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6/19/24 Wednesday

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East Palestine Derailment Spread Chemicals to 16 US States, Study Says

Norfolk agreed to pay a $600 million settlement in April 2024, to resolve a class action lawsuit for claims within a “20-mile radius from the derailment” as well as personal injury claims within a “10-mile radius from the derailment”, ABC News reported in April.

In February of 2023, a Norfolk Southern freight train carrying hazardous materials derailed in a village between the US states of Pennsylvania and Ohio named East Palestine. And according to a new study, the toxic spill from that derailment and subsequent fire resulted in emissions of “large amounts” that polluted at least 16 states in the US.

In a study published on Wednesday in Environmental Research Letters, researchers found that toxic chemicals from the crash washed over areas from South Carolina to Wisconsin to New England. The pollution spread to over 540,000 square miles worth of land which is 14% of US land area.

“I didn’t expect to see an impact this far out,” said David Gay, lead author of the study. “There’s more going on here than most people would have guessed, including me.”

Because the cars were carrying 115,580 gallons of flammable gas, officials decided to authorize a controlled release and burn of the chemicals due to fear that there would be an explosion. But not only did the derailment spew toxic chemicals into the air, soil, creeks and lakes of East Palestine, the researchers estimate that 110 million Americans were impacted by the pollution.

Eleven of the derailed cars were transporting hazardous materials, five of which were vinyl chloride. Several other cars contained ethyl acrylate and isobutylene, which are considered to be possibly carcinogenic as well as toxic, ABC News reported, citing the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Institutes for Health (NIH).

In their study, the researchers analyzed rain and snow water samples in the week of the derailment as well as the week after. The samples were collected at 260 sites from surrounding states of the accident. Many of the samples showed soot, ash and dirt and researchers found “exceptionally elevated levels” of chloride as far as Virginia, South Carolina and Wisconsin.

“It’s not death and destruction. It’s fairly low concentrations, but they are very high relative to the normal that we typically see — some of the highest we’ve measured in the last 10 years,” Gay said.

The study also revealed an unexpected phenomenon. According to Gay, rain without pollutants is slightly acidic and carries with it a reasonable amount of hydrogen ions. But the collected samples showed less hydrogen ions than normal - metals that were omitted during the fire somehow consumed much of the rain’s hydrogen ions, he explains.

Dr. Erin Haynes, chair of the University of Kentucky's Department of Epidemiology and Environmental Health, surveyed about 400 adults following the train's derailment. She found that three of four residents had suffered some health impact following the derailment, including symptoms of: nose and eye irritation, coughing, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, rashes and feeling

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weak or tired. One East Palestine residentsaid she had ear pain and blood in her ears as well as hair loss.

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PLA Navy Advancements, Putin's Promise, and US Failure in the Middle East

A captain for the PLA Navy said that their submarines will “enable" the Chinese people to develop economy in peace without fear of an invasion. While China’s submarine technologies have trailed behind other navies, their latest breakthrough shows that they are “catching up,” Sputnik reported, citing experts.

The Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Navy’s submarine force has made “historic breakthroughs in torpedo and missile capabilities”, Global Times reported, citing a report by China Central Television (CCTV).

"Now, the country's submarine force development comprises both nuclear-powered and conventional boats, with nuclear-powered being the main focus," said Wen Xuexing, a captain at a submarine detachment of the PLA Navy.

"We have achieved historic breakthroughs in terms of maritime verifications on our torpedo attacks and missile attacks. This means that our combat capabilities are stronger, we can reach regions farther away, and we are more confident in our missions," Wen added.

Dr. David Oualaalou, an international geopolitical consultant, author, veteran and former international security analyst in Washington, DC joined Sputnik’s The Critical Hour on Wednesday to discuss the PLA Navy’s developments. The hosts and their guest also discussed Russian President Vladimir Putin’s recent visit to North Korea during which he signed a security agreement with Kim Jong Un.

“The Chinese are sending the message. Usually, to my knowledge, this kind of technology, the Chinese do not disclose much about it,” said Oualaalou. “I got word that the upcoming summit of NATO is going to be in July in Washington, DC, that they're going to state - NATO, that is - that [they’re] going to go global. All they mean by that is that the next front is Asia. So the Chinese are getting ahead of this by saying we have what we're going to be countering you with, including this kind of advanced torpedoes which are very major to the point of having the ability to sink an aircraft carrier.”

Submarine developments are typically kept private for any navy, but a small amount of leaked information can serve as a deterrence, a Chinese military expert told the Global Times.

“And all this falls within that concept of the entire Global South is moving in a different direction that's going to bypass the US dollars, especially now that the Russians and the Chinese have established a mechanism by which to bypass the SWIFT system altogether,” he added.

“The agreement that Russia and North Korea signed will pave the way now for North Korea to do trade. Why? It's because now the system is going to bypass the US dollar,” Oualaalou explained. “They're going to bypass the SWIFT system. And if we know anything about what's going on right now in the Global South, it's that everybody is moving into the direction of de-dollarization.”

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“In other words, we don't need the dollar anymore. North Korea will fall into that category of doing trade and North Korea has some things that other countries will be interested in, such as the missile technology, which, by the way, was provided to them by the Russian, Soviet Union,” the analyst said, adding that while Russia will assist North Korea militarily, China could potentially be an economic partner of North Korea.

Sputnik’s Garland Nixon then asked the show’s guest for his thoughts on Russia “utilizing [its] legacy of goodwill in Africa” as a way to return to alliances in that continent which are of “great value to BRICS”.

“What Western media is limiting in disclosing the truth so the people here in the West will not know, is that the Russians have forgiven about $28 billion of debt to African nations,” said Oualaalou. “[Russia said], you know what? We're going to forgive this $28 billion in debt and we'll move forward. So Russia's relations with the Africans is moving in the right direction, the same way with the Chinese, given the infrastructure they're doing in Africa.”

