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Namibian Opposition Demands Genocide Recognition Deal With Germany be 'Renegotiated'
By - Fantine Gardinier

The leader of the opposition in the Namibian parliament has written a letter to the German foreign ministry insisting that negotiations for payments in recognition of Berlin's colonial genocide in the country be redone with input from the affected communities.
McHenry Venaani, leader of the People's Democratic Movement (PDM), has written a letter to German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock asking for the $1.3 billion settlement to be "renegotiated" and "restructured," Deutsche Welle reported.
"There are descendants of genocide victims living in Botswana and South Africa - and they are left to fend for themselves," he told the German state-owned outlet. He said that representatives from organizations of the two tribes targeted for extermination, the Ovaherero Traditional Authority (OTA) and the Nama Traditional Leaders Association (NTLA), were not included in the talks.
"Reparations have not been recognized as a consequence of the admission of genocide," Venaani said, according to AFP, calling on Germany "to come back to the negotiating table and rework an agreement that would satisfy both groups."
"It seems like this issue in Germany is only about gaining political power," OGF chairman Nandiuasora Mazeingo also told DW. "But we will outlast these governments because we are on the right side of history!"
"We are not going to sign a sham agreement that makes Germany look good on the international stage," Mazeingo added.
Venaani told DW he wants a clear, legal recognition of the genocide, and to push for both a larger monetary sum as well as "a package that will sustainably improve the socio-economic conditions of the affected communities." That could also include a formal apology from Berlin.
The German foreign ministry told DW it doesn't reply to open letters. Last week, Berlin rejected appeals for new negotiations.
The deal was agreed to by the German and Namibian governments in May 2021, the product of six years of negotiations, in which the German government will admit that it carried out a genocide in Namibia while the country was a German colony in the early 20th century, and will pay out a $1.22 billion settlement over the next 30 years, amounting to $40.67 million per year.
However, it was almost immediately rejected by representatives from the Ovaherero and Nama tribes, who said that the cash settlement was inadequate in terms of both the amount and the failure to address the entire scope of outcomes from the killings and land evictions.
The tribes have also accused their own government, led by the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO), of failing to take their considerations into account. SWAPO is dominated by the Ovambo people, who were not targets of the German massacres. In

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September of last year, protesters stormed the Namibian parliament demanding the deal be rejected, which they called “the fake genocide deal.”

Lasting Legacy of Colonialism

Germany claimed the territory of Namibia for itself in 1884, calling it “German South West Africa,” and settlers poured into the arid land, coming into conflict with local tribes like the Herero and Nama. In 1904, several tribes launched a joint revolt against German land seizures and plans to force them into reservations, and the German response was devastating. German commander Lothar von Trotha, who was sent to crush the uprising, ordered that “every Herero, with or without rifles, with or without cattle, will be shot,” giving a similar order for the Nama people the following year.

The German colonial forces drove the African tribes off their lands and into the harsh deserts of the interior, sealing off their wells and watering holes to stop them from returning. Those who survived the desert were put into concentration camps and used as slave labor, where many more died. In the end, 80% of the 100,000-strong Herero people and 50% of the 10,000-strong Nama people had been killed by 1908.

After World War I, the territory was ceded to the victorious United Kingdom and became a colony of South Africa, being subjected to the same apartheid white supremacist system as the rest of the country. However, SWAPO led an insurgency against South African rule and secured independence for Namibia in 1990, as South Africa’s invasion of neighboring Angola collapsed and the anti-apartheid movement inside South Africa grew stronger. White Apartheid rule in South Africa ended just four years later, in 1994.

SWAPO has been the ruling party ever since and has overseen attempts at reforming land ownership and the legal code. However, the country’s colonial legacy persists in many ways, including in the distribution of wealth: white descendants of German and South African settlers constitute just 6% of Namibia’s population but hold roughly 80% of its wealth, including 72% of all agricultural land.

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'Ruinous at Home, Dangerous Abroad': Biden Policies Ignore Suffering for Political Goals - Expert

By - Fantine Gardinier

After a consumer report showed inflation only slightly declined last month, US stocks crashed, erasing billions in wealth. Depreciation of the dollar is being driven by US policies at home and overseas, but it’s normal Americans who are suffering because of it, not the elites who make the policies, a former Wall Street investor said.

US President Joe Biden has authorized billions of dollars in military aid to Ukraine over the last nine months and requested billions more, while at the same time pushing a boycott of Russian energy exports on nations around the world that is driving up oil prices and making inflation even worse.

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The Tuesday report from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics showed consumer prices had increased by 8.3% in August 2022 over their prices in August 2021, meaning little impact has been made fighting inflation. Despite this, and despite a Commerce Department report showing the US is technically in a recession, the Biden administration has continued to claim that all is well in the US economy.

Political commentator and former hedge fund manager Charles Ortel told Sputnik on Wednesday that "inflation is a cruel and unforgiving tax" that hurts the poor the most, who are likely to vote against the Democrats in the November elections if things fail to improve.

"The Biden 'administration' from the president-down is peopled with economically illiterate hacks on a political mission to replace regulated capitalism with government-controlled socialism. Their lens is not whether individuals are better or worse off financially - in the main they care about power and control and they seem to believe they will retain power for years, whether or not voters are happy," he said.

"Throughout modern American history, voters have cared most about whether after-tax incomes are rising faster than the cost of living, and about whether they are safe in their communities. Abundant evidence across America suggests that Biden initiatives are ruinous at home and dangerous abroad. So, Democrats and RINOS (Republicans in Name Only) who support them should be worried about the looming elections on 8 November 2022. Yet, Biden and his supporters still project confidence in their chances."

"If events continue on their downward trajectory through the elections, a rout should happen, as happened in 2010. But we shall soon see whether Biden critics turn out to vote, or whether they will be intimidated or worse come election day."

Noting that for economists, making predictions about inflation "seems more like a SWAG - 'sophisticated wild-ass guess,'" Ortel noted three questions that dominate the concerns of ordinary American households:

1.
how do we keep the lights on and the heat running?
2.
how shall we change our diets to afford soaring price increases in basic foodstuffs?
3.
how can we ever hope to make better lives for our children and save for retirement?

"Absent a deep recession or a depression, inflation could soar into double digits in America, particularly if we have a cold winter here. And for about 85% of American households, inflation is a cruel and unforgiving tax, one that hurts the poorest among us the most, as the wealthy can dip into savings to defray rising costs," he noted.

"By their callous actions, Washington, DC, insiders in both parties show they care most about holding onto power and little about the consequences to constituents of their dangerous and foolhardy programs."

Ortel noted that since the end of the Cold War, "America and her allies have rushed to embrace unregulated globalism - a system where no national government is strong enough or willing to hold multinational enterprises in check, whether these are profit-seeking or non-profit organizations."

This system, he says, "has entrenched power in a handful of self-proclaimed 'elites' who are much wealthier and more powerful than they were in 1989," widening the gap between rich and

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poor in America and the world. The contest between these worlds is part of the present political struggle, both domestically and internationally.
“The world teetered on a cliff 14 years ago in September 2008 - since then, actions by central banks to suppress benchmark interest rates below inflation and by governments to borrow and spend more money than they generated in tax revenues [have] created a cruel illusion that we were better off. In truth, these central banks and governments face a tougher reckoning as America and other nations will be forced to raise benchmark interest rates, making the cost of accumulated debts and ongoing deficits potentially overwhelming,” he said.
“Soon, we may find out just who may be too big to fail and whether failure is an option.”

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New Strikes in Tigray Capital as TPLF Says It’s Killed ‘Tens of Thousands’ of Ethiopians, Eritreans
By - Fantine Gardinier

Health officials in Mekelle, the capital of Ethiopia’s Tigray state, have reported 10 deaths following a pair of airstrikes by Ethiopian forces on Wednesday. It was the second strike in as many days, and comes as the governing Tigray People’s Liberation Army (TPLF) claimed to be slaughtering Eritrean and Ethiopian forces in the northern state.
Kibrom Gebreselassie, the CEO of Ayder Referral Hospital, Mekelle’s main hospital, told Agence France-Presse (AFP) that two airstrikes had hit a Mekelle neighborhood, killing 10 people and injuring at least 14 others. The agency noted it could not independently confirm the claims of the strike or of the death toll.
The reported strikes come a day after another strike, also allegedly carried out by a drone, hit Mekelle University. No one was killed in the attack, but at least one person was injured. Photos posted on social media by Tigrayan officials showed damaged trucks and a person with a small cut on their knee.
TPLF Claims Eritrean Advances
The strikes come as fighting reportedly continues in western Tigray, where the TPLF has engaged Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) troops and, reportedly, Eritrean forces. Tadesse Worede, commander of the TPLF’s armed forces, said on Tuesday that "Eritrean forces are in Sheraro,” a town about 8 miles from the Eritrean border in northwestern Tigray. The TPLF claimed Eritrea launched an offensive in the area in conjunction with ENDF forces last week, but there has been no confirmation of that by Asmara or non-TPLF sources.
Addis Ababa has claimed that it was the TPLF who initiated the fighting in western Tigray, launching an offensive to reclaim the four westernmost woredas and open a land bridge to Sudan, where the group has reportedly been recruiting irregular forces from refugee camps. A day after the fighting resumed, on August 25, the ENDF said it had shot down a transport plane flying from Sudan to Tigray carrying arms. It gave no details about the type or size of the aircraft.
New Ceasefire Offer, New Demands

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Prior to the new fighting last month, which both sides have accused each other of initiating, months of preparations had seemingly finally set the stage for peace talks to begin between the TPLF and the government of Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. On Friday, the TPLF offered a truce via a letter to the United Nations, and on Monday offered to accept the proposed mediation of peace talks by the African Union, something it had previously rejected as impossible.

The ceasefire offer, however, was followed by gloating by TPLF spokesperson Getachew Reda, who claimed the Ethiopian-Eritrean offensive had “hit a brick wall” and that “tens of thousands of Eritreans & Ethiopians along with numerous commanders have been killed in engagements the last few days in the south and western fronts.”

The group has also renewed other demands previously part of the peace talks, including for the restoration of electricity, internet and banking services, and for food aid convoys to return - the lattermost of which were canceled by the UN World Food Program (WFP), not Abiy’s government.

However, the TPLF has also added new demands, such as that the ENDF totally withdraw from Tigray, including the four westernmost woredas that it has occupied since the conflict began in November 2020. The districts were once part of Amhara state, but added to Tigray when the TPLF seized power from the Derg military regime in 1991.

Revolt Against Abiy

That insurrection began after two years of waning influence over Ethiopian politics, following Abiy’s appointment as prime minister. Ethnic parties allied to the TPLF rejected its dominating position and nominated Abiy, the first Oromo to ever hold the office, and he immediately set about reducing the TPLF’s influence and reversing many of its policies. Later that year, he received a Nobel Peace Prize for ending the 20-year-long war with Eritrea that had killed 120,000 people.

Foreign governments and international organizations have urged both sides to end the fighting, with the European Union on Wednesday throwing its weight behind the AU-led peace process. "The Ethiopian government is committed to the AU-led peace process and expressed hope that the EU would support efforts to end the conflict peacefully," Ethiopian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Demeke Mekonnen told Rita Laranjinha, Director for Africa at the European External Action Service, on Wednesday.

The war has worsened an already-dire situation as a drought plagues the region. Across Ethiopia, more than 20 million people are in need of food aid - one-fifth of the country’s population - including 5.4 million in Tigray, according to the WFP.

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California Files Antitrust Lawsuit Against Amazon, Company Accused of Being Anticompetitive
By - Mary Manley

On Wednesday, the state of California sued the company Amazon, the world’s largest retailer and cloud service provider, alleging that they are monopolizing their market and inflating prices

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by creating restrictive deals with their sellers. The state accuses Amazon of making Californians pay more than they should for their products.

“For years, California consumers have paid more for their online purchases because of Amazon's anticompetitive contracting practices,” California Attorney General Rob Bonta said in a statement. “Amazon coerces merchants into agreements that keep prices artificially high, knowing full well that they can't afford to say no.”

Amazon is accused of actively penalizing sellers if they offer their products for lower prices on competing websites. For instance, if the company finds one of their sellers marketing a product for a lower price on a competing website, they allegedly remove the “Buy Now” or “Add to Cart” buttons from the products page as a way to punish the seller for their “disloyalty” to Amazon.

In doing so, the online retail giant is said to be in violation of California’s Unfair Competition Law and Cartwright Act, according to the Prosecutor’s Office.

“With today’s lawsuit, we’re fighting back,” Bonta added. “We won’t allow Amazon to bend the market to its will at the expense of California consumers, small-business owners and a fair and competitive economy.”

Amazon is making it difficult for other merchants to compete, they are dominating the online retail market, the complaint alleges, and in doing so, they are forcing consumers to pay more for their products with artificially inflated prices and fees.

