that the European Union has basically already outlawed all Russian media within the EU space, right? You can't watch RT. Websites are suppressed, blocked, and it's pretty hard to look at Russian media in the EU."

“What is a little bit different, though, about this is that this was specifically aimed at journalists who would report in Russian, for Russian audiences, but would do so from EU countries. And the idea was that they would be charged, and what's interesting also is that the warrants for their arrest would be secret. They would be arrested upon arrival and it would be a way to basically just kidnap these reporters and journalists and hold them hostage.”

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Threat to arrest Russian journalists signals growing political persecution in West (Part 2)

European countries have made increasingly aggressive attempts in recent years to restrict media and control the flow of information across the continent. The EU has outright banned Russian media outlets from broadcasting within the 27-nation bloc, but measures have been taken against third-party platforms, as well. The video sharing website Rumble was forced to disable access to its service in France after refusing to comply with government demands to block Russian content.

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Bank of Canada Cuts Key Interest Rate for First Time in Over Four Years to 4.75%

WASHINGTON, June 5 (Sputnik) – The Bank of Canada on Wednesday cut the overnight rate from 5% to 4.75%, marking the first reduction since 2020.

"The Bank of Canada today reduced its target for the overnight rate to 4¾%, with the Bank Rate at 5% and the deposit rate at 4¾%. The Bank is continuing its policy of balance sheet normalization," the bank said in its latest monetary policy decision.

The Governing Council made the decision to reduce the rate by 25 basis points after it came to the agreement that considering evidence showing that underlying inflation is on an easing trend, it no longer needs to be as restrictive, the bank added.

Moreover, recent data increased confidence that inflation will continue moving downward to the 2% target, the bank said. However, it remains concerned about the inflationary outlook.

"The Bank remains resolute in its commitment to restoring price stability for Canadians," it said. The next rate announcement is scheduled for July 24, the bank said.

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Pentagon Declines to Confirm Whether Ukraine Already Using US Weapons on Russian Territory

WASHINGTON, June 5 (Sputnik) - A US Defense Department spokesperson told Sputnik on Wednesday that the United States' new guidance allowing Ukraine to use US-supplied weapons for limited strikes inside Russia has just gone into effect, but declined to disclose whether such strikes have already happened.

On Tuesday, the New York Times reported that US-supplied weapons hit Russian missile launchers in the Belgorod region.

"I can't confirm that," the spokesperson said regarding reports of US weapons hitting military targets on Russian territory this week.

The spokesperson added that the new US guidance has just gone into effect and is specifically focused on helping Ukraine defend against military targets just over the border that Russia is using to launch offensives against Ukraine.

US policy with respect to prohibiting the use of ATACMS or long-range strikes inside of Russia has not changed, the spokesperson said.

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Austin Says His Chief of Staff Kelly Magsamen to Step Down at End of June

WASHINGTON, June 5 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin announced on Wednesday the departure of Chief of Staff Kelly Magsamen at the end of June after three and a half years of service in the position.

"At the end of June, my Chief of Staff, Kelly Magsamen, will step down. I am deeply grateful for her tremendous service over three and a half pivotal years to me, the Department, and the country as the Chief of Staff," Austin said in a statement.

Before joining the Pentagon in January 2021, Magsamen served on the National Security Council (NSC) in the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations as well as on the NSC's transition team during the Biden-Trump transition, according to media reports.

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US Works Closely With Lebanon After Attack on Embassy in Beirut - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, June 5 (Sputnik) - The United States is working closely with the Lebanese authorities to ensure the security of the US embassy in Beirut after the facility was attacked by a gunman, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Wednesday.

"We are working closely with local authorities to ascertain what exactly happened here to ensure there is no continuing threat," Sullivan told NBC News.

Earlier on Wednesday, the Lebanese military said that a Syrian citizen opened fire on the US embassy in Beirut, but was injured after the intervention of the security guards and was then detained.

Sullivan said one Lebanese guard who was outside of the SU diplomatic compound was wounded during the attack.

"He is receiving care now," Sullivan also said.

The embassy staff are safe and accounted for, Sullivan added.

The US embassy announced on the social media platform X that the incident took place at 8:34 a.m. local time (5:34 GMT) and that its staff and facility are safe thanks to the quick reaction of the Lebanese military, police and the embassy's own security team.

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Americans Increasingly Concerned About Access to Social Safety Net Programs – Survey

WASHINGTON, June 5 (Sputnik) – Middle-aged Americans are increasingly concerned about their future access to Medicare, according to a West Health-Gallup survey on aging released on Wednesday.

Nearly three quarters, 73%, of American adults under 65 say that are "extremely worried" (32%) or "worried" (41%) that they will not be able to access Medicare when they reach the age of eligibility.

This marks an overall increase of six percentage points since 2022, with the sharpest increases seen in the 40-49 age group (nine points to 83%) and 50-64 age group (13 points to 74%).

Americans reported even greater concern with future access to Social Security, with 80% saying they are "extremely worried" (47%) or "worried" (33%). This marks an overall increase of five percentage points, with the sharpest increase (nine points) seen in the age group (50-61) with the soonest eligibility for Social Security.

The West Health-Gallup 2024 Survey on Aging in America was conducted from November 13,

2023 to January 8, 2024 with 5,149 adults across the US.

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Pushkin Can Serve as Bridge Between Peoples - US Poet

WASHINGTON, June 5 (Sputnik) - The renowned Russian poet Alexander Pushkin can become a bridge between all sides in any conflict because he was a genius and his work is truly beautiful, Julian Lowenfeld, US poet and translator of Pushkin's poetry, told Sputnik.

"Pushkin wrote 'The day shall come, when all the peoples of this world, their quarrels forgot, in one great family shall be united,' and I think Pushkin can become a bridge connecting and reconciling people," Lowenfeld said.

The poet said he is aware that in some places Pushkin's statues are being torn down, but emphasized that he fails to see how such actions contributes to the cause of world peace.

"Why should anyone hate a great poet? Just because he was Russian? That's wrong. I strongly reject the idea of collective guilt on either side for any reason. Pushkin did not bomb anyone, he did not attack anyone, he did not start any war. He wrote of love, of honor, of freedom, of kindness," Lowenfeld said.

The poet also expressed strong opposition to the calls to cancel Russian culture.

"The world will only become poorer if we lose Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Pushkin and other Russian geniuses. Quite the contrary, in the words of another Russian genius, Dostoevsky, 'The world will be saved by beauty,'" he said.

Lowenfeld expressed regret that this year, to his knowledge, there will be no major events dedicated to Pushkin's 225th birthday - on June 6 - in the United States.

"We did once have a Pushkin marathon, with readers of his poetry from over 40 countries around the world, but unfortunately, it is very difficult to organize due to the political situation now," he said.

However, Lowenfeld also said that the best way to commemorate Pushkin is to read his works.

"I will be reading Pushkin's fairy tales to my son and daughter, and I will be reading some beautiful poems of his to my wife," he said.

Lowenfeld recently translated Pushkin's most famous masterpiece - "Eugene Onegin" and is currently finishing commentaries for Americans to better understand the book written almost 200 years ago.

When asked about the date of the release of the translation, Lowenfeld cited another famous Russian writer, Michail Bulgakov, who said that "manuscripts do not burn."

"My plan is to finish my job, and then I leave it to the publisher. I do what I love, and I am sure that somebody will respond," Lowenfeld said.

Pushkin was born on June 6, 1799. Russia and the Russian diaspora abroad celebrate his birthdate as the Day of the Russian Language.

