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9/27/22 Tuesday

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Videos: US Airports Close, Millions Told to Evacuate as Hurricane Ian Barrels Toward Florida
By - Allison Dubois

In 2021, Hurricane Ida hit Louisiana, causing upwards of $75 billion in damages. Now, two weeks after Hurricane Fiona devastated portions of the Caribbean and eastern Canada, photos of sandbags shoring up sidewalks and lining exterior doors are circulating as the Tampa Bay area prepares for Hurricane Ian – this season's second named hurricane.

Hurricane Ian continued to grow stronger on Tuesday as it entered Florida's Gulf Coast, with the National Weather Service bulletins projecting life-threatening storm surge, or abnormal rises in water brought on by strong winds, of over 9 feet along Florida's western coastline.

The ninth named storm of the season, Ian was upgraded to a "major hurricane" (meaning a Category 3 or higher) on Tuesday morning, prompting airports in the southern portion of the state to halt all departures. Central Florida airports announced plans to halt flights starting on Wednesday, when Ian is expected to make landfall in the Sarasota area – though the timing and intensity could still change.

The US National Weather Service (NWS) said in a release that the storm is likely to gain strength and lose speed while in the Gulf of Mexico, prompting both Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and Georgia Governor Brian Kemp to declare states of emergency and a number of counties along the Florida coastline to issue evacuation orders.

"Floridians up and down the Gulf coast should feel the impacts of this," DeSantis said at a press conference on Tuesday. "This is a really, really big hurricane at this point."

DeSantis has activated 5,000 Florida Guardsmen ahead of Ian's landfall.

Images and video of congested traffic heading out of the Tampa area, which hasn't experienced a major hurricane since 1921, toward Orlando circulated on Twitter as citizens heeded evacuation orders, which urged over 2.5 million people to find higher ground.

"This is a life-threatening situation," the NWS said. "Persons located within these areas should take all necessary actions to protect life and property from rising waters and the potential for other dangerous conditions. Ian is forecast to approach the west coast of Florida as a dangerous major hurricane. This is not the time to stay. We are talking about a 10 to 15-foot surge."

Tampa Mayor Jane Castor held a news briefing on Tuesday morning as the hurricane crossed over Cuba and entered the Gulf Coast, echoing the NWS warning. "This is going to be potentially the worst-case scenario for the Tampa Bay area," Castor said. "A slow-moving storm right off our coast is going to bring a devastating amount of water to the Tampa Bay area."

Ian would be the first major hurricane to slam into Florida since the Category 5 storm known as Hurricane Michael hit the state in 2018, causing $25 billion in damage and killing at least 45 people.

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Damaging winds and flooding are expected to continue to migrate as far north as South Carolina through Friday, according to the US National Hurricane Center (NHC), with forecasters projecting surges of up to 10 feet depending on the tide.

'I Hope We Escape This:' Ian Slams Cuba With 125MPH Winds

Hurricane Ian made landfall in western Cuba early Tuesday, resulting in what the NHC called "significant wind and storm surge impacts" that damaged homes, tobacco fields, and forced evacuations.

Late Tuesday, Lazaro Guerra, who serves as the technical director of the Electric Union of Cuba, detailed that island's electrical grid had collapsed after the cyclone tore through Cuba. Guerra has underscored that officials are working to restore the system, and will be working through the night.

About 50,000 people in Cuba's Pinar del Rio province were moved to safer locations, with some 6,000 individuals placed in state-run shelters, according to local authorities. Early details of some of the damage circulated online as locals who remained to record the damage shared photos on social media of the decimated downtown area, with toppled buildings and fuel pumps scattered several feet from their concrete moorings.

In El Fanguito, a low-income neighborhood near Havana's Almendares River, residents voiced their anxiety. "I hope we escape this one because it would be the end of us. We already have so little," health worker Abel Rodrigues said.

Though the hurricane caused lots of damage on the island, leaving one million without power, there have been few injuries and one deathreported. A woman, 43, was killed after the walls of her home fell to the storm.

Mayelin Suarez, a resident of Pinar del Rio, called the night the storm hit "the darkest of her life."

"We almost lost the roof off our house," she told Reuters. "My daughter, my husband and I tied it down with a rope to keep it from flying away."

Cuban President Miguel Diaz Canel visited the area and vowed the region would recover, his officials tweeted.

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Chronically Unhappy? It Could Be Killing You, Study Finds

By - Allison Dubois

If you've ever been told by a doctor you have the "body of someone half your age," you might be happier – no, really. In the fields of gerontology and anti-aging meds, there's a distinction between biological age, or the condition of our cells, and chronological age. New research suggests that happiness correlates to remaining "young" for longer.

A new study conducted by researchers at Stanford and Hong Kong University shows that one's mental health plays a larger role in the aging process than previously thought. The team, composed of scientists from both Hong Kong and the United States, learned that feeling

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unhappy for lengths of time damages our biological clock, potentially leading to heart disease, Alzheimer's, and other age-related illnesses.

The research, part of the China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study, developed an "aging clock" using blood test data to demonstrate the connection between the physical and psychological elements of aging. It was able to detect "accelerated" aging in people with heart, liver, and lung conditions, and was able to demonstrate that psychological factors, especially unhappiness or loneliness, "significantly" influence one's biological age.

Feelings of sadness and loneliness alone are capable of increasing one's biological age by over 1.5 years – more than smoking, which was found to add up to 1.25 years to a person's "biological age," or how old we appear.

"Your body and soul are connected — this is our main message," said Fedor Galkin, a co-author of the study and lead scientist at the Hong Kong startup Deep Longevity.

The study has implications for programs seeking to promote overall wellness, with the potential for mental health promotion to be included in anti-aging intervention programs. "We conclude that the psychological component should not be ignored in aging studies due to its significant impact on biological age," the researchers wrote.

In addition to loneliness and unhappiness, factors such as living in a rural area (due to lesser access to medical services), and being unmarried also contributed to biological age and early death.

"Mental and psychological states are some of the most robust predictors of health outcomes — and quality of life — and yet they have been omitted from modern health care," said Manuel Faria, a researcher at Stanford and co-author of the study.

The study looked at adults aging from middle to elderly ages, and it is unclear if the same results apply to younger age groups.

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US, EU Each Set to Impose New Sanctions on Russia - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) – The United States and the European Union are each set to impose their own new set of sanctions on Russia, The Wall Street Journal reported, citing unnamed officials.

The White House will seek to impose economic pain via critical state-linked financial institutions, potentially the Russian Deposit Insurance Agency, National Payment Card System (Mir), Central Counterparty National Clearing Center, and the National Settlement Depository, the report said on Tuesday.

The Biden administration is also allegedly considering blocking more Russian banks from the SWIFT global messaging system, adding export controls on more goods, and imposing sanctions on more state-run companies.

The European Commission will likely propose additional import and export controls and sanction more Russian officials and pro-Russian forces in Ukraine. The key import control it is looking to propose is a ban on nonindustrial rough diamonds, which is a key source for Belgium's diamond

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 09/28/2022 9:50:43 AM

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industry. The commission may also ban the import of steel and related products, chemicals, and machinery. It may tighten export controls on components that could be used in weaponry, aviation and hydraulics, according to the report.

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Several US Organizations Pledge $8Bln to Address Hunger, Nutrition Problems - White House

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - US-based organizations have pledged $8 billion in commitments and investments to fight hunger and integrate nutrition into heath care, the White House announced on Wednesday.

"Across the whole of society, Americans responded – and advanced more than $8 billion in private- and public-sector commitments. These range from bold philanthropic contributions and in-kind donations to community-based organizations, to catalytic investments in new businesses and new ways of screening for and integrating nutrition into health care delivery," the statement said.

These commitments are due to be announced at a conference on hunger, nutrition and health in Washington, which US President Joe Biden will host later on Wednesday. At least $2.5 billion of this amount will be invested in start-ups that offer solutions to combat hunger. More than $4 billion will be spent on activities to promote healthy lifestyles and facilitate access to wholesome healthy foods.

The White House also announced steps that organizations plan to take in this direction. Among the organizations that intend to take part in the activities and allocate funds, are big companies like Google, Warner Bros. Discovery, Danone, as well as educational institutions, medical centers and small local organizations. The list includes not only American companies.

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Hurricane Ian Nearing Florida Grows to a Category 5 Storm - National Hurricane Center

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - Hurricane Ian, which is set to make landfall in Florida tomorrow, is nearing a category 5 storm, with maximum sustained winds now up to 155 mph, the National Hurricane Center said on Wednesday.

"Recent data from a @NOAA_HurrHunter aircraft indicate #Ian is rapidly intensifying & max sustained winds are now up to 155 mph," the statement said.

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Biden Administration Set to Release First US-Pacific Island Strategy at Washington Summit

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - The United States will release the first-ever US-Pacific Island Strategy later on Wednesday to review with nations from the region at a historic summit hosted by President Joe Biden, an administration official told reporters.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 09/28/2022 9:50:43 AM

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The Biden administration is hosting Pacific Island nation leaders in Washington, DC, on Wednesday and Thursday for a summit designed to enhance US engagement with the region in areas of trade and security. The official said to expect a range of announcements in the next two days.

Attending the first-ever US-Pacific Island Country Summit will be leaders from Fiji, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Cook Islands, French Polynesia, and New Caledonia, according to the official.

Vanuatu and Nauru, the official added, are sending representatives and Australia, New Zealand, and the Secretary General of the Pacific Island Forum will be present as observers.

The purpose of the strategy document is aimed at the concerns and the objectives in the Pacific as a whole, including efforts about how to organize disparate elements of the US government towards tackling issues like climate change, training, fishing, investment in technology, among other topics, the official said.

Pacific Island nation leaders will meet with State Department officials on Wednesday and then will meet with US President Joe Biden and US congressional leaders on Thursday, the official said.

Pacific leaders will also visit the US Chamber of Commerce on Thursday to engage with a broad array of American business groups ranging from tourism to travel to energy to technology, to essentially talk about how US business groups can be more actively engaged with the Pacific Island nations, the US official said.

On Tuesday, Australian media reported that the Solomon Islands will not sign onto an 11-point declaration that the United States and its Pacific Island nation partners are expected to sign during the summit.

One US official, in response to the report, said the United States has had very good consultations with Pacific Island nations, but there is more work to do. There is substantial areas of overlap with respect to what the United States wants to accomplish and do going forward and what the Pacific Island leaders expect, the US official said.

The US official confirmed that Solomon Island Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare is in Washington to attend the summit.

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RPT - ANALYSIS - US Fed Misjudgments on Prime Rate May Trigger 'Waterfall' Recession

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - The Federal Reserve's latest rate hike was based on an over optimistic assessment of the US economy's performance and is highly likely to trigger a recession, experts told Sputnik.

The Fed is implementing the sharpest interest rate rise in a generation in a bid to tame inflation after it hit a 40-year high. The Fed lowered interest rates to near zero during the pandemic but earlier this year was forced to begin hiking them up again as inflation soared over 8 percent.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 09/28/2022 9:50:43 AM

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The Fed aims to bring inflation down to 2 percent by raising interest rates to slow demand. Last week, in an effort toward this goal, the Fed raised its benchmark rate by three-quarters to a range of 3.00%-3.25% and projected continued hikes until the end of 2023.

