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9/29/22 Thursday

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‘Financier of Genocide’ - Rwandan Massacre Bankroller Begins Hague Trial
By - Fantine Gardinier

On Thursday, Felicien Kabuga, one of the few remaining primary figures responsible for the 1994 Rwandan genocide who has not yet faced justice, began his trial in the UN International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals in the Hague, the Netherlands.
The 89-year-old, who uses a wheelchair, appeared in the court from his cell via video link, having refused to enter the courtroom. He is charged with seven counts, including genocide, complicity in genocide, direct and public incitement to commit genocide, attempt to commit genocide and conspiracy to commit genocide, according to the Rwandan New Times. He is also accused of two crimes against humanity: persecution and extermination.
At the hearing, prosecutors laid out their case against the Rwandan businessman, including detailing how he provided financing, weapons, and moral support to the Interhamwe, the Hutu Power paramilitary force that spearheaded the massacres of Tutsis and Twa in the spring of 1994.
“This trial will also be an opportunity to remind the world again of the grave dangers of genocide ideology and hate speech,” Serge Brammertz, the UN tribunal’s chief prosecutor, said in a statement. “Kabuga had a central role in provoking hatred of Tutsis, dehumanizing innocent civilians and paving the way for genocide.”
"Twenty-eight years after the events, this trial is about holding Felicien Kabuga to account for his substantial and intentional role in that genocide," prosecutor Rashid S. Rashid told the court, according to AFP.
"Kabuga didn't need to wield a rifle or a machete at a roadblock, rather he supplied weapons in bulk and facilitated the training that prepared the Interahamwe to use them," he added. "He didn't need to pick up a microphone to call for the extermination of the Tutsi on the radio, rather he founded, funded and served as president of... the radio station that broadcast genocidal propaganda across Rwanda."
In particular, Kabuga helped create the pro-Hutu Radio-Television Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) and closely managed it during the genocide, when it broadcast round-the-clock hate speech referring to Tutsis as “cockroaches,” spreading news of Tutsi hiding places, and urging Hutus to kill them. He is also accused of passing out machetes to Hutus at rallies and telling them to “finish the job.”
The radio station also targeted “inkotanyi,” or members of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a Tutsi politico-military group led by Paul Kagame that overthrew the Hutu Power government, driving them from the country and ending the genocide. Kagame is now Rwanda’s president.
Prosecutors said Kabuga had broadcasters read the names of RPF members, their cars’ license plate numbers, and other identifying information.
Kabuga is one of just a handful of the central genocidaires to have so far escaped justice.

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In May, UN investigators finally closed the book on the fate of Protais Mpiranya, the head of the Rwandan presidential guard, who oversaw the assassination of key Tutsi figures and Hutu moderates at the start of the genocide in April 1994. His grave was found, under a false name, in Zimbabwe. Likewise, in July, a French court sentenced Laurent Bucyibaruta, the former prefect of Rwanda's Gikongoro province, to 20 years in prison for helping the Interahamwe kill tens of thousands of Tutsis who believed Bucyibaruta's administration had offered them refuge. Four accused perpetrators remain at large, including Fulgence Kayishema, who was a police officer at the time the genocide began and who is accused of helping militiamen kill roughly 2,000 Tutsis hiding in a church in western Rwanda. Prosecutors consider him a "priority," but a raid on what was believed to be his flat in Cape Town, South Africa, in June found he had long since departed.

Divide-and-Rule Makes Fuel for Genocide

Rwanda was colonized by the Germans, then the Belgians, before becoming independent in 1962. Their "divide and rule" policy spread messages across the region that the Hutus and Tutsis were different people with contrary goals, and encouraged the Hutu thinking that Tutsis were "outsiders" that underpinned the Hutu Power movement.

The killings were set in motion in April 1994 when an airplane crashed near Kigali carrying then-Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana and Burundian President Cyprien Ntaryamira, both ethnic Hutus. Extremist elements in Habyarimana's government who had opposed a recent peace deal with the RPF seized the opportunity to launch a new attack, which they had been planning for months, and also to get revenge on Hutu political moderates for having agreed to the peace deal.