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Northrop Grumman Joins South Korea's Hanwha Group to Make Guns For Australia - Release

WASHINGTON, June 5 (Sputnik) - Northrop Grumman has reached an agreement with a subsidiary of South Korean conglomerate Hanwha Group in Australia to manufacture guns for the infantry vehicles the company makes for the Australian armed forces, the US defense giant has announced in a press release.

"Northrop Grumman is partnering with Hanwha Defense Australia to supply Mark44 Stretch Bushmaster® Chain Guns for integration on the Hanwha Redback Infantry Fighting Vehicle," the release said on Tuesday. "As part of Australia's LAND 400 Phase 3 program, the contract calls for the production of 129 chain guns with initial deliveries beginning in 2026."

The MARK 44S enables interoperability with Northrop Grumman's ammunition that was developed for the US Army and includes a new programmable air burst munition, the release said.

"More than 20,000 Bushmaster Chain Guns are in service with 65 allied nations' land, air and sea-based combat platforms worldwide ... [and] chain guns are currently integrated on the Australian Defence Force's land, air and sea-based combat platforms," Northrop Grumman said.

Northrop Grumman's ammunition portfolio includes the multifunction airburst munition, armor piercing and ammunition using proximity fuzes, allowing crewmembers to defeat a broad range of ground and aerial threats by selecting the optimal ammunition at a moment's notice, the company said.

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Blinken, UN Chief Discuss Conflict Mitigation Efforts in Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 5 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, in a meeting with United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, discussed efforts to mitigate the conflicts in the Gaza Strip, Ukraine, and unrest in Sudan, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a press release.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken met with UN Secretary-General António Guterres today in Washington, DC. The Secretary thanked the Secretary-General for his public support of the proposed deal to reach a comprehensive ceasefire in Gaza, secure the release of all hostages, and end the crisis in Gaza. The Secretary emphasized the importance of the Security Council speaking out to call for implementation of this deal without delay," Miller said on Tuesday.

Blinken and Guterres also discussed the importance of ensuring that Gaza has access to humanitarian assistance, Miller said.

The officials also discussed US cooperation with the UN to support a resolution of the Ukraine conflict, the release read, the spokesperson added.

Moreover, Miller said Blinken and Guterres discussed the conflict in Sudan and "the importance of taking every measure to end the violence, protect civilians, and scale up humanitarian assistance," the release read.

Last Friday, US President Joe Biden said that Israel had offered Palestinian movement Hamas

a new three-phase proposal with a road map that would lead to an enduring cessation of hostilities in the Gaza Strip and the release of all hostages.

The first phase includes a complete ceasefire, the withdrawal of Israeli troops from all Gaza population centers and the release of some of the hostages held by Hamas, including the wounded, the elderly, and women, as well as the release of detained Palestinians from prisons. The second phase involves an indefinite cessation of hostilities in exchange for the release of the remaining hostages. The third phase of the initiative is to begin reconstruction of the war-torn Gaza.

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China's Lunar Probe Landing Right Direction for Exploration - US Astronaut

WASHINGTON, June 5 (Sputnik) - China's Chang'e-6 lunar probe, which for the first time in history collected soil samples from the far side of the Moon, is a right direction for exploration, NASA astronaut Reid Wiseman said.

Earlier in June, China's Chang'e-6 lunar probe landing module has successfully landed on the back side of the Moon to collect soils, Xinhua reported on Sunday, citing the China National Space Administration.

When asked whether he views the development as a race with China, Wiseman said, "I can't help but just be impressed."

"I think that's just a great thing for everybody if we're doing more exploration," Wiseman said. "I think from our perspective, we are crew, we don't feel like this is a race and we feel like this is just the right direction for exploration. That's the direction that we're headed in. As an American, I do sense that. There is building pressure."

Wiseman noted that the United States is looking at public private partnerships as well as international collaboration and has had a fair amount of initial success with those.

"Japan tried to send a lander out, we had another US company attempt and there'll be more coming later this year and next year. So to me, all of that is a lot of positive progress for exploration," Weisman said.

The United States launched the Artemis program during the Trump administration to return to the Moon. The program includes a manned flyby of the Moon, the landing of a crew and the construction of a habitable station in lunar orbit.

The program is described as international in nature, with the United States signing Artemis Accords bilateral agreements with various countries declaring their interest in the project.

NASA management has repeatedly said that it is in a space race with China to get to the Moon, but does not consider Russia a participant in the competition.

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Hubble Space Telescope Losing 12% Effectiveness After Gyros Failed - NASA Officials

WASHINGTON, June 5 (Sputnik) - The Hubble Space telescope has lost 12% of its effectiveness because of failed gyros and will only be able to operate using one of its two remaining aging ones, though its operational life expectancy should still be longer than a decade, NASA officials told a press conference.

"We will transition Hubble into using only one of its three remaining gyros," NASA Science Mission Directorate Astrophysics Director Mark Clampin said on Tuesday.

Hubble Space Telescope Project Manager Patrick Crouse said gyro three had experienced repeated saturation events in recent months. Hubble was fitted with six new gyroscopes by visiting US astronauts in 2009 but three of them have not worked in years. The telescope was originally launched in 1990.

Crouse said the problem has been reappearing more frequently and, as a result, when the telescope will be reactivated later this month, it will suffer a 12% reduction in observational capabilities and be unable to track targets closer than the orbit of Mars.

However, Hubble had already doubled its operational life expectancy and is still expected with a 70% probability of being to continue to operate until around 2035 when its orbit will degrade, NASA officials said.

The officials said they have ruled out sending up a later mission to boost Hubble into a higher orbit but they still had that option open to them.

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No Injuries, Damage After Houthis Launch 2 Anti-Ship Missiles in Red Sea – CENTCOM

WASHINGTON, June 5 (Sputnik) - Another attempt to attack ships in the Red Sea with two ballistic missiles by allegedly the Yemeni Houthis did not result in any injuries or damage reported by either navy or commercial ships, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) said in a post on X.

"In the past 24 hours, Iranian-backed Houthis launched two anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBM) from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen into the Red Sea. There were no injuries or damage reported by U.S., coalition, or commercial ships," the post said on Tuesday.

Houthis vowed in November 2023 to attack any ships associated with Israel until it halts military actions in the Gaza Strip. Amid the Houthi attacks, some companies suspended shipments through the Red Sea.

The attacks prompted the United States to form a multinational coalition, which includes the United Kingdom among others, to protect shipping in the area of the Red Sea, as well as to strike Houthi targets on the ground.

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PREVIEW - Biden Heads to France for D-Day Events, Talks with Macron on Ukraine and Other Matters

WASHINGTON, June 5 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will visit in France this week to participate in events commemorating the 80th anniversary of the Allied D-Day invasion, but he'll also use the trip as an opportunity to engage in discussions with French President Emmanuel Macron on a range of regional issues, including Ukraine.

On June 6, Biden will be in Normandy, France, to deliver remarks to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Allied landings in Normandy. While there, he will get a chance to meet and speak with veterans from World War II, including men who participated in Operation Overlord. The following day, Biden will deliver additional remarks at Pointe du Hoc, France.

Earlier this week, the White House noted that the United States was not involved in France's decision to rescind its invitation to Russia for a D-Day commemoration events this week, but underscored that the Soviet Union played a significant role in the war.

"The President's aware that the Soviet Union was an ally in World War II and certainly deeply engaged in defeating Germany, and we recognize that that's history that happened. There's no way, nor would there be any intention, to distract from that or to undermine it or to ignore it," White House National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky will be in France for the D-Day commemoration events as well, but the White House said there is no meeting scheduled between him and Biden. However, officials hinted that a meeting could be possible.