Fed Chairman Jerome Powell in a presser after the announcement vowed to stay the course until inflation is reined in, even if that means slowing economic expansion which in turn could boost unemployment.

The Fed forecasted GDP to rise 0.2% for fiscal year 2022, a significant drop from the 5.7 percent the US saw in the prior year. In addition, the Fed's outlook for 2023 has GDP rising 1.2% and unemployment increasing about 0.7%.

On Monday, all three of Wall Street's major stock indexes were in bear-market territory amid relentless talk of future rate hikes.

Levy Economics Institute of Bard College Research Associate Marshall Auerback warned the Fed's latest rise in the prime interest rate was based on an over-optimistic assessment of the state of the US economy.

"The historical record says that with further tightening of financial conditions it will be followed by a waterfall recession that could be among the few most severe and protracted recessions in the postwar period," Auerback told Sputnik.

UNREALISTIC ECONOMIC GROWTH ESTIMATES

Federal Reserve Bank of Boston president Susan Collins on Monday said a "soft landing" for the US economy will be difficult, but it is possible. The fed official anticipates slower economic growth in 2023 although believes inflation is nearing its peak.

Auerback said the US economy has traced out an eight-month period "of something a little worse than apparent stagnation with turbulence."

"The Fed projected 1.2% growth in 2023," Auerback pointed out. "For that to happen the rise in the unemployment rate would have to stop at 4.4% on a dime, and the historical record says that doesn't happen."

It would require a productivity boom, he added, and productivity growth since the Great Recession has been lousy and especially bad through the first eight months of this year.

"So basically, the Fed's growth projection is a lie," he said.

As a result, the Fed was going to be blamed for taking too harsh action to tackle an inflation crisis that was already declining anyway, Auerback added.

"The Fed Heads will have strutted about with so much hawkish machismo they will be blamed for a possibly protracted and severe recession that wasn't needed. They will have made a second major policy error in less than two years," Auerback said.

Fed officials appeared to have ignored warning signs of a major slowdown that were already accumulating, Auerback observed.

"The Fed Heads are walking into an unprecedented risk to themselves… all of the forward indicators are deteriorating rapidly," Auerback concluded.

Independent Institute Center for Peace & Liberty Director Ivan Eland said a deep recession is likely as the Fed continues to tighten interest rates to drive the inflation out of the economy now, but it may not last as long as some anticipate.

Eland acknowledged some of the recent inflation had been caused by pandemic-induced supply chain issues and the war in Ukraine, but believes those effects will gradually dissipate. The real problem, he added, lies elsewhere.

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"For too long the Fed has flooded the system with too much money and politicians have… incurred too high budget deficits," Eland told Sputnik. "Both of which need to be, and are now being, ameliorated."

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RPT - US Rep. Pete Sessions Says He Did Not Know He Met With Azov Militants on Capitol Hill

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - US Republican Rep. Pete Sessions following his meeting with soldiers of Ukraine's Azov nationalistic regiment (terrorist organization, banned in Russia) on Capitol Hill told Sputnik he did not know with whom he met since these people did not wear a uniform.

During a telephone call with Sputnik, Sessions initially said reports about him meeting with soldiers from Azov — a group that had been under a Congress funding ban several years ago — were false, then clarified that he did meet with a group of people but was unsure if they were Azov soldiers.

"I did have some meeting with some people," Sessions said. "I met with a group of people."

When asked if the meeting included members of the Azov regiment, he said "I don't know, nobody was in a uniform."

On Monday, chief of Kiev-based NGO Anti-Corruption Action Center Daria Kaleniuk said that Azov soldiers were received on Capitol Hill earlier in September. The Ukrainian delegation also met with Senators Joni Ernst, Dan Sullivan, Shelley Moore, Jeanne Shaheen, and other lawmakers to discuss Ukraine's request for modern tanks like the Abrams, the Counter-Rocket, Artillery, Mortar (C-RAM) and other air defense systems, Kaleniuk said.

The delegation's visit to Washington also included a meeting with US Deputy Assistant Secretary responsible for Central and Eastern Europe in the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs Robin Dunnigan and the State Department's Head of the Office of Sanctions Coordination Jim O'Brien to lobby for designating Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism and to seize $300 billion in Russian sovereign funds located abroad so that Ukraine can use it to buy modern weapons, according to Kaleniuk.

In August 2022, Russia's Supreme Court designated Azov as a terrorist organization. According to the Russian prosecutor general's office, Azov militants use prohibited means and methods of warfare and are complicit in torture of civilians and killings of children.

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White House Adviser Says UK, EU Economies to Face 'Tough Period' in Coming Months

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 09/28/2022 9:50:43 AM

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WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - White House National Economic Council Director Brian Deese in an interview at The Economic Club in Washington said the UK and the EU will go through a difficult period economically in the next few months.
On Monday, the British pound fell to an all-time low of $1.0384 against the US dollar in light of UK Prime Minister Liz Truss's tax-cutting plans. .
"I think the situation in Europe and the UK is very difficult right now," Deese said on Tuesday. "It is and is going to be a tough period for the UK and for the European Union over the course of the next several months."
He said the UK and EU are more exposed to energy volatility and do not have some of the incumbent strengths that the US does economically, he added.
On Friday, UK Chancellor of the Exchequer Kwazi Kwarteng announced a 45 billion pound ($48 billion) tax-cutting package that would benefit the highest earners most, causing concern about unsustainable government borrowing.
The International Monetary Fund (IMF) in a statement to Sputnik on Tuesday said the fund is closely following reports about concerning economic developments in the British economy and currently engaged with UK authorities about the matter.

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White House Preparing for Departure of Treasury Chief Yellen After Midterms - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - White House officials are quietly preparing for Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen to depart from the administration after the midterm elections, Axios reported.
The move would mark the first and most consequential exit in what might be a complete reorganization of President Joe Biden's economic team, the report said on Tuesday, citing people familiar with the matter.

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UPDATE - US Senate Advances Short-Term Spending Bill to Avert Shutdown, Provide More Ukraine Aid
(Updates with House Republican statement, other details in paras 7,8)
WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - The US Senate advanced a short-term spending bill to avert a government shutdown on October 1 and provide some $12 billion in additional security and economic assistance to Ukraine.
The Senate voted 72-23 on Tuesday evening to limit debate on the short-term spending bill that will keep the federal government operational through December 16.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 09/28/2022 9:50:43 AM

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Lawmakers have until October 1 to pass legislation funding the government or risk a shutdown. The continuing appropriations bill is intended to give Congress more time to pass an omnibus budget for the remainder of the fiscal year.

The bill provides $4.5 billion in economic assistance for Kiev, $3 billion in security aid, $2.8 billion towards operations in US European Command, $1.5 billion to replenish US weapons stocks, $540 million to increase critical munitions production, $35 million for nuclear incident preparedness in Ukraine, and $2 million for an Inspector General report on Ukraine assistance monitoring.

The bill requires 60 votes to get through the Senate, a feat that initially appeared unlikely given Minority Leader Mitch McConnell's call for Republicans to block its passage due to the presence of energy permitting reform measures included by Senator Joe Manchin.

During remarks on the Senate floor on Tuesday, McConnell called the measure a "poison pill" within the legislation and urged Republican colleagues to vote against the bill. Later on Tuesday, Majority Leader Chuck Schumer announced Manchin agreed to move forward on a stopgap bill without the measure.

Senator Rand Paul told reporters he is unsure when the Senate will hold a final vote to pass the bill.

Republican leaders in the House of Representatives will urge their colleagues to vote against the spending bill once it reaches the lower chamber, according to a statement from the Republican Whip's office.

The Biden administration supports passage of the continuing resolution despite not including public health funding for monkeypox and COVID-19 response as the White House requested from Congress. The administration also looks forward to working with Congress to pass a full-year appropriations bill, the White House said on Tuesday.

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US to Admit Up to 125,000 Refugees in FY2023, Nearly 1/3 of Spots Saved for Africa - Biden

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - The United States will authorize the admission of up to 125,000 refugees in fiscal year 2023, with 32% of the spots allocated for people from Africa, US President Joe Biden said in a memorandum to Secretary of State Antony Blinken.
Earlier this month, the US State Department recommended a 125,000 person cap on refugee admissions to address needs emerging from humanitarian crises worldwide.
"By the authority vested in me as President… I hereby make the following determinations and authorize the following actions: the admission of up to 125,000 refugees to the United States during Fiscal Year 2023 is justified by humanitarian concerns or is otherwise in the national interest," Biden said on Tuesday.
Biden allocated 40,000 admission spots to people from Africa, 35,000 to the Near East and South Asia, 15,000 to East Asia, 15,000 to Latin America and the Caribbean, and 15,000 to Europe and Central Asia, according to the memorandum.
The 5,000 unallocated refugee spots will be distributed to regional ceilings as needed, the memorandum added.
People in Cuba, Iraq, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Eurasia or the Baltics may be considered refugees for the purpose of admission to the US within their countries of nationality or habitual residence, the memorandum also said.

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Lockheed Awards $115Bln Contract to Produce Scarce Parts for F-35 Jet Program - Statement
WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - Lockheed Martin has been awarded a $115 billion contract to produce scarce parts for the F-35 Lightning II jet program, the Department of Defense said in a press release.

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"Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Co., Fort Worth, Texas, was awarded an $115,351,997 firm-fixed-price, indefinite-delivery/indefinite-quantity contract," the release said on Tuesday. "This contract provides diminishing manufacturing sources parts for F-35 Lightning II program for the Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, non-US Department of Defense participants, and Foreign Military Sales customers."

The F-35 program has experienced sourcing shortage issues of certain parts for the aircraft since 2019, the response said.

Earlier this month, the Department of Defense suspended deliveries of new F-35 jets for the US armed forces after learning that a magnet in its engine was manufactured with unauthorized material from China.

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US Congress Considering Funding Bill to Stop Shutdown, Give $12.4Bln in New Aid to Ukraine

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - The US Congress began consideration of a continuing appropriations bill designed to prevent a government shutdown in October, as well as provide over $16 billion in assistance related to the conflict in Ukraine, including $12.4 billion in new funding, according to an official breakdown of the legislation.

Lawmakers have until October 1 to pass legislation funding the government, lest it risk a shutdown. The continuing appropriations bill is intended to give Congress more time to pass an omnibus budget for the remainder of the fiscal year.

The legislation extends fiscal year 2022 funding levels with some exceptions, according to a section-by-section summary of the Senate's version of the bill, known as the Continuing Appropriations and Ukraine Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2023.

Additionally, the bill provides for over $16 billion in assistance for areas related to the conflict in Ukraine, including approximately $12.4 billion in new funding, the summary said.

The bill provides $4.5 billion in economic assistance for Kiev, $3 billion in security aid, $2.8 billion towards operations in US European Command, $1.5 billion to replenish US weapons stocks, $540 million to increase critical munitions production, $35 million for nuclear incident preparedness in Ukraine, and $2 million for an Inspector General report on Ukraine assistance monitoring, the summary said.

The legislation also authorizes the US President to give $3.7 billion in Presidential Drawdown Authority equipment to Ukraine, the summary added.

The legislation also includes $1 billion in funding for low-income heating assistance, $20 million to address the water crisis in Jackson, Mississippi and $15.3 million to the FBI for investigative activities associated with Afghan resettlement operations, according to the summary.