A recent report published to Mondoweiss claims that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is spearheading a campaign of “deception” regarding the war in Israel. During an interview with Al Jazeera, Blinken claimed the proposal that US President Biden “laid out 12 days ago” is virtually identical to one that Hamas accepted on May 6.

But the report notes that at the time, the US said that Hamas had not accepted the proposal. Not only that, but Biden’s plan suggests that if Israel decides Hamas is not negotiating “in good faith” it can resume its military strikes at the approval of the US. Biden’s plan also says Israel can free many, but not all of their hostages.

“In essence, Israel wants a deal that frees the hostages and also allows it to ‘finish the job.’ Hamas, quite reasonably, wants the slaughter and siege to end, Israel to withdraw, and reconstruction to immediately commence,” the report writes.

“Hamas said we will be willing to sit down and talk about this ceasefire and all that you're saying, except that we'd like to have the Russians and the Chinese sitting at the table with all of us. And you know why? It's because they know Hamas, Hamas knows in that case, first of all, they can't trust the Americans,” Oualaalou explained.

“And, second, should that ever happen that the US will not take the credit for saying, ‘oh, we are the ones that achieved the ceasefire when in reality, it is not’. So, the Chinese understand this reality. The Russians understand this reality and the US, this is why Tony Blinken said what he said. It's to divert from this reality and mislead the masses into thinking that the US is willing to do this ceasefire when in reality it is none of that,” the analyst added.

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Simon Says Freeze

The fundraiser appeared to be the second time that Biden had wandered away from the stage of a political event and needed to be guided back by another political leader. While critics of the president say his cognitive abilities are failing, the White House has shot back that Republicans are manipulating videos and spreading "disinformation".

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A recent star-studded fundraiser in Los Angeles has sparked a debate about whether or not US President Joe Biden froze on stage and had to be snapped back to reality by former President Barack Obama, whom Biden was vice president to.

The claim was first published by the New York Post on Sunday, who said the president had to be led off stage by Obama in an awkward moment. The sitting president, the former president, as well as the celebrity late-night host Jimmy Kimmel stood for applause following a 45-minute interview at the Peacock Theater.

But while the men stood for applause, “Biden’s gaze seemed to become fixed on the crowd for a full 10 seconds until [Obama] took his wrist and led him offstage,” the New York Post claimed.

The Biden campaign reportedly raised more than $30 million at the event where Hollywood stars including George Clooney, Julia Robert and Barbara Streisand headlined. Tickets to the event ranged from $250 to $500,000.

The Biden campaign is trying to fight back against the financial upswing of former President Donald Trump’s campaign which raised more than $50 million during an April fundraiser in Florida. Polling has also shown Biden falling behind Trump in key states including Arizona, Nevada and Florida.

However, hundreds of anti-Israel protesters swarmed the event and attempted to block entry to the fundraiser. According to the Post, protesters shouted such chants including, “Biden, Biden you’re a liar, we demand a ceasefire.” Police were called in to keep the protesters away from the theater, but no arrests were made, the Post said, citing the Los Angeles Police Department.

The White House hit back against the claims that Biden had froze, and accused right-wing critics of selectively editing videos in a “misinformation” campaign against the president. The White House shared footage of what they say was the president pausing to take in the applause.

"It tells you everything that we need to know about how desperate Republicans are here," press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said at Monday's daily press briefing. She added that “the manipulated videos [are] done in bad faith".

Last week, the Post also shared a clip of the US leader apparently freezing during a skydiving demonstration in Italy on Thursday where he was meeting with other G7 leaders. Biden seemed to walk away from the group of leaders to speak to a parachuter when Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni had to reel him back in for the photo op.

Both Biden and Trump have been criticized for their age and mental health. Trump is just three years younger than Biden who is 81-years-old. Biden has often stumbled over his words, fallen on a stairway and said hello during a White House event to a former congresswoman who had recently died.

Meanwhile, Trump has repeatedly forgotten who the current president is, and identified his former ambassador to the UN as the former speaker, has often mispronounced simple words and repeatedly rambled and followed tangents during his speeches, US News reported. The American psychologist Dr. John Gartner claimed that Trump - America’s apparent presidential frontrunner - first showed intermittent examples of mental collapse in 2017 and that “now, he is getting worse.”

“He can’t get through a whole rally without revealing himself. And, because this is a progressive illness, he will continue to get worse. And if he is like most patients like this, at some point, he is

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literally going to fall off the cognitive cliff and he will be completely incapacitated," Gartner told The Hill.

President Putin Arrives to Fanfare in North Korea

Russian President Vladimir Putin approved a new comprehensive strategic partnership agreement with North Korea, Sputnik reported. Mark Sleboda, a Moscow-based international relations security analyst joined the Critical Hour on Tuesday to discuss Russia and North Korea's recent partnership. "Putin [arrived] to a lot of fanfare," said Sleboda. "Putin even penned an article in North Korea's, the DPRK's daily newspaper and his, Putin is kind of known for his measured, low key, pragmatic, calculated rhetoric, I would say, over the last two decades. This is not that Putin [who] wrote that article." The analyst said that Russia's decision to sign the strategic partnership agreement particularly contrasts with what many Western countries have done with Ukraine. "[It's] widely assumed that what North Korea is getting out of all of their cooperation deals with Russia is Russian knowledge, Russian experience, helping with their space program, including the launch of sophisticated satellite reconnaissance," he added. After the visit is over, Putin will then travel to Vietnam at the invitation of Communist Party General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong.

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RFK Jr. Calls on Russia, US, Ukraine to Start Peace Talks to End Conflict

WASHINGTON, June 20 (Sputnik) - US presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said on Thursday that he wants the United States, Russia, and Ukraine to sit down at the table to discuss ways to end the conflict and warned of the danger it could turn into a global war.