Biden will then travel to Paris to participate in an official state visit hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron on Saturday.

According to the White House, the bilateral meeting between both leaders will include discussions on continuing support for Ukraine, G7 efforts to seize frozen Russian assets, navigation issues in the Indo-Pacific region, the ongoing crisis in the Middle East, and efforts to combat climate change.

There will be a series of deliverables coming from the bilateral meeting related to those issues highlighted by the White House.

Aside from regional issues, Biden and Macron will discuss other matters important to the bilateral relationship that are related to trade, investing in nuclear energy capacity, and US-French cooperation to ensure proper security at the Summer Olympics in Paris.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, June 5 (Sputnik) -

ELECTIONS IN INDIA

* The Indian Election Commission officially confirmed on Tuesday the victory of the National Democratic Alliance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in India's parliamentary elections.

* Modi thanked the people of India for voting for the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), led by

his Bharatiya Janata Party, during the country's general election.

- * Russia closely monitored the past elections in India, Kremlin aide Yuri Ushakov said.

GAZA STRIP

- * Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and French President Emmanuel Macron discussed Israel's current plan on the release of hostages from the Gaza Strip, the Office of the Israeli Prime Minister said on Monday.

- * US President Joe Biden said there is a need to transition to a two-state solution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and that is his biggest disagreement with Netanyahu.

- * Biden said he was not sure whether Israel has committed war crimes in Gaza but admitted that too many innocent lives have been lost during Israel's military operations in the Palestinian enclave.

RUSSIA'S FROZEN ASSETS

- * US President Joe Biden will travel to Apulia, Italy, to participate in the G7 summit on June 13-14 and discuss a range of issues, including efforts to use Russia's frozen assets to aid Ukraine, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said on Tuesday.

- * The US-EU discussions on how to make use of Russia's frozen assets now include a range of options, Assistant Treasury Secretary for International Finance said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

- * The United States is not in a position to know exactly what munitions Ukraine fires on a daily basis, White House National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby said on Tuesday.'

- * Kirby said that Ukraine has never been restricted to shoot down hostile aircraft, even those outside of its airspace.

- * The joint African peace initiative on Ukraine remains on the table, Congolese Foreign Minister Jean-Claude Gakosso said.

- * There are indications that France has already deployed military instructors in Ukraine and they will be legitimate targets for Russia if their presence is confirmed, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.

US IMMIGRATION POLICY

- * President Joe Biden issued a new executive order barring migrants who illegally cross the US southern border from claiming asylum in the United States, the White House said on Tuesday.

- * Biden's new executive order is a politically motivated decision that is coming too late in the struggle to address the record levels of illegal immigration, US Congressman Paul Gosar told Sputnik.

ST. PETERSBURG INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC FORUM

- * Russian President Vladimir Putin, Bolivian President Luis Arce and Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa will address the plenary session of the upcoming St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF), Kremlin aide Yuri Ushakov said on Tuesday.

- * Putin will share his vision on the situation in the global economy, politics and trade as well as will give an assessment on the Russian economy during the special military operation at the

SPIEF plenary session, Ushakov said.

* Representatives of various international organizations will attend the SPIEF, including the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Commonwealth of Independent State (CIS) and the African Union, Ushakov said.

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UPDATE - US House Passes Bill to Authorize Sanctions on ICC for Israeli Leader Arrest Warrants

(Updates with details in paras 3-7)

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives passed legislation on Tuesday to authorize sanctions on the International Criminal Court (ICC) in response to an ICC prosecutor's request for arrest warrants for Israeli leaders.

House lawmakers passed the bill, dubbed the Illegitimate Court Counteraction Act, in a vote of 247 in favor, 155 opposed and two present.

On May 20, ICC prosecutor Karim Khan filed arrest warrant requests for officials including Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, as well as for leaders of Palestinian organization Hamas.

Neither Israel nor the United States are parties to the treaty establishing the ICC.

The bill enables the imposition of sanctions on the ICC or any other foreign actor that supports their effort to arrest, detain or prosecute protected persons of the US or its allies; the legislation's definition of a protected person includes foreign citizens or lawful residents of a US ally that has not consented to ICC jurisdiction.

The legislation was backed by House Republican leadership, but the White House said that the Biden administration strongly opposes the bill. There are more effective ways to defend Israel and preserve US positions on the ICC, the White House said in a statement.

On October 7, Hamas launched a large-scale attack on Israel, killing nearly 1,200 people and abducting some 240 others. Israel subsequently launched military operations in the Gaza Strip, which have killed more than 36,500 people in the Palestinian enclave, according to local authorities.

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US Senate Republican Leaders Rally Behind Trump, Predict Trial Verdict Overturn

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - The Republican leadership in the US Senate on Tuesday unanimously threw their weight behind their party's presidential primary victor and almost certain election nominee Donald Trump despite his conviction in a New York court last week.

"It [the trial and verdict] should never have been brought in the first place and I believe will be overturned on appeal," Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said during a press conference.

Republican Conference Chairman John Barrasso said the American people were now seeing a two-tiered system of justice in the United States.

The Democrat-controlled Justice Department ice was desperately trying to throw a lifeline to President Joe Biden, who was failing and failing in his major policies, Barrasso said.

Senator Steve Daines said that Trump had a trial worthy of a banana republic.

"It was a total and complete sham. Trump would have gotten a fair trial in Honduras," Montana said.

Senator Joni Ernst said the Democrats have been weaponizing the federal justice system against Trump and the American people.

The latter are suffering from soaring crime rates and wide open borders flooded by millions of illegal immigrants as well as from high prices, rising inflation and soaring energy costs, and they are tired of the worsening situation, Ernst added.

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UPDATE 2 - Biden Issues Order to Bar Migrants Who Enter Southern Border Illegally From Getting Asylum

(Updates with details, exclusive comments in paras 3-9, background in paras 10-11)

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden issued a new executive order barring migrants who illegally cross the US southern border from claiming asylum in the United States, the White House said on Tuesday.

"President Biden believes we must secure our border. That is why today, he announced executive actions to bar migrants who cross our Southern border unlawfully from receiving asylum," the White House said in a press release. "These actions will be in effect when high levels of encounters at the Southern Border exceed our ability to deliver timely consequences, as is the case today."

Biden's executive actions will make it easier for US immigration officers to remove migrants who have no lawful basis to remain in the United States, the release said.

These actions are not permanent and will be discontinued when the number of illegal crossings

on the southern border is low enough for US immigration authorities to safely and effectively manage border operations, the release said.

The White House said the new restrictions will take effect at midnight on Wednesday.

The suspension will be removed when daily illegal entries hit or fall below 1,500 for seven consecutive days but will snap back into place if the number of daily encounters exceeds 2,500 for seven straight days.

The White House said Biden's executive actions include humanitarian exceptions for unaccompanied children and victims of trafficking, among others.

US Congressman Paul Gosar told Sputnik that Biden's is politically motivated and comes too late to effectively address the issue.

"Biden's latest politically motivated actions are too little, too late and do nothing to stop the asylum abuse, do not end catch-and-release and certainly won't do a damn thing to address the 13 million lawbreakers who have been welcomed into our country since Biden took office," Gosar said.

Illegal crossings at the US southern border have gone through three consecutive record-breaking years since Biden took over the White House in January 2021, totaling nearly 8 million encounters during that period, 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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These actions are not permanent and will be discontinued when the number of illegal crossings on the southern border is low enough for US immigration authorities to safely and effectively manage border operations, the release said.