The bill requires 60 votes to get through the Senate - a feat that initially appeared unlikely given Minority Leader Mitch McConnell's call for Republicans to block its passage due to the presence of energy permitting reform measures included by Senator Joe Manchin.

During remarks on the Senate floor on Tuesday, McConnell called the measure a "poison pill" within the legislation and urged Republican colleagues to vote against the bill. Later on Tuesday,

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Poland Foreign Minister Says Ukraine's Accession to EU Will 'Last Long'

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - Poland will do everything to support a speedy accession of Ukraine to the European Union but the process will realistically take a long time, Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau said during a Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) event.
"Of course, Poland will do everything that we can in order to support the speedy accession of Ukraine to the European Union, but to be realistic, it's going to last long. I don't know how long. Hopefully, not as long as it took Poland, about ten years, [and] not as long as it's taking the Western Balkans states, sometimes more than 20 years," Rau said on Tuesday.
The European Union should help Ukraine to rebuild itself after the conflict with Russia is over, but Poland wishes to see the world act on the issue much sooner than that, Rau added.
Rau noted that Poland has so far delivered to Ukraine more heavy military equipment than France, Germany and Italy combined as well as is doing a lot to help Ukraine economically.
On February 24, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine after the breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk requested help to defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Ministry of Defense said the operation is solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure.

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US Approves $250Mn Potential Sale of M1A2K Tank Ammo, Equipment to Kuwait - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - The United States has given a green light to the potential sale of M1A2K Abrams tank operational and training ammunition to the Kuwaiti military, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said in a press release.
"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Kuwait of M1A2K tank operational and training ammunition and related equipment for an estimated cost of $250 million. The Defense Security Cooperation Agency delivered the required certification notifying Congress of this possible sale today," DSCA said on Tuesday.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 09/28/2022 9:50:43 AM

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Kuwait's government wants to buy from the US a wide range of ammunitions for their main combat battle tank, including incendiary, armor piercing, high explosive, tracing and screening-smoke shells, the statement said, adding that spare and repair parts as well other logistical and program support elements, have been requested.
This ammunition sale would be in accordance with US foreign policies, the statement continues, as it provides a "Major Non-NATO ally" with the due support to reinforce its security.
DCSA considers that delivering on Kuwait's request would ensure the country's ability to properly address regional threats and facilitate the further deployment of the M1 Abrahams tanks.
"The proposed sale of this equipment and support will not alter the basic military balance in the region," the statement adds.

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Poland Does Not Exclude Sabotage as Cause for Nord Stream Incidents - Foreign Minister

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - Poland does not exclude sabotage as the primary cause of the incident with a gas leak on the Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 pipelines, Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau said during a Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) event.
"Intellectual honesty requires us not to exclude a sabotage," Rau said on Tuesday. "And if this was the case, this would mean that someone wanted to intimidate Baltic Sea states with the exception of Russia."
Rau pointed out that one should not reject the notion that the incidents could be an element of Russia's alleged hybrid war against NATO but did not explain why he considers it to be a plausible scenario.
On Tuesday, the gas pipeline operator Nord Stream AG said that it is currently impossible to estimate the timing of the resumption of the work of the Nord Stream pipelines, but noted that all resources are involved to assessing the damage.
On Monday, Nord Stream AG told Sputnik that a landfall dispatcher had registered a rapid drop of pressure on one of the segments of Nord Stream 2. The incident occurred in the Danish waters near the island of Bornholm. Later in the day, the operator said that the pressure drop had also been registered on both strings of Nord Stream 1.
The reasons for the incidents remain unknown and an investigation is underway.

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US Expected to Announce Another $1Bln in Military Aid for Ukraine in Coming Days - Reports

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 09/28/2022 9:50:43 AM

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WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik/Prime) - The United States is expected to announce another $1 billion in military assistance for Ukraine in the coming days, Reuters reported citing US officials.
Meanwhile, Congress is working to approve up to some $12 billion in additional military and economic assistance to Ukraine by the end of the month.

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US to Table UNSC Resolution Condemning Russian Referenda - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, September 27 (Sputnik) - The United States will table a resolution in the UN Security Council to condemn Russian referenda held in regions in Ukraine, the US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said.
"The United States will be tabling a resolution condemning the sham referenda being held in Ukrainian territory," Thomas-Greenfield told journalists on Tuesday.
The United States knows that the outcomes of these "sham referenda" were predetermined in Moscow, she added.
The UN Security Council meeting on the referenda in Ukraine was conducted upon a request by the United States, Albania and Ukraine.
United Nations Under Secretary General Rosemary DiCarlo said the referenda do not represent a genuine popular will and added they are against international law.

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NASA, SpaceX Delay Crew-5 Launch Date to Tuesday Because of Hurricane Ian - Statement

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - NASA and SpaceX are delaying the planned launch date to send astronauts to the International Space Station (ISS) next week due to Hurricane Ian, the US space agency said in a press release.
"NASA and SpaceX are targeting no earlier than 12:23 p.m. EDT Tuesday, Oct. 4, for the launch of the agency's Crew-5 mission to the International Space Station with a backup opportunity on Wednesday, Oct. 5," the release said on Tuesday. "Mission teams will continue to monitor the impacts of [Hurricane] Ian on the Space Coast and NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida and could adjust the launch date again, as necessary."
The original launch date set on Monday has been scrapped due to Hurricane Ian, a Category 3 storm that is expected to hit the Florida's west coast in the coming days.
The Crew-5 flight will carry NASA astronauts Nicole Mann and Josh Cassada, who will serve as mission commander and pilot, respectively, along with Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency astronaut Koichi Wakata, and Roscosmos cosmonaut Anna Kikina, who will serve as mission specialists, the release said.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 09/28/2022 9:50:43 AM

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SpaceX's Dragon Endurance spacecraft is currently attached to a Falcon 9 rocket and safely secured inside SpaceX's hangar at Kennedy Space Center, the release added.
After the Hurricane passes, teams from NASA and SpaceX will evaluate the potential impacts to the space center and determine whether to push back the launch date again, according to the release.

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More Americans Oppose Sending Military Aid to Ukraine Without Diplomatic Efforts - Poll

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - Nearly half of Americans are against sending military aid to Ukraine if the US is not involved in diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict, a new poll conducted by the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft revealed.
Almost half of respondents (47%) said they only support the continuation of US military aid to Ukraine if Washington is involved in ongoing diplomacy, the poll showed on Tuesday. About 40 percent expressed their support for providing weapons to Kiev regardless of the negotiation process.
Roughly 58% say they would oppose the US providing military aid to Ukraine at current levels if their own country suffers higher gas prices and a higher cost of goods.
The poll also revealed that 57% of likely voters support the US pursuing diplomatic negotiations as soon as possible to end the conflict, while only 32% oppose such efforts.
"Americans recognize what many in Washington don't: Russia's war in Ukraine is more likely to end at the negotiating table than on the battlefield. And there is a brewing skepticism of Washington's approach to this war, which has been heavy on tough talk and military aid, but light on diplomatic strategy and engagement," executive vice president at the Quincy Institute Trita Parsi was quoted as saying in the release.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY
WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) -

NORD STREAM PIPELINES INCIDENTS
* The Swedish Maritime Administration (SMA) does not have any information regarding the causes of the leaks on the Nord Stream 1 and 2 gas pipelines, a SMA representative told Sputnik on Tuesday.
* Russia is extremely concerned about the emergency situation at the Nord Stream gas pipelines, which is unprecedented and needs a prompt investigation, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 09/28/2022 9:50:43 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 09/28/2022 9:50:43 AM

* It is currently impossible to estimate the timing of the resumption of the work of Nord Stream, all resources are involved to assess the damage, the gas pipeline operator Nord Stream AG said
* The United States cannot confirm reports about whether Russia's Nord Stream 1 and 2 gas pipelines were sabotaged, but such an attack would be in no one's interest, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.
* NATO is monitoring the situation in the Baltic Sea after accidents on the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipeline systems and exchanging data with allies, the alliance's secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, said.

REFERENDUMS IN DONBAS, KHERSON AND ZAPORIZHZHIA REGIONS
* With 100% of the ballots processed in the Luhansk People's Republic (LPR), 98.42% of voters supported accession to Russia, regional election commission head Elena Kravchenko told reporters.
* With 100% of the ballots at the referendum in the Kherson region processed, 87.05% of voters supported reunification with Russia, regional election commission head Marina Zakharova said.
* With 29.19% of ballots processed in the referendum in the Zaporizhzhia region, 93.11% of voters have supported accession to Russia.
* The Russian Civic Chamber stated that the referendums in the people's republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, as well as Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions had been held successfully.

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS
* The United States has not delivered the National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS) to Ukraine yet, but will do that within two or three months, Pentagon spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.
* Russia remains ready to negotiate with Ukraine, at the same time the situation and conditions are changing, but the goals of the special military operation remain the same, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

GLOBAL ENERGY MARKETS
* Oil prices had their first biggest gain in nearly three weeks on Tuesday, with benchmark crude futures rising more than 2% on concerns about potential damage to offshore US energy production facilities from the start of the Atlantic hurricane season.
* The price of Gazprom's gas exports to countries that are not members of the the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) grew by more than 3.5 times during the first half of 2022 year-on-year, laying the basis for record financial indicators, Famil Sadygov, deputy chairman of the Gazprom management committee, said.
* The sanctions applied against Russia create additional obstructions for trade between Iraqi and Russian companies in the energy industry that must be taken into consideration, Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein told Sputnik.
* The price of oil could soar to $150 per barrel during the coming winter season, Hussein told Sputnik.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 09/28/2022 9:50:43 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 09/28/2022 9:50:43 AM

* Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar discussed a proposed multilateral price cap on Russian oil with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken during meetings in Washington, Jaishankar said.

GAZPROM-NAFTOGAZ DISPUTE
* Russian gas giant Gazprom said on Tuesday that it had rejected Ukraine's Naftogaz's claims in arbitration on the transit of Russian gas to Europe and emphasized services not rendered should not be paid.
* Gas futures in Europe surged after Gazprom rejected Naftogaz's claims, according to data from the London ICE exchange.

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Oil Prices Up Most in Nearly 3 Weeks Based on US Hurricane Watch

NEW YORK, September 27 (Sputnik) - Oil prices had their first biggest gain in nearly three weeks on Tuesday, with benchmark crude futures rising more than 2% on concerns about potential damage to offshore US energy production facilities from the start of the Atlantic hurricane season.
Fears that the so-called Hurricane Ian might pulverize oil producing platforms on the US Gulf Coast of Mexico prompted oil super-majors Chevron and BP to evacuate their facilities there, triggering the biggest rally in crude since September 9.
New York-traded West Texas Intermediate, which serves as the US crude benchmark, settled at $78.50 a barrel, up $1.79, or 2.3%, on the day.
Brent, the London-traded global benchmark for oil, settled at $86.27, up $2.21, or 2.6%, on the day.
Prior to Tuesday, crude prices had experienced a torrid selloff from the combination of super-sized rate hikes by the Federal Reserve, recession worries and the dollar at 20-year highs. A strong dollar is anathema to commodities priced in the currency, including crude, as it raises transaction/acquisition costs for commodity traders using the euro and other currencies.
Oil prices still came off Tuesday's highs after Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis President James Bullard cautioned that the United States remained at the risk of a recession from its worst inflation in over 40 years.
"No matter how you look at it, we have a serious inflation problem in the US," Bullard said in a speech delivered virtually to an economic event in London. "We're missing our inflation target and the credibility of our inflation targeting regime is at risk."
Federal reserve Bank of Minneapolis President Neel Kashkari, meanwhile, said "there's a lot of tightening in the pipeline" - referring to rates already up by 300 percentage points and likely to rise another 125 before the year-end. "We are moving at an appropriately quick pace," Kashkari, adding that "there is a danger of overdoing it."
Their comments pushed the mercurial dollar back into positive territory after it had been lower for most of Tuesday morning. The stock market, up earlier in the day, also tanked, after the

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 09/28/2022 9:50:43 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 09/28/2022 9:50:43 AM

litany of comments from Bullard, Kashkari and other regional Fed chiefs. Wall Street's three major stocks indicators - the Dow, the S&P 500 and Nasdaq - are all down about 20% or more for 2022, placing them in bear-market category.