In one instance, a “large consumer electronics device supplier” tried to offer a discount to their shoppers through a competitor of Amazon. Amazon then demanded $100,000 from the supplier in order to maintain their profit margin deal. Following the confrontation, the supplier was less likely to offer discounts on products.

“Without basic price competition, without different online sites trying to outdo each other with lower prices, prices artificially stabilize at levels higher than would be the case in a competitive market,” the complaint said.

Merchants are also in a tight corner when it comes to selling on Amazon. Selling their products on competing websites would be cheaper and more cost-effective, but Amazon is such a popular website in the consumer industry that sellers don’t want to miss out on the market. Therefore they’d rather risk raising their prices on other sites than risk getting penalized by Amazon, which has more than 160 million Prime members nationwide and about 25 million customers in California alone, according to the Prosecutor's Office.

The Prosecutor’s Office also found in a survey among consumers that 96% of all Prime members say they are more likely to buy products from Amazon as opposed to other online stores, while 74% of all consumers go directly to Amazon when in search of a specific product.

“With other e-commerce platforms unable to compete on price, consumers turn to Amazon as a one-stop shop for all their purchases,” the Prosecutor’s Office said. “This perpetuates Amazon's market dominance, allowing the company to make increasingly untenable demands on its merchants and costing consumers more at checkout across California. The reality is: Many of the products we buy online would be cheaper if market forces were left unconstrained.”

The Prosecutor’s Office is seeking damages for California’s consumers and the state’s economy as well as other penalties and is requesting Amazon cease their anticompetitive behavior through the San Francisco Superior Court.

A similar lawsuit took place last year when D.C. Attorney General Karl A. Racine filed an antitrust lawsuit against the retailer to end their anticompetitive practices, but the suit was

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thrown out this year. Racine filed a notice in August to appeal the decision. The Federal Trade Commission has also been investigating the company's monopoly practices, while Capitol Hill has kept its eyes on the retailer and is hoping to combat these same egregious tactics. Amazon has responded with extensive lobbying campaigns.

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R. Kelly Convicted of Child Pornography, Acquitted of Fixing 2008 Child Pornography Trial
By - Mary Manley

Kelly was first arrested in July of 2019 before being sentenced to 30 years in prison on nine counts of racketeering and sex trafficking charges in June after he sexually abused children. Accusations of Kelly's sexual abuse date back more than three decades, but last year was the first time Kelly had been criminally charged for his crimes.

On Wednesday, disgraced R&B artist R. Kelly was found guilty on three counts of child enticement into criminal sexual activity and on three counts of producing child sexual abuse imagery. A 12-person jury convicted the 55 year old on six of 13 charges against him. Those six crimes involved the same 14-year-old girl who goes by the pseudonym Jane.

Kelly was acquitted on charges that he conspired to obstruct justice stemming from a 2002 state case. That case involved one of Kelly's victims who met with Kelly and her parents for a meeting after reports began to circulate that there was a video of Kelly and Jane engaging in sexual acts. At that meeting, according to Jane, Kelly admitted he was having a sexual relationship with Jane.

The victim and her father received subpoenas to testify before a grand jury in 2002, where Jane denied having a sexual relationship with Kelly and appearing in his child pornography videos. Before the jury in this year's case, Jane testified that in 2002, Kelly had a conversation with Jane about "loyalty" and "denying" the relationship as well as the sex tape.

In 2008, Kelly was acquitted of child pornography charges in Chicago because Jane, the victim shown in the video tapes, denied that it was her.

Jane met R. Kelly when she was only 13. At some point, Kelly became Jane's godfather, so her parents felt comfortable letting her spend the night, and even the weekend, at his home without supervision. She was 14 when she and Kelly began a sexual relationship. Jane, who is now 37, testified that she and Kelly had sex "hundreds" of times before she turned 18.

Jane decided in 2019 to cooperate with investigators years after she was sexually abused by Kelly. "I no longer wanted to carry his lies," Jane testified.

Wednesday's sentence could add years to Kelly's 30-year prison sentence handed down in Brooklyn last year.

"There was a mixed verdict, but we won more counts than we lost," Jennifer Bonjean, Kelly's lawyer, said outside court following the verdict. "If this jury concluded that he was guilty on the first three counts, would they care enough to consider the evidence on the rest? And they demonstrated that they did. They did their job. They looked at each count separately."

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Kelly was placed on suicide watch at the Metropolitan Detention Center in July after he was sentenced to 30 years in prison. His lawyer, Bonjean, argued that the singer was not suicidal and that he was placed on watch only as a "punishment" by the guard in the prison. She said the detention center is run like a "gulag" and that when she and her associates called the prison to learn of Kelly's status, the guards hung up on them multiple times and "laughed and were highly unprofessional." Kelly's legal team filed a lawsuit and was removed from suicide watch in the prison as a result.

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Taking Multivitamins Daily May Slow Cognitive Decline in Older Adults
By - Mary Manley

Researchers were shocked by the results of the study, which found that daily multivitamins may be associated with improved brain function in older adults. Experts in the field of Alzheimer's disease and dementia are also excited about the finding, but caution that larger studies are needed before multivitamins can be clinically recommended.

The study, published in Alzheimer's Association, the journal of the Alzheimer's Association, surveyed 2,262 people all aged 65 and older, and followed those individuals for three years after they signed up between August 2016 and August 2017 for the survey. The study found that daily vitamins may slow cognitive decline by about 60% (or about two years) and is most effective in seniors who have a history of cardiovascular disease.

"We provide the first evidence in a long-term, randomized controlled trial of older women and men that daily use of a safe, readily accessible, and low-cost multivitamin-mineral can improve cognition," the researchers wrote. "This finding could have important public health implications for brain health and resilience against future cognitive decline."

The participants of the trial, which is referred to as COSMOS-Mind, were divided into four groups: one group took daily multivitamins as well as cocoa extract containing flavonoids (phytonutrients that have anti-inflammatory effects and protect cells from oxidative damage), another group who took only the cocoa supplement, a third group that took only multivitamins, and a fourth group who took a placebo.

The researchers found that cocoa had no effect on the participants' cognitive functions, but that multivitamins showed improvements in the brain function of those taking them over the course of three years, and had a particularly significant impact on the cognitive function in those with cardiovascular disease, which is a known risk factor and can slow cognitive functions.

"It's well-known that those with cardiovascular risk factors could have lower levels in their blood of vitamins and minerals. So supplementing those vitamins and minerals could improve cardiovascular health and, by virtue of that, improve cognitive health -- and we know that there's a strong connection between cardiovascular health and brain health," said Dr. Keith Vossel, a professor of neurology and director of the Mary S. Easton Center for Alzheimer's Research and Care at the University of California, but who was not involved in the study.

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"If we can really eliminate or really prevent chronic diseases, we could prevent dementias," he added. "Roughly up to 40% of dementia could be prevented with just better preventative measures throughout life's span."

Vossel warns that researchers have “been down this road before” in studying the connection between vitamins and cognition. For instance, some health professionals began recommending vitamin E to help boost cognition after research showed promising results that it would help combat Alzheimer’s and dementia, says Vossel, but since then results have been mixed.

Jeff Kaye, who directs Oregon Health & Science University’s aging and Alzheimer’s center and was not a part of the study, is also skeptical of the findings.

“You could score a point better when you take the test a year later, and it’s statistically significant,” said Kaye. “But does that translate into anything meaningful in a person’s life?”

The researchers are planning a second trial in the future and will be using more diverse participants, as one dementia specialist noted that the COSMOS-Mind study focused primarily on white people with high levels of education.

“While these preliminary findings are promising, additional research is needed in a larger and more diverse group of people. Also, we still have work to do to better understand why multivitamins might benefit cognition in older adults,” said Professor Laura Baker, co-principal investigator on the Cosmos study at Wake Forest University.

A similar study reported by CNN in early August showed one way that adults can slow their cognitive function: ultra processed foods. The study found that eating processed foods like pre-packaged soups, frozen pizzas and ready-to-eat meals for more than 20% of one’s daily calorie intake can slow cognitive function.

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GOP NJ Candidate: Eliminate Welfare, Revive Trump’s ‘Platinum Plan’

By - Ian DeMartino

In an interview with Sputnik’s The Backstory, Republican congressional candidate for New Jersey’s 12th district Darius Mayfield laid out his plan for alternatives to reparations.

Host Lee Stranahan and guest co-host Carmine Sabia asked Mayfield what he thought about reparations, and the candidate brought up former President Trump’s “platinum plan,” an October 2020 proposal intended to increase Trump’s popularity with black voters. It included investments in “peaceful” urban neighborhoods, increasing policing standards, expanding school choice and increasing black home ownership, and the creation of a national clemency project.

It also called for designating “antifa” a terrorist organization along with the Ku Klux Klan.

Mayfield mentioned the plan, saying that black Americans had something similar to reparations “in the palm of their hands” with Donald Trump’s platinum plan.

“We spend over a trillion dollars a year on just welfare services in this country. I know that the whole trillion isn’t just black people, but a large chunk of it is. My plan for what I guess we can call reparations of a sort is to ultimately eliminate some of those welfare benefits and things like that for this population and introduce what Donald Trump wanted to introduce,” Mayfield told

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The Backstory. “Bonds for economic investment, opportunity zones, fixing our schools, creating school choice. So, I do believe in a form of reparations. We do understand that there is a long history in this country between black and white people with what happened. [...] we want to do it the right way.”
Elsewhere in the interview, Mayfield talked about the decrease in black farmers in the country as a major concern and laid out how he thinks Republicans can win elections in the state of New Jersey by getting more Republicans out to vote.
Mayfield was the only candidate for the Republican nomination in New Jersey’s 12th district. He will face Democratic incumbent Bonnie Watson Coleman and Libertarian candidate C. Lynn Genrich in November’s midterm election.

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European Commission Proposes Ban on Forced Labor Goods
By - Ian DeMartino

China has been accused of using forced labor to produce many of the goods it exports, an accusation that it denies.
The European Commission proposed a ban on the sale of forced labor products in the European Union on Wednesday.
While no countries are listed in the proposal, it is seen as a move to add pressure on China, in addition to moves by the United States. It comes after a call from the European Parliament to pass such a law after human rights violations were alleged in China’s Xinjiang region.
China has been accused of abusing the largely Muslim Uyghur minority in Xinjiang, with the United States accusing China of genocide in the region. China denies any abuses in the region.
The United States banned the importation of goods from Xinjiang in 2021.
Under the proposal, member countries would be required to appoint “competent authorities” to determine if products were created by forced labor and ban their sale in the country. The ban would apply to all levels of production, including the extraction and harvest of raw materials and the production of components.
Amendments to the proposal are expected before it is voted on. If passed, the proposal is not expected to affect supply chains in a major way, but it could cause companies to take a closer look at where they source their components and materials.
The proposal cites the International Labour Organization, which says more than 27.6 million people are used in forced labor in the world. It also notes that an estimated 15.1 million forced laborers reside in the Asia Pacific region.
However, it is worth pointing out that US prison labor accounts for the production of $2 billion in goods annually, in addition to another $9 billion in services. While it could be argued some of that is not forced labor because prisoners sometimes volunteer for work, 76% of prison laborers report that they were forced to work or face additional punishment, including solitary confinement.

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While the 13th amendment of the United States Constitution banned slavery in the United States, it made an exception for those incarcerated after being convicted of a crime.
It is not clear if the proposal would affect goods created in the United States using prison labor. When asked, a spokesperson for the European Commission referred Sputnik to a press information sheet. Follow-up questions remained unanswered at press time.