The White House pointed out in the release that Biden's executive actions include humanitarian exceptions for unaccompanied children and victims of trafficking.

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crossing into the United States on the southern border, CBP data shows.

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FBI Director Says Increasingly Concerned About Possible Coordinated Terror Attack in US

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - FBI Director Christopher Wray said in a congressional testimony on Tuesday that he is increasingly concerned by the possibility of a coordinated terrorist attack in the United States similar to the one at the Crocus City Hall near Moscow, Russia.

"Increasingly concerning is the potential for a coordinated attack here in the homeland, not unlike the ISIS-K attack we saw at the Russian concert hall back in March," Wray told the US Senate Appropriations Committee.

Wray said the level of violent crime in the United States remains too high despite the end of the coronavirus pandemic when the number of crimes reached record levels.

Wray emphasized the alarming situation with the spread of fentanyl and other drugs in the United States as the drug cartels push them throughout the country.

Wray added that the FBI is currently leading between 300 and 400 investigations into drug cartels leadership and described the situation in the United States as the "fentanyl epidemic."

On March 22, several armed men broke into the Crocus City Hall concert venue near Moscow and started shooting indiscriminately at concert-goers. They also started a fire in one of the auditoriums, which was full of people ahead of a concert. The attackers killed 145 people and many more injured. The four main suspects in the case tried to flee the scene in a car toward the border with Ukraine but were detained and charged with terrorism.

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Sheinbaum Tells Harris Mexico, US Will Work With Respect for Each Other's Sovereignities

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - Mexico and the United States will work together to advance different matters while respecting each other's sovereignities, Mexican President-Elect Claudia Sheinbaum said on Tuesday.

"Thanks to Vice President Kamala Harris for her congratulations. We will work with respect for our sovereignities on the different issues that unite our people and nations," Sheinbaum said via the X platform.

On Monday, Harris congratulated Sheinbaum on her electoral victory. The vice president said she looked forward to strengthening the US-Mexico partnership on issues ranging from economic growth, national security and the root causes of migration.

Sheinbaum, candidate of ruling leftist Morena party, won the Mexican presidential election, gaining between 58.3% and 60.7%, according to data from the National Electoral Institute. The final results of the election will be announced after the vote count is completed later this week.

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US-EU Conversations on Frozen Russian Assets Now Include Number of Options - Treasury

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - The conversations between the United States and the European Union on how to make use of Russia's frozen assets now include a range of options, Brent Neiman, assistant secretary for international finance at the US Department of the Treasury, said on Tuesday.

"The conversations now include a number of options but one option is yes to put together in the short run lending that would be essentially paid back by those annual streams," Neiman said. "It would simply be a matter of taking windfall profits, which would come over time and bringing them forward so that they would benefit Ukraine in the very short run."

Neiman stated that Ukraine's short-run needs are quite high.

"I think we're making progress together with partners in thinking of ways again to build on this very important European step. And hopefully, we'll be able to continue that progress and announce something," he said.

When asked whether he expects a decision at the upcoming G7 summit, Neiman said, "I won't get out ahead of that."

"Europe conceived of this very, I think, innovative, interesting and important way to essentially, in the spirit of what the G7 leaders asked us to do, find a way for Russia's mobilized sovereign assets to produce an economic benefit for Ukraine," he added. "The way that they conceived of doing this actually in no way involves, for instance, seizing Russian assets. It's about taking the interest revenues essentially earned off of those immobilized assets."

The US government's freezing of foreign assets, including those of Russia, is a very short-sighted policy and sends a message to the international community that the United States may stop honoring transactions, US Congressman Thomas Massie told Sputnik in May.

Massie also said US moves to freeze foreign assets are "extremely dangerous" because they will increase the price that Washington has to pay to finance its debt.

The Kremlin has maintained that any attempts to confiscate Russian assets amount to theft and a violation of international law.

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Guterres, Blinken Discuss Conflicts in Gaza, Ukraine - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, June 4 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary General Antonio-Guterres met with US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken for talks that addressed the conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine, among other issues, UN spokeswoman Florencia Soto Nino said on Tuesday.

"The Secretary General is in Washington DC today, and just wrapped up a meeting with the Secretary of State Anthony Blinken," Nino said in a press briefing. "They had a good meeting and they discussed obviously, the situation in Israel and Palestine and the broader region. They also discussed Sudan and Ukraine."

Earlier this week, Blinken held telephone calls with his counterparts from Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan to discuss Israel's new three-part proposal to potentially achieve a permanent ceasefire agreement in Gaza that includes the release of all hostages.

Blinken emphasized to his counterparts that Hamas should accept the deal and that every country with a relationship with the group should press it to do so without delay, the State Department said.

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Biden Backtracks, Says Doesn't Think Netanyahu Playing Politics With War in Gaza

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden told reporters on Tuesday that he does not think Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is playing politics with the war in Gaza, which is contradictory to earlier remarks he made on his Israeli counterpart's handling of the war in Gaza,

Biden told Time magazine that there is every reason for people to think Netanyahu is prolonging the Gaza conflict for his own political goals.

"I don't think so, he's trying to work out a serious problem he has," Biden said when asked if Netanyahu is playing politics with war.

Netanyahu has been receiving lots of international backlash for prolonging the war in Gaza at the cost of tens of thousands of Palestinian residents displaced in the enclave.

The backlash has worsened as Israel conducts further strikes in Rafah, where millions of Palestinians are seeking refuge. The United States has repeatedly voiced its opposition to a full-scale Israeli operation in Rafah, but it continues to provide security assistance.

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 36,400 people have been killed so far by Israeli strikes in the Gaza Strip, according to local authorities. More than 100 hostages are still believed to be held by Hamas in Gaza.

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Lockheed Martin to Deliver 25 F-35 Stealth Fighter Jets to Israel – Statement

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) – Major US military contractor Lockheed Martin confirmed to Sputnik on Tuesday that it had inked a deal with Israel to deliver 25 F-35 fighter jets.

"We are pleased by the Israeli government's decision to procure 25 additional F-35s," the company told Sputnik in a statement.

The Israeli Ministry of Defense said earlier in the day that the contract also includes technical

support and is worth \$3 billion with the first deliveries starting in 2028.

The delivery of the aircraft will bring the total number of the Israeli Air Force's F-35 fleet to 75. According to the ministry, the delivery of the 25 aircraft will be fully financed by US military assistance to Israel.

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UN Must Employ 'Much More Aggressive Approach to Impunity' - Griffiths

UNITED NATIONS, June 4 (Sputnik) - The United Nations need a more aggressive approach to impunity given that nobody has been held liable for killings of humanitarian aid workers, among other crimes in the Gaza Strip, Sudan, Ukraine and elsewhere, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs said on Tuesday.

"I would simply say that we need to have a much more aggressive approach to impunity," Griffiths said in the UN briefing to journalists.

Griffiths noted that nobody has been found liable for the killing of humanitarian aid workers in Gaza nor found liable for the attacks on health facilities in Gaza, Ukraine and Sudan.

The under-secretary-general pointed out it is not "rocket science" to come to the realization that humanitarian workers must conduct their work in safety.

Last month, Human Rights Watch reported that Israel has killed or injured at least 31 aid workers in Gaza since October 7 and it at least eight strikes on coordinates that were provided by aid groups to Israeli authorities in advance. More than 190 United Nations staff have been killed during Israel's military operations in Gaza.