"Crude prices are attempting to stabilize alongside most risky assets as the global recession fear-driven selloff is slowly getting fully priced in," said Ed Moya, analyst at online trading platform OANDA. "The oil market could see another drop if risk aversion quickly returns, [although] the current tightness should prevent a drop below the mid-$70s."

Notwithstanding Tuesday's advance, WTI is down 40% from its March high of around $130, which had come a fortnight after the breakout of the Russia-Ukraine war.

The US crude benchmark remained almost 40% lower from its March highs of around $130. It was also down more than 12% on the month and 26% off for the July-through-September period, marking its first quarterly decline in two years.

Brent, meanwhile, remains some 38% off from its March peak of almost $140. It is also 10% lower on the month, and off 25% for the third quarter.

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Fed's Kashkari Says Lots of Tightening Left on US Rates, Danger of 'Overdoing It'

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - The Federal Reserve has a lot more tightening to do with US interest rates in order to curb inflation and there is a danger it could overdo it, Neele Kashkari, the central bank's regional chief for the district of Minneapolis, said Tuesday.

"There's a lot of tightening in the pipeline," Kashkari said, appearing on a live-streamed discussion on the US economy and interest rates, hosted by the Wall Street Journal. "We are moving at an appropriately quick pace. There is a danger of overdoing it."

The Fed last week announced its fifth rate for the year, raising rates by 75 basis points to bring them up by 300 points from a base of just 25 in February. The central bank's chairman Jerome Powell said rate hikes have some way to go before the Fed considers a pause or reduction, with the likelihood of another 125 basis points being added before the end of the year.

"We must continue to tighten policy until there is compelling evidence that underlying inflation has peaked and is declining," Kashkari said. "Then we must sit and pause. Wages and rents continue to rise, resulting in stickier inflation. Right now, the economy is sending us a lot of mixed signals."

For most of the past decade, the Fed had no problems with inflation, with annual price growth remaining well below its 2% target. It could be argued then that the central bank's real problem was a lack of inflation. That changed with the 2020 coronavirus outbreak, which upended global commodities production and supply chains. Since then US inflation, as measured by the broad Consumer Price Index, or CPI, has been at or near four-decade highs.

Even after the Fed's first 75-basis point rate hike in June, the CPI grew by an annualized 9.1% that month, marking a 41-year high. Price pressures have come down since, with the CPI slowing to an annualized 8.5% in July and 8.3% in August. However, its retreat of 0.8% over two months — versus two rate hikes totaling 1.5% in the same period — hasn't been encouraging.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 09/28/2022 9:50:43 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 09/28/2022 9:50:43 AM

Kashkari echoed Fed Chair Powell's stance of not dropping rates until the inflation fight was won, adding that this would apply even in a slowdown.
"We will not repeat the mistake of cutting interest rates when the economy weakens," the Minneapolis Fed chief said.
Many economists have warned that the Fed could push the United States into a deep recession with the sharpest rate hikes in four decades, pointing to the high-flying housing sector and one-time ebullient stock market as the central bank's potential victims.
Wall Street's three major stocks indicators — the Dow Jones Industrial Average, the S&P 500 and the Nasdaq Composite — are all down about 20% or more for 2022, placing them in bear-market category.
The Fed has projected an economic growth of 0.2% for this year and 1.2% for 2023, versus the runaway 5.7% in 2021, when the United States recovered robustly from business lockdowns forced by the coronavirus outbreak.

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Conservative Legal Activists Sue to Block Biden Decision to Cancel Student Loan Debt

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - A group of conservative activists on Tuesday filed a lawsuit against the Biden administration to dispute its decision over canceling student loan debt.
"Today, Pacific Legal Foundation filed suit against the US Department of Education to block its illegal move to cancel more than $500 billion in student loan debt," the group said in a statement.
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. An additional $10,000 of debt will be canceled for eligible borrowers who also received a federal Pell grant.
In March 2020, the US Department of Education granted forbearance to holders of federal student loans amid the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, with an estimated 60% of all borrowers taking advantage of the program.
PLF's attorney Caleb Kruckenberg said it is illegal for the executive branch to create a $500 billion program "by press release, and without statutory authority or even the basic notice and comment procedure for new regulations."
The case filed in US District Court for the Southern District of Indiana, according to the statement.
PLF has received funding from right-wing activists and organizations such as the Koch family, according to a posting by the House natural resources committee.

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Zelenskyy Urges UNSC to Provide Ukraine With Collective Security Guarantees

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 09/28/2022 9:50:43 AM

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WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - Volodymyr Zelenskyy called on the UN Security Council on Tuesday to provide Ukraine with collective security guarantees.
"Ukraine should receive clear and legally binding guarantees of collective security," Zelenskyy told a UNSC meeting.

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Russia Objects to Virtual Participation of Zelenskyy in UNSC Meeting on Ukraine - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, September 27 (Sputnik) - Russia objects to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's virtual participation in the Security Council meeting on Ukraine, the Russian permanent representative to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said on Tuesday.
"The Council should not turn into a forum for political shows or cinema," Nebenzia told a briefing on Ukraine in the UNSC.
The 70-years old rules require the briefers to participate in person, he added.
Russia is against virtual participation in the Security Council meetings, as it causes a serious harm to the prestige of the Council.
At the end of September, the United Nations voted to allow Zelenskyy to participate virtually also in the United Nations General Assembly debate. Russia opposed it but the majority of the UN members voted for Zelenskyy to participate online.

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UN Official Says Russian Referendums Cannot Be Regarded as Legal Under International Law

UNITED NATIONS, September 27 (Sputnik) - The referendums in Ukraine cannot be regarded as legal and as genuine expressions of popular will, UN Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo said on Tuesday.
"Unilateral actions aimed to provide a veneer of legitimacy to the attempted acquisition by force by one State of another State's territory, while claiming to represent the will of the people, cannot be regarded as legal under international law," DiCarlo said during the UNSC Meeting on Ukraine.
These referendums cannot be called genuine expressions of popular will, she added.

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IMF Says Closely Monitoring Recent Economic Developments in UK, Engaged With Authorities

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 09/28/2022 9:50:43 AM

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WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is closely following reports about concerning economic developments in the British economy and currently engaged with UK authorities about the matter, an IMF spokesperson said in a statement to Sputnik on Tuesday.

On Monday, the British pound fell to an all-time low of $1.0384 against the US dollar in light of UK Prime Minister Liz Truss's tax-cutting plans. .

"We are closely monitoring recent economic developments in the UK and are engaged with the authorities," the spokespersons said.

On Friday, UK Chancellor of the Exchequer Kwazi Kwarteng announced a 45 billion pound ($48 billion) tax-cutting package that would benefit the highest earners most, causing concern about unsustainable government borrowing.

It was the biggest package of tax cuts in 50 years announced "without even a semblance of an effort to make the public finance numbers add up," Institute for Fiscal Studies Director Paul Johnson said in comments on the measure.

The IMF does not recommend large and untargeted fiscal packages at this moment given elevated inflation pressures in many countries, including the United Kingdom, the spokesperson said.

The IMF spokesperson added that the UK measures will likely increase inequality in the country. The UK government should consider ways to provide support that is more targeted and reevaluate the tax measures, especially those that benefit high income earners, the spokesperson said.

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Pentagon Releases 2021 Civilian Casualty Report Saying US Military Killed 12, Injured 5

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - The US military killed a dozen civilians and injured five others in operations undertaken abroad during 2021, the Defense Department said in its annual report on civilian casualties on Tuesday.

“[The Defense Department] assesses that there were approximately 12 civilians killed and approximately 5 civilians injured during 2021 as a result of US military operations,” the report said.

The Defense Department received four credible reports of civilian casualty incidents in Afghanistan in 2021 that resulted in 12 deaths and 2 injuries, the report said.

The United States withdrew its forces from Afghanistan in August 2021 at the direction of President Joe Biden, resulting in a swift takeover of the country by the Taliban.

The US Africa Command assesses that three civilians were injured as the result of an airstrike in Somalia in January as well, the report said.

The Defense Department continues to assess three reports of civilian casualty incidents in Iraq and Syria as part of Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve, the report also said.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 09/28/2022 9:50:43 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 09/28/2022 9:50:43 AM

The US responds to civilian casualty incidents by acknowledging responsibility, providing medical care or providing payments; one such payment was made in 2021 for an incident in Herat, Afghanistan, in January, the report added.
US government assessments may differ from those of non-governmental organizations and other groups due to differences in methodology, according to the report.

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US Judge Sets Russian National Vinnik's Next Hearing for December 16

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - Further steps in the case of Russian citizen Alexander Vinnik, extradited to the United States, will be taken during the next hearing scheduled for December 16, Senior District Judge Susan Illston said during the zoom hearing on Tuesday.
"So, Mr. Vinnik, we'll see you then, if not before, we'll see you on Friday, December 16, perhaps we'll be in-person, so we can see one another and we will take further steps on this case at that time," Illston said.
During the zoom hearing, the representatives of the defense and the prosecution were in the same room. Vinnik was present from the room in the jail. In a separate window, there was a translator for Vinnik. He looked calm.
Vinnik is accused of financial crimes by US authorities, including money laundering through his cryptocurrency trading platform BTC-e. Prosecutors allege the platform enabled criminal activity by obscuring and anonymizing transactions and sources of funds.
Vinnik faces upwards of 50 years in prison if convicted on the charges, which he denies. Assistant Federal Public Defender David Rizk will represent Vinnik during the case.
Vinnik was extradited to the United States from Greece earlier this month, outraging officials in Moscow. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova objected to the transfer over concerns Vinnik would be subject to "punitive justice" by the US.
Greek authorities detained Vinnik in 2017 on the request of the US government. However, Vinnik was initially extradited to France, where he was sentenced to five years in prison and fined $119,433. Vinnik was later returned to Greece before being taken to the US on a private plane.

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Congressmen Raise Issue of Chinese Firm Buying Farmland Near US Military Base - Letter

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - US lawmakers reached out to the Biden administration this week raising national security concerns about a Chinese firm with alleged

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 09/28/2022 9:50:43 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 09/28/2022 9:50:43 AM

ties to the Chinese government purchasing farmland near a US military base in the state of North Dakota, according to a letter released on Tuesday.

"The recent acquisition of property north of Grand Forks, North Dakota, by the Fufeng Group, a Chinese-based manufacturer with close links to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), is an alarming development for our national security," the letter said.