Within hours of Habyarimana's death, Hutu Power leaders had assassinated Tutsi leaders and moderate Hutus using "kill lists" already drawn up, and soldiers and police established checkpoints the next day and conducted sweeps to check people's national ID cards, which indicated the bearer's ethnicity. Those who were Tutsi were executed. Later, gangs and mobs were organized and set upon the local population.

By July, up to 1.1 million people, including 800,000 Tutsis, or two-thirds of all Rwandan Tutsis, had been killed, along with one-third of the 30,000-strong Twa people. Only the RPF's steady advance through the country and the capture of Kigali ended the killing.

After the Hutu government was overthrown in July 1994, its remnants fled across the western border into Zaire, and soon began mounting new attacks. When the Rwandan military, now Tutsi-led, intervened in Zaire to hunt down the Hutu militias, it helped set in motion the destruction of Zaire, the foundation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the decade-long Congo Wars that drew in half of Africa and killed more than 5 million people.

In May 2021, French President Emmanuel Macron met with Kagame in Kigali, but while he did not apologize for France's support for the Rwandan government at the start of the genocide, he did acknowledge "the magnitude of our responsibilities."

Two other French reports from earlier that year found the government of then-French President Francois Mitterrand bore "overwhelming responsibilities" for the genocide for continuing its divide-and-rule tactics while being fully aware of Hutu preparations for the genocide of Tutsis, as well as arming, advising and protecting the Hutu-led Rwandan government.

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Putin Signs Decree Recognizing Zaporozhye, Kherson Regions as Independent Territories
By - Fantine Gardinier

In recent days, Kherson and Zaporozhye regions held referenda on their status, voting by large majorities to secede from Ukraine and join the Russian Federation. The Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics also held referenda, but only on joining Russia - both republics voted heavily in favor of accession.

Just after midnight on Friday, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed two decrees recognizing Kherson and Zaporozhye as regions independent of Ukraine.

"In accordance with the generally accepted principles and norms of international law, recognizing and confirming the principle of equality and self-determination of peoples enshrines in the Charter of the United Nations, and taking into account the will of the people of the Kherson region at the referendum, which took place on September 27, 2022, I hereby decree: to recognize the sovereignty and independence of the Kherson region," the signed decree read.

Referenda in the two territories, which Russia has controlled since early in its special operation in Ukraine, were held from September 23 through 27 to determine their status, following requests from local administrators. The votes showed that 87.05% of voters in Kherson region and 93.11% in Zaporozhye region wanted to join the Russian Federation, just as nearby Crimea did in 2014, following the US-backed nationalist coup in Kiev.

Putin's decree recognizes the declarations of the Kherson and Zaporozhye governments to be independent states. However, the question of annexation is expected to be taken up by the Russian government early next month.

The Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics in the Donbass region rebelled against Ukrainian sovereignty in 2014 as well, after the new right-wing nationalist government attempted to reduce the status of the Russian language in the country. Before February, when Moscow recognized the independence of the Donbass republics, roughly one-third of Ukrainians were ethnic Russians and spoke Russian as their first language, which another one-third speak Russian regularly.

People whose primary or secondary language is Russian form a majority of the population or a large plurality in all five provinces that have voted to secede from Ukraine.

The special operation was launched in February 2022 following the failure of negotiations with Kiev and NATO about Russia's security red lines. The operation aims at achieving what diplomacy could not: the neutralization of Ukraine as a base from which NATO forces would be able to attack Russia and the elimination of the neo-Nazi threat against Russians in the region.

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Beijing, Tokyo Commemorate 50 Years of Relations Amid Deepening Political Row
By - Fantine Gardinier

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Japan seized Taiwan from China as a war prize in 1895 and turned it into a sugar colony, and it was only returned to Beijing's control after the Japanese surrender in 1945, at the end of World War II. Then just four years later, communist forces triumphed in the Chinese civil war, while nationalist forces retreated to Taiwan.