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Oil Continues Fall, US Crude Closes in on Bear Target of Below \$70 Per Barrel

NEW YORK, June 4 (Sputnik) - Oil prices fell for a fifth day in a row, with US crude closing in the bear market target of beneath \$70 per barrel, as demand woes continued to dodge a market that typically does better at this time of year from the busy summer travels of Americans.

With an hour to Tuesday's settlement, the front-month July contract for US-origin West Texas Intermediate crude was down 63 cents, or 0.9%, to \$73.59 per barrel. It sank to \$72.48 earlier in the session, the lowest price for a US crude benchmark since February.

The front-month August contract for UK-origin Brent crude, the global benchmark for oil, was down 59 cents, or 0.6%, to \$77.77. The global crude benchmark hit a session low of \$76.77, also its lowest since February.

Both the US crude benchmark and Brent are already down more than 4% from just two days of June trading, adding to a 6% drop seen in May.

"The oil bears are celebrating at a time of year when it should be a bull market for crude, especially with the approaching of the US summer," John Kilduff, partner at New York energy hedge fund Again Capital, told Sputnik. "My low target for US crude is \$68, well beneath the \$70

support, before some serious buying comes in again."

Oil extended its declines this week on worries that global oil producing alliance OPEC+ will not provide adequate support with its output cuts to offset weak summer demand for fuels.

OPEC, the global oil producing alliance, affirmed on Sunday that it will carry out output cuts through 2025, extending commitments initially set until the end of summer. OPEC+, which groups the 13-member Saudi-led Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries with 10 other oil producing nations steered by Russia, will attempt to cut 2.2 million barrels per day from its joint production.

The problem for oil bulls though is nagging market fear that the reductions will not be enough to compensate for potentially weaker-than-usual demand for fuels this summer, especially with rising crude output from non-OPEC+ producers led by the United States.

To add to market consternation, OPEC+ suggested that if demand improved by the year end, the alliance would add more than 500,000 barrels per day to the market by December, and 1.8 million by June 2025.

US crude production has, meanwhile, been climbing, adding to the weight on oil prices.

The US Energy Information Administration said last week that crude production across the country rose 0.6% in March to 13.2 million barrels per day, the highest since December.

The agency also said that large builds in fuel stockpiles in the week prior had offset crude draws, raising questions about energy demand. Gasoline and distillates balances rose by over 2 million barrels each versus a 4-million-barrel draw in crude, the agency's inventory data for the week ended May 24 showed. Gasoline is the No. 1 motor fuel in the United States. Distillates are primarily processed into the diesel required by trucks, buses and ships, and also go into making airplane fuel.

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Blinken in Call With Saudi Counterpart Urges Hamas to Accept Ceasefire Deal - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken during a call with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud on Tuesday said Hamas was obstructing efforts to reach a ceasefire in Gaza and called on the group to immediately accept a proposed truce, the State Department said in a readout of their call.

"The Secretary reiterated that it is Hamas that is standing in the way of a ceasefire and that they should take the deal without further delay," the State Department said.

Blinken and Prince Faisal during their call continued discussions on the recently announced proposal for a lasting Gaza ceasefire and hostage release.

On Friday, US President Joe Biden said that Israel had offered the Palestinian movement Hamas a new three-phase proposal with a road map that would lead to an enduring cessation of hostilities in the Gaza Strip and the release of all hostages.

The first phase includes a complete ceasefire, the withdrawal of Israeli troops from all Gaza population centers, and the release of some of the hostages held by Hamas, including the wounded, the elderly, and women, as well as the release of detained Palestinians from prisons. The second phase involves an indefinite cessation of hostilities in exchange for releasing the

remaining hostages. The third phase of the initiative is to begin the reconstruction of the war-torn Gaza.

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 36,400 people have been killed so far by Israeli strikes in the Gaza Strip, according to local authorities. More than 100 hostages are still believed to be held by Hamas in Gaza.

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UN to Look at Biden's Border Order, Sees as Asylum as Fundamental Right - Spokeswoman

UNITED NATIONS, June 4 (Sputnik) - The United Nations will study US President Biden's new order to impose restrictions at the southern border and emphasizes that seeking asylum remains a fundamental human right, the UN spokeswoman Florencia Soto Nino said on Tuesday.

"We are aware that this has been in the works, and I know that it was just announced, so we will have a look at that," Nino said during a press briefing. "However, I just want to remind you that UNHCR and our position as well is that in all situations, we reiterate that seeking asylum is a fundamental human right."

Earlier on Tuesday, Biden issued a new executive order barring migrants who illegally cross the US southern border from claiming asylum in the United States.

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, totaling nearly 8 million encounters during that period, according to publicly available CBP data.

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Maduro, Sheinbaum Hold Talks, Ratify Path for Cooperation - Venezuelan Foreign Minister

WASHINGTON, May 4 (Sputnik) - Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and Mexican President-elect Claudia Sheinbaum spoke by telephone and reaffirmed their intention to follow a path of cooperation, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Yvan Gil said on Tuesday.

"President Nicolas Maduro held a brotherly and friendly telephone conversation with Mexico's President-elect Claudia Sheinbaum," Gil said via the social media platform X. "Both ratified the path for cooperation and brotherhood between Mexico and Venezuela."

Maduro concluded the call by addressing a message to the Mexican progressives, saying that their victory has the effect of a "holy water falling over Latin America and the Caribbean," Gil

added.

Sheinbaum, candidate of ruling leftist Morena party, won in the Mexican presidential election, gaining between 58.3% and 60.7%, according to data from the National Electoral Institute. The final results of the election will be announced after the vote count later this week.

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US Does Not Want to See Full-Blown War Between Israel, Hezbollah – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) – The United States does not want a full-blown war between Israel and the Lebanese Shia movement Hezbollah to happen, but believes Israel has a right to defend itself against attacks, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.

"We don't want to see that [full-blown war] happen. Now that said, Israel has the right to defend itself from Hezbollah as attacks," Miller said during a press briefing.

Miller added Washington hopes to see Israel and Hezbollah finding a diplomatic solution to their conflict to prevent another war, but no predictions can be made at the moment.

The United States assesses that the acceptance of a ceasefire by Hamas and the beginning of a ceasefire would help establish calm in northern Israel and southern Lebanon, Miller noted.

Earlier in the day, Al Jazeera reported that Israel's army chief Major General Herzl Halevi said the IDF is prepared for an offensive in the north against Hezbollah and that Israel is "nearing a decision point" in this regard.

The situation on the Israeli-Lebanese border worsened after the start of Israel's military operation in the Gaza Strip in October 2023. The Israeli army and Lebanese Hezbollah fighters have exchanged fire across the border almost daily since then.

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UN Has Not Found Formula to Engage With Taliban But Economy Good 'Entry Point' - Griffiths

UNITED NATIONS, June 4 (Sputnik) - The United Nations has not yet found a way to engage with the Taliban across the board, but the country's economy could be a good entry point, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator Martin Griffiths said on Tuesday.

"We have not been able to craft a formula yet," Griffiths said in a briefing to journalists. "I think it's tough with them. We haven't been able to craft a formula which allows us to have across the board engagement."

However, focusing attention to the economy is a "very important entry point," he said.

Griffiths noted that he has been dealing with Taliban for more than 25 years and effectively the same leading people are in power now in Afghanistan.

The Taliban came to power in August 2021, toppling the US-installed and financed government as US and NATO troops were leaving the country after almost 20 years of military presence

there.

The Taliban government is not recognized by the United Nations.