The lawmakers said in the letter that the presence of a CCP-affiliated corporation near the US military installation "potentially undermines the integrity of our high-capability military bases, jeopardizing our strategic interests."

US Congressmen Carlos Gimenez, Mike Waltz, and 48 other lawmakers signed the letter sent to US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack.

The letter said the farmland acquired by the alleged Chinese-backed company is near the Grand Forks Air Force Base, which has exceptional intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities, making the recently purchased land the ideal location to closely monitor and intercept military activity.

The lawmakers asked the Biden administration to disclose if anything is being done to appropriately address the this matter and other similar situations.

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Biden Confers With Florida Officials as Category 3 Hurricane Ian Approaches - White House

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden has discussed with several Florida mayors the preparations in anticipation of Hurricane Ian, a Category 3 storm that is expected to hit the state's west coast, the White House said in a readout on Tuesday.

"President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. held separate calls today with Mayor Jane Castor of Tampa, Mayor Ken Welch of St. Petersburg and Mayor Frank Hibbard of Clearwater to discuss preparations for the potential impacts from Hurricane Ian," the readout said.

Biden spoke about what federal, state and local governments are doing to position resources ahead of the hurricane and the plan to implement evacuation operations, including resources the US president directed to Florida after his emergency declaration announcement over the weekend.

Biden said he has directed Federal Emergency management Agency (FEMA) Administrator Deanne Criswell to ensure that all available federal support is prepared in advance and positioned in ways to augment state and local emergency response efforts after the hurricane passes, the readout said.

Two-and-a-half million residents have so far been ordered to evacuate the Tampa and surrounding areas.

Hurricane Ian slammed into Cuba earlier causing significant wind and storm surge impacts, according to the US Hurricane Center.

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Pentagon Says Russian Objective to Take Over Ukraine Has Not Changed, Efforts Stalled

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - The United States continues to believe that Russia remains intent on taking over Ukraine as part of its special military operation despite the lines of contact largely stalling, Defense Department Press Secretary Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.
"In terms of Russian force posture, broadly speaking, without getting into a detailed operation update, no major shifts, other than that we continue to see, particularly in the Donbas region, the Russians attempt to conduct offensive operations in that area, with Ukraine successfully holding the line," Ryder said during a press briefing. "We've seen no indication that they have any intention of changing their overall aim, which is to take over Ukraine."
Russia launched its special military operation on February 24 in response to requests from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics (DPR and LNR) to protect them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops.
The DNR and LNR as well as the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions are currently holding referenda on whether to join the Russian Federation. The United States and its allies have said they consider the referenda illegitimate and will not recognize the results.
Earlier on Tuesday, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said Ukraine has a right to continue using military force, including US-provided weapons, against the territories even if they are in the process of voting to join Russia.
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US Has Over 3,200 Guardsmen in Florida Prepositioned Ahead of Tropical Storm - Pentagon
WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - Some 3,200 US National Guardsmen have been prepositioned in Florida to be deployed to impacted areas as tropical storm Ian is expected to bring high-speed winds and floods this week, Pentagon spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.
"As of this morning, the Florida National Guard has more than 3,200 soldiers and airmen on state active duty with another 1800 plus in the pipeline. Florida has pre-positioned guard soldiers, airmen, and equipment at bases and armories around the state in preparation for deploying them to areas impacted by the storm," Ryder said during a press briefing.
The guardsmen will provide root clearing, search and rescue teams to support flood control and security, while aviation assets like helicopters are also on standby to assist as required, Ryder said.
Five neighboring Florida states stand ready to make an additional 2,000 plus guardsmen available if required, Ryder added.
On September 26, the National Hurricane Center (NHC) warned that a life-threatening storm surge, hurricane-force winds, flash floods, and possible mudslides were expected in Western Cuba. Ian, which the NHC upgraded to the "major hurricane" category, hit the island early on Tuesday when maximum sustained winds at landfall were estimated to reach 125 miles/hour. The hurricane is then forecast to head toward Florida, where a life-threatening storm surge is due to hit the state's west coast on Wednesday.

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UN Chief Has Held No New Conversations With Putin - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, September 27 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres had no new conversations with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Wednesday.
"There has been no new conversation with President Putin but obviously, contacts remain on many different levels," Dujarric told a briefing when asked about the referendums in Ukraine.
Dujarric during the briefing also said the UN has deep concerns about the referendums in Ukraine but has no plans to get involved.
With regard to the Nord stream pipeline leads, Dujarric said the UN hopes they get repaired given the ecological impact it could have and to ensure the flow of energy.
The United Nations Security Council is going to discuss the referendums on Wednesday afternoon upon request of the United States, Albania and Ukraine.

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US Assesses Russia Now Using Iranian-Provided Drones in Ukraine - Pentagon
WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - The United States assesses that Russia has began using Iran-made drones as part of its special military operation in Ukraine, Defense Department Press Secretary Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.
"We do assess that the Russians now are using the Iranian drones that we talked about in the past that were delivered to Russia. We do assess that they are now using them in Ukraine," Ryder said during a press briefing.
Ryder declined to comment on the battlefield effectiveness of the Iranian drones so far, but called the reports that Ukraine had shot down some of the drones "credible."
The drones are being used for both kinetic and surveillance purposes, Ryder added.

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More Americans Face Hunger Because of Inflation, Expiring Federal Benefits - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - Poor and middle class Americans are increasingly facing the prospects of hunger as a result of record inflation and the end of temporary benefits from the US federal government, Bloomberg reported on Tuesday.

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Hunger is spreading among Americans with steady but low-paying jobs, such as maintenance workers, retail employees, roofers and nursing aides, as record inflation continues despite attempts by the Federal Reserve to tame it by raising interest rates, the report said.
The Biden administration attempted to help the US economy by providing a $1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package during the pandemic, including a variety of safety-net programs. The benefits included $1,400 stimulus payments, universal free school lunches, temporarily expanded child tax credit of up to $300 per child of monthly payments and other food-aid increases.
As the United States has entered a recession, the suspension of the programs has added to the hardship experienced by Americans. However, critics have said US government spending and currency printing in the amounts of trillions of dollars have contributed to the record-high inflation and a stagnating economy,
President Joe Biden recently announced plans to end hunger by 2030 and invited food security and other experts, state and local officials as well as food companies representatives to the White Conference conference on hunger, health and nutrition. The Biden administration has said it plans to raise the minimum wage, expand food assistance, include free school lunches and restore the expanded child tax credit.

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St. Louis Fed Chief Says Recession a Risk, Inflation Woes Hurt Central Bank's Credibility
WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - The United States is at the risk of a recession from its worst inflation in over 40 years and the Federal Reserve has a credibility problem in addressing this, James Bullard, the central bank's regional chief for St. Louis, said Tuesday.
"There is a risk of recession; unexpected macroeconomic shocks could push the United States into recession," St. Louis Fed President Bullard said in a speech delivered virtually to an economic event in London monitored by Sputnik. "No matter how you look at it, we have a serious inflation problem in the US. We're missing our inflation target and the credibility of our inflation targeting regime is at risk."
The Fed last week announced its fifth rate for the year, raising rates by 75 basis points to bring them up by 300 points from a base of just 25 in February. The central bank's chairman Jerome Powell said rate hikes have some way to go before the Fed considers a pause or reduction, with the likelihood of another 125 basis points being added before the end of the year.
Despite this, several regional heads of the Fed have expressed concerns that the central bank had problems convincing investors and markets that it was on target with its inflation fighting efforts. Among them was Boston Fed Chief Susan Collins who said Monday that the central bank had to "move quickly on rates in order to maintain our credibility".
Collins also said that achieving a soft landing for the US economy would be difficult but possible as growth could take a dip this year and next.
Bullard took that assessment further on Tuesday by saying the Fed "will have to maintain higher policy rates for some time," expressing hope that the outcome will be as positive as in 1994, when the central bank managed to avert a recession with some fine-tuned rate hikes.

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"These [current] levels of inflation are similar to levels that you would have seen in the 1970s or early 1980s; so this is something we have not experienced since the days of Paul Volcker," he said, referring to the Fed's legendary chairman from that era who raised rates by as much as 22% to fight inflation.

Bullard said the problem with the 70s and 80s was a higher level of tolerance for inflation and volatile prices.

"And the real economy was also volatile, there were four recessions in 13 years, culminating in the 1982 recession which sent unemployment all the way to 10.8% in the US at the peak," he said. "So, this is a serious problem. We need to be sure that we respond to it appropriately and not replay the very volatile area era of the 1970s."

For most of the past decade, the Fed had no problems with inflation, with annual price growth remaining well below its 2% target. It could be argued then that the central bank's real problem was a lack of inflation. That changed with the 2020 coronavirus outbreak, which upended global commodities production and supply chains. Since then US inflation, as measured by the broad Consumer Price Index, or CPI, has been at or near four-decade highs.

Even after the Fed's first 75-basis point rate hike in June, the CPI grew by an annualized 9.1% that month, marking a 41-year high. Price pressures have come down since, with the CPI slowing to an annualized 8.5% in July and 8.3% in August. However, its retreat of 0.8% over two months versus two rate hikes totaling 1.5% in the same period — hasn't been encouraging.

Many economists have warned that the Fed could push the United States into a deep recession with the sharpest rate hikes in four decades, pointing to the high-flying housing sector and one-time ebullient stock market as the central bank's potential victims.

Wall Street's three major stocks indicators — the Dow Jones Industrial Average, the S&P 500 and the Nasdaq Composite — are all down about 20% or more for 2022, placing them in bear-market category.

The Fed has projected an economic growth of 0.2% for this year and 1.2% for 2023, versus the runaway 5.7% in 2021, when the United States recovered robustly from business lockdowns forced by the coronavirus outbreak.

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US Has Not Delivered NASAMS to Ukraine Yet, Shipment Expected Within 2-3 Months – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) – The United States has not delivered the National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS) to Ukraine yet, but will do that within two or three months, Pentagon spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.

"[T]he US has not delivered NASAMS to Ukraine at this stage. We expect the first two [systems] to be delivered within the next two months or so," Ryder said during a press briefing. "That'll be from tranche three. And then the remaining six that were part of the USAI [Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative] are expected to be delivered in the future. I don't have a date to provide, but those will be longer term."

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White House Says Will Not Speculate on Cause of Nord Stream Gas Pipelines Leaks

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration will not speculate on the cause of major damage to the offshore Nord Stream 1 and 2 gas pipelines and stands ready to support its European allies, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said on Tuesday.
"I'm not going to get into going to speculate on the cause of this, it's not something that we're going to do," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing.
The United States will be ready to support its European partners after they complete the investigation in the matter, Jean-Pierre said.
The White House spokesperson also said the United States continues to consult with the European allies on energy security matters in light of the approaching winter.
On Monday, the pipelines' operator, Nord Stream AG, told Sputnik that a landfall dispatcher had registered a rapid drop of pressure on one of the segments of Nord Stream 2. The incident occurred in Danish waters near the island of Bornholm. Later in the day, the operator said a pressure drop had also been registered on both strings of Nord Stream 1.
Earlier on Tuesday, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said Russia was extremely concerned about the emergencies concerning the Nord Stream gas pipelines and called for a prompt investigation while not ruling out the possibility of sabotage.