"The world is being held hostage over a proxy war with Russia that might destroy the planet. And most Americans don't even know why we are involved. I call for real peace talks now, with the US, Russia and Ukraine at the table. [President Vladimir] Putin was willing. We need to be willing too," Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said in an X post commenting on a recent interview with Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic.

RFK Jr. also called on Americans to demand that US lawmakers begin taking steps to end the conflict in Ukraine before it escalates even further.

"No more money for the Ukraine war. It is time for the grownups to make peace," the post said.

Earlier in June, Vucic said in an interview for the Swiss magazine Die Weltwoche that if the great powers fail to end the conflict in Ukraine soon, the world will be on the verge of a real disaster.

Vucic noted that to achieve peace in Ukraine, the presence of Russia at the negotiating table is necessary, which was not the case during the conference on Ukraine hosted by Switzerland last week.

Switzerland hosted a high-level conference on Ukraine at the Buergenstock resort outside of Lucerne from June 15-16. Russia did not receive an invitation, but even if it had, it would not have attended the conference, Vladimir Khokhlov, the spokesman for the Russian Embassy in Bern, told Sputnik in April.

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Biden Admin. Plans to Ban Sales of Kaspersky Antivirus Starting September 29 - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 20 (Sputnik/Prime) – The Biden administration is planning to ban the sales of the software developed by Russian multinational cybersecurity and anti-virus provider Kaspersky Lab in the United States and to place the company on its trade blacklist, Reuters reported on Thursday, citing people familiar with the matter.

The ban coupled with trade restrictions is expected to go into effect on September 29, the report said.

The report added that the Biden administration will announce the new rule with respect to the Russian company later on Thursday.

Currently, only US government agencies are banned from using Kaspersky Lab software.

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East Palestine Train Derailment Polluted 16 States, Canada - Study

WASHINGTON, June 20 (Sputnik) – The Norfolk Southern train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio, in February 2023 spread hazardous compounds to 16 states and Canada, according to a study published in Environmental Research Letters.

"Our measurements revealed a large areal impact from the Midwest through the Northeast and likely Canada, and perhaps as far south as North Carolina (portions of 16 states, 1.4 million km2). Observations showed the expected high chloride concentrations, but also unexpectedly high pH (basic) and exceptionally elevated levels of base cations exceeding 99th percentiles versus the historic record," according to the study published on Wednesday.

The freight train had been carrying several hazardous materials when it derailed in the village on the border of Ohio and Pennsylvania, some which spilled and caused a days-long fire.

A controlled release and burn of vinyl chloride in five derailed cars was carried out three days after the crash to avoid a potential explosion, but many reports of contaminated water and strong odors during and after the fire emerged.

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biden administration plans to bar sales of kaspersky antivirus software in united states starting on september 29 - reuters, citing person familiar

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UN Following Putin Visit to N. Korea 'With Interest,' Awaiting Outcome - UN Official

UNITED NATIONS, June 20 (Sputnik) - The United Nations has been following Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to North Korea with interest and is awaiting the outcome of that trip, UN Under-Secretary-General of Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu said.

"We are obviously following his visit with interest. We haven't heard much about the conclusion or the outcome of that visit," Nakamitsu said during a press briefing on Wednesday.

Earlier in the day, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un called Russia the most honest friend and ally and Putin a dearest friend of the Korean people.

Putin arrived in Pyongyang late on June 18 and held talks with Kim after which the two countries signed joint agreements, including the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement to stimulate the development of bilateral cooperation.

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Canada Designates IRGC as Terrorist Entity - Public Safety Minister

WASHINGTON, June 20 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government has designated Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization, Public Safety Minister Dominic LeBlanc has said.

"Today I'm here to announce that our government has made the decision to list the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist entity under the Criminal Code. This action sends a strong message that Canada will use all of the tools at its disposal to combat the terrorist entity of the IRGC," LeBlanc said during a press conference alongside Foreign Minister Melanie Joly and Justice Minister Arif Virani.

Following the designation, "thousands" of senior Iranian government officials, including IRGC members will be inadmissible into Canada, LeBlanc said. Moreover, current and former officials who currently reside in the country could be subject to investigation and removal, he warned.

Canada's top diplomat warned that the decision taken against the IRGC could increase the risk of arbitrary detention in Iran. Joly urged Canadian nationals to leave the country "right now" and strongly discouraged travel for people planning a trip to the Islamic republic.

By going forward with the designation, the Trudeau cabinet finally caved in to pressure from some members of the Iranian Canadian community as well as the Conservative and New Democratic parties. Calls for action against the IRGC increased following the crash of Flight PS752 and demands made by an association representing the victims' families.

On January 8, 2020, flight PS752 crashed shortly after takeoff from Tehran's international airport. The accident claimed the lives of all 167 passengers on board the airplane - mostly Canadian and Iranian citizens - and nine Ukrainian crew members.

Iran admitted that the plane had been mistakenly shot down by its military, which mistook it for a cruise missile at a time when Iran's air defenses were active after strikes on a US military base in Iraq.

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NATO Secretary-General Predicts No Imminent Attack, Nuclear Escalation

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) - NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said on Wednesday that he did not see an imminent attack on the alliance, including one stemming from the use of nuclear weapons.

"We don't see an imminent threat or any military attack and not over the use of nuclear weapons," Stoltenberg said in response to a question regarding the risk of nuclear escalation given the strengthened alliance between Russia and China.

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NATO Allies Need to Impose 'Cost' on China if It Continues to Support Russia - Stoltenberg

WASHINGTON, June 20 (Sputnik) - NATO allies must impose costs on China if it continues its alleged support of Russia's defense industrial base, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said on Wednesday.

"At some point, and unless China changes course, allies need to impose a cost," Stoltenberg said during an event in Ottawa hosted by the NATO Association of Canada.