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Sanders Blocks Resolution That Would Have Forced Rail Workers to Accept Deal
By - Ian DeMartino

Rail workers are set to strike on Friday if a deal is not reached. A Presidential Emergency Board was commissioned in August to make recommendations to break the impasse. On Monday, Republicans introduced a resolution that would force the union to accept the deal laid out by the board.
On Wednesday, Senator Bernie Sanders prevented the quick passage of a Republican-led resolution that would have forced rail workers back to work before a strike that is set to begin on Friday if unions and rail industry companies cannot come to an agreement before then.
The resolution was proposed by Republican Senators Roger Wicker of Mississippi and Richard Burr of North Carolina. It would require workers, who have been negotiating for better working conditions for three years, to accept the outline laid out by the Presidential Emergency Board (PEB) formed by President Biden in August.
While the workers and rail companies have agreed to compensation levels, the key sticking points that remain are the lack of sick days, paid or unpaid, and a grueling on-call schedule that requires rail workers to be on-call for 12 hours a day for 14 straight days and be ready to get to the job at a moment's notice. Workers are demanding 15 paid sick days a year and a more reasonable on-call schedule.
The proposal includes a pay increase of 24%, an annual bonus of $1,000 and one additional day of paid leave, but does not include any sick days. If a deal is not reached by Friday, a strike will begin, shutting down freight rails across the country. It has been estimated that the strike could cost $2 billion a year.
Sanders blocked the resolution, arguing that the rail companies are reaping billions in profits while forcing their workers to endure horrible working conditions.
"The rail industry has seen huge profits in recent years and last year alone made a record breaking $20 billion in profit," Sanders said on the Senate floor. "The CEOs of many of these rail companies are enjoying huge compensation packages. For example, last year the CEO of CSX made over $20 million in total compensation, while the CEOs of Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern made over $14 million each in total compensation. In other words, what is happening in the rail industry is what is happening all over this country. Corporate profits are soaring and CEOs are making incredibly large compensation packages."
The Vermont senator would later mention that "the rail industry spent over $18 billion, not to improve rail safety, not to address the supply chain crisis in America, but to buy back its own

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stock and hand out huge dividends to its wealthy stockholders. In fact, since 2010, the rail industry has spent over $183 billion on stock buybacks and dividends."
Sanders then went on to compare the conditions of rail workers to that of employees at the Department of Transportation.
"If you are an employee at the Department of Transportation in the United States, sitting behind a desk, you are appropriately, I believe this very much, guaranteed 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave. But if you are an engineer, running a train with tons of freight behind you, a very dangerous job, you get zero sick leave. Now, that may make sense to someone, but it does not make sense to me."
He also noted that providing rail workers with 15 days of sick pay would cost an estimated $688 million a year, which is less than 3.5% of the profit made by the industry.
While the leaders of 10 of the 12 unions have accepted the outline laid out by the PEB, the two largest, which make up roughly half of rail workers in the United States, have not. In addition, the 10 who have accepted it have not put a vote to the rank-and-file members of the union, which is required before it is accepted.
The unions could be forced to accept the deal because of a 1926 law that governs how and when rail workers can strike.
Republican Senator Minority leader Mitch McConnell called out the Democrats for blocking the Burr-Wicker resolution, saying it would have "prevented a crippling strike and supply chain crisis."
However, on the Senate floor, Sanders, who is independent, said it was time for Congress to stand with the American worker.
"It is time for Congress to stand on the side of workers for a change, and not the heads of large multinational corporations. Rail workers have a right to strike for reliable schedules, they have a right to strike for paid sick days, they have a right to strike for safe worker conditions, rail workers have a right to strike for decent benefits. The Burr-Wicker resolution would take these fundamental rights away from workers. We cannot allow that to happen."

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Lebanese Citizens Are Robbing Banks For Their Own Money
By - Ian DeMartino

Lebanon has been dealing with a financial crisis that has limited bank withdrawals for three years. The World Bank says the financial crisis in Lebanon is one of the worst in the world since the mid-19th century.
On Wednesday, two banks were robbed in Lebanon by customers who wanted access to their own money. In the first case, a woman and a few associates entered BLOM Bank in the capital city of Beirut brandishing a gun. She left with $13,000 of money from her account, according to a depositors' advocacy group (via Reuters).
A short time later, also on Wednesday, a man in the mountain city of Aley entered a Bankmed branch armed with a gun and demanded some of the money trapped in his savings account.

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Last month, a different man held up a bank in Beirut to access his funds to pay for treatments for his sick father. That man took six hostages until he was able to access roughly $30,000 of the $200,000 locked in his account.

The woman who held up the BLOM Bank, Sali Hafiz, spoke to Al Jadeed TV before going into hiding. She says that she had gone into the bank a few days earlier, asking for access to her funds but was denied, adding that she needed the funds to pay for her sister's cancer treatment. She says she even considered selling her kidney to pay for it, before deciding to demand her money back from the bank.

"I have nothing more to lose, I got to the end of the road," Hafiz told Al Jadeed TV, adding that the gun she used to hold up the bank was not real.

A BLOM Bank spokesman told Reuters that Hafiz entered the bank with her associates and threatened to set people on fire if she did not receive the money.

Sali Hafiz's mother, Hiam Hafiz, spoke to a local TV station about her daughter's actions. "All we have is this money in the bank. My daughter was forced to take this money - it's her right, it's in her account - to treat her sister."

Banks in Lebanon claim that they allow customers to withdraw their funds for humanitarian cases, but depositors say that the banks rarely approve withdrawals even in cases of emergencies.

Less is known about the man who demanded his money from the Bankmed branch in Aley, and Bankmed has declined to comment thus far.

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Queen Elizabeth's Death Leaves Vacuum Impossible to Fill - Guterres

UNITED NATIONS, September 15 (Sputnik) - The death of Queen Elizabeth II has left a vacuum which is impossible to fill, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Thursday as the UN General Assembly pays its tribute to the late British monarch.

"Queen Elizabeth's passing leaves a vacuum that will be impossible to fill, particularly for those who knew and loved her best. Her legacy is an inspiring example of leadership that serves," he said.

The UN chief added that Queen Elizabeth spoke of friendship and strong ties between nations. She supported hundreds of global causes that are at the heart of the UN's work, he continued.

"For seven decades, Queen Elizabeth transcended her role to connect at the most human level with everyone she met – world leaders and ordinary people alike. And for that, she was among the most respected and loved global leaders of our age," Guterres said.

Guterres will not attend the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II in the United Kingdom due to his preparations for the General Assembly high-level week. He, however, will be represented by his Chef de Cabinet, Courtenay Rattray.

Queen Elizabeth II passed away on September 8, at the age of 96, at Balmoral Castle in Scotland surrounded by her family, after over 70 years on the British throne. Her eldest son, Charles III, became the new king of the United Kingdom immediately after her death.

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UPDATE - Texas Governor Drops 2 Busloads of Migrants Off Outside Kamala Harris' Residence - Reports

(Changes attribution, adds quote in para 2)

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) – Two buses of migrants sent by Texas Governor Greg Abbott arrived on Thursday morning outside US Vice President Kamala Harris' residence in Washington.

"VP Harris claims our border is 'secure' & denies the crisis," Abbott said in a tweet. "We're sending migrants to her backyard to call on the Biden Administration to do its job & secure the border."

The migrants, approximately 100 people from Venezuela, Uruguay, Colombia and Mexico, were picked up in Eagle Pass, Texas, Fox reported. Non-profit organization Sanctuary DMV told Fox that it had arranged for a church to offer them a "safe location."

The buses arrived hours after Florida Governor Ron DeSantis sent two planes of migrants to Martha's Vineyard on Wednesday. Abbott also recently sent dozens of buses of migrants to DC, New York City, and Chicago. Southern states have been protesting the Biden administration's handling of the border crisis by relocating migrants to so-called sanctuary states.

DC Mayor Muriel Bowser said the city did not have the infrastructure to handle migrants, but would "rise to the occasion." Her two requests for assistance from the National Guard have been denied by the Department of Defense.

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US Unlikely to Provide Long-Range Army Tactical Missiles Systems to Ukraine - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - The United States is unlikely to provide long-range Army Tactical Missile Systems, also known as ATACMS to Ukraine, CNN reported on Thursday, citing officials.

The Biden administration believes that supplying Ukraine with such systems could be too escalatory, as they could be used to strike Russian territory. The weapons might be eventually provided to Ukraine, but such a decision is likely far in the future, the sources said.

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Texas Governor Drops 2 Busloads of Migrants Off Outside Kamala Harris' Residence - Reports

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The migrants, approximately 100 people from Venezuela, Uruguay, Colombia and Mexico, were picked up in Eagle Pass, Texas. Non-profit organization Sanctuary DMV told Fox that it had arranged for a church to offer them a "safe location."

The buses arrived hours after Florida Governor Ron DeSantis sent two planes of migrants to Martha's Vineyard on Wednesday. Abbott also recently sent dozens of buses of migrants to DC, New York City, and Chicago. Southern states have been protesting the Biden administration's handling of the border crisis by relocating migrants to so-called sanctuary states.

DC Mayor Muriel Bowser said the city did not have the infrastructure to handle migrants, but would "rise to the occasion." Her two requests for assistance from the National Guard have been denied by the Department of Defense.

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Biden Order on Foreign Investments Linked to Ukraine-Related Sanctions - Senior Official

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden's executive order to enhance the federal government's review of foreign investments in the United States was driven in part by concerns raised over the Ukraine-related sanctions, a senior Biden administration official said.

"Without getting into any specific cases, which we can't do of course, I do think that the review of certain cases really has kind of brought out some of the specific concerns that we're addressing here," the official said during a conference call with reporters.

The official's comment came in response to a question about whether cases involving Ukraine-related sanctions or investigations against Russian and Chinese entities caused the Biden administration to bolster the government's review of foreign investments in the United States.

The executive order places a special importance on protecting US supply chain resilience, both industrial and defense, as well as sensitive data and the United States' technological leadership, the official said.

The executive order is not country specific but recognizes that some countries exploit the United States' open investment ecosystem to further their own national security priorities, the official added.

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Biden to Issue Order to Bolster Review of Foreign Investor Transactions - Senior Official

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WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden will issue an executive order later on Thursday that would direct an interagency committee to bolster its review of transactions involving foreign investments in key sectors that may impact US national security, a senior Biden administration official said.

"The President will be signing the first ever presidential directive since CFIUS [Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States] was established in 1975 to provide formal presidential direction on national security risks that from the administration's perspective are important for CFIUS to consider in evaluating transactions by foreign investors making investments here in the United States," the official said during a conference call with reporters.

The executive order places a special importance on protecting US supply chain resilience, both industrial and defense, as well as on sensitive data and on the Unite States' technological leadership, the official said.

The official said the executive order is not country specific, noting that some countries exploit the United States' open investment ecosystem to further their own national security priorities.

The executive order does not expand or limit the legal authorities or jurisdiction of the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States, the official added.

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More Than Half of US Student Loan Borrowers Cannot Afford Resuming Payments – Poll

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) – More than half of US student loan borrowers say they will not be able to afford their loan payments when the current moratorium expires in January, according to a Morning Consult poll released Thursday.

Fifty-eight percent of respondents reported that they would either "probably not" or "definitely not" be able to afford their payments. Women (66%) and adults in households earning less than $50,000 per year (68%) were more likely to be unable to make their payments.

The average borrower has about $29,000 in student loan debt. Of those who owe $25,000 or less, 54% said that paying their loans was unaffordable.

The survey was conducted on August 27-28 among 715 US adults with student loans.

The White House announced last month that student loan payments will resume next year and at least $10,000 of student loan debt will be canceled for each eligible borrower. In March 2020, amid the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Education granted forbearance to holders of federal student loans, with an estimated 60% of all borrowers taking advantage of the program.

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Biden Announces Tentative Deal to Avert Looming Rail Strike

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WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden announced that a preliminary agreement has been reached to prevent a looming freight rail strike that threatened to disrupt supply chains across the country.

The unions, which collectively represent more than 100,000 workers in the US rail industry, demanded better working conditions, threatening to go on strike across the country from September 16. Eight of the 12 unions were reportedly able to reach preliminary agreements, one officially refused, and said it was ready to go on strike on September 29.

"The tentative agreement reached tonight [on Wednesday] is an important win for our economy and the American people. It is a win for tens of thousands of rail workers who worked tirelessly through the pandemic to ensure that America's families and communities got deliveries of what have kept us going during these difficult years," Biden said in a statement released by the White House.

Biden thanked unions, companies, and officials for reaching the agreement that would keep railroads running and prevent disruption to the US economy.

Under the agreement, railway workers will receive higher wages, better working conditions, as well as a solution to a number of problems regarding their health insurance, the US president said.

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US to Announce New Military Package for Ukraine 'Very, Very Soon' - Kirby

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - The United States will provide another package of security assistance to Ukraine "very, very soon" it will include advanced rocket systems, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby told CNN on Thursday.

"I think you'll see that very very soon," Kirby said.

"I think you'll see that it's very consistent with the kinds of capabilities that we've provided to Ukraine in the past, in the recent past as they have fought in the Donbas and in the south - systems like the advanced rocket systems, howitzers and artillery systems that allow them to establish some range and some distance so that they can actually affect the Russians behind their own defensive lines. And I think that you'll see that the package forthcoming will be consistent with those capabilities," he added.

The United States has committed $15.2 billion in security assistance to Ukraine since January 2021, including more than $14.5 billion since the beginning of Russia's special military operation in the country on February 24.

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RPT - US to Be Dragged Into Conflict With Russia if Kiev Gets Long Range Missiles – Antonov

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WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - The United States will be dragged into a military confrontation with Russia if Ukraine receives longer-range missiles or strikes Russian territory, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov told Sputnik.

"Of particular concern is the fact that for many months Ukraine has been soliciting the supply of ATACMS operational-tactical missiles, which are designed to strike targets at a distance of up to 300 km [187 miles]. If Kiev obtains such weapons, large Russian cities, as well as industrial and transport infrastructure facilities will fall into the area of possible destruction," Antonov said.

"Such a scenario would mean direct involvement of the United States in a military confrontation with Russia."

According to Antonov, Kiev has already demonstrated that it will not hesitate to use long-range missile systems to attack Russian territory as it has been the case with the Donetsk and Luhansk People's republics where the Ukrainian armed forces constantly violate the norms of humanitarian law.