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Russia Warns IS-Fueled Instability in Afghanistan Could Spill Over Into Central Asia

UNITED NATIONS, September 27 (Sputnik) - The Islamic State terrorist group (IS, banned in Russia) is seeking to turn Afghanistan into a hotbed of instability which could spill over into Central Asia and Russia, Russia's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations said on Tuesday.
"It's obvious that ISIS terrorists are using all resources at their disposal to destabilize the internal political situation to impose an atmosphere of fear and despair on the population and also to create a hub of instability which ultimately could spill over into Central Asia and then into Russia," Anna Evstigneeva said during a UN Security Council meeting on Afghanistan.
The IS is trying to demonstrate that the Taliban (under UN sanctions for terrorism) are out of control of the situation, she added.
Earlier in September, Uzbekistan's Foreign Minister Vladimir Norov urged the international community to prevent an isolation of Afghanistan. He warned it would have a negative impact on regional and global security.

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UN 'Has No Plans' to Be Involved in Russian Referendums - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, September 27 (Sputnik) - The United Nations has no plans to be involved in the referendums conducted in the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics and the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions to join the Russian Federation, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Wednesday.

"No, there is no plan for the United Nations to be involved in that way, shape or form," Dujarric said during a press briefing.

The UN Security Council is scheduled to discuss the referendums on Wednesday afternoon on the request of the United States, Albania and Ukraine.

On Monday, Moscow released the first results of the referendums on the Luhansk and Donetsk people's republics as well as the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions to join Russia.

With 14.22% of processed ballots in the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), 97.91% of residents have supported the DPR accession to Russia.

Meanwhile, with 12.56% processed ballots in the Luhansk People's Republic (LPR), 97.82% of residents voted to join Russia.

With 18% and 14% of the votes counted in the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson region, respectively, 98.19% and 96.97% of residents supported their respective regions to join Russia.

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US Envoy to UN to Introduce Resolution Condemning Russia Over Donbas Referendums - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - US ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield is going to introduce on Tuesday a resolution condemning Russia over the referendums in Donbas, CNN said, citing a US official.

The resolution will declare that the UN Security Council does not support the use of force to change state borders, the report said.

US diplomats are privately meeting with counterparts from all Security Council members, including from China and India, to ensure that they will support the document, the official noted.

Thomas-Greenfield will accuse Russia of the intention to annex the territories of another UN member country by force, he added.

Referendums on joining Russia have taken place from 23 to 27 September in the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions as well as the Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics.

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Blinken Says Ukraine Able to Use US Weapons to Take Russian-Controlled Territories

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - Ukraine is able to use US-provided weapons to launch attacks on territories controlled by Russian forces, where referenda are being held on accession to the Russian Federation, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday.
"Ukraine has the absolute right to defend itself throughout its territory, including to take back the territory that has been illegally seized one way or another by Russia. The equipment, the weapons that we and many other countries are providing them have been used very effectively to do just that, as we've seen in northeast Ukraine and as we see as well in the south," Blinken said during a press conference.
The Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics, as well as the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions, began polling on Friday in referenda to join Russia, which will last through Tuesday. The Biden administration has warned of additional economic consequences for Russia should the referenda proceed.
Russia's special military operation was launched on February 24 at the request of officials in Donetsk and Luhansk, who purported years of mistreatment by authorities in Kiev.

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Maryland Couple Enters New Guilty Pleads for Trying to Sell Military Information - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - A couple from Annapolis, Maryland, has entered new guilty pleas in US federal court for attempting to sell classified military information to a foreign government, the Baltimore Sun reported on Tuesday.
Jonathan and Diana Toebbe pleaded guilty to one felony count each of conspiracy to communicate restricted data after their previous plea agreements that called for specific sentencing guidelines were rejected by the court, the report said.
The previous sentencing range agreed to by lawyers for Jonathan Toebbe had called for a potential punishment between 12 years and 17 years in prison, according to court documents.
The court rejected the initial pleas last month, saying the sentencing options were strikingly deficient considering the seriousness of the case. The couple then immediately withdrew their initial guilty pleas and judge in the case set trial for January, the report said.
Prosecutors in the case said on Tuesday that the sentences they seek would be some of the most significant imposed in modern times under the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, the report said.
Under the latest plea agreement entered on Tuesday, the couple would each face a maximum sentence of life in prison and a $100,000 fine, although prosecutors are asking for a three-yer sentence for Diana Toebbe, the report added.

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According to the court documents, Jonathan Toebbe, a former US Navy officer, smuggled classified documents on nuclear submarines from his workplace and sent a letter to an undisclosed foreign government in April 2020 with a sample of material for sale. However, the recipient of the letter passed the information to the FBI.
Over the course of several months in 2021, the Toebbes supplied undercover FBI agents posing as representatives of the foreign government with the smuggled material during multiple document drops, after which they were arrested by the authorities, the documents said.

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ANALYSIS - US Fed Misjudgments on Prime Rate May Trigger 'Waterfall' Recession

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - The Federal Reserve's latest rate hike was based on an over optimistic assessment of the US economy's performance and is highly likely to trigger a recession, experts told Sputnik.
The Fed is implementing the sharpest interest rate rise in a generation in a bid to tame inflation after it hit a 40-year high. The Fed lowered interest rates to near zero during the pandemic but earlier this year was forced to begin hiking them up again as inflation soared over 8 percent.
The Fed aims to bring inflation down to 2 percent by raising interest rates to slow demand. Last week, in an effort toward this goal, the Fed raised its benchmark rate by three-quarters to a range of 3.00%-3.25% and projected continued hikes until the end of 2023.
Fed Chairman Jerome Powell in a presser after the announcement vowed to stay the course until inflation is reined in, even if that means slowing economic expansion which in turn could boost unemployment.
The Fed forecasted GDP to rise 0.2% for fiscal year 2022, a significant drop from the 5.7 percent the US saw in the prior year. In addition, the Fed's outlook for 2023 has GDP rising 1.2% and unemployment increasing about 0.7%.
On Monday, all three of Wall Street's major stock indexes were in bear-market territory amid relentless talk of future rate hikes.
Levy Economics Institute of Bard College Research Associate Marshall Auerback warned the Fed's latest rise in the prime interest rate was based on an over-optimistic assessment of the state of the US economy.
"The historical record says that with further tightening of financial conditions it will be followed by a waterfall recession that could be among the few most severe and protracted recessions in the postwar period," Auerback told Sputnik.
UNREALISTIC ECONOMIC GROWTH ESTIMATES
Federal Reserve Bank of Boston president Susan Collins on Monday said a "soft landing" for the US economy will be difficult, but it is possible. The fed official anticipates slower economic growth in 2023 although believes inflation is nearing its peak.
Auerback said the US economy has traced out an eight-month period "of something a little worse than apparent stagnation with turbulence."

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"The Fed projected 1.2% growth in 2023," Auerback pointed out. "For that to happen the rise in the unemployment rate would have to stop at 4.4% on a dime, and the historical record says that doesn't happen."

It would require a productivity boom, he added, and productivity growth since the Great Recession has been lousy and especially bad through the first eight months of this year.

"So basically, the Fed's growth projection is a lie," he said.

As a result, the Fed was going to be blamed for taking too harsh action to tackle an inflation crisis that was already declining anyway, Auerback added.

"The Fed Heads will have strutted about with so much hawkish machismo they will be blamed for a possibly protracted and severe recession that wasn't needed. They will have made a second major policy error in less than two years," Auerback said.

Fed officials appeared to have ignored warning signs of a major slowdown that were already accumulating, Auerback observed.

"The Fed Heads are walking into an unprecedented risk to themselves… all of the forward indicators are deteriorating rapidly," Auerback concluded.

Independent Institute Center for Peace & Liberty Director Ivan Eland said a deep recession is likely as the Fed continues to tighten interest rates to drive the inflation out of the economy now, but it may not last as long as some anticipate.

Eland acknowledged some of the recent inflation had been caused by pandemic-induced supply chain issues and the war in Ukraine, but believes those effects will gradually dissipate. The real problem, he added, lies elsewhere.

"For too long the Fed has flooded the system with too much money and politicians have… incurred too high budget deficits," Eland told Sputnik. "Both of which need to be, and are now being, ameliorated."

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India Says Received Request From Ukraine for Assistance With Resolving Specific Issues

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said on Tuesday that India received a request from Ukraine for assistance on certain specific issues.

"I had a meeting with the Prime Minister of Ukraine," Jaishankar said during a press conference alongside his US counterpart. "He did mention some very specific concerns which he thought merited our attention. He thought we could be of some use."

Jaishankar did not reveal what specific issues Ukraine requested assistance on.

India previously consulted with Russia during negotiations to open up the Black Sea ports for shipments of Ukrainian grain, Jaishankar said.

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US Rep. Pete Sessions Says He Did Not Know He Met With Azov Militants on Capitol Hill

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - US Republican Rep. Pete Sessions following his meeting with soldiers of Ukraine's Azov nationalistic regiment (terrorist organization, banned in Russia) on Capitol Hill told Sputnik he did not know with whom he met since these people did not wear a uniform.

During a telephone call with Sputnik, Sessions initially said reports about him meeting with soldiers from Azov — a group that had been under a Congress funding ban several years ago — were false, then clarified that he did meet with a group of people but was unsure if they were Azov soldiers.

"I did have some meeting with some people," Sessions said. "I met with a group of people." When asked if the meeting included members of the Azov regiment, he said "I don't know, nobody was in a uniform."

On Monday, chief of Kiev-based NGO Anti-Corruption Action Center Daria Kaleniuk said that Azov soldiers were received on Capitol Hill earlier in September. The Ukrainian delegation also met with Senators Joni Ernst, Dan Sullivan, Shelley Moore, Jeanne Shaheen, and other lawmakers to discuss Ukraine's request for modern tanks like the Abrams, the Counter-Rocket, Artillery, Mortar (C-RAM) and other air defense systems, Kaleniuk said.

The delegation's visit to Washington also included a meeting with US Deputy Assistant Secretary responsible for Central and Eastern Europe in the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs Robin Dunnigan and the State Department's Head of the Office of Sanctions Coordination Jim O'Brien to lobby for designating Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism and to seize $300 billion in Russian sovereign funds located abroad so that Ukraine can use it to buy modern weapons, according to Kaleniuk.

In August 2022, Russia's Supreme Court designated Azov as a terrorist organization. According to the Russian prosecutor general's office, Azov militants use prohibited means and methods of warfare and are complicit in torture of civilians and killings of children.

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Jaishankar Says India Still Able to Service, Supply Parts for Russian-Bought Equipment

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - India is still able to service and supply military equipment purchased from Russia despite an array of sanctions on Moscow by the United States and its allies, Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said on Tuesday.

"On the military equipment, to the best of my knowledge, I don't think in recent months we have faced any particular problems in terms of servicing and spare parts supply of equipment that we have got in the past from Russia," Jaishankar said during a press briefing.

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Former US Army Reservist Convicted of Conspiracy to Act as Agent of China - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, Sputnik (September 27) - A former US Army reservist has been convicted by a federal jury for acting as an illegal Chinese agent in the United States, the Justice Department said in a press release on Tuesday.

"Ji Chaoqun, 31, of Chicago, was found guilty on one count of conspiracy to act as an agent of a foreign government, specifically the People's Republic of China, without first notifying the Attorney General; one count of acting as an agent of the People's Republic of China without first notifying the Attorney General; and one count of making a material false statement to the US Army," the release said.