Stoltenberg went on to accuse Beijing of sharing high-end technologies like semiconductors and other dual-use items with Russia that can be used to produce missiles, tanks, and aircraft. China is also allegedly working to provide Russia with improved satellite capability and imagery, he added.

China also allegedly helps Russia evade the impact of Western sanctions and export controls, according to Stoltenberg.

Last week, Chinese Deputy Ambassador to the UN Geng Shuang during a UN Security Council meeting urged the United States to stop using the Ukrainian crisis as a pretext to criticize China and suppress its companies.

Geng also pointed out that while the United States criticizes China for trading with Russia, it continues its own business dealings with Russia.

Russia called for the UN Security Council meeting to discuss Western supplies of weapons to Ukraine. It is the sixteenth meeting on this topic Russia that has called for and many Western states have deemed it unnecessary.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

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WASHINGTON, June 20 (Sputnik) -

RUSSIA-NORTH KOREA RELATIONS

* Trade between Russia and North Korea is still modest, but there is a good growth dynamic, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Wednesday.
* The growing scale and intensity of joint US-South Korea-Japan military exercises undermine peace and stability, as well as threaten the security of the entire region, Putin said.
* Russia rejects attempts to hold North Korea responsible for the complication of the situation in the world, Putin said.
* North Korea is satisfied with the outcomes of Putin's visit, Charge d'Affaires of the North Koran Embassy in Russia Lee Yong Zin said.
* Putin's visit to North Korea is an impetus for creating mechanisms to reduce the impact of sanctions on bilateral relations, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.
* The new agreement between Russia and North Korea on the comprehensive strategic partnership demonstrates the political will to develop all vectors of bilateral relations, Peskov said.

MIDDLE EAST

* The international shipping community has called for urgent measures to stop unlawful attacks on seafarers in the Red Sea, according to a joint statement released on Wednesday.
* The Canadian government has designated Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization, Public Safety Minister Dominic LeBlanc said.
* The United Nations welcomes any efforts to deliver humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip but has already made clear the limitations of getting aid through the US-built pier, UN spokesman Farhan Haq said.

CANADA-CHINA TENSIONS

* China strongly condemns a statement issued by the Canadian government on the South China Sea and urges Ottawa to respect China’s territorial sovereignty and interests in the region, Chinese Embassy in Ottawa spokesperson told Sputnik on Wednesday.

PUTIN VISIT TO VIETNAM

* Russia will continue to develop bilateral ties and cooperation with Vietnam, President Vladimir Putin said in an article published by Nhan Dan on Wednesday.
* Moscow expects Vietnamese investors to take advantage of the opportunities to work in the Russian market, Putin said.

NEW EU SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

* The European Union is planning to impose sanctions against 20 Russian individuals and 22 legal entities as part of a new sanctions package against Russia, EUobsever media outlet reported on Wednesday, citing the draft document.
* Hungary has agreed to the new, 14th package of EU sanctions against Russia, which tightens rules for EU subsidiary firms in Russia, but Germany has its doubts, European news outlet EUobserver reported.

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* The introduction of sanctions on the Russian state nuclear corporation Rosatom can have negative consequences for nuclear safety, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Grossi said.

NATO

* NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said on Wednesday that NATO members need to prioritize defense investments in order to respond to a more dangerous security environment.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* The Ukrainian armed forces have lost up to 560 soldiers in clashes with the Russia's army group South in the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Wednesday.
* A Ukrainian drone attack on the Luch substation led to power outage in the the city of Energodar (also known as Enerhodar) in the Zaporizhzhia Region, the city authorities said.
* French industry group Thales said it had signed three strategic agreements with Ukraine at the Eurosatory defense exhibition, including on creating a joint venture on Ukrainian territory to ensure seamless operations and equipment supplies.
* There is no physical version of the final communique of the conference on Ukraine in Switzerland; it is an adjustable list that can be signed at any time even by states that did not participate in the conference, Swiss Foreign Ministry Pierre-Alain Eltschinger told Sputnik.
* The decision of the G7 countries to allocate $50 billion to Ukraine from the profits from the Russian frozen assets is an example of theft, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

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NATO Secretary General Says Members Need to Prioritize Defense Spending

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) – NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said on Wednesday that NATO members need to prioritize defense investments to respond to a more dangerous security environment.

"The reality is that now we need to prioritize defense investments in our security because we need to respond to [a] more dangerous and challenging security environment," Stoltenberg said at the NATO Association of Canada.

He added that he continued to expect all allies to meet the guideline of spending at least 2% of GDP on defense and that 23 allies were currently doing so.

He also called for allies to agree for NATO to lead the coordination and provision of security assistance and training for Ukraine, given that there had been serious delays and gaps in delivering support that had consequences on the frontline.

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UPDATE - Canada Must Respect Chinese Territorial Sovereignty, Interest in South-China Sea – Embassy

(Adds details throughout text, background in para 8)

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) – China strongly condemns a statement issued by the Canadian government on the South China Sea and urges Ottawa to respect Beijing's territorial sovereignty and interests in the region, the spokesperson for the Chinese Embassy in Ottawa told Sputnik on Wednesday.

On Tuesday, the Canadian Foreign Ministry issued a statement condemning China for actions it undertook against Philippine vessels in the South China Sea the day prior when one supply ship and two speed boats of the Philippines irrupted into what Beijing considers its sovereign waters.

"On June 18, Global Affairs Canada released a statement that disregarded the facts, distorted the truth, and groundlessly attacked China's fully justified law enforcement activities at Ren'ai Jiao," the spokesperson said. "China expresses its strong condemnation and firm opposition to the statement."

China urges the Canadian government "to genuinely respect China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea and stop creating disturbances and provoking confrontations in the South China Sea," the spokesperson added.

The Chinese Coast Guard took appropriate control measures to halt the intruding ships, in accordance with the law. The maneuvers were professional, restrained, justified and lawful, the spokesperson said.