On Monday, The Wall Street Journal reported that Kiev had requested Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS) and the US Defense Department is worried Ukrainian forces might use those to strike Russian territory and escalate the conflict.

The list of arms requested for future offensive operations also includes tanks, drones, artillery systems, anti-ship missiles, and ammunition for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS).

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US to Withhold $130Mln in Military Aid to Egypt Over Human Rights Concerns - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - The Untied States will withhold $130 million in military aid to Egypt over human rights concerns but will release $170 million under a waiver, the Associated Press reported citing US officials.

The report said on Wednesday that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken notified Egypt of the Biden administration's decision.

The report said the United States determined Egypt has been making some progress on human rights improvements by releasing some 500 of an estimated 60,000 political prisoners.

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Biden Administration Aims to Decouple Central Asia From Russian Economy - USAID Official

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - The United States is aiming at decoupling the Central Asian region from the Russian economy, USAID Asia Bureau Deputy Assistant Administrator, Anjali Kaur, said at a congressional hearing.

"What we are trying to do in efforts then is to promote regional connectivity, strengthen the democratic institutions, advance the rule of law, respect for human rights as always, you know,

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develop human capital which I think is really critical, foster economic growth and stimulate joint climate action," Kaur said on Wednesday. "All of these priorities we find to be critical to eventually decouple Central Asia from the Russian economy, which should be our goal."
Kaur also said the Ukraine conflict has had serious consequences for the region including impact on the trade routes, financial system as well as migrants who previously lived in Russia.
Kaur's comments come as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is set to hold its 2-day summit in the Central Asian state of Uzbekistan starting on Thursday. Earlier this week, Kremlin aide Yury Ushakov said the SCO offers a real alternative to Western-centric structures and mechanisms.

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US Awards $191Mln Unmanned Drone Contract - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - The United States is awarding over $191 million to Boeing subsidiary Insitu Inc. as part of a contract for reconnaissance drone systems such as the ScanEagle and Blackjack, the Pentagon said in a statement.
"Insitu Inc., Bingen, Washington, is awarded a $191,835,973 firm-fixed-price modification to a previously awarded indefinite-delivery/indefinite-quantity contract. This modification adds scope to procure 13 RQ-21A Blackjack air vehicles, 25 ScanEagle air vehicles, 48 RQ-21A and ScanEagle payloads and turrets, support equipment, spares and sustainment spares and tools in support of RQ-21A Blackjack and ScanEagle unmanned aircraft platforms for the Navy, Marine Corps, and Foreign Military Sales customers," the Pentagon said on Wednesday.
The ScanEagle and Blackjack drones are unmanned aerial vehicles designed for forward reconnaissance. The two drones use the same launch and recovery system.
The ScanEagle systems are among those being sent by the Pentagon to Ukraine for use against Russian forces.

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US to Ensure Provision of Equipment to Ukraine to Continue Offensive Operations - Kirby

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - The United States will ensure the provision of equipment to Ukraine needed to continue that country's offensive operations, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said.
"They are on the offense in the Donbas, and they are on the offense down in Kherson. We want to make sure that we are giving them the tools that they need to continue those offensive operations and be as successful as possible," Kirby said on Wednesday.
Kirby pointed out that the United States will continue to provide artillery as well as long-range missile-type weapon systems.

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Earlier on Wednesday, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov told Sputnik that the United States will be dragged into a military confrontation with Russia if Ukraine receives longer-range missiles or strikes Russian territory.
Antonov said Kiev has already demonstrated that it will not hesitate to use long-range missile systems to attack Russian territory as it has been the case with the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics, where Ukrainian troops constantly violate the norms of humanitarian law and target civilians.
On Monday, The Wall Street Journal reported that Kiev had requested Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS) and the US Defense Department is worried Ukrainian forces might use those to strike Russian territory and escalate the conflict.
The list of arms requested for future offensive operations also includes tanks, drones, artillery systems, anti-ship missiles and ammunition for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS).

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UN Chief, UNICEF Avoid References About Ukraine Site Targeting Children - Russian Diplomat

UNITED NATIONS, September 15 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have avoided references in public and did not change their behavior toward the neo-Nazi Ukrainian website Mirotvorets targeting children, among others, for allegedly being enemies of Ukraine and making their personal information public, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the UNited Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said.
The Russian mission to the United Nations has sent letters to UNICEF about the case of Faina Savenkova, 13, whose private information was placed on the Mirotvorets website because she warned against killing children in the Donbas region.
"The Secretary General carefully avoided references to this issue in public. As for UNICEF, it promised to hold a meeting between the relevant specialist of the Fund and Faina," Polyanskiy said via Twitter on Wednesday.
Polianskiy said despite the fact that the meeting did not take place - UNICEF representatives only notified Faina that a specialist is not able to meet her because of personal reasons - the agency nevertheless claimed it had duly addressed this situation and met Faina.
"This deception and sham was easily exposed but UNICEF changed nothing in its behavior," he said.
The Russian mission immediately shared the relevant information with Guterres and UNICEF but received no reaction from the UN chief and his office or from UNICEF headed by Executive Director Catherine Russel, Polyanskiy said.
In July, the Russian mission has previously submitted a letter to Guterres' office on the fact that 327 children have been listed on the Mirotvorets website as enemies of Ukraine. In addition, senior Russian diplomats met with the UNCEF chief in August and appealed to her that an investigation be undertaken.

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The Mirotvorets website continues to function despite the please of the Russian government to take action against it and the requests by several governments of UN member states to shut it down.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY
WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) -

US-RUSSIA RELATIONS
* The United States' claims of its non-involvement in the Ukraine conflict are untenable, especially after the "bravado" of the Biden administration and the top brass about their role in planning Ukraine's counteroffensive, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov told Sputnik.
* The United States will be dragged into a military confrontation with Russia if Ukraine receives longer-range missiles or strikes Russian territory, Antonov said.
* Russia believes that "curators of Kiev" will not agree to a peaceful settlement and will continue to push it to suicidal adventures, Antonov said.

PUTIN-GUTERRES TALKS
* Russian President Vladimir Putin and United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres discussed the murder of Russian journalist and political scientist Daria Dugina during a phone conversation on Wednesday, the Kremlin said.
* Putin and Guterres discussed preparations for the UN fact-finding mission to Olenivka in Donbas to investigate the July attack on a Russia-controlled jail that killed Ukrainian prisoners of war, the Kremlin said.
* Putin and Guterres discussed the situation around the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP), including the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) mission to the facility, the Kremlin said.
* Putin and Guterres discussed sea deliveries of Ukrainian grain and exports of Russian agriculture products during a phone conversation, the Kremlin said.
* Guterres said that he spoke over the telephone with Russian President Putin in the morning about the Black Sea Initiative concerning grain and fertilizer exports and the ZNPP, among other issues.

TAIWAN
* The US Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Wednesday advanced the Taiwan Policy Act of 2022 that would provide the island with $4.5 billion in security aid and a $2 billion loan guarantee authority for the purchase of military equipment.
* The director of the European Union Intelligence and Situation Centre, Jose Casimiro Morgado, canceled his visit to Taiwan, scheduled for October, after his visit plans became known to Beijing, the Politico newspaper has reported, citing two diplomats familiar with the situation.

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UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS

* The United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday that chances for peace between Russia and Ukraine are minimal.
* The Group of Creditors of Ukraine has agreed to suspend the nation’s debt service through the end of 2023, the US Treasury Department said.
* Ukraine's document on security guarantees has confirmed Kiev's intention to join NATO, thus making reasons for Russia's special military operation even more relevant, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.
* The situation in the Kherson region is stable, the borders are safe, as there are enough forces and means to prevent any attempts by the Ukrainian military to break through, the acting head of the regional administration said.

ARMENIA-AZERBAIJAN CONFLICT

* Shooting at the Armenian-Azerbaijani border has almost stopped since 16:00 GMT on Wednesday, Armenian Defense Ministry spokesman Aram Torosyan said.
* The Russian Permanent Representative Vassily Nebenzia said Russia insists that a tripartite statement of Presidents from Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan are included in press elements which are being prepared by the experts of the Security Council countries on the situation between Armenia and Azerbaijan.
* Azerbaijan has proposed a humanitarian ceasefire to Armenia amid ongoing clashes at the border, the Foreign Ministry said.
* Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said that 105 Armenians have been killed during the ongoing clashes on the border with Azerbaijan.

GLOBAL ECONOMY

* The eurozone and the United Kingdom will likely enter a recession later this year while the United States is expected to experience a "mild recession" in 2023, Fitch Ratings said in a global economic forecast released on Wednesday.
* Several countries throughout Europe may experience social unrest if the coming winter is harsh amid an economic crisis, International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said.
* Additional income from of EU member states from "surplus" profits of energy companies may amount to about 25 billion euros ($24.99 billion) in 2022, according to the European Commission estimates, given the implementation of revenue caps emergency measure.
* The European Commission suggests that EU countries reduce overall electricity use by at least 10% by the end of March, 2023, according to the bloc's emergency measures.

TAJIK-KYRGYZ CONFLICT

* A mortar attack from the Kyrgyz side killed two Tajik border guards and injured six others, the administration of Tajik city of Isfara told Sputnik on Wednesday, adding that five civilians have been injured.
* Two Kyrgyz civilians have suffered injuries during a border shootout between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the Kyrgyz national security committee’s border service told Sputnik.

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Russia Will Not Support Proposal to Allow Zelenskyy to Address UNGA by Video - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, September 14 (Sputnik) - Russia will not support the proposal to allow Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy to address the UN General Assembly by video and considers it a breach of the United Nations rules, Russian Ambassador to the world body Vassily Nebenzia said on Wednesday.
"This is another violation of the rules that we have set for ourselves. He [Zelenskyy] travels well. Yesterday, he visited regions of his country, but he cannot come here. If he cannot come, he can always send his representative to speak at the General Assembly. This is another violation. Of course, we will not support this decision." Nebenzia said.

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Russia Informed UNSC of CSTO's Efforts to Resolve Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, September 14 (Sputnik) - Russia has informed the UN Security Council about the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)'s efforts to resolve the Armenia-Azerbaijan tensions, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Wednesday.
"Naturally, we talked about the effort that Russia has made, both individually and through the Collective Security Treaty Organization, to normalize the situation and achieve a truce [between Armenia and Azerbaijan], about the efforts that the CSTO will make after the meeting of the collective Security Council. The partners thanked us for sharing this information, thanked for our efforts," Nebenzia told journalists after a UN Security Council meeting during which the matter was discussed.

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UPDATE - US Senate Committee Advances Bill Giving Taiwan $4.5Bln in Security Aid, $2Bln in Loans
(Updates with more details in paras 5-10)
WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The US Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Wednesday advanced the Taiwan Policy Act of 2022 that would provide the island with $4.5 billion in security aid and a $2 billion loan guarantee authority for the purchase of military equipment.

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The lawmakers passed the bill, moving it for consideration by the full Senate, according to a statement by Foreign Relations Committee Ranking Member Jim Risch.
"We must get ahead of a future crisis and give Xi Jinping reasons to think twice about invading or coercing Taiwan. I hope the full Senate will vote on this legislation soon," the statement said.
The legislation would provide the security assistance over a period of four years and would designate Taiwan as a "Major Non-NATO Ally," according to a draft copy of the bill.
The bill would provide up to $2 billion in loan guarantees for foreign military financing as well.
The legislation also directs the US government to engage with the "democratic government of Taiwan" as the legitimate representative of the island's inhabitants and prohibits restrictions on engagements between US officials and their Taiwanese counterparts.
In addition, the bill calls on the US Secretary of State to allow the display of symbols of Taiwanese sovereignty by their officials, including their flag, and establishes "de facto diplomatic treatment for Taiwan equivalent to other foreign governments."
However, the bill's actions are not to be construed as entailing restoration of diplomatic relations with Taiwan or altering the US position on its international status, the legislation said.
The bill reaffirms the Taiwan Relations Act and the Six Assurances, which have served as the foundation for relations between Washington, Taipei and Beijing.
The bill directs the US Secretary of Defense to establish a training program with Taiwan to improve defense capabilities and force interoperability; directs the Secretary of State to address disinformation and propaganda related to Taiwan and submit a strategy for addressing alleged economic coercion by China against countries who increase support for Taiwan.

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US Senate Committee Advances Bill Giving Taiwan $4.5Bln in Security Aid, $2Bln in Loans

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The US Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Wednesday advanced the Taiwan Policy Act of 2022 that would provide the island with $4.5 billion in security aid and a $2 billion loan guarantee authority for the purchase of military equipment.
The lawmakers passed the bill, moving it for consideration by the full Senate, according to a statement by Foreign Relations Committee Ranking Member Jim Risch.
“We must get ahead of a future crisis and give Xi Jinping reasons to think twice about invading or coercing Taiwan. I hope the full Senate will vote on this legislation soon,” the statement said.
The legislation would provide the security assistance over a period of four years and would designate Taiwan as a “Major Non-NATO Ally,” according to a draft copy of the bill.
The bill would guarantee up to $2 billion in loan guarantee for foreign military financing as well.