Trial evidence showed that Ji, a Chinese national, reported to a high-level intelligence officer in the Jiangsu provincial department of China's Ministry of State Security, the release said.

Ji was responsible for procuring biographical information about potential recruits for the department, including Chinese nationals working in the United States as engineers and scientists, some of whom were US defense contractors, the release also said.

He enlisted in the US Army Reserves in 2016 under the Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest program and lied durign his application and a subsequent interview that he had not been in contact with a foreign government within the past seven years, the release added.

Ji faces up to ten years in prison for acting in the United States as an agent of China and up to five years for the conspiracy and false statement offenses, according to the release.

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Indian FM Says Talked Russia Oil Price Cap With Blinken, Considers Impact on Global South

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar discussed a proposed multilateral price cap on Russian oil with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken during meetings in Washington, Jaishankar said on Tuesday.

"On the price cap, we had a brief discussion on it this morning. More technical people are engaged between the two systems on this particular subject," Jaishankar said during a press conference. "Countries in the Global South have found it difficult to compete for limited energy… We would judge any situation, frankly, by how it affects us and other countries of the Global South."

The US has led calls for a price cap on purchases of Russian oil in an attempt to slash the Kremlin's energy revenues amid the special military operation in Ukraine.

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Blinken Says Initial Reports Indicate Nord Stream Pipelines Sabotaged, But Cannot Confirm

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - The United States cannot confirm reports about whether Russia's Nord Stream 1 and 2 gas pipelines were sabotaged, but such an attack would be in no one's interest, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday.
"The leaks are under investigation," Blinken said during a press conference. "There are initial reports indicating that this may be the result of an attack or some kind of sabotage, but these are initial reports and we haven't confirmed that yet. But if it is confirmed, that's clearly in no one's interest."

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Nord Stream Pipelines Leaks Not to Significantly Impact Europe Energy Resilience - Blinken

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - The leaks of the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines will not significantly affect Europe's energy resilience, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday.
"My understanding is the leaks will not have a significant impact on Europe's energy resilience," Blinken said during a press conference.

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UN Security Council Members Call on Taliban to Reopen Schools for Women, Girls

UNITED NATIONS, September 27 (Sputnik) - The ten elected and five incoming members of the UN Security Council on Wednesday issued a statement calling on the Taliban to reopen schools for women and girls in Afghanistan.
"[Ten] days ago, marked one year since Taliban decided to exclude girls from secondary education in Afghanistan. We, the ten elected members and five incoming members of the Security Council are calling on the Taliban to immediately reverse this decision," the statement said.
The members issued the call prior to the UN Security Council meeting on Afghanistan and said the Taliban should respect the universal right to education by reopening the schools for female students.
The Taliban had promised the international community to allow women and girls to continue the life styles they had prior to them taking over the government in Afghanistan. However, the

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Taliban regime has not fulfilled its promises and the UN Security Council members continue condemning Kabul for its actions.
In late September, US President Joe Biden terminated Afghanistan's designation as a major non-NATO ally following the developments on the ground in the country.

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Bank of America Survey Finds 71% of US Workers Feel Wages Outpaced by Cost of Living

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - Some 71% of workers in the United States feel that their wages cannot keep up with the increasing cost of living, Bank of America said in a press release on Tuesday about a survey it had conducted.
"In addition, 80% of employees are concerned about inflation, and 71% feel the cost of living is outpacing growth in their salary or wages," the release said.
Bank of America surveyed 2,148 workers throughout the United States in February and July as part of its annual Workplace Benefits Report, which examines trends related to workplace financial benefits and wellness programs.
For more than a decade, price growth in the United States remained below the Federal Reserve's 2% target. Some economists have argued then the US central bank's real problem was a lack of inflation. However, the situation changed with the 2020 coronavirus outbreak measures that upended global commodities production and supply chains. Since, US inflation, as measured by the broad Consumer Price Index (CPI), has been at or near four-decade highs. Despite the Federal Reserve's interest rate hikes, the reading for the CPI remains at above 8% per year - more than four times the Federal Reserve's 2% target.

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US Consumer Confidence Up 2nd Month in Row Despite Rate Hikes - Conference Board

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - US consumer confidence rose for a second straight month in September despite fears of recession from aggressive rate hikes aimed at curbing inflation, The Conference Board said Tuesday.
"Consumer confidence improved in September for the second consecutive month supported in particular by jobs, wages, and declining gas prices," Lynn Franco, senior director of economic indicators at The Conference Board, which groups public and private corporations that track and publish economic data, said.
The board said the September reading for its Consumer Confidence Index was 108 versus 103.6 in August.
"Purchasing intentions were mixed, with intentions to buy automobiles and big-ticket appliances up, while home purchasing intentions fell," Franco said, attributing the latter to rising mortgage

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rates and a cooling housing market. "Looking ahead, the improvement in confidence may bode well for consumer spending in the final months of 2022, but inflation and interest-rate hikes remain strong headwinds to growth in the short term."
The Federal Reserve raised US interest rates for a fifth time last week, bringing them up by a total of 300 percentage points from a base of just 25 in February in a bid to fight inflation hovering near four decade highs. The central bank said it has some way to go before it can consider a pause or reduction in rates, and that another 125 percentage points will likely be added before the end of this year.
US mortgage rates have also surged as a result of the rate hikes, with the benchmark 30-year lending rate for home loans rising 0.25% last week to reach 6.29%, almost double the level seen in February.
The Commerce Department, however, reported on Tuesday that new home sales in the United States jumped almost 30% in August from a month ago despite the surge in interest and mortgage rates.
Consumer spending accounts for 70% of the US economy.

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Iraqi Foreign Minister Says He Was 'Frightened' by Leaders' Speeches at UNGA

UNITED NATIONS, September 27 (Sputnik) - Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein told Sputnik that the speeches delivered by some of the key leaders of the world at the United Nations General Assembly were frightening.
"To be honest, I was frightened when I listen to all these speeches of the leaders," Hussein said on the sidelines of the UNGA. "They are complaining about climate change, about the threat of the nature, threat to our health, threat to each other, about wars."
Hussein also mentioned the crisis in Ukraine, the impact it has on global food security, and the threat of using nuclear weapons as some of the pressing issues facing the world.
Hussein said he found it strange that most of the leaders were pessimistic.
The foreign minister pointed out that most of these issues are man-made.

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Senator Pledges to Work to Ensure Ongoing US Support for Ukraine, Hold Putin Accountable

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - US Senator Jeanne Shaheen said on Tuesday that she will continue working with her colleagues in the Senate to support Ukraine and hold Russian President Vladimir Putin accountable for his actions in the ongoing conflict.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 09/28/2022 9:50:43 AM

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"I will continue to work with my Senate colleagues to ensure ongoing US support for Ukraine and to hold Putin to account for his actions," Shaheen said in a virtual address during an event at the Center for European Policy Analysis.
Earlier on Monday, Shaheen, along with other senators, unveiled new legislation to ensure the United States has sufficient stocks of munitions and is ready for potential overseas contingencies amid the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and increased tensions around Taiwan.
Also on Monday, lawmakers in Congress reportedly agreed to include a nearly $12 billion aid package for Ukraine in a stop-gap spending bill in response to a Biden administration request for funding.

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US Ready to Support Europe After Nord Stream Leaks - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - The United States is ready to support Europe after leaks at Russia's Nord Stream 1 and 2 gas pipelines, AFP reported on Tuesday, citing a White House official.
"I'm not going to speculate on the cause, and I know our European partners are investigating. We stand ready to provide support to their efforts," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.
On Monday, Nord Stream 2 AG reported a sharp pressure drop at one of the lines of Nord Stream 2, which had been filled with technical gas after construction. An investigation into the cause is underway, the company said. Shortly after, Nord Stream AG, the operator of Nord Stream 1, reported a decrease in pressure at both lines. The pipeline has been out of operation since the end of August, but is filled with gas. The reasons for the pressure drop are also unknown.
Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov has said that Russia is extremely concerned by the emergencies, calling for a prompt investigation without ruling out an act of sabotage as the cause.

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Iraqi Foreign Minister Says Imports of High-Priced Food Causing Inflation

UNITED NATIONS, September 27 (Sputnik) - The Iraqi economy is being affected by imports of high-priced food products because it is causing inflation, Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein told Sputnik.
"The high price of the food or shortages will affect us directly," Hussein said. "We are not only importing food with a high price, we are also importing inflation in many other countries."

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 09/28/2022 9:50:43 AM

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Hussein pointed out that although high energy prices will benefit Iraqi oil companies, the downside is that expensive oil leads to an increase in other goods. Hussein predicts the price of oil in the global market will increase in the coming months to at least $150 per barrel.
Hussein said he hopes the crisis in Ukraine will end as soon as possible.
On February 24, Russia began a military operation in Ukraine, responding to calls for help from the breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk. In response, the West and its allies have rolled out a comprehensive sanctions campaign against Moscow.

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Iraqi Foreign Minister Says Security Situation in Iraq 'OK' Following Recent Unrest
UNITED NATIONS, September 27 (Sputnik) - The security situation in Iraq is okay following a short period of unrest in the country that sparked over Iraqi Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr's retirement, Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein told Sputnik.
"Security wise, it is okay," Hussein said on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly.
In late August, Sadr's announcement of his final retirement from politics led to violent clashes between followers of al-Sadr and Iraqi security forces, leaving at least 20 people dead and over 700, including 110 security officers, injured, according to media reports.
Hussein said Iraqi officials were worried that the unrest would lead to a prolonged conflict inside the country.
Moreover, Hussein said terrorism has not been a major issue in Iraq, adding that terrorist organizations have become small with only a few sporadic attacks in the country.

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Iraq's Potential Development of Nuclear Power Plants Still Under Discussion - Hussein

UNITED NATIONS, September 27 (Sputnik) - Iraq's potential plan to build nuclear power plants is still under discussion by government officials, Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein told Sputnik.
"This is [in] the stage of talks, it is not yet a serious issue," Hussein said.
Hussein said Iraqi officials discussed this matter with Russian officials during a recent trip to Moscow.
The Iraqi government wants to build eight nuclear power plants as part of an effort to resolve electricity shortage issues in the country.

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US Technology Company Emerson Says Will Sell Business in Russia to Local Management

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - The US technology company Emerson announced on Tuesday that it plans to sell its Russia business to the local management as part of the previously announced exit from that country.

“Emerson today announced an agreement to sell its Russia business, including Metran, its Russia-based manufacturing subsidiary, and Emerson LLC in Russia, the sales and service organization for Metran, to the local management team,” the company said in a statement.

In 2021, Russia represented approximately 1.5% of Emerson's total sales and included a pre-tax loss of $162 million in the third quarter of fiscal 2022, the statement said.

Emerson is going to work closely with the local Russia management team to help ensure a smooth transition for employees through the process, the statement added.

The company describes itself as a leader in industrial automation, which helps process, hybrid, and discrete manufacturers optimize operations, protect personnel, reduce emissions and achieve their sustainability goals through its automation solutions.

On February 24, Russia launched a military operation in Ukraine after the breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk requested help to defend them from intensifying Ukrainian attacks. In response, the United States and its allies imposed comprehensive sanctions against Russia that includes airspace closures and restrictive measures targeting numerous Russian officials and entities, media, and financial institutions. Dozens of transnational companies announced their exit from Russia in response to the special military operation.