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Mexican President-Elect Says Dialogue With Russia Will Continue 'Without Doubt'

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) – Dialogue and the search for cooperation opportunities between Mexico and Russia will undoubtedly be "constant," Mexican President-Elect Claudia Sheinbaum said on Tuesday.

"We thank the government of the Russian Federation ... led by President Vladimir Putin, for its congratulations. Without doubt, dialogue and the search for cooperation opportunities will be constant between our countries," Sheinbaum said via X.

On Monday, Putin congratulated Sheinbaum on her victory in the Mexican presidential election. The Russian president said Moscow believes her presidency will help further develop constructive cooperation between the two countries.

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Trump Says Biden's Executive Order on Border 'All for Show' Ahead of June 27 Debate

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that US President Joe Biden's new executive order on immigration is a political maneuver ahead of their June 27 debate.

Last month, Trump and US President Joe Biden agreed to a June 27 CNN debate and a September 10 ABC debate.

"Crooked Joe Biden is pretending to finally do something about the border—but in fact, it's all for show because he knows we have a debate coming up in 3 weeks," Trump said in a social media post on Truth Social.

Earlier today, Biden issued a new executive order barring migrants who illegally cross the US southern border from claiming asylum in the United States.

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, totaling nearly 8 million encounters during that period, according to publicly available CBP data.

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N. Cyprus Leader Says Talked to Owner of Hotel Zelenskyy Allegedly Bought, He Denies It

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar told Sputnik on Tuesday

that he had spoken with the owner of the Oscar Group hotel after media reported the property was purchased by Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy and he confirmed the reports are not true.

"I have talked to the owner, Huseyin Oscar," Tatar said. "He confirms that it is not true."

Earlier on Tuesday, Greek Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides told reporters that the media reports about Zelenskyy having acquired a casino in Kyrenia have not yet been confirmed.

Media outlets have reported that Film Heritage Inc. - registered in Belize and owned by Zelenskyy - had acquired the Vuni Palace hotel and casino, located in northern Cyprus.

Information about Zelensky's offshore companies was published by the Pandora Papers investigation.

Odav TV reported that the purchase of the facility built in 2006 was completed in early May, but the amount of the transaction is unknown and can reach \$192 million.

The Ukrainian Embassy in Cyprus said the report was false and allegedly disseminated by Russian propaganda to create diplomatic tension between Ukraine and Cyprus.

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Blinken Acknowledges 35th Anniversary of 'Tiananmen Square Massacre' - Statement

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Tuesday acknowledged the 35th anniversary of the Chinese military putting down the student demonstrations on Tiananmen Square in Beijing.

"Today, on the 35th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre, we remember the tens of thousands of peaceful Chinese pro-democracy protestors who were brutally assaulted for standing up for freedom, human rights, and an end to corruption," Blinken said in the release.

The secretary of state noted that the true toll is still unknown 35 years later, but emphasized that "we honor all those killed and imprisoned on June 4, 1989, and the days that followed."

Blinken also acknowledged the allegedly silenced voices in Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong and called on the Chinese government to recognize the human rights and freedoms enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In addition, Blinken called on Chinese government to accept the recommendations made earlier this year regarding the country's human rights records in the United Nations' Universal Periodic Review, including releasing arbitrarily and unjustly detained people.

The student demonstrations for democratic reforms in China erupted in Beijing in April 1989. The demonstrations reached a culmination on Tiananmen Square on June 4, when the Chinese government deployed the military, equipped with tanks, and put down the demonstrations. According to official reports, some 200 people died and 7,000 were injured. However, human rights organizations have said that the number of dead reached several thousand people.

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Ex-Judge Napolitano Says Wasn't With Ritter When Passport Seized Prior to Travel to Russia

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - Former US Judge Andrew Napolitano said in a statement to Sputnik on Tuesday that he was not with former US military intelligence officer Scott Ritter when his passport was seized by US border authorities as he was getting ready to board a flight to Russia.

On Monday, Ritter told Sputnik that US border agents did not allow him to fly to Russia and confiscated his passport for a reason unknown to him. Ritter said he planned to travel to Russia to participate in the annual St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF). Ritter had initially said Napolitano was taken off the plane as well.

"I was neither on the plane nor at the airport when this incident occurred," Napolitano said. "Scott's free speech and travel rights were profoundly violated. From a constitutional perspective, I condemn the actions of the State Department."

Later on Tuesday, Ritter during an interview on Napolitano's Judging Freedom podcast clarified that the judge was not at the airport at the time of his incident.

"You weren't with me because I made a phone call to you earlier in the morning, recommending that you not travel to Russia," Ritter told Napolitano during the podcast. "It had nothing to do with what happened to me and everything to do with what happened to our sponsor, Alexander Zyrianov, who from my standpoint, tragically was placed under arrest in Novosibirsk on his way to St Petersburg."

Napolitano noted that he had planned to travel to Russia.

The US Department of State told Sputnik it cannot comment on the status of Ritter's passport.

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Biden to Attend G7 Summit in Italy to Advance Talks on Tapping Russia Assets - White House

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden will travel to Apulia, Italy to participate in the G7 summit on June 13-14 and discuss a range of issues, including efforts to use Russia's immobilized assets to aid Ukraine, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Tuesday.

"President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. will attend the G7 Leaders' Summit in Apulia, Italy on June 13-14. The President and G7 leaders will discuss a range of the most pressing global issues, including the G7's unwavering support for Ukraine. Leaders will advance efforts to make use of Russia's immobilized sovereign assets to help Ukraine as well as actions to continue imposing costs on Russia and those who support Russia's war effort," Jean-Pierre said in a statement.

The G7 leaders will also take steps to promote economic security and address "harmful overcapacity" amid heightened tensions between China and the West, the statement added.

Moscow has criticized the efforts to seize its sovereign assets as the biggest theft in history and a violation of international law.

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AI Needs Policing, Workers Must Be Allowed to Expose Risks - Employees' Letter

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - A group of current and former employees of artificial intelligence (AI) companies are demanding greater exposure and policing of their industry, including the ability for staff to openly criticize their workplace without reprisal so as to check dangerous and unknown risks.

"We believe in the potential of AI technology to deliver unprecedented benefits to humanity," the group said in a letter on Tuesday. "We also understand the serious risks posed by these technologies. These risks range from the further entrenchment of existing inequalities, to manipulation and misinformation, to the loss of control of autonomous AI systems potentially resulting in human extinction."

The letter was signed by 13 people - two who identified themselves by name and as former AI workers at Google DeepMind and 11 associated with OpenAI, including six present employees who chose to be anonymous.

OpenAI has taken the world by storm since its AI chatbot, ChatGPT, went viral upon its release in November 2022. The company counts billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk as being among its co-founders, though he has since cut ties and become a vocal critic of the company, while launching a competitor.

The group expressed hope in the letter that with greater exposure and policing - along with sufficient guidance from the scientific community and policymakers - the risks from AI could be adequately mitigated.

While AI companies have acknowledged the risks, they could not be trusted to act, the letter said.

"AI companies have strong financial incentives to avoid effective oversight, and we do not believe bespoke structures of corporate governance are sufficient to change this," the letter said.

In addition, AI companies possess substantial non-public information about the capabilities and limitations of their systems, the adequacy of their protective measures and the risk levels of different kinds of harm, the letter said.

This was offset by the companies' lack of will to be open with such information, the letter said.

"They currently have only weak obligations to share some of this information with governments, and none with civil society. We do not think they can all be relied upon to share it voluntarily," the letter said.

Given the growing risks, the group called for adequate policing of the industry.

"So long as there is no effective government oversight of these corporations, current and former employees are among the few people who can hold them accountable to the public," the letter said.