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Texas to Continue Sending Migrants to Sanctuary Cities Until Biden Secures Border - Abbott

EL PASO, September 14 (Sputnik) - The state of Texas will continue to send undocumented migrants to sanctuary cities throughout the United States until President Joe Biden takes appropriate action to secure the US southern border, Governor Greg Abbott said on Wednesday.

"We will continue busing migrants until Biden secures the border," Abbott said via Twitter.

Abbott emphasized that mayors of so-called "sanctuary cities" in the United States are complaining they are overwhelmed by several dozen migrants arriving on buses from Texas, but they are only a fraction of what Texas faces on a daily basis.

Earlier on Wednesday, the governor of the state of Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker issued a disaster proclamation on Wednesday to enhance efforts to adequately respond to the hundreds of undocumented migrants arriving to Chicago from Texas.

Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser last week declared a public emergency in the city due to the arrival of thousands of undocumented migrants bused to the area from Texas and Arizona.

On Friday, Abbott said Texas has transported some 10,000 undocumented migrants who crossed illegally into the United States to sanctuary cities like Washington, New York and Chicago.

Well over two million migrants have entered the United States illegally via the US southern border since October, breaking last year's record set under the Biden administration's watch. The influx has severely strained local, state and federal resources on the southern border that are trying to handle the situation.

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Ukraine Proposal to Let Zelenskyy Address UNGA by Video to Be Voted on Friday - Document

UNITED NATIONS, September 14 (Sputnik) - The UN General Assembly will vote September 16 on whether to let Volodymyr Zelenskyy deliver a pre-recorded video address during the upcoming UN high-level week, according to a letter from the Ukrainian mission.

"In this regard, the Permanent Mission of Ukraine initiates a draft decision of the General Assembly, which, without setting a precedent for future general debates and mandated high-level meetings planned for future high-level weeks, will allow President of Ukraine H.E. Mr. Volodymyr Zelenskyy to submit a pre-recorded statement to be played in the General Assembly Hall during the general debate of the Assembly at its seventy-seventh session," the letter said.

Zelenskyy cannot participate in-person due to the "ongoing Russian aggression" against Ukraine, the letter stated.

"The draft decision will be considered at the third plenary meeting of the General Assembly of the seventy-seventh session on Friday, 16 September 2022," it added.

The office of the President of the General Assembly said that if such a document is submitted, it will require a simple majority to be granted.

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The Russian mission to the UN previously objected to pre-recorded video participation in UN General Assembly events, even during COVID-19 restrictions. Russian delegates believe that it is a bad precedent and lowers the importance of the United Nations.

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California Sues Amazon for Alleged Anti-Competitive Contracting Practices - Statement

*WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - California Attorney General Rob Bonta has sued e-commerce giant Amazon for allegedly shutting out competitors and causing prices to rise in the state, the Prosecutor’s Office said in a statement on Wednesday.

“For years, California consumers have paid more for their online purchases because of Amazon's anticompetitive contracting practices,” Bonta said in the statement. “Amazon coerces merchants into agreements that keep prices artificially high, knowing full well that they can't afford to say no.”

Amazon violated California’s Unfair Competition Law and the so-called Cartwright Act with its actions that stifled competition and caused prices to increase across the state, the statement said.

In order to avoid competing on prices with other online e-commerce sites, Amazon requires merchants to enter into agreements that severely penalize them if their products are offered for a lower price off-Amazon, the statement said.

These agreements thwart the ability of other online retailers to compete, contributing to Amazon's dominance in the online retail marketplace and harming merchants and consumers through inflated fees and higher prices, the statement said.

Bonta noted that Amazon was the dominant online retail store in the United States with more than 160 million Prime members nationwide and some 25 million customers in California alone. Bonta cited a survey where 96% of all Prime members said they are more likely to buy products from Amazon than any other online store and that 74% of all consumers go directly to Amazon when they are ready to buy a specific product.

“With other e-commerce platforms unable to compete on price, consumers turn to Amazon as a one-stop shop for all their purchases,” Bonta said. “This perpetuates Amazon's market dominance, allowing the company to make increasingly untenable demands on its merchants and costing consumers more at checkout across California. The reality is: Many of the products we buy online would be cheaper if market forces were left unconstrained.”

Bonta is seeking an order from the San Francisco Superior Court to stop Amazon's anticompetitive behavior and recover the damages to California’s consumers and the state’s economy.

The lawsuit asks the court to prohibit Amazon from entering into and enforcing contracts that harm price competition; require Amazon to affirmatively notify vendors that it does not require sellers to offer prices on par with off-Amazon prices; appoint a court-approved monitor to ensure Amazon’s compliance with the court’s order; order damages to compensate consumers harmed

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by increased prices; and order Amazon to return its ill-gotten gains and pay penalties to serve as a deterrent to other companies contemplating similar actions.

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Chicago Issues Disaster Proclamation in Response to Migrants Bused From Texas - Governor
WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - Illinois Governor Jay Robert "J.B." Pritzker on Wednesday issued a disaster proclamation to enhance efforts to adequately respond to the hundreds of undocumented migrants arriving to Chicago from Texas.
"Governor J.B. Pritzker today issued an emergency disaster proclamation and activated approximately 75 members of the Illinois National Guard to ensure all state resources are available to support asylum seekers arriving nearly daily to Chicago from the State of Texas," the Office of the Governor said in a press release.
The release said more than 500 asylum-seeking migrants have arrived in Chicago since August 31 and buses carrying migrants are arriving nearly every day.
Last week, Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser declared a public emergency in the US capital due to the arrival of thousands of undocumented migrants being bused to the area from Texas and Arizona.
On Friday, Texas Governor Greg Abbott said his state has bused some 10,000 undocumented migrants who crossed illegally into the United States to so-called "sanctuary jurisdictions" like Washington, New York, and Chicago.
Well over two million migrants have entered the United States illegally via the US southern border since October, breaking last year's record set under the Biden administration's watch. The influx has severely strained local, state and federal resources on the southern border that are trying to handle the situation.

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State Dept. on Possible Lavrov-Blinken Meeting in NY: No Business as Usual With Russia

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The US State Department said on Wednesday it cannot be business as usual with Russia, when asked about a possible meting between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Secretary of State Antony Blinken during the UN General Assembly high-level week in New York.
"Our schedule is still coming together," spokesperson Ned Price told a briefing. "What I can say at this point is that it is our firm belief that it cannot be business as usual with the Russian Federation."

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US 'Deeply' Concerned About Continued Attacks Along Armenia-Azerbaijan Border - State Dept

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The United States is deeply concerned about continued attacks along the the Armenia-Azerbaijan border, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Wednesday.

"We are deeply concerned about continued attacks along the Armenia-Azerbaijan border," Price said during a press briefing. "We've seen continued attacks now for a second straight day. We are particularly disturbed by continued reports of civilians being harmed inside Armenia."

Price added that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and other senior State Department officials have had a number of conversations with government officials from Armenia and Azerbaijan, including with other concerned stakeholders and partners. Price said he is not in a position to detail all of those engagements.

Earlier this week, new clashes broke out on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border, in an area unrelated to the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region. Baku and Yerevan have accused each other of ongoing shelling and reported losses in their ranks.

An extraordinary meeting of the permanent council of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) convened on Tuesday at the request of Yerevan, during which council members expressed extreme concern about the situation and considered proposals regarding possible use of CSTO mechanisms to resolve the situation. The first CSTO expert group will depart for Armenia on Thursday, and CSTO Secretary General Stanislav Zas will arrive next week.

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State Dept. Says Labeling Russia Sponsor of Terror Would Have 'Unintended Consequences

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Wednesday, in response to a newly introduced bill in the Senate to designate Russia a state sponsor of terrorism, that such a move would cause unintended consequences for the international community.

Earlier in the day, US Democratic Sen. Richard Blumenthal and US Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham introduced the legislation.

"There's also the unintended consequences that would come with designating Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism," Price said during a press briefing. "We believe that there are more targeted approaches that we could take that would hold the Russian economy and the Russian government to account, to continue to impose those massive costs and consequences without incurring those unintended consequences."

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Biden administration officials in recent days have held discussions with Congress about steps that would be appropriate and effective for use against Russia over its special military operation in Ukraine, Price said. These steps being discussed with US lawmakers would have effects that are analogous to those envisioned in a state sponsor of terrorism designation but without those unintended consequences, he added.
Graham said during a press conference earlier in the day that US lawmakers hope to pass the legislation before the end of the year.
The White House said last week that President Biden's decision not to designate Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism is final. Designating Russia would affect Ukraine, jeopardize food exports and would not be a "strong" way forward, the White House said.

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US Says Ex-Envoy Richardson's Visit Can Potentially Complicate Talks on Griner Release

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The visit of former US Ambassador to the UN Bill Richardson to negotiate release of basketball player Brittney Griner in Russia can potentially complicate the talks which are being conducted through official channels, State Department spokesperson Ned Price told reporters on Wednesday.
Richardson reportedly met with Russian officials to negotiate the potential release of US professional women's basketball player Brittney Griner, who was convicted of carrying cannabis oil in her luggage at a Moscow airport.
"Of course, families are perfectly free to engage and to consult with outside voices with outside entities," Price told a briefing. "But again, we want to make sure that any outside effort is fully and transparently coordinated with us and in this case, we believe that any efforts that fall outside of that officially designated channel have the potential to complicate what is already an extraordinarily complicated challenge that we face."

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UPDATE - US to Be Dragged Into Conflict With Russia if Kiev Gets Long Range Missiles – Antonov
(Updates with additional details in para 3, background in paras 4-5, corrects typo in the quote)
WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The United States will be dragged into a military confrontation with Russia if Ukraine receives longer-range missiles or strikes Russian territory, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov told Sputnik.
"Of particular concern is the fact that for many months Ukraine has been soliciting the supply of ATACMS operational-tactical missiles, which are designed to strike targets at a distance of up to 300 km [187 miles]. If Kiev obtains such weapons, large Russian cities, as well as industrial and transport infrastructure facilities will fall into the area of possible destruction," Antonov said.

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"Such a scenario would mean direct involvement of the United States in a military confrontation with Russia."
According to Antonov, Kiev has already demonstrated that it will not hesitate to use long-range missile systems to attack Russian territory as it has been the case with the Donetsk and Luhansk People's republics where the Ukrainian armed forces constantly violate the norms of humanitarian law.
On Monday, The Wall Street Journal reported that Kiev had requested Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS) and the US Defense Department is worried Ukrainian forces might use those to strike Russian territory and escalate the conflict.
The list of arms requested for future offensive operations also includes tanks, drones, artillery systems, anti-ship missiles, and ammunition for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS).

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State Department Says in Contact With Ex-US Envoy Richardson Amid Visit to Moscow

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said they have been in contact with former US Ambassador to the UN Bill Richardson amid his visit to Moscow but he declined to comment any further on the matter.
Richardson reportedly met with Russian officials to negotiate the potential release of US professional women's basketball player Brittney Griner, who was convicted in a Russian court for carrying cannabis oil in her luggage at a Moscow airport.
"We have been in contact with the Richardson Center," Price said during a press briefing. "We're not going to comment on the governor's travel or the governor's [Richardson's] activity."

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Union Rejects Deal With Largest US Freight Railroads, Strike Deadline Extended - Statement

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers District 19 said on Wednesday it rejected a tentative deal with the National Carriers' Conference Committee (NCCC), which represents the United States' freight railroads, to avert union strikes but the strike deadline has been extended to the end of the month to allow room for further negotiations.
"The Tentative Agreement has been rejected and the strike authorization vote was approved by IAM District 19 members. Out of respect for other unions in the ratification process, an extension has been agreed to until Sept. 29, 2022 at 12 p.m. ET," the union said in a press release.
US railroad companies initially needed to reach a deal with all their unions in order to avert a full-fledged strike on Friday.

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The extension will allow the union to continue to negotiate changes with the NCCC in the hopes of achieving an agreement its members would ratify, the release said. Approximately 4,900 members of the union voted to reject the tentative agreement with the NCCC.
The Biden administration is working with other modes of transportation such as the trucking industry and air carriers to plan for mitigation efforts in the event of a strike. US Labor Secretary Martin Walk hosted on Wednesday representatives of unions and railway companies as part of the Biden administration's effort to avoid a strike.
The US Chamber of Commerce warned that a potential rail strike would lead to an "economic disaster" and called on Congress to be prepared to intervene.

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Moscow Wants Statement of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia in UNSC Press Elements - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, September 14 (Sputnik) - The Russian Permanent Representative Vassily Nebenzia said on Wednesday Russia insists that a tripartite statement of Presidents from Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan are included in press elements which are being prepared by the experts of the Security Council countries on the situation between Armenia and Azerbaijan.
"Everyone unanimously spoke in favor of an early ceasefire and settlement of the situation by diplomatic means, now the press elements are being discussed, experts are left in the hall who are finalizing them. We insist that these elements contain a reference to a tripartite statement of the presidents of Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan from 20 and 21 years, which are the basis for the normalization of relations between the two countries, contain an appeal and commitment to a ceasefire and a number of projects that the parties must undertake," Nebenzia told journalists.