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Iraqi Foreign Minister Says Discussed Ukraine-Russia Peace Prospects With Both Countries

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - Iraq as part of a contact group on Ukraine has engaged with officials from both Moscow and Kiev recently, including Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, to help negotiate a resolution to the countries’ conflict, Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein told Sputnik.

"We talked about how we can help to bring both sides together… [Lavrov] was not so optimistic about the reaction of the Ukrainians, because he said the Ukrainians are not the ones who can decide, it is up to the Americans," Hussein said. "We are trying [to negotiate peace]. I don’t know if we will succeed."

A ceasefire is needed first to create a successful negotiation environment, Hussein added. However, neither Russia nor Ukraine are ready to negotiate with each other at this moment, according to Hussein.

Iraq is part of an Arab League contact group on Ukraine with whom Lavrov spoke last week about the genesis of the conflict in Ukraine. The meeting came on the sidelines of the 77th UN General Assembly in New York, where the situation in Ukraine and related issues such as food insecurity have been central themes.

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Oil Prices Could Reach $150 Per Barrel This Winter - Iraqi Foreign Minister

UNITED NATIONS, September 27 (Sputnik) - The price of oil could soar to $150 per barrel during the coming winter season, Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein told Sputnik.
"We are approaching winter, and I have the feeling that the price of oil is going to be higher and higher in the coming few months. Perhaps, it will reach 150 or something like that," Hussein said on the sidelines of the General Assembly.

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UN General Assembly Confirms Grandi to Another Term as High Commissioner for Refugees

UNITED NATIONS, September 27 (Sputnik) - The UN General Assembly has confirmed Filippo Grandi to remain High Commissioner for Refugees for another two-and-a-half years, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Wednesday.
"Following the recommendation of the Secretary-General, after consultation with Member States, the General Assembly confirmed Filippo Grandi of Italy as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for a further two-and-a-half-years beginning on 1 July 2023 and ending on 31 December 2025. Mr. Grandi is currently serving the first two-and-a-half-year period of his second term as UNHCR's High Commissioner," the statement said.
While UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres had intended to request the General Assembly to confirm Grandi for a second term of five years, the later to shorter term due to personal reasons, the statement added.
Grandi had previously served at the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees for four years and as Deputy Special Representative for the UN Secretary-General in Afghanistan.

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Iraq Must Take Sanctions Into Consideration When Cooperating With Russia - FM

UNITED NATIONS, September 27 (Sputnik) - The sanctions applied against Russia create additional obstructions for trade between Iraqi and Russian companies in the energy industry that must be taken into consideration, Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein told Sputnik
Hussein was answering a question about new projects coming up between Moscow and Baghdad on Iraq's oil fields.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 09/28/2022 9:50:43 AM

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"But one thing I know is that because of the sanctions against Russia, Russian companies in Iraq, but also the Iraqi government must take the sanctions into consideration, otherwise, we

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Artemis I Mission to Moon Likely to Launch in Mid-November – NASA Administrator

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) – NASA Administrator Bill Nelson said on Tuesday that the earliest launch date of the Artemis I mission to the Moon could be in late October but will "likely" take place in the middle of November following several rollbacks due to technical issues.
"We know that the earliest it could go is late October but more than likely we will go in the window in the middle of November and of course whenever they need to do to the rocket now that it is safely encased back in the Vehicle Assembly Building, they'll do it," Nelson said in an interview.
Nelson added he is not concerned that the pullback of the Artemis I uncrewed mission will result in a longer delay for the Artemis II manned launch, scheduled for May 2024.
On Monday, NASA officials decided to postpone the launch of Artemis I, originally scheduled for September 27, and to roll the Space Launch System moon rocket back to the Vehicle Assembly Building to protect it from tropical storm Ian, which is expected to make landfall in Florida on Thursday.
US President Joe Biden on Saturday declared a state of emergency in Florida and ordered that federal assistance be provided to local authorities.
This is the third time NASA has postponed the unmanned mission to the Moon. The launches were previously canceled over a liquid hydrogen leak.

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US New Home Sales Up in August Despite Surging Interest, Mortgage Rates - Commerce Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - New home sales in the United States jumped almost 30% in August from a month ago despite surging interest and mortgage rates, according to data from the Commerce Department on Tuesday that, however, indicated a 6% drop in prices.
"Sales of new single family houses in August 2022 were at a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 685,000," the Census Bureau and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, both units of the Commerce Department, said in a statement.
New home sales for last month were 28.8% above the revised July rate of 532,000, the statement.
However, when compared to the August 2021 sales of 686,000, the current sale volume was 0.1% lower, the two agencies noted.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 09/28/2022 9:50:43 AM

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They also listed the median sales price of a new US home in August at $436,800, versus the July median of $466,300, translating to a drop of $29,500 or about 6%.
The Federal Reserve raised US interest rates for a fifth time last week, bringing them up by a total of 300 percentage points from a base of just 25 in February in a bid to fight inflation hovering near four decade highs. The central bank said it has some way to go before it can consider a pause or reduction in rates, and that another 125 percentage points will likely be added before the end of this year.
US mortgage rates have also surged as a result of the rate hikes, with the benchmark 30-year lending rate for home loans rising 0.25% last week to reach 6.29%, almost double the level seen in February.
Demand for homes has been one of the contributors to US inflation.
Until their recent decline, US home prices jumped almost 40% over the past two years. After this year's Fed rate hikes that began in March, mortgage rates swelled as well, almost doubling from the pre-hike level of 3.2%. The combination has pushed up the cost of home ownership in the United States to the highest in a generation, putting purchases out of reach for a growing number of prospective buyers, particularly first-timers.
Housing and real estate play important roles in the US economy, with roughly 65% of occupied housing units being owner-occupied. That makes homes a substantial source of household wealth and home construction a key provider of employment.
In the 2008/09 financial crisis, a crash of the housing market precipitated what later came to be known as the era of the Great Recession. Since then, the US property market has rapidly recovered on the back of economic recovery as well as demand from buyers.

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Saudi-Iran Sixth Round of Talks to Continue at Intelligence Level - Iraqi Foreign Minister

UNITED NATIONS, September 27 (Sputnik) - The next round of talks between Saudi Arabia and Iran will continue on the intelligence service level, Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein told Sputnik.
"But one thing I know - the process of negotiation will continue and perhaps the next round, once again, it will continue on the level of the intelligence service people. Then, we hope that after the next round, it will be different," Hussein said in an interview on the sidelines of the General Assembly.
Riyadh and Tehran held a fifth round of talks in Baghdad in April of this year. The countries are trying to re-establish their relations, building the path for a meeting of the two foreign ministers. Saudi Arabia and Iran cut off their diplomatic ties in 2016.

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Deal on Formation of Iraqi Government Hopefully Reached in One Month - Foreign Minister

UNITED NATIONS, September 27 (Sputnik) - Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein told Sputnik he hopes an agreement will be reached on the formation of a new government within the next thirty days or so.
"I hope that within a short time, and that's within a month or something like that, we will reach an agreement about the formation of a new government," Hussein said on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly debate.

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US Launches Arctic Strategy Office to Boost Power Projection, Domestic Defense - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department is launching an Arctic Strategy and Global Resilience Office to bolster the United States' ability to project power in the region and use it to protect domestic soil, the Pentagon said on Tuesday.
Iris Ferguson will lead the office as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Arctic and Global Resilience, a new role that demonstrates the attention US leaders are paying to the region, according to DoD News report.
"[The Arctic] is a critical region for power projection and also for homeland defense," Ferguson is quoted as saying in an interview.
The US has seen increased "geopolitical activity" by Russia and China in the Arctic region as well, Ferguson said. Russia has been refurbishing airfields and other defense architecture across the Arctic, according to Ferguson.
China has asserted their status as a "near-Arctic nation" despite not being "remotely near" the region, Ferguson said. The US is keeping a watchful eye on China's activity in the Arctic to ensure that its interests are protected, Ferguson noted.
In addition to strategic competition, climate change also impacts the US' activities in the Arctic, Ferguson said. The region's importance will only grow as the impacts of climate change accelerate, Ferguson added.
The US is currently working to mitigate climate impacts on military infrastructure built atop permafrost, as well as the impact of coastal erosion on radar sites, Ferguson said.
The Arctic is home to US missile defense facilities, radars and early warning sites among other defense assets, and includes parts of US Northern Command, European Command and Indo-Pacific Command.

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Pompeo Criticizes Biden for 'More Ambiguous' US Policy on Taiwan

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WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) – Former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo criticized President Joe Biden on Tuesday for making US policy on Taiwan "more ambiguous."
In his keynote speech at the inaugural Global Taiwan Business Forum in Kaohsiung, Pompeo said there were concerns in the US that the Biden administration was not as committed to Taiwan.
"I think these highlight the muddled and confusing statements by President Biden. I'm confused, too. Concerning America's true commitment to Taiwan, the ambiguity that had been American policy has now become even more ambiguous," he said, as quoted by Focus Taiwan
Pompeo also criticized the White House for not including Taiwan in its new Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, saying it was "side-lining" its eighth largest trading partner for "political reasons."
Pompeo reiterated his support for the self-governed island's sovereignty, saying Taiwan does not need to declare independence because it is already independent. He called for the US to pursue a "deeper and far more enthusiastic relationship" with Taiwan, arguing that this was part of a free 21st century, rather than a Chinese century dictated by the PRC.
The trip marks Pompeo's second trip to the country this year, following a visit in March. He will also deliver an opening speech at the World Taiwanese Chambers of Commerce's annual meeting on Wednesday and visit technology companies in southern Taiwan.

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Meta Says Removed 1,600 'Fake Accounts' Allegedly Linked to Russian Propaganda

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - Meta (banned in Russia as an extremist organization) announced on Tuesday that it took down 1,600 fake accounts for allegedly spreading Russian propaganda about the situation in Ukraine.
"TAKEDOWN BY THE NUMBERS. Presence on Facebook and Instagram: 1,633 accounts, 703 Pages, one Group and 29 accounts on Instagram," it said in a report.
Meta also took down "a small network that originated in China" for allegedly targeting the United States.
"Our automated systems took down a number of accounts and Facebook Pages for various Community Standards violations, including impersonation and inauthenticity," it said.
Russia designated Meta as extremist on March 21 after the social media giant selectively lifted its rules to allow Ukrainians to call for violence and use hate speech against Russian "invaders," including calls for death of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko.
In April, Russia imposed sanctions on Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg.

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Net Worth of Wealthiest Americans Drops for First Time Since Great Recession – Forbes

WASHINGTON, September 27 (Sputnik) - The 400 richest people in the US did not get richer this year for the first time since the Great Recession, with their combined net worth down 11% or $500 billion, according to the Forbes 400 list.

Forbes found that tech tycoons were most affected. They lost a combined $315 billion and 41 of them slipped down the list's rankings. Mark Zuckerberg lost the most of anyone on the list, losing $76.8 billion and falling out of the top 10 for the first time since 2014.

Elon Musk unseated Jeff Bezos to place first on the list for the first time, gaining $60.5 billion from an increase in Tesla's stock prices and new funding for SpaceX.

The top 10 people are worth a collective $1.6 trillion or 40% of the wealth represented on the Forbes 400 list. The list remains largely male, with only 58 women, an increase of two from last year.

Forbes calculated net worth using September 2 stock prices.

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