The Chinese government stands ready to resolve differences and disputes that may arise in the South China Sea via dialogue with the countries directly concerned. However, Beijing will also "resolutely respond" to any provocation in the region, the spokesperson stressed.

"Canada is not a party to the South China Sea issue, yet frequently makes erroneous statements on this issue," the spokesperson noted. Ottawa repeatedly sends warships and helicopters to the region under the pretext of safeguarding the freedom of navigation, he added.

In recent years, tensions between the Philippines and China have heightened in the South China Sea due to territorial disputes. In May, the Philippines pledged to increase defense cooperation with the United States, Japan and Australia. The four allies also held their first joint naval exercise in the disputed South China Sea in April with the stated goal of enhancing regional stability. China criticized the formation of exclusive alliances that increased bloc confrontations in the region.

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Canada Must Respect Chinese Territorial Sovereignty, Interest in South-China Sea – Embassy

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undertook against Philippine vessels in the South China Sea.

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The embassy said China urges the Canadian government "to genuinely respect China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea, and stop creating disturbances and provoking confrontations in the South China Sea."

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Netanyahu Feud With US May Distract from Work to Avoid War on Lebanese Border - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) - The growing feud Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is sparking with the Biden administration could distract from diplomatic work to avoid a war with Hezbollah on the Israeli-Lebanese border, Axios reported, citing US officials on Wednesday.

The report said the Biden administration is concerned that the unstable relationship on display between the United States and Israel could damage Israel's deterrence power in the region and likely embolden Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah and Iran.

The White House is angry over Netanyahu's ingratitude after he released a video earlier this week accusing the United States of withholding security assistance to the country. However, the United States has only withheld 2,000-pound bombs that it believes could be used by Israel in densely populated areas in Gaza.

The White House in response to Netanyahu's accusations decided to cancel a high-level U.S.-Israel meeting on Thursday that was supposed to be about addressing threats from Iran and Lebanon, the report said.

White House adviser Amos Hochstein, who for months has been engaged in diplomatic work in Lebanon, met with Netanyahu on Tuesday to brief him on his talks with Lebanese officials and discuss ways to avoid a war. However, US officials told Axios that the meeting was "bad" as Hochstein and the US Ambassador to Israel Jack Lew spent most of the meeting scolding Netanyahu over his mismanagement of the crisis and sudden claims about the US withholding weapons from Israel.

US officials, the report said, believe the row between Netanyahu and Washington may contribute to further instability in the United States and disrupt work to avoid a regional war.

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Canada Designates IRGC as Terrorist Entity - Public Safety Minister

(Adds details in paras 3-4, background in 5-7)

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government has designated Iran's Islamic

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Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization, Public Safety Minister Dominic LeBlanc said on Wednesday.

"Today I'm here to announce that our government has made the decision to list the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist entity under the Criminal Code. This action sends a strong message that Canada will use all of the tools at its disposal to combat the terrorist entity of the IRGC," LeBlanc said during a press conference alongside Foreign Minister Melanie Joly and Justice Minister Arif Virani.

Following the designation, "thousands" of senior Iranian government officials, including IRGC members will be inadmissible into Canada, LeBlanc said. Moreover, current and former officials who currently reside in the country could be subject to investigation and removal, he warned.

Canada's top diplomat warned that the decision taken against the IRGC could increase the risk of arbitrary detention in Iran. Joly urged Canadian nationals to leave the country "right now" and strongly discouraged travel for people planning a trip to the Islamic republic.

By going forward with the designation, the Trudeau cabinet finally caved in to pressure from some members of the Iranian Canadian community as well as the Conservative and New Democratic parties. Calls for action against the IRGC increased following the crash of Flight PS752 and demands made by an association representing the victims' families.

On January 8, 2020, flight PS752 crashed shortly after takeoff from Tehran's international airport. The accident claimed the lives of all 167 passengers on board the airplane - mostly Canadian and Iranian citizens - and nine Ukrainian crew members.

Iran admitted that the plane had been mistakenly shot down by its military, which mistook it for a cruise missile at a time when Iran's air defenses were active after strikes on a US military base in Iraq.

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Close to 7 in 10 Canadians Say Prime Minister Trudeau Should Step Down - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) - Nearly 70% of Canadians would like to see Prime Minister Justin Trudeau step down from the premiership position, Global News reported on Wednesday.

According to an Ipsos poll conducted for the news outlet, 68% of Canadians want Trudeau to step down. The proportion of individuals wishing for his resignation is highest in Alberta (79%) and Atlantic Canada (76%), the report said.

If elections were to be held tomorrow, the Conservatives would comfortably win, with 42% of voting intentions. The Tory leader Pierre Poilievre would make a better prime minister, 44% of the poll respondents said.

Three in four Canadians would like to have another party take over the government, the report said. Only a quarter of the surveyed believe the Liberals deserve to be reelected.

In a November poll, Ipsos found that 72% of Canadians would like to see Justin Trudeau step down as prime minister and leader of the Liberal Party, marking a 12 points increase from September.

The next Canadian federal elections are scheduled to take place on or before October 20, 2025. Trudeau has expressed his intention to run for another term for the Liberal Party in what

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would be his fourth general election.

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Emerson College Faces Lower Enrollment Than Expected for Fall 2024 - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) - The projected number of incoming first-year students at Emerson College for the fall of 2024 is significantly lower than expected, local media reported.

"Now that the College's enrollment deposit deadline for this year has passed, we want to share with our community that the size of our projected incoming first-year class for Fall 2024 is significantly below what we had hoped," the report said, citing an alleged email sent out to staff members.

According to the report, the reduction was attributed to several factors such as national enrollment trends away from smaller private institutions, a delay in enrollment deposits due to the new Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) rollout, student protests impacting yield events and campus tours, and negative publicity from the demonstrations and arrests.