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Visas Were Not Received by Large Part of Lavrov Delegation to UNGA - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, September 14 (Sputnik) - The Russian Permanent Representative Vassily Nebenzia said on Wednesday that a large part of the delegation meant to go with Foreign Minister Lavrov to attend the United Nations General Assembly has not received visas to enter the United States.
"Part of the delegation that flies with the minister has been issued visas, and the majority of the delegation that flies with the minister has not yet been issued visas, we are waiting. Now it is Wednesday," Nebenzia told journalists.

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Russian Citizen Klyushin's Defense to File Motions in US Court Postponing Trial - Lawyer

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The legal defense team for Russian national Vladyslav Klyushin, who is charged in the United States with being involved in a global hacking and fraud scheme, is set to file several motions that will postpone his trial, Klyushin's attorney Maksim Nemtsev told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"We are preparing to file several motions, and that is why the trial will be postponed," Nemtsev said. "The judge will announce the exact date tomorrow. The postponement to January 30, 2023 was previously discussed."

Nemtsev pointed out that Klyushin feels fine and is actively working with the lawyers to study the evidence and prepare for the trial.

The status conference for Klyushin is scheduled for Thursday, according to the schedule of the US District Court gfor the District of Massachusetts.

Klyushin owns the media monitoring and cybersecurity services company M13. He was arrested in Switzerland in March of 2021 and extradited to the United States later that year.

In December, Klyshin was charged together with four other Russian nationals with crimes in connection with an alleged global hacking and trading scheme that netted the defendant $82 million through the use of stolen company data to inform trading decisions.

The US Justice Department accused the defendants of hacking the computer networks of two US filing agents used by publicly traded companies to make quarterly and annual filings during the period between January 2018 and September 2020.

Klyushin denied all accusations during the initial court hearing in January but the judge then rejected his request for bail and ordered that he be kept detained until the trial commences.

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US to Be Dragged Into Conflict With Russia if Kiev Gets Long Range Missiles - Antonov

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The United States will be dragged into a military confrontation with Russia if Ukraine receives longer-range missiles or strikes Russian territory, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov told Sputnik.

"Of particular concern is the fact that for many months Ukraine has been soliciting the supply of ATACAMS operational-tactical missiles, which are designed to strike targets at a distance of up to 300 km [187 miles]. If Kiev obtains such weapons, large Russian cities, as well as industrial and transport infrastructure facilities will fall into the area of possible destruction," Antonov said. "Such a scenario would mean direct involvement of the United States in a military confrontation with Russia."

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Lawyer of Russia's Klyushin Cannot Confirm or Deny if He is Part of Possible Prisoner Swap

(Updates with more details, background in paras 3-13)

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - Maksim Nemtsev, Vladislav Klyushin's attorney, told Sputnik on Wednesday that he cannot confirm or deny reports that his client, charged in the United States with involvement in a global hacking and fraud scheme, is part of a possible prisoner exchange deal for US citizens Paul Whelan and Brittney Griner.

"We can neither confirm nor deny this information," Nemtsev said. "According to information from the media, a special channel was created to discuss the conditions for the exchange of citizens of Russia and the United States, agreed upon by the leaders of the two countries at a meeting in Geneva in July last year. For questions about the exchange of citizens of Russia and the United States, you should contact the press service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation or the US State Department."

Nemtsev said Klyushin's legal defense team is set to file several motions that will postpone the trial.

"We are preparing to file several motions, and that is why the trial will be postponed," he said. "The judge will announce the exact date tomorrow. The postponement to January 30, 2023 was previously discussed."

Nemtsev pointed out that Klyushin feels fine and is actively working with his lawyers to study the evidence and prepare for the trial.

The status conference for Klyushin is scheduled for Thursday, according to the schedule of the US District Court for the District of Massachusetts.

US media reported in August that the Russian authorities want an equal two-for-two prisoner exchange with the United States, thus insisting that another Russian prisoner be added to the swap for US citizens Paul Whelan and Brittney Griner.

Russia is looking for a fairer deal with the United states that would involve adding another Russian national to the swap for Whelan and Griner, Bloomberg reported, citing sources. A two-for-one deal is reportedly considered unacceptable to Russia.

The report said several people who may be included in the swap have come to light, including Klyushin.

Klyushin was arrested in Switzerland in 2021 for allegedly making millions of dollars through hacking corporate earnings information from US companies.

In January, Klyushin pleaded not guilty to all charges brought against him. A US court denied him bail and ordered that he is held in custody until his trial on October 11.

On February 17, the Russian authorities detained Griner at a Moscow airport for carrying cannabis oil in her luggage. The Moscow Region Court sentenced Griner on August 4 to nine years in prison and a fine of $16,700 for drug trafficking while traveling to Russia - one of the gravest crimes under Russian criminal law.

White House officials have said Washington is optimistic about doing a prisoner swap for Griner and Paul Whelan, another US citizen imprisoned in Russia for espionage.

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RPT - US Claims of Non-Involvement in Ukraine Conflict Untenable, Facts Say Otherwise - Antonov

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The United States' claims of its non-involvement in the Ukraine conflict are untenable, especially after the "bravado" of the Biden administration and the top brass about their role in planning Ukraine's counteroffensive, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov told Sputnik.

Antonov noted that Russia is "deeply concerned" by "the open bravado of the US administration," including generals, who claim that Ukraine's "battlefield" gains were achieved thanks to a direct role of the Pentagon in planning Ukraine's strategy.

"Given this, Washington's statements that the United States stands aside and is not a party to the conflict sound absolutely ridiculous and unfounded," Antonov said. "Facts, interviews of former and current politicians and generals say the opposite. To date, everything has been done to turn the country into a testing ground for the disposal of obsolete weapons and testing of new NATO military equipment to counter Russian weapons."

The ambassador added that videos circulated by Western TV channels clearly show that soldiers and officers fighting Russia in Ukraine speak English fluently and many have British and American accents.

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Canadian Farms Expected to Produce More Grain in 2022 Than Previous Year - Stat Agency

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - Canadian farmers are expected to produce more wheat, canola, and oats amongst other grains than it did in 2021, the country's statistics agency said on Wednesday.

"In 2022, Canadian farmers are projected to produce more wheat, canola, barley, oats, soybeans, and corn for grain than they did in 2021, according to the most recent yield model estimates using satellite imagery and agroclimatic data. Increased production was largely driven by higher yields because of better growing conditions in Western Canada," Statistics Canada said in a news release.

According to the available data, wheat yields are set to increase by 55.6%, on a year-to-year basis, to 34.7 million tons. The rise is mainly driven by a higher harvesting area and the production of 51.3 bushels per acre, the release said.

Besides wheat, on a nationwide basis, corn yields will increase by 6.3 to 14.9 million tons, soybean by 3.7% to 6.5 million tons, and canola by 38.8% to 19.1 million tons, the release added.

Barley and oats are respectively growing by 33,5% to 9.4 million tons and 65.7% to 4.7 million tons, according to the release.

Statistics Canada has been collaborating with Agriculture Canada since 2016 to estimate the amounts of crops, relying on satellite technology to predict grain yields.

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US Crude Stocks Up Again as Refiners Process Less Oil With Summer Ending - Energy Agency

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - US crude inventories rose for a second week in a row, the Energy Information Administration (EIA) said on Wednesday, as refiners appeared to process fewer barrels into fuel amid the approaching end of summer that is typically marked with less driving in the United States.

Crude stockpiles rose by 2.442 million barrels during the week ended September 9, adding to the 8.844-million barrel build from the previous week to September 2, the EIA said. Industry analysts polled by US media had anticipated a crude build of 1.85 million barrels for the week to September 9.

Adding to the total oil inventory in the market was the latest release from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR), which the Biden administration has been drawing down to deliberately suppress fuel prices in the market.

The Biden administration has been drawing down the SPR since last November, but the outflows accelerated in May when the administration embarked on a battle to bring down the spiraling price of gasoline at the pump that had bumped US inflation to 40-year highs. The US president committed to draw down 180 million barrels from the SPR over a six month period - or roughly one million barrels per day - between May and October.

According to the EIA, the SPR saw an outflow of 8.4 million barrels during the week to September 9, bringing its stockpile to 434.1 million barrels - the lowest since November 1984.

Inventories of distillates - the oil variant required for making the diesel needed for trucks, buses and trains, as well as the fuel for jets - rose by 4.219 million barrels, adding to the previous week's 95,000-barrel build. Analysts had forecast distillate balances to be flat for the week.

Stockpiles of gasoline, however, fell 1.767 million barrels after the previous build of 333,000. Analysts had forecast a drawdown of 1.6 million barrels.

Total demand for gasoline itself was lower, at 8.49 million barrels for the week to September 9, down 233,000 barrels from the previous week.

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Lawyer of Russian Klyushin Cannot Confirm or Deny if He is Part of Possible Prisoner Swap

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - Maksim Nemtsev, Vladislav Klyushin's attorney, told Sputnik on Wednesday that he cannot confirm or deny reports that his client, charged in the United States with involvement in a global hacking and fraud scheme, is part of a possible prisoner exchange deal for Americans Paul Whelan and Brittney Griner.

"We can neither confirm nor deny this information," Nemtsev said. "According to information from the media, a special channel was created to discuss the conditions for the exchange of

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citizens of Russia and the United States, agreed upon by the leaders of the two countries at a meeting in Geneva in July last year. For questions about the exchange of citizens of Russia and the United States, you should contact the press service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation or the US State Department."

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Eurozone to Enter Recession This Year, US to Suffer 'Mild Recession' in 2023 - Fitch

(Updates with more details in paras 3-10)

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The eurozone and the United Kingdom will likely enter a recession later this year while the United States is expected to experience a "mild recession" in 2023, Fitch Ratings said in its Global Economic Outlook on Wednesday.

"Fitch now expects world GDP to grow by 2.4% in 2022 - revised down by 0.5pp since the June GEO - and by just 1.7% in 2023, a cut of 1pp," the ratings agency said, referring to percentage point (pp) moves in GDP. "The eurozone and UK are now expected to enter recession later this year and Fitch forecasts that the US will suffer a mild recession in mid-2023."

US growth is seen at 1.7% in 2022 and 0.5% in 2023, revised down by 1.2pp and 1pp, respectively, Fitch said.

China, constrained by continuous COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and a prolonged property slump, is expected to grow by 2.8% this year and 4.5% next year, less by 0.9pp and 0.8pp, respectively, than previously forecast, it said.

"We've had something of a perfect storm for the global economy in recent months, with the gas crisis in Europe, a sharp acceleration in interest rate hikes and a deepening property slump in China," Brian Coulton, chief economist at Fitch Ratings, said in a summary of the Global Economic Outlook.

Fitch pointed out that its EU outlook also assumes a "full or near complete shut-off of Russian pipeline gas to Europe," adding to the region's growth risk.

"Despite EU efforts to find alternatives, total EU gas supply will fall significantly in the near term, with impacts felt through industrial supply chains," it said. "These supply-side impacts would be exacerbated if rationing became necessary to avoid outright gas shortages, a key risk in Germany."

Fitch noted that European wholesale gas and electricity prices have risen nearly tenfold due to the crisis, adding that an unfettered pass-through to retail gas and electricity prices could have huge impacts on inflation as measured by consumer prices.

"By means of illustration, a three- to four-fold rise in retail gas and electricity prices would add more than 15pp to the CPI. Governments are forging responses to protect consumers and we anticipate more muted retail price rises. But these support measures could have significant fiscal costs," it added.

The combination of risks from high and persistent inflation as well as tight labor markets have prompted central banks from the US Federal Reserve Bank to the Bank of England and the European Central Bank to become more hawkish in recent months by raising interest rates higher than expected, according to Fitch.

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US Claims of Non-Involvement in Ukraine Conflict Untenable, Facts Say Otherwise - Antonov

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The United States' claims of their non-involvement in the Ukraine conflict are untenable, especially after the "bravado" of the Biden administration and the top brass about their role in planning Ukraine's counteroffensive, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov told Sputnik.

Antonov noted that Russia is "deeply concerned" by "the open bravado of the US administration," including generals, who claim that Ukraine's "battlefield" gains were achieved thanks to a direct role of the Pentagon in planning Ukraine's strategy.

"Given this, Washington's statements that the United States stands aside and is not a party to the conflict sound absolutely ridiculous and unfounded," Antonov said. "Facts, interviews of former and current politicians and generals say the opposite. To date, everything has been done to turn the country into a testing ground for the disposal of obsolete weapons and testing of new NATO military equipment to counter Russian weapons."

The ambassador added that video circulated by Western TV channels clearly show that soldiers and officers fighting Russia in Ukraine speak English fluently and many have British and American accents.