On Thursday, the governments of Japan and China commemorated half a century of diplomatic relations, albeit without the pomp and circumstance, due to their present strained relations.

On September 29, 1972, Japanese Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai signed a joint communique in which the two countries agreed to "establish relations of perpetual peace and friendship."

The agreement saw Tokyo end its relations with the so-called Republic of China, which only governed Taiwan, and recognize the People's Republic of China (PRC) in Beijing as the "sole legal government" of China. In the civil war 23 years earlier, communist forces overthrew the Republic and established a socialist government in Beijing, declaring the moment to be the end of a century of Chinese subservience to foreign imperialists.

Japan's move came months after US President Richard Nixon traveled to Beijing to do much the same, pledging to work toward "mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence." However, the US only made the formal switch from recognizing Taipei to recognizing Beijing in 1978.

'Constructive and Stable' Relations

Separate receptions were held in Beijing and Tokyo on Thursday to mark the anniversary. In Beijing, the reception was held at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse and attended by senior Chinese officials as well as Hideo Tarumi, Japan's ambassador to Beijing.

"I would like to build constructive and stable Japan-China relations for the peace and prosperity of not only our two nations but also the region and the world," Kishida said in his statement, warning that relations with China, "while possessing various possibilities, face many challenges and issues."

Xi hailed the anniversary as an "opportunity" for the two nations to "work together to build a China-Japan relationship that meets the requirements of the new era."

In Tokyo, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi attended an event hosted by the Japan Business Federation, a powerful lobby better known as the Keidanren.

At the event, Keidanren chairman Masakazu Tokura hailed Japan's relationship with China as "one of the most important bilateral relationships."

"The flow of people between Japan and China has stalled against a backdrop of the coronavirus pandemic, and international affairs have been getting more complex and opaque," he said, according to Kyodo News Agency. "Exactly because of such situations, however, proactive high-level exchanges, including those between leaders of the two nations, are needed."

Japanese figure skater Yuzuru Hanyu, a two-time Olympic champion who is beloved in China as an athlete and cultural ambassador, also attended the Tokyo ceremony.

"Today is a memorable day, and I feel very glad," Hanyu said, adding that he hopes Japan and China will "build a better relationship because they are neighbors."

However, the feelings are different in the diplomatic sphere, where Japan has pulled closer to its chief ally, the United States, which declared in 2017 that "great power competition" with Russia and China was its new chief strategic concern.

Tensions and Trauma

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Tensions remain between the two nations, though, rooted partly in present-day competing interests and claims, but also in historical trauma.

Under former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Japan began a turn sharply to the right, pursuing increasing militarization as Abe sought to amend a key clause of the Japanese constitution that mandates military neutrality. He also aroused fury in China and Korea by visiting the Yasukuni Shrine, a memorial to Japanese war heroes, including those accused of war crimes. Abe was assassinated earlier this year at a political rally after leaving office by a man with a personal grudge against him.

Between 1895 and 1945, the expanding Japanese Empire launched a series of wars against China, seizing increasingly large parts of its territory, including an all-out invasion in 1938 that penetrated deep into central China. At least 14 million Chinese were killed in the war, including in brutal massacres using chemical weapons and mass executions. While Tokyo has issued formal apologies for the war and its many crimes against humanity, it continues to honor many of the perpetrators of those crimes at the Yasukuni Shrine.

China and Japan also have competing claims over a group of uninhabited islands in the East China Sea that Japan calls the Senkakus and China calls Diaoyu Dao. The islets have great strategic value, sitting well offshore from mainland China and near the Miyako Strait and Japan's Ryukyu Islands.

Still, the economic and cultural exchange between the two East Asian countries has been immense: China has become Japan's largest trading partner, with bilateral trade in 2021 reaching a record $391.4 billion. Trendy Chinese brands dot Japanese storefronts and Chinese youth dine on classic Japanese foods.