The group also voiced fears of reprisal to AI workers who exposed or criticized workplace activity.

"Broad confidentiality agreements block us from voicing our concerns, except to the very companies that may be failing to address these issues. Some of us reasonably fear various

forms of retaliation, given the history of such cases across the industry," the letter said.

OpenAI has used hardball tactics to prevent workers from voicing their concerns, US media reported on Tuesday.

"OpenAI is really excited about building A.G.I. [artificial general intelligence] and they are recklessly racing to be the first there," Daniel Kokotajlo, a former OpenAI researcher, was quoted as saying.

The group said in the letter that ordinary whistleblower protections were insufficient for the industry because many of the risks were not regulated yet.

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biden, other g7 leaders at June summit in italy will advance efforts to make use of frozen russian assets to help ukraine - white house

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Biden's 'Politically Motivated' Border Actions Too Late, Don't End Asylum Abuse - Lawmaker

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden's new executive order to address the border crisis is a politically motivated decision that is coming too late in the struggle to address the issue, US Congressman Paul Gosar told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"Biden's latest politically motivated actions are too little, too late and do nothing to stop the asylum abuse, do not end catch-and-release and certainly won't do a damn thing to address the 13 million lawbreakers who have been welcomed into our country since Biden took office." Gosar said.

Biden's new executive order bars migrants who illegally cross the US southern border from being eligible to claim asylum in the United States.

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Biden Issues Order to Bar Migrants Who Enter Southern Border Illegally From Getting Asylum

(Updates with more details, background in paras 4-7)

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden issued a new executive order barring migrants who illegally cross the US southern border from claiming asylum in the United States, the White House said on Tuesday.

"President Biden believes we must secure our border. That is why today, he announced executive actions to bar migrants who cross our Southern border unlawfully from receiving asylum," the White House said in a press release. "These actions will be in effect when high levels of encounters at the Southern Border exceed our ability to deliver timely consequences, as is the case today."

Biden's executive actions will make it easier for US immigration officers to remove migrants who have no lawful basis to remain in the United States, the release said.

These actions are not permanent and will be discontinued when the number of illegal crossings on the southern border is low enough for US immigration authorities to safely and effectively manage border operations, the release said.

The White House pointed out in the release that Biden's executive actions include humanitarian exceptions for unaccompanied children and victims of trafficking.

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, totaling nearly 8 million illegal encounters during that period, 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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Bob Menendez Says Filed to Run for US Senate in New Jersey as 'Independent Democrat'

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - US Senator Bob Menendez said in a statement that he filed to run for reelection as an independent Democrat, amid a federal bribery trial involving the lawmaker.

"Today, I submitted well above the threshold of signatures required to run for re-election," Menendez said on Monday evening. "The people of this great state deserve a leader in Washington with a proven track record of fighting tooth and nail to deliver results, and I intend to keep doing so as an independent Democrat."

On Tuesday, the New Jersey Division of Elections listed Menendez on their unofficial list of candidates for US Senate, after having gathered nearly 2,500 petition signatures.

Menendez faces 16 criminal charges for alleged crimes including bribery, wire fraud, acting as a foreign agent and obstruction of justice. Menendez has pleaded not guilty to the charges against him.

Prosecutors allege that Menendez received bribes in exchange for using his authority to assist the Qatari government and benefit Egypt. Prosecutors also accuse Menendez's wife of engaging in a scheme to return the alleged bribe money under the guise of loan repayment.

"Despite what is portrayed in the press, my innocence continues to be laid out in court. As I have said before; I have committed no crime. I am more confident than ever that New Jerseyans and the rest of the American public will see me exonerated of what I am being accused of, and I will be re-elected to the Senate once again," Menendez said in the statement.

The criminal trial against Menendez began in May and is still ongoing in the US District Court for the Southern District of New York.

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Biden's 'Politically Motivated' Border Actions Too Little, Too Late, Do Nothing to Stop Asylum Abuse - US Congressman Gosar to Sputnik

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US Not in Position to Know What Exactly Ukraine Fires on Day-to-Day Basis - Kirby

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - The United States is not in a position to know exactly what does Ukraine fire on a daily basis, White House National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby said on Tuesday.'

"We're just not in a position on a day to day basis of knowing exactly what the Ukrainians are firing at, certainly at a tactical level," Kirby said during a press briefing.

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Biden Issues Order to Bar Migrants Who Enter Southern Border Illegally From Getting Asylum

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden issued a new executive order barring migrants who illegally cross the US southern border from claiming asylum in the United States, the White House said on Tuesday.

"President Biden believes we must secure our border. That is why today, he announced executive actions to bar migrants who cross our Southern border unlawfully from receiving asylum," the White House said in a press release. "These actions will be in effect when high levels of encounters at the Southern Border exceed our ability to deliver timely consequences, as is the case today."

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US Test-Launches Unarmed Minuteman III Intercontinental Ballistic Missile - Air Force

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - The United States has conducted a test-launch of an unarmed Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile equipped with one re-entry vehicle, the US Air Force said in a press release on Tuesday.

"A joint team of Air Force Global Strike Command Airmen supported by Space Force Guardians launched an unarmed Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile equipped with one re-entry vehicle June 4 at 12:56 a.m. Pacific Time from Vandenberg Space Force Base, California," the release said.

The missile reentry vehicle made about 4,200 miles to a test site on the US Army

Garrison-Kwajalein Atoll, Republic of the Marshall Islands, the release said.

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Ukraine Never Restricted to Shoot Down Hostile Aircraft Even Outside Own Airspace - Kirby

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Tuesday that Ukraine has never been restricted to shoot down hostile aircraft, even those outside of its airspace.

"There's never been a restriction on the Ukrainians shooting down hostile aircraft, even if those aircraft are not necessarily in Ukrainian airspace," Kirby said during a press briefing. "I mean, they can shoot down Russian airplanes that pose an impending threat, and they have, they have since the beginning of the war."

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US Attorney General Tells Congress Terrorist Threat Level in US 'Has Gone Up Tremendously'

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - The threat level for a terrorist attack in the United States has increased enormously following the October 7 resumption of hostilities in the Gaza Strip and the Middle East, US Attorney Merrick Garland said in a congressional testimony on Tuesday.

"I am worried about the possibility of a terrorist attack in the country post October 7. The threat level for us has gone up enormously," Garland told the US House Judiciary Committee.

The US attorney general pointed out that the Justice Department is quite worried about the possibility of a terrorist attack.

The Justice Department is actively trying to track anyone who might be attempting to hurt the United States, Garland added.

On Monday, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said that the potential for a major terrorist attack in the United States or Europe is among the crises currently concerning Washington.

On October 7, 2023, Hamas attacked Israel from the Gaza Strip, killing some 1,100 Israeli military personnel and civilians. Israel launched massive strikes on Gaza and implemented a complete blockade of the Palestinian enclave. Israel then conducted a ground invasion of Gaza with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages.

More than 35,000 Palestinians have been killed so far by the Israeli military in Gaza and nearly 2 million Palestinians have been displaced amid the widespread devastation. More than 100 Israeli hostages are believed to be held by Hamas.

Protests against the brutality of the Israeli military in Gaza have erupted in the United States and throughout the world, amid acute malnutrition and the possibility of starvation and overall catastrophic living conditions.

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Kirby Says Vice President Harris at Ukraine Peace Summit 'Senior, Sober Representation'

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - The United States sending Vice President Kamala Harris to the upcoming peace conference on Ukraine in Switzerland is a sign of senior level and serious representation, White House National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"I would note that sending the Vice President of the United States and the National Security Advisor is a senior level, sober, serious representation, and we're grateful that the Vice President and Mr. Sullivan are going to make that trip and be there at that summit," Kirby said in a press briefing.