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UN Chief Calls on Iran to Establish Dialogue With International Atomic Energy Agency

UNITED NATIONS, September 14 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday he has appealed to Iran to establish dialogue with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that would create the conditions for effective communication to achieve credibility needed for reaching any agreement.

"My appeal to the government of Iran or to any other government in the same situation is to establish a serious dialogue with the IAEA, creating the conditions for an effective cooperation that is needed for the credibility of any agreement," Guterres said during a press briefing.

The UN Secretary-General emphasized that IAEA is a very important entity and its indolence must be preserved.

Guterres comment came in response to a question about how he would answer Iran's complaints that IAEA is politically driven regarding the negotiations to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) nuclear agreement.

In June, the IAEA Board of Governors passed a resolution accusing Iran of insufficient cooperation on nuclear safeguards, given that the country had allegedly failed to explain traces of uranium at three nuclear sites. Iran said it had provided the IAEA with accurate technical

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details and criticized the agency for acting on "fake information" contributed by Israel. In response to the resolution, Iran installed advanced centrifuges for uranium enrichment at its nuclear sites.

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Russia Believes That 'Curators of Kiev' Will Not Agree to Peaceful Settlement - Antonov

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - Russia believes that "curators of Kiev" will not agree to a peaceful settlement and will continue to push it to suicidal adventures, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov told Sputnik on Wednesday.
"American arms manufacturers have always been getting rich in wars. This is happening even now, when millions of shells and a huge amount of weapons made in the US are sent to Ukraine. That is why the peaceful scenario cannot suit Kiev's curators, who are hungry for power and money. They will not stop pushing Ukraine into further suicidal adventures, such as the initially doomed offensives," he said.

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US May Host Service Celebrating Queen Elizabeth in Washington Next Week - Pelosi

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The United States may host a service in Washington sometime next week celebrating Queen Elizabeth II in the wake of her passing, US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said on Wednesday.
"My understanding is the embassy will be making an announcement that we will have a big service in Washington, DC perhaps sometime next week, but it’s their announcement to make," Pelosi said during a press conference.
Queen Elizabeth died at the age of 96 on Thursday, leaving the throne to her eldest son, King Charles III.
Pelosi noted during the press conference that Queen Elizabeth II was the United Kingdom's monarch, but was a "matriarch for democracy."

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Launching Nord Stream 2 Easiest Way to Solve Europe's Energy Problems - Antonov

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WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - To cope with Europe's energy problems is extremely easy as one just needs to press a button and launch Nord Stream 2, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov told Sputnik on Wednesday.
"Solving Europe's energy problems is extremely easy. You just need to press a button and launch Nord Stream 2," he said.

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Western Sanctions Doomed to Failure as Russian Exports Growing - Antonov

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - Sanctions policy of the West is doomed to failure since Russia's export earnings are growing, and the situation of citizens in the West is deteriorating, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov told Sputnik on Wednesday.
"The thoughtless and completely illiterate sanctions policy, the open sanctions-information war of the collective West against our country is doomed to failure. Russia is strengthening its independence. The income from energy exports is constantly growing. The situation of ordinary citizens in Western countries is rapidly deteriorating," he said.

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US Senator Says Hopes Congress Approves New Military, Economic Aid for Ukraine Before 2023

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - US Senator Lindsay Graham said on Wednesday that he hopes US lawmakers will pass a new package of military and economic aid for Ukraine by the end of this year.
"I want to make sure Congress passes another round of military and economic aid to keep the fight going," Graham said during a press conference.
Graham specified he hopes Congress will pass such legislation before January and added that bipartisanship is strong when it comes to supporting Ukraine in its fight against Russia.
Last week, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said that he expects Congress to approve additional funding to support Ukraine in the future.
The Biden administration announced on Thursday a new $2.8 billion package of additional military assistance for Ukraine and its neighboring countries.
The United States has committed $15.2 billion in security assistance to Ukraine since January 2021, including more than $14.5 billion since the beginning of Russia’s special military operation in the country on February 24.

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US Senators Introduce Bipartisan Bill to Designate Russia as State Sponsor of Terrorism

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - US Senators Richard Blumenthal and Lindsey Graham on Wednesday introduced bipartisan legislation to label Russia a state sponsor of terrorism because of its special military operation in Ukraine.

"We believe that Russia has more than earned the right to be among the pariah club of Iran, North Korea, Cuba and Syria, and this resolution, hopefully, will have the same success," Blumenthal said during a press conference. "The time is short in this Congress, but we are absolutely determined to do as much as possible, as soon as possible, and to seek a vote."

Graham said during the press conference that the lawmakers hope to pass the legislation before the end of the year.

Both senators disagreed with President Joe Biden's decision not to designate Russia a state sponsor of terrorism, but noted that their legislation would give the US president a waiver ability to do the things that he thinks may be necessary, which would not normally be permitted under US law once a country is so designated.

Graham said designating Russia would waive sovereign immunity regarding Russia's standing in US court and it would strengthen secondary sanctions against countries trying to help the country.

The White House said last week that President Biden's decision not to designate Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism is final. Designating Russia would affect Ukraine, jeopardize food exports and would not be a "strong" way forward, the White House said.

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CDC Sees Decline in Growth of New Monkeypox Cases in US - Director

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has seen a decline in the growth of new monkeypox cases and approaches the development with cautious optimism, CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said in a congressional testimony on Wednesday.

“Over the last several weeks, we have been pleased to see a decline in the growth of new cases here and abroad,” Walensky told the US Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions. “We approach this news with cautious optimism,” she noted. Adding that some regions in the US still show increase of the infections.

Walensky noted that the CDC has reported more than 22,000 monkeypox cases and one related death in the United States. She also said that the authorities must continue with the aggressive response and use all available tools to stop the infection.

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Monkeypox is a viral disease that is not easily transmitted and usually spreads through close physical contact, including sexual contact, with an infected individual. The virus can enter the human body through broken skin, respiratory tract, eyes, nose, mouth and bodily fluids. It originates in animals like rodents and primates in remote parts of Central and West Africa.

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Pelosi Says Working With White House, Unions to Avoid US Railway Strike

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said on Wednesday that she is working with the Biden administration and unions to prevent a nationwide railway freight strike, which she attributes to disagreements over the lack of sick leave for workers.
“Yes, I have been engaged in conversation with the White House and with the unions involved in this. We’re all hoping that negotiations will continue so there is no rail strike,” Pelosi said during a press conference. “The main area of disagreement is that there’s no sick leave for the workers.”
Starting on Monday, US freight railroads stopped accepting a number of hazardous materials for shipment to ensure that cargo is not left unattended in the event of a work stoppage. President Joe Biden during a trip to Boston on Monday called on unions and rail companies to avert the looming strike.
The White House is working with other modes of transportation such as the trucking industry and air carriers to plan for mitigation efforts in the event of a strike. US Labor Secretary Martin Walk hosted on Wednesday representatives of unions and railway companies as part of the Biden administration’s effort to avoid a strike.

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Eurozone to Enter Recession This Year, US to Suffer 'Mild Recession' in 2023 - Fitch

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The eurozone and the United Kingdom will likely enter a recession later this year while the United States is expected to experience a "mild recession" in 2023, Fitch Ratings said in a global economic forecast released on Wednesday.
"Fitch now expects world GDP to grow by 2.4% in 2022 - revised down by 0.5pp since the June GEO - and by just 1.7% in 2023, a cut of 1pp," the ratings agency said, referring to percentage point (pp) moves in GDP in its Global Economic Outlook. "The eurozone and UK are now expected to enter recession later this year and Fitch forecasts that the US will suffer a mild recession in mid-2023."

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Guterres Says World at Risk of Food Shortages in 2023 if Fertilizer Issue Not Resolved Now

UNITED NATIONS, September 14 (Sputnik) - The world is at risk of food shortages next year if the problem of a destabilized market for fertilizer is not resolved now, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday.
"In 2022 we have no lack of food, we have a problem of distribution," Guterres said during a briefing. "If we don't normalize the fertilizer market, we will have a problem of food in 2023."

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Griner's Family Confirms Ex-US Envoy Richardson Helping Negotiate Her Release - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The family of US women's professional basketball player Brittney Griner confirmed that former US Ambassador Bill Richardson is helping to negotiate her release in Moscow, CNN reported on Wednesday.
The report said Brittney Griner's wife, Cherelle, asked Richardson and the Richardson Center to help and is encouraged about the meetings he conducted in Moscow.
Richardson Center for Global Engagement Executive Director Mickey Bergman told Sputnik he could not provide any comments on this matter at present.
Richardson is known for being dispatched on several occasions to negotiate the release of Americans who have been detained overseas.
On February 17, the Russian authorities detained Griner at a Moscow airport for carrying cannabis oil in her luggage. The Moscow Region Court sentenced Griner on August 4 to nine years in prison and a fine of $16,700 for drug trafficking while traveling to Russia - one of the gravest crimes under Russian criminal law.
White House officials have said Washington is optimistic about doing a prisoner swap for Griner and Paul Whelan, another US citizen imprisoned in Russia for espionage.

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UN Chief Says Spoke With Putin Wednesday Morning About Grain Agreement, Zaporizhzhia Plant

UNITED NATIONS, September 14 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday that he spoke over the telephone with Russian President Putin in the morning about

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the Black Sea Initiative concerning grain and fertilizer exports and the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (ZNPP), among other issues.
"The last time I spoke with President Putin was this morning. That is the reason I came late to this press conference. We had the opportunity to discuss the Black Sea Initiative, its extension and possible expansion," Guterres told journalists.
Guterres said he also discussed with Putin the situation around the ZNPP as well as the fact-finding mission whose goal is to investigate the attacks in Olenivka.

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UN Looking at Expanding Grain Deal to Ammonia Exports - Guterres

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) -The United Nations is looking at expanding the grain deal to ammonia exports, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday.
"We are looking not only at maintaining the grain deal but expanding it namely in relation to, just to give an example, the possibility of having ammonia exports through the same channel from the Russian Federation and possibility of an extension in time of the grain deal," Guterres said.

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UN Chief Says Chances for Peace Between Russia, Ukraine 'Minimal'

UNITED NATIONS, September 14 (Sputnik) - The United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday that chances for peace between Russia and Ukraine are minimal.
"I have no illusions that at the present moment, the chances for a peace deal are minimal," Guterres told journalists.

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US Charges 3 Alleged Iranian Cyber Criminals as Part of Interagency Crackdown - FBI Chief

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The US Justice Department is charging three Iranian nationals for their alleged role in cybercriminal operations against computer systems in the United States and around the world as part of an interagency crackdown on malicious Iranian cyber activities, FBI Director Christopher Wray said on Wednesday.
"Today, I’m announcing the indictment of three Iranian nationals for their roles in a multi-year scheme to compromise the networks of hundreds of companies, organizations and institutions, many of which offer critical services we all rely on every day. I’m talking about healthcare

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facilities, power companies [and] local governments in communities across the United States and around the globe," Wray said in a video statement. "The individuals being charged today… engaged in a pattern of hacking, cyber theft and extortion largely for personal gain."
The three individuals are accused of hacking a range of organizations, including small business, non-profits and educational and religious institutions, to exfiltrate information from computers and engage in ransomware schemes, according to a Justice Department statement.
Wray said the three defendants targeted systems within Iran in addition to engaging in foreign hacking.
The indictment comes alongside new US Treasury Department sanction designations on ten Iranian persons and three entities with purported ties to malicious cyber activity conducted by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), as well as new $10 million State Department bounties for information on malicious foreign cyber actors.
In addition, the US government published a joint cybersecurity advisory with observed tactics, techniques and indicators of compromise for IRGC-affiliated cyber actors.
While the three charged individuals may have been hacking for personal gain, the charges reflect how criminals can flourish in the "safe haven" created for cyber actors by Iran, the statement said.
The individuals are charged with crimes including conspiring to commit computer fraud, damaging a protected computer and transmitting a demand in relation to damaging a protected computer, the statement added.
The conspiracy and demand charges carry up to five years in prison and the damage charge up to ten years, according to the statement.

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US Labor Secretary Hosting Rail Companies, Unions to Avert Massive Strike - White House

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - Labor Secretary Martin Walsh is hosting unions' and rail companies' representatives as part of the Biden administration’s effort to prevent a massive US railroad freight strike, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said on Wednesday.
"This morning, Secretary Walsh is hosting the rail companies and unions in Washington DC at the Department of Labor," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing.
The White House considers the possibility of the US railway freight system shutdown as "unacceptable outcome" for the economy and for the American people and urges all parties to work in good faith to avoid it, Jean-Pierre added.
According to the White House, President Joe Biden called on Monday unions and rail companies during his trip to Boston to avert the looming freight rail strike all the while his administration is working with other modes of transportation such as truckers and air freight carriers to see whether they can "step in and keep goods moving" in case of a strike.
Starting on Monday, US freight railroads stopped accepting a number of hazardous materials for shipment, including chlorine and ammonia, a key component of about three-quarters of all fertilizers, to ensure that such cargo is not left unattended or unsecured on trains in the event of

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a work stoppage due to an impasse in labor negotiations, the Association of American Railroads said.
A spokesperson for the Association of American Railroads told Sputnik negotiating parties are meeting and working hard to try to reach an agreement.