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Researchers Find 885 Websites Used as CIA Fronts a 'Motivated Amateur Sleuth' Could've Found

By - Fantine Gardinier

For several years, the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) managed its contacts with sources through a network of fake websites. However, after Iranian counterintelligence officers cracked their system and shared their findings with Beijing, at least two dozen CIA operatives were hounded out and killed.

That story was first made public in a Yahoo News report in 2018, but researchers wanted to know more. Citizen Lab at the University of Toronto announced its findings on Thursday, publishing them in a statement in lieu of a full report.

According to the researchers, it was fairly easy for them to figure out how to identify CIA-linked websites, of which they found 885 they could claim "with high confidence" were part of a CIA network.

"Knowing only one website, it is likely that while the websites were online, a motivated amateur sleuth could have mapped out the CIA network and attributed it to the US government," Citizen Lab said in a statement.

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"The reckless construction of this infrastructure by the CIA reportedly led directly to the identification and execution of assets, and undoubtedly risked the lives of countless other individuals. Our hope is that this research and our limited disclosure process will lead to accountability for this reckless behavior."

The websites were active between 2004 and 2013, but Citizen Lab said they are probably not being used by the intelligence agency anymore. They were used to both find informants and maintain contact with them.

Reuters has published a much deeper report on Thursday as well, titled "America's Throwaway Spies: How the CIA failed Iranian informants in its secret war with Tehran."

In response to that article, CIA spokesperson Tammy Kupperman Thorp told the news agency: "CIA takes its obligations to protect the people who work with us extremely seriously and we know that many of them do so bravely, at great personal risk. The notion that CIA would not work as hard as possible to safeguard them is false."

Yahoo's 2018 report revealed that Iranian counterintelligence officers had found out about the websites sometime around 2009 and exploited it to hunt down and destroy the CIA's network in Iran. When they shared their findings with their Chinese counterparts, much of the CIA's network there was eradicated as well.

Last year, the New York Times reported on a top secret CIA cable in which the spy agency admitted it had a severe problem of losing informants and warned its agents not to underestimate the tenacity of foreign adversaries. However, as early as 2006, CIA figures were calling attention to the major problems: John Reidy, a former government contractor, described the losses as a "catastrophic failure" in a 2006 report.

"Upwards of 70% of our operations had been compromised," Reidy told McClatchy in 2015; still, the CIA fired him rather than address the problem.

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Exxon Mobil Rejects White House Call to Reduce Fuel Exports - Letter

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - Exxon Mobil has rejected the White House's call to reduce fuel exports, The Wall Street Journal reported on Friday, citing a copy of a letter from CEO Darren Woods.

"Continuing current Gulf Coast exports is essential to efficiently rebalance markets -- particularly with diverted Russian supplies," Woods wrote. "Reducing global supply by limiting US exports to build region-specific inventory will only aggravate the global supply shortfall."

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has led to soaring oil prices and an increasing reliance of European countries on US exports. The Energy Department warned in August that the US east coast region was facing low oil and gas levels and the industry should to do more to ensure an adequate supply there, especially ahead of the peak hurricane season. The administration might otherwise take unspecified emergency regulatory actions.

The Energy Department has privately discussed export restrictions with industry executives, the Journal added, citing unnamed sources.

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RPT - US Surgeons Operate on 10 Children in Ukraine, Plan 4 New Trips - Team Leader

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - A group of surgeons from the US-based Bill Novick Cardiac Alliance last week operated on ten children in Lviv, Ukraine, and is planning to make four additional trips to the country during the remainder of this year and in 2023, team leader Bill Novick told Sputnik.

"We operated on ten children. We were open to do more surgeries - 16 or 17, but that is not what happened," Novick said upon returning to the United States after his 12-day trip to Ukraine.

Novick pointed out that several surgeries were canceled at the last minute because the patients developed fever the night before their operation or arrived at the hospital with different symptoms of cold.