Numerous pro-Palestinian demonstrations have rocked college campuses across the US in recent weeks as protesters demand an end to US military, financial and diplomatic support for Israel's military operations in the Gaza Strip, which have resulted in the deaths of more than 34,600 Palestinians. Students are also calling on their universities to condemn Israel's military campaign in Gaza, to divest from companies linked to Israel and discontinue programs of study abroad at Israeli universities.

On October 7, 2023, Palestinian movement Hamas launched a large-scale rocket attack against Israel and breached the border, attacking both civilian neighborhoods and military bases. Nearly 1,200 people in Israel were killed and some 240 others 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 34,800 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 on US-Built Pier Relocation: Any Aid to Gaza Welcome, But This Avenue Has Limitations

UNITED NATIONS, June 19 (Sputnik) - The United Nations welcomes any efforts to deliver aid to Gaza but has already made clear the limitations of getting aid through the US-built pier, spokesman Farhan Haq said on Wednesday, when asked to comment on the US's plans to reanchor the floating dock after it was dismantled again due to rough seas.

The temporary pier was removed last Friday and towed to Ashdod, Israel, due to expected high seas. The Pentagon said on Tuesday that the pier is expected to be back in place on the Mediterranean Sea this week to resume aid deliveries to Gaza.

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"Well, certainly questions about the relocation of the floating dock are really for our US counterparts, but on our side, our basic position has always been that we welcome any and all efforts to bring in additional aid to Gaza, given the crucial need for aid, but at the same time, we have made very clear the limitations of getting aid through these avenues," Haq said during a UN briefing when asked whether it is worth bringing the floating dock back.

The World Food Programme assessment on the safe functionality of delivering aid through the US pier has not been concluded yet, he added.

In late May, the pier was damaged by bad weather only two weeks after it began operating once the US military constructed it. CENTCOM had to temporarily dismantle the pier to conduct repairs. On June 7, the pier was reestablished off the coast of Gaza.

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US Central Command Says Killed Senior ISIS Official in Syria Airstrike

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) - The United States killed a senior official of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria terrorist group (ISIS, banned in Russia) in an airstrike in Syria, US Central Command said on Wednesday.

"On June 16, US Central Command conducted an airstrike in Syria, killing Usamah Jamal Muhammad Ibrahim al-Janabi, a senior ISIS official and facilitator," Central Command said in a statement.

The ISIS official's death will disrupt the terrorist group's ability to resource and conduct attacks, the statement said.

The statement added that there are no indications that any civilians were harmed during the strike.

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Canada Designates IRGC as Terrorist Entity - Public Safety Minister

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government has designated Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization, Public Safety Minister Dominic LeBlanc said on Wednesday.

"Today I'm here to announce that our government has made the decision to list the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist entity under the Criminal Code. This action sends a strong message that Canada will use all of the tools at its disposal to combat the terrorist entity of the IRGC," LeBlanc minister said during a press conference alongside Foreign Minister Melanie Joly and Justice Minister Arif Virani.

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Criminal Gangs Among Causes of High Level of Lawlessness in Gaza - UN Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, June 19 (Sputnik) - The high level of chaos in the Gaza Strip is caused by multiple factors including criminal gangs taking advantage of scared residents in need, United Nations spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Wednesday.

"Criminal gangs are taking advantage of the unrest but there's an overall anarchy and there are a lot of frightened people so there's many different causes behind this [lawlessness]," Haq said during a press briefing.

The spokesperson made the remark in response to a question about why there is such a high level of lawlessness in Gaza.

Earlier on Wednesday, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said that the Israeli army systematically violates the laws of war in Gaza.

The obligation to choose means and methods of warfare to prevent, or at least minimize as far as possible, harm to civilians appears to have been systematically violated during Israel's bombing campaign in the Gaza Strip, the OHCHR said,

The Israeli army has repeatedly violated the fundamental principles of the laws of war and Israel has provided no explanation for the deadliest bombings for months despite public promises, the OHCHR added.

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Blinken, Philippine FM Discuss Tensions in S. China Sea After Ships Collision - State Dept

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Philippine's Secretary of Foreign Affairs Enrique Manalo have discussed the situation in the South China Sea after its vessel collided with a Chinese Coast Guard ship while delivering supplies, State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a readout on Wednesday.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke today with Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Enrique A. Manalo about the People's Republic of China's escalatory actions against the Philippines in the South China Sea," Miller said. "Their discussion followed the PRC's dangerous and irresponsible actions to deny the Philippines from executing a lawful maritime operation in the South China Sea on June 17. "

China accused the Philippines of causing a ship collision in the South China Sea, while Manila said Beijing's accusations that its ship provoked the collision were misleading.

"Secretary Blinken emphasized that the PRC's actions undermine regional peace and stability and underscored the United States' ironclad commitments to the Philippines under our Mutual Defense Treaty," Miller said. "The Secretaries also exchanged views on how to build on momentum from recent high-level bilateral engagements on issues of shared concern."

The escalatory incident is the latest in a series of Chinese provocations to impede critically needed supplies from reaching service members stationed at the BRP Sierra Madre, the statement read.

In late May, the Philippines opened a coast guard post on the Itbayat Island near Taiwan to boost security amid China's increasing presence in the South China Sea, Philippine National

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Security Adviser Eduardo Ano said.

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Democrats Concerned About Biden Campaign's 'Dire' Situation - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) - Democrats familiar with US President Joe Biden's 2024 reelection campaign are concerned with its strategy leading up to Election Day, Axios reported on Wednesday.

Some Democrats, including some of Biden's own aides, have doubts about the campaign's strategy, which relies on voters embracing his narratives about the events at the US Capitol on January 6, alleged threats to democracy in the United States and former President Donald Trump's personal character, the report said.

"It is unclear to many of us watching from the outside whether the president and his core team realize how dire the situation is right now, and whether they even have a plan to fix it. That is scary," the report quotes a Democratic strategist in touch with the campaign as having said.