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IMF Chief Says Harsh Winter Could Lead to Social Unrest in Some European Countries

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - Several countries throughout Europe may experience social unrest if the coming winter is harsh amid an economic crisis, International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Wednesday.
"There is certainly fear of recession in some countries, or even if it is not recession, that it would feel like recession this winter," Georgieva said during remarks at the 2022 Michel Camdessus Lecture. "And if Mother Nature decides not to cooperate, and the winter is actually harsh, that could lead to some social unrest."

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Guterres Says Multiple Famines Possible This Year Despite Grain Deal

UNITED NATIONS , September 14 (Sputnik) - The world risks facing multiple famines this year despite the UN-brokered grain deal and the agreement to get Russian food and fertilizers to the market, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday.
"Despite the Black Sea Grain Initiative and the agreement to get Russian food and fertilizers to global markets, there is a real risk of multiple famines this year," he said in his remarks at a press briefing about the 77th session of the General Assembly.
Guterres noted that global hunger started to rise before the COVID-19 pandemic and "has never recovered."
On July 22, Russia, Ukraine, and Turkey signed a UN-brokered initiative to provide a humanitarian maritime corridor for ships with food and fertilizer exports from Black Sea ports. Three key Ukrainian ports — Odesa, Chornomorsk, and Yuzhne — were unblocked to resume exports. The Istanbul-based Joint Coordination Center (JCC) was set up to monitor the implementation of the initiative, including ensuring that cargo ships do not carry unauthorized goods or personnel.
Since the signing of the deal, only 28% of grain shipments from Ukraine went to low-income countries, and 44% to high-income countries, according to a report of the JCC on September 12. Russian President Vladimir Putin said he will discuss a revision of the deal with his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, during the upcoming SCO summit in Samarkand.

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Moreover, Russia's envoy to the UN said the part of the deal concerning Russian food exports was not working altogether, which may lead to the termination of the agreements.

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Floods in Pakistan Show Inadequacy of Global Response to Climate Crisis - Guterres

UNITED NATIONS, September 14 (Sputnik) - The devastating floods that have recently struck Pakistan are the result of the "inadequate" global response to the climate crisis the world is facing, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday.
"What is happening in Pakistan demonstrates the sheer inadequacy of the global response to the climate crisis, and the betrayal and injustice at the heart of it," he said in his remarks at a press briefing about the 77th session of the General Assembly.
Guterres, who recently returned from Pakistan, said that the trip opened a window into the future, "a future of permanent and ubiquitous climate chaos on an unimaginable scale."
"Devastating loss of life, enormous human suffering, and massive damage to infrastructure and livelihoods. It is simply heartbreaking. No picture can convey the scope of this catastrophe. The flooded area is three times the size of my entire country, Portugal," the UN chief said.
In late August, the Pakistani authorities declared a state of emergency in the country and called on other states and international organizations to provide all possible assistance to the population. According to the National Disaster Management Authority, Pakistan has witnessed 388.7 mm (15 inches) of rainfall this year, in comparison with the average 134 mm (5.3 inches).
The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) said on Tuesday that the death toll from floods in Pakistan is nearing 1,500 people, with another 12,000 injured since June.

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Iraq’s Ban on Kurdistan Oil, Gas Exports Risks Driving Out US Firms - US State Dept.
WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - Iraq’s ban on Kurdistan oil and gas exports risks driving out US firms from the country and leading to wide economic repercussions, US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Barbara Leaf said on Wednesday.
The Iraq Supreme Court invalidated on February 15 the arrangements for the export of oil and gas made by the semi-autonomous Kurdish regional government. The decision is expected to significantly alter the investment climate for all foreign companies that are doing oil and gas business in Kurdistan.
"Washington is quite concerned that rushing forward and implementing this decision [on oil and gas exports ban] risks driving US firms out of Iraq, other firms out of Iraq, which would be a terrible vote of no confidence in the business environment in Iraq and, frankly, could produce wider economic repercussions well beyond the Kurdish region of Iraq," Leaf said during a press briefing.

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While visiting Iraq in early September, Leaf met with the political leaders in Baghdad and Erbil and suggested finding a discussion venue for a new hydrocarbons law that in Washington's view has been long overdue.
In her message for Iraq’s leaders in Baghdad and Erbil, Leaf noted that "an emerging economic crisis was going to overlay what was already a very serious political crisis."
Leaf visited Tunisia, Israel, including the West Bank, and Jordan on August 29-September 4 to discuss a range of shared interests and priorities across the region.

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Biden to Nominate Career Diplomat Lynne Tracy as Next US Ambassador to Russia - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden is expected to nominate current Ambassador to Armenia Lynne Tracy to serve as the new chief of the mission in Russia, CNN reported on Wednesday, citing sources in the know.
The US Administration is hopeful that Tracy will take her post swiftly to replace John Sullivan who stepped down earlier tin September, and Washington has already given Tracy's name to Moscow to begin that process, the report said.
Tracy speaks Russian and served in Moscow as Deputy Chief of Mission from 2014 to 2017. She would be the first female US ambassador to serve in Russia.

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US Producer Prices Ease in August, Provide Some Relief to Stubborn Inflation - Labor Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - US producer prices, or prices paid to the producers of goods and services, came within expectations for August, Labor Department data showed on Wednesday, providing some relief to policy-makers after consumer prices from a day ago showed little success in fighting inflation.
"The Producer Price Index for final demand fell 0.1 percent in August," the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, a unit of the Labor Department, said in a statement. "On an unadjusted basis, the index for final demand moved up 8.7 percent for the 12 months ended in August."
Economists polled by US media had expected the Producer Price Index to ease by 0.1% in August, and to grow 8.8% year-on-year.
"These are close enough to expectations not to cause big ripples," economist Adam Button said in a comment on the Forex Live forum.
The PPI data came on the heels of Wednesday’s release of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for August that showed an annualized growth of 8.3% for August, above the 8.1% forecast by economists.

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The CPI grew by an annualized 9.1% in June, at its fastest pace in four decades. With the headline inflation figure abating less than 1% over the past two months despite the best efforts of policy-makers, economists said they expect the Federal Reserve to resort to another substantial interest rate hike this month.
The Fed has raised rates by 225 basis points in four increases since March, with two back-to-back 75 basis point hikes in June and July. Money market traders expect a third 75-basis point increase when the central bank meets on September 21 to decide on rates.
The Fed's target for inflation is 2% per year and it has vowed to raise interest rates as much as necessary to achieve that goal.

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UPDATE - Biden Called Unions, Companies in Effort to Avert Looming Rail Strike - White House
(Updates with exclusive comment from Association of American Railroads in para 6)
WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden called unions and companies during his trip to Boston on Monday to avert a looming freight rail strike, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said.
"Just yesterday, while he was in Boston, the President called both the unions and the companies to avert a [railway] strike," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing on Tuesday.
The Biden administration is currently working with other modes of transportation in the United States, including truckers and air freight carriers, to see if they can "step in and keep goods moving" in case of the rail shutdown, Jean-Pierre said.
The White House has also been working with relevant agencies to assess what supply chains and commodities are most likely to face severe disruptions, Jean-Pierre added.
Starting on Monday, US freight railroads stopped accepting a number of hazardous materials for shipment, including chlorine and ammonia, a key component of about three-quarters of all fertilizers, to ensure that such cargo is not left on an unattended or unsecured train in the event of a work stoppage due to an impasse in labor negotiations, the Association of American Railroads said in a statement.
A spokesperson for the Association of American Railroads told Sputnik negotiating parties are meeting and working hard to try to reach an agreement.
The US Chamber of Commerce warned that a potential rail strike would lead to an "economic disaster" and called on Congress to be prepared to intervene.
Also on Monday, about 15,000 nurses represented by the Minnesota Nurses Association went on a three-day strike in what is described as the largest strike of private-sector nurses in US history.

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Austin, Indian Counterpart Agree to Expand Info Sharing, Logistics Cooperation – Pentagon

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WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin spoke by phone with his Indian counterpart, Rajnath Singh, on Wednesday to discuss information-sharing and logistics cooperation, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said.

"In light of the evolving regional security environment, the two defense leaders committed to expanding information-sharing and logistics cooperation as the US and Indian militaries operate and coordinate more closely together," Ryder said in a press release.

Austin expressed his support for additional mid-voyage repairs of US Navy ships in India, he added.

Both leaders agreed to initiate a dialogue later this year to deepen bilateral collaboration in space, cyber, artificial intelligence, and other new defense domains, according to the statement.

"Secretary Austin and Minister Singh highlighted their commitment to strengthening defense technology and industrial cooperation to support India’s rise as an industry leader and regional security provider," Ryder said.

They also reaffirmed their shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific region, he noted.

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Ukraine Creditors Agree to Suspend Nation's Debt Service Through End of 2023 - US Treasury

(Updates with more details in paras 5-7)

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The Group of Creditors of Ukraine has agreed to suspend the nation’s debt service through the end of 2023, the US Treasury Department said on Wednesday.

"Today, the Group of Creditors of Ukraine, including the United States, concluded a Memorandum of Understanding to implement Ukraine’s request for a coordinated suspension of debt service through the end of 2023," the Treasury Department said in a statement.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said the move will allow the Ukraine government to "direct additional resources toward its domestic needs and the welfare of the Ukrainian people" amid Russia's special military operation in the country.

Yellen also urged other creditors to take similar measures to support Ukraine.

In a separate statement, the Group of Creditors, comprising of the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, and the United Kingdom and 15 observer states, noted that this Memorandum of UNderstanding allows to ease the pressures on Ukraine’s liquidity.

"During the meeting, the Minister of Finance of Ukraine provided a description of the economic and financial situation in his country and presented the measures taken by his government in the past few months to support the Ukrainian economy in the context of the war," the statement said.

The creditors welcomed the reforms Ukraine has undertaken to address the economic and financial impacts of the current conflict.

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US Puts Cyber-Related Sanctions on 10 People, 2 Entities Linked to IRGC - Treasury Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The United States is designating 10 people and two entities linked to Iran under cyber-related sanctions for purportedly engaging in malicious cyber activity, the Treasury Department said on Wednesday.

"Today, the Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned ten individuals and two entities for their roles in conducting malicious cyber acts, including ransomware activity," the Treasury Department said in a statement. "This action continues the series of OFAC designations that aim to protect US persons from ransomware activity, facilitators of ransomware activity, and other cybercrime."

The designated individuals and entities are all affiliated with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the statement added.

The IRGC group of cyber actors have been compromising US networks for ransomware and espionage activities since at least 2020, the statement said. The group has launched campaigns against defense and diplomatic personnel in the US and Middle East, as well as private media, energy and telecommunications services, according to the statement.

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US Lawmakers Say $300 in Egypt Military Financing Must Be Withheld Over Right Violations

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - Members of the US House Foreign Affairs Committee are concerned about systemic violations of human rights in Egypt and believe the State Department should withhold $300 million in foreign military financing, according to a letter the lawmakers sent to Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

"We write to express our concerns over the State Department providing the $300 million conditioned on human rights in Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Foreign Military Financing (FMF) to Egypt … we remain concerned by continued reports – both by the State Department as well as credible international and Egyptian organizations – about the ongoing, pervasive, and systemic violations of human rights in Egypt that risk destabilizing the country" the letter said on Tuesday.

The lawmakers in the letter called on the State Department to deny certification of human rights criteria Egypt needs to meet to receive the $300 million in FMF.

Egypt has failed to take "sustained and effective steps" required by the United States to receive funding, including conditions imposed last year on another $130 million in withheld funds, the letter said.

Adhering to the spirit and intent of the FMF standards aligns with the Biden administration's prioritization of human rights in US foreign policy, the letter added.

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The letter was signed by lawmakers including House Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Gregory Meeks and Representatives Gerald Connolly, Sara Jacobs and Ted Lieu.

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Biden in 1st Call With King Charles Says Wants to Continue Close US-UK Ties - White House

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden in his first call with King Charles expressed his desire to continue fostering a close relationship between the United States and United Kingdom following the death of Queen Elizabeth, the White House said on Wednesday.

"The President recalled fondly the Queen's kindness and hospitality, including when she hosted him and the First Lady at Windsor Castle last June. He also conveyed the great admiration of the American people for the Queen, whose dignity and constancy deepened the enduring friendship and special relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom. President Biden conveyed his wish to continue a close relationship with the King," the White House said in a readout of the leaders' call.

Queen Elizabeth passed away on Thursday at the age of 96 after ruling for over seven decades. King Charles is her eldest son.

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Yellen also urged other creditors to take similar measures to support Ukraine.

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