The children are doing well and almost all, except two, have already returned home, Novick said.

"We have two children left in the intensive care unit. One because he may or may not need a pacemaker. Right now, he is on a temporary pacemaker and the local doctors are waiting to see if his regular electrical system recovers," he said.

Another child faced respiratory problems.

"He is not on the ventilator, he is breathing spontaneously, but he has got either bronchitis or low-grade pneumonia," the doctor added.

Speaking about security conditions during the trip, Novick acknowledged that he heard air radar signals every day, but fortunately, nothing serious has happened.

"We heard daily air raid signals, but no missile strikes or anything like that while we were there. Just air raid signals," he said.

The team is planning additional trips to Lviv, hoping that the security situation will allow it to continue the work.

"If everything is ok, we are going to Lviv on December 5 and will stay until December 17 for another two-week program, and then back next year in March, June, September and December," Novick said.

The Cardiac Alliance established a pediatric heart surgery project in Lviv last year given that there were no such programs in the western part of Ukraine at that time and children had to travel to Kiev and other cities to receive relevant treatment.

READY TO RESUME COOPERATION IN RUSSIA

Novick also said the alliance is ready to resume programs in Russia as soon as their Russian colleagues are ready.

The alliance planned to visit Kemerovo last spring to operate on children with conditions requiring complex surgeries, however local colleagues asked them to postpone the trip due to financial issues. They did not cancel the previously scheduled program in December, but Novick said he had not heard a single word from them since.

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Novick suggested that due to the current global geopolitical situation, the Russian doctors are really worried about the perception of bringing an American foundation to Kemerovo at this time.
"I totally understand that. So, I think realistically my answer would be - it is highly unlikely that we will be going to Kemerovo in December," he said.
The doctor said he is ready to wait for an answer from Kemerovo until early November and he is going to contact them next week.
"November 1 is like the very last second. But here is the problem - my Russian visa has expired. So, I do not know if I can actually get a visa in time to go, plus I have to accumulate a team," Novick said.
While waiting for a reaction from Kemerovo, Novick said he continues maintaining online contacts with colleagues from other Russian cities, where he worked before.
"I talked to my colleagues in Voronezh last week. They are not doing the number of cases that they would like to do, but they are operating between two and four children every week, and they are very thankful for the training and the experience that we provided for them," he said.
In September, the cardiologist communicated with doctors in the city of Nizhny Novgorod.
"They are happy with that they are doing," he said. "From the point of view of our reputation, this war in Ukraine has not impacted their view of us - I mean the help that we provided."
The Cardiac Alliance has conducted some 500 surgeries in Russia since 2008. Previously, the Cardiac Alliance performed surgeries in several Russian cities, including Voronezh and Nizhny Novgorod.
The group is comprised of medical specialists from different countries who usually work in "hot spots" around the world.

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NASA, SpaceX Launch Feasibility Study to Give Hubble Telescope Longer Life - Officials

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - NASA and SpaceX are going to conduct a feasibility study on the possibility of boosting the Hubble Space Telescope 40 to 45 miles higher in its low earth orbit (LEO) to give it an additional period of life, senior agency and company officials told a podcast press conference.
"The idea is of a commercial crew to boost Hubble into a higher orbit," NASA Science Mission Directorate Associate Administrator Thomas Zurbuchen said on Thursday. "We have signed an agreement that we announce today to do [a feasibility study] on that."
NASA and SpaceX signed their unfunded Space Act Agreement on September 22, the space agency said in a blog on Thursday. The two organizations will now conduct a feasibility study on boosting the Hubble Telescope, which was launched in 1990, into a higher orbit with the Dragon spacecraft, at no cost to the US government.
"SpaceX and the Polaris Program want to expand the boundaries of current technology and explore how commercial partnerships can creatively solve challenging, complex problems. Missions, such as servicing Hubble, would help us expand space capabilities to ultimately help

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all of us achieve our goals of becoming a space-faring, multiplanetary civilization," SpaceX Vice President of Customer Operations and Integration Jessica Jensen said.
Teams expect the study to take up to six months, collecting technical data from both Hubble and the SpaceX Dragon spacecraft, NASA said in the blog.
The Hubble's original orbit was 380 miles or 600 kilometers above the ground but over the years it has decayed to 335 miles above the earth, NASA said. Currently, three is a 50% probability that Hubble will fall back to earth 15 years from now in 2037 if its orbit is not boosted before then, NASA added.