People close to Biden reportedly said that they worry about expressing concerns during meetings because top aides can exile dissenters.

In May, a New York Times/Siena College poll found that Trump leads Biden in five out of six so-called "swing states" ahead of Election Day in November.

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Families of Victims in 2 Boeing 737 MAX Crashes Ask US Govt. to Seek $24Bln Fine - Letter

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) - The families of the victims in two Boeing 737 MAX crashes on Wednesday sent a letter to the US Justice Department requesting that federal prosecutors seek a maximum fine of $24 billion from the US aircraft manufacturer.

"Because Boeing's crime is the deadliest corporate crime in US history, a maximum fine of more than $24 billion is legally justified and clearly appropriate," the families' lawyer Paul Cassell said in the letter.

Cassell added that the families of the victims wanted the Boeing senior executives responsible to be prosecuted.

The Justice Department is currently mulling whether Boeing should face a punishment for allegedly breaching a 2021 deferred-prosecution agreement following two fatal 737 MAX aircraft crashes that occurred in 2018 and 2019. It has until July 7 to make a decision.

The Justice Department said that Boeing is subject to criminal prosecution after the company went through a series of safety mishaps this year, including a door plug that blew off an Alaska Airlines flight shortly after takeoff.

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Canada to List Iran's IRGC as Terrorist Group - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) - The government of Canada is preparing to designate Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization, CBC News reported on Wednesday.

The announcement is expected as soon as this week, the report said, citing several sources with knowledge of the matter. Talks are still ongoing, and details are yet to be finalized, it added.

Once the IRGC is placed on the country's terror list, law enforcement will be able to charge anyone financially or materially supporting the group, the report said. Financial institutions will be allowed to freeze assets, it added.

By going forward with the designation, the Trudeau cabinet will have finally caved in to pressure from several political and social actors such as members of the Iranian Canadian community as well as the Conservative and New Democratic parties that have long sought its listing. Calls for action against the IRGC increased following the crash of Flight PS752 and demands made by an association representing the victims' families.

On January 8, 2020, flight PS752 crashed shortly after takeoff from Tehran's international airport. The accident claimed the lives of all 167 passengers on board the airplane - mostly Canadian and Iranian citizens - and nine Ukrainian crew members.

Iran admitted that the plane had been mistakenly shot down by its military, which mistook it for a cruise missile at a time when Iran's air defenses were active following strikes on a US military base in Iraq.

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Libya 'Fed Up' With Regional Powers Using Country For Proxy Wars- UN Ambassador

UNITED NATIONS, June 19 (Sputnik) - Libyan Ambassador to the UN Al-Taher El Sonni said on Tuesday that it is time to leave Libya alone and that the country is tired of regional powers using it for its proxy wars.

"I guess it's about time to leave Libya alone and to free it from this Council. Let us decide on our future," Sonni said in the UN Security Council meeting on Libya.

He also expressed frustration and exhaustion with Libya being used as a proxy by certain countries and regional powers for "selfish, greedy battles," some of which have colonial ambitions.

On Wednesday, Russia said in the Council that it would like to see the total elimination of foreign fighters in Libya, which is a crucial goal, and that it needs to be done in a phased withdrawal.

Libya is currently ruled by two rival governments. The western part of Libya is controlled by the UN-backed Government of National Accord, based in Tripoli, while the eastern part is under the Government of National Stability, backed by the Libyan National Army. The southern part of the

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country remains in turmoil due to civil unrest, the continuing threat of terrorism, and armed tribal violence.

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Russia Concerned by Outside Players' Plans to Connect Libya Military Groups - Deputy Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, June 19 (Sputnik) - Russia is observing with concern the plans of extra-regional players in the Libyan conflict to train and equip private military companies that will effectively unite units in the east and west of the country, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Anna Evstigneeva said on Tuesday.

"Moreover, it is with concern that we have observed the fact that that information has surfaced about certain obscure plans of extra-regional players to establish, train and equip with the assistance of private military companies Libyan border guards, which would unite the fighters in the west and east of Libya," Evstigneeva said during a UN Security Council meeting on Libya.

Evstigneeva said that Russia fears such plans are not beneficial to the national Libyan army but serve the national interests of certain other countries.

Russia has also argued many times that foreign fighters in Libya should be eliminated and this remains a crucial goal that must be done in a phased withdrawal.

Libya is ruled at present by two rival governments. The western part is controlled by the UN-backed Government of National Accord, based in Tripoli, while the eastern part is under the Government of National Stability, backed by the Libyan National Army. The southern part of the country remains in turmoil due to civil unrest, the continuing threat of terrorism and armed tribal violence.

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Missouri Judge Exonerates Sandra Hemme After Over 40 Years in Prison for Murder - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) — A Missouri judge has overturned the wrongful conviction of 64-year-old Sandra Hemme, who spent 43 years incarcerated for a 1980 murder, NBC News reported on Wednesday.

According to the report, Hemmes' lawyers argued in a petition reviewed by Livingston County Circuit Judge Ryan Horsman that evidence from the 1980 murder implicates Michael Holman, a deceased St. Joseph police officer with a criminal history, including crimes committed before and after the death of 31-year-old Jeschke.

The report said that the St. Joseph Police Department is accused of hiding key evidence that connects Officer Michael Holman to the murder of Ms. Jeschke, including his use of her credit card posthumously, his truck's presence at her home during the crime, and her earrings in his closet, alongside his implication in similar crimes.

However, the report added that Missouri's Attorney General Andrew Bailey has requested an appellate court review of a ruling ordering Hemmes' release within 30 days, potentially delaying

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her freedom.
On November 12, 1980, Patricia Jeschke was found murdered in her St. Joseph, Missouri home, leading to the conviction of Sandra Hemme in 1981 after a contested trial and subsequent retrial in 1985.