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us not in position to know exactly what ukrainians are firing at on day to day basis - white house's kirby

Congress Wants Biden to Buy Eight More F-35s than He Asked for in Budget - Draft Bill

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - House of Representatives members sitting on the appropriations committee want the US Air Force to buy eight more F-35 Joint Strike Fighters than President Joe Biden requested in his fiscal year 2025 budget request, the draft bill released said.

"[The draft bill requests] \$9.2 billion for 76 F-35 aircraft, which includes 44 F-35As for the Air Force (two aircraft above the President's Budget Request), 13 F-35Bs for the Marine Corps, and 19 F-35Cs for the Navy (six aircraft above the President's Budget Request)," the House Appropriations Committee stated in its list of key takeaways from the legislation late on Monday night.

The US Marines' F-35B variant of the Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter is still failing to meet its minimum performance goals by 45%, and both other versions of the aircraft are also at least 13% below minimum performance requirements, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) said in a report last month.

In February, a Department of Defense report said the aircraft was suffering mission systems software and avionics stability problems with its new Technology Refresh 3 (TR-3) hardware going into Lot 15 production models, forcing a halt in deliveries of the product for the planes.

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Some Canadian Lawmakers 'Wittingly' Aided Foreign Actors - Report

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - Canada's National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians said in a report that some lawmakers were "wittingly" assisting foreign actors to interfere in Canadian affairs.

On Monday, the parliamentary committee released its Special Report on Foreign Interference in Canada's Democratic Processes and Institutions.

"In some cases, parliamentarians were unaware they were the target of foreign interference," the report said.

Further details were censored to remove "injurious or privileged information."

The censored part "described an example of India's financial support to some candidates from two political parties, and CSIS [Canadian Security Intelligence Service]'s assessment that the candidates were unaware of the source of the funds."

"Some elected officials, however, began wittingly assisting foreign state actors soon after their election," the report said.

The second instance of censored information gives alleged examples of parliamentarians having worked to influence their colleagues on India's behalf, the report said. They also allegedly proactively provided confidential information to Indian officials.

The report comes a month after a public inquiry found that foreign interference did not impact the outcomes of Canada's 2019 and 2021 federal elections, despite evidence that several international actors allegedly tried to meddle in the country's democratic processes.

Russia is unlikely to be a significant actor with respect to foreign interference in Canadian federal elections, the report concluded. It also found that nothing suggests that Russia favors any particular Canadian political party or leader.

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

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US House Panel Releases \$833Bln FY2025 Defense Appropriations Bill - Statement

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - The US House Appropriations Committee on Tuesday released the text of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 defense appropriations bill, which provides a total discretionary allocation of \$833.053 billion.

The legislation does not include Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative funding as it typically does. However, the bill does provide \$1 million to establish an Office of the Special Inspector General for Ukraine.

Although the \$833 billion discretionary allocation is 1% above the FY2024 level, it rejects \$18 billion in "unjustified and unnecessary" items included in President Joe Biden's budget request, the panel said in a statement.

The bill redirects the resources to programs and activities that counter China and other near-peer adversaries, foster innovation, combat the flow of illegal drugs as well as support servicemembers and their families, the statement said.

The panel's defense subcommittee will hold a markup for the bill on Wednesday at 8:00 a.m.

ET.

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Biden Says Doesn't Believe Russia's Proposal to End Conflict is the Best for Ukraine

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden told Time that he does not believe that Russia's proposal to end the conflict is the best that Ukraine can hope for at this point.

"No, it's not. And by the way, I don't know why you skip over all that's happened in the meantime. The Russian military has been decimated. You don't write about that. It's been freaking decimated," Biden said in an interview.

He also highlighted the strength of NATO and Western support of Ukraine.

"Europe has spent more money than the United States has, collectively Europe has spent more money in taking on Russia," Biden stated.

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Russia Could Retaliate Against NATO After Biden Authorized Strikes Inside Russia – Reports

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden's decision to allow Ukraine to hit targets on Russian territory with American weapons could result in a new round of escalation of the conflict, including the risk of Russian retaliatory strikes on training centers for Ukrainians by NATO specialists in the country, retired US Marine captain Matthew Hoh told Newsweek in an interview published on Tuesday.

On Thursday, a US State Department spokesperson told Sputnik that Biden had greenlighted Ukrainian strikes using US-supplied weapons inside Russian territory for counter-fire purposes in the Kharkov (also known as Kharkiv) region, but has not authorized the use of long-range missiles, including ATACMS, inside Russia.

While Hoh doesn't think Russia can go as far as striking NATO targets outside Ukraine, he nonetheless warns of the dangers of giving Kiev a free hand with Western weapons.

"What this means are strikes against facilities in Ukraine, where NATO troops may be training Ukrainian troops or assisting with Ukrainian command functions," Newsweek quoted Hoh as saying. "It may mean shooting down NATO reconnaissance aircraft and drones, it may mean destroying NATO logistics vehicles that have been reported to be bringing weapons and material into Ukraine."

According to Hoh, a potential trigger in this situation could be Kiev's attack on a civilian target in Russia like a school full of children.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov has said that attempts to strike Russia with US weapons were already being made. President Vladimir Putin warned NATO allies last week that they should realize "what they are playing with" when they allow Ukraine to use long-range Western weapons to strike deep into Russia.

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Opening Arguments Begin in Hunter Biden Firearm Form Trial in Delaware - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - Opening arguments began at a Delaware court in the case involving Hunter Biden's alleged lies about his drug use on a firearm purchase form, CNN reported on Tuesday.

The opening arguments were delayed from their scheduled start time while the court waited for jurors to arrive, the report said.

One juror dropped out due to living an hour away from the courthouse and being unemployed, which made the daily trip untenable for her.

Biden faces three criminal charges for allegedly lying about his drug use on a firearm purchase form. If convicted, he faces a prison sentence of 25 years. The US Justice Department has said that actual sentences for such crimes are typically less than maximum penalties.

Biden's legal team unsuccessfully attempted to have the case tossed ahead of the trial, based on arguments that the charges violate the Second Amendment of the US Constitution.

The Second Amendment protects the right of Americans to keep and bear arms, but some restrictions on ownership - such as on felons and users of controlled substances - have been found legally permissible.

The White House said in December that President Joe Biden would not pardon his son if he were convicted.

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Russia Can Meddle in Canadian Elections, Lacks Intent to Do So - Parliamentary Committee

WASHINGTON, June 4 (Sputnik) - Russia has the capability to meddle into Canadian affairs but lacks the intent to do it, Canada's National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians said in a report.

"In short, while Russia maintained the capability to engage in foreign interference generally against Canada, it lacked the intent to do so," the Special Report on Foreign Interference in Canada's Democratic Processes and Institutions said.

Contrary to the 2019 assessment alleging Russia was the second most significant foreign interference threat to Canada, it now found that Russia did not engage in meddling activities within the narrower context of the country's institutions democratic processes.

The review period of the committee's latest report shows that Canada was a "lower level" priority for Russia, the report said.

Russia allegedly focused its attention on other strategic priorities and "adversarial competition" with the United States, the report said.

The parliamentary report confirms the early-May preliminary report by the Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference in Federal Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions that Moscow is

unlikely to have meddled in Canadian elections.

Russia, China and India have consistently denied Canada's claims of interference in its elections.