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US Expects Zelenskyy to Come to Washington for NATO Summit - White House

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) - The United States expects Volodymyr Zelenskyy to visit Washington in July for NATO's anniversary summit and a NATO-Ukraine Council meeting, Senior Director for Europe at the US National Security Council Michael Carpenter said on Wednesday.
"We expect President Zelenskyy to come and to hold a NATO-Ukraine Council meeting at the leaders' level," Carpenter told reporters.
He said Ukraine will be an important topic on the agenda of the NATO summit but declined to comment on potential deliverables. He also pointed out that members of the alliance are currently discussing how they can support Ukraine.
The 75th NATO summit will take place from July 9-11 in Washington.
The US and its allies have yet to reach a consensus on how strongly they are going to commit to Ukraine's NATO membership during the summit, CNN reported earlier in the day, citing US and European sources familiar with the matter.
On Friday, President Vladimir Putin said that Russia would immediately cease fire and begin negotiations with Ukraine after Kiev withdraws troops from the regions incorporated into Russia in 2022 and officially abandons plans to join NATO.

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US, NATO Cannot Develop Hypersonic Weapons for at Least 20 Years - Top Expert

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) - The United States and NATO will not be able to develop and deploy operational hypersonic weapons for at least another 20 years and possibly longer because they are so far behind in the vital technologies, NATO's top expert in the field said on Wednesday, according to Defense News.
NATO Science and Technology Organization Executive Officer for Applied Vehicle Technology Kerstin Huber told the US publication that the development process for the weapons, which have already been operationally fielded by Russia and China, will take at least another two decades.
The weapons were still decades away from any operational deployment and their development needed to be carried out collaboratively by Alliance members and not by the United States alone, Huber said, speaking to Defense One at the Eurasatory 2024 defense show in Paris.

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Hypersonic weapons fly at Mach 5, or five times the speed of sound - well over 3,000 miles per hour - and unlike ballistic missiles can be maneuvered, making them almost impossible to intercept in flight. They also generate extreme heat and therefore need many advanced ceramics and other difficult to develop and produce exotic materials.

Huber said Australia has more space than the United States to test the vehicles, while European nations are able to provide vital resources including scientists and simulation capabilities.

The US Congressional Budget Office acknowledged in a 2023 report that repeated test failures in recent years have delayed US progress in developing the new weapons.

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US, Allies Sending Weapons to Ukraine to Strengthen Possible Negotiating Position - NSC

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) - The United States and its allies are continuing weapons deliveries to Ukraine in an effort to strengthen the negotiating position of the regime in Kiev for possible peace talks, White House National Security Council Senior Director for Europe Michael Carpenter said on Wednesday.

"What we – the United States and our allies and partners who support Ukraine – are trying to do is strengthen Ukraine's ability to defend itself, to liberate additional territory and to negotiate, if they choose to, from a position of strength," Carpenter said in response to a question from Sputnik on whether continued arms deliveries will prolong the conflict.

The Kremlin has repeatedly warned that continuing arms deliveries to Ukraine will extend fighting. Moreover, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that cargo containing weapons for Ukraine will be considered legitimate targets for Russian strikes.

Earlier this month, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Russia would immediately enact a ceasefire and begin negotiations with Ukraine if the Kiev regime withdraws troops from Russian territory and abandons plans to join NATO. However, Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy rejected the proposal as an ultimatum.

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Woman Claims US Congressman Matt Gaetz Paid Her for Sex - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) - A woman interviewed by the US House Ethics Committee claimed that Congressman Matt Gaetz paid her for sex, ABC News reported on Wednesday.

The woman told lawmakers on the panel that Gaetz paid her for sex, while other witnesses claimed that they were paid to attend parties with Gaetz, which featured sex and drugs, the report said, citing multiple sources familiar with the matter.

The Ethics Committee has been conducting closed-door interviews with witnesses as part of its probe into Gaetz's alleged sexual misconduct and illicit drug use. Gaetz has denied the accusations against him.

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The panel interviewed at least half a dozen women who also served as witnesses in a US Justice Department investigation into alleged sex trafficking tied to Gaetz. In 2023, the Justice Department informed Gaetz that it would not bring charges as a result of the investigation.

However, Gaetz's associate, Joel Greenberg, was sentenced to 11 years in prison for sex trafficking a minor and other charges.

On Tuesday, the panel said in a statement on their probe that there has been a "significant and unusual" amount of reporting on their activities. Much of the reporting has been inaccurate, the statement said.

Nevertheless, the committee determined that certain allegations against Gaetz merit further review, the statement added.

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US, Allies Debating How Strongly to Commit to Ukraine's Future in NATO at Summit - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) – The United States and its allies have yet to reach a consensus on how strongly they are going to commit to Ukraine's NATO membership during the alliance's anniversary summit in July, CNN reported on Wednesday, citing US and European sources familiar with the matter.

Some European countries, particularly those close to Russia's border, are criticizing the US for not being ready to go as far as they want, the report said.

US and German officials have proposed that NATO promise that Ukraine has a "bridge" to NATO membership instead of an "irreversible path," which some Eastern European countries insist on, it added.

One senior US official emphasized that the White House doubted that the whole alliance and Hungary, in particular, would support the word "irreversible."

Another US official said that some NATO members are also reluctant to use the word because Ukraine has yet to implement all the necessary reforms, according to the report.

"Most Central European countries are disappointed by the Biden administration's ambiguity and procrastination," a Central European diplomat was quoted as saying in the report.

Another European official pointed out that European allies have been directly lobbying the White House to make Ukraine's pathway as clear as possible, according to the report.

"We instinctively feel a new path should be laid out," another official said. "Fast tracking [Ukraine's membership] should be looked at," the official was quoted in the report.

On Friday, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Russia would immediately cease fire and begin negotiations with Ukraine after Kiev withdraws troops from the regions incorporated into Russia in 2022 and officially abandons plans to join NATO

The 75th NATO summit will take place from July 9-11 in Washington.

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