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Canada, Allies Call for Providing Ukraine Regulator Access to Zaporizhzhia NPP

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - The International Nuclear Regulators' Association (INRA), consisting of Canada, the US, and seven other allies, called for allowing Ukraine's regulator access to the Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP).
"INRA members are clear that Ukraine's sovereign nuclear regulator should be given immediate, unfettered access to the ZNPP to enable it to effectively carry out its regulatory oversight role," the group said in a joint statement on Thursday.
The INRA, the release added, is gravely concerned about the current situation's potential serious impacts on the safety and security of Ukraine's nuclear power plants.
The group also said it fully supports the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) recommendations, following its recent visit, to maintain technical experts to support the plant safety and security.
The INRA includes the national nuclear regulators from Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Spain, South Korea, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States.
Since the Russian military took control over the ZNPP, Ukraine has repeatedly shelled and attempted te retake the Nuclear facility, increasing the risks of a radioactive disaster.
In Early September, an international mission led by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) visited the ZNPP. The agency issued a report on the situation at the facility and called on all sides to the conflict to end the shelling of the plant and establish a safety zone around it.

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UN Chief's Statement on Referenda Another Example of 'Double Standards' - Russian Mission

UNITED NATIONS, September 30 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' statement on the referenda held in the Donetsk and Luhansk people' republics (DNR and LNR) and in the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions are an assault on the right to self determination and an example of double standards, the Russian mission to the United Nations said.

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"Against this backdrop such a direct assault by the UN Secretary-General on the fundamental right of self-determination expressed by the population of DNR, LNR, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions represents yet another example of double standards," the Russian mission said in a statement on Thursday evening.

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US Navy Orders 4 Close-Range Missile Defense Systems for S. Korean Warships - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - Raytheon Missiles and Defense has received an almost $50 million US Navy modification contract to produce four Mk-15 Close-In Weapon Systems (CIWS) to provide additional air defense for South Korea, the US Defense Department announced.
"Raytheon Missiles & Defense, Tucson, Arizona, is awarded a $49,046,788 ...modification ...contract for the procurement of four MK-15 Close-In Weapon Systems (CIWS) Block 0 to Block 1B Baseline 2 Upgrade and Conversion and related equipment for the Republic of Korea," the Defense Department said in a press release on Thursday.
Work on the contract is expected to be completed by May 2025, the release added.
The CIWS is a point defense weapon system mounted on warships that is designed to detect and destroy short-range incoming missiles and enemy aircraft, according to reports.

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Pentagon Awards $12Mln Modified Contract for Radar Systems Going to Ukraine

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - The US military awarded the firm SRCTec a $12 million contract to produce radar systems that will go to Ukraine, the Pentagon said in a press release.
"SRCTec LLC, Syracuse, New York, was awarded a $12,096,538 modification (PZ0004) to contract W56KGY-22-C-0004 for UKR/TPQ-50 radar systems," the release said on Thursday. "Fiscal 2022 Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative funds in the amount of $12,096,538 were obligated at the time of the award."
Work on the procurement is estimated to be complete on June 30, 2023, the release said.
The Defense Department has committed more than $16 billion in military assistance to Ukraine, consisting of weapons provided immediately from US stockpiles and other weapon contracts that may take up to three years to complete.

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The doctor said he is ready to wait for an answer from Kemerovo until early November and he is going to contact them next week.
"November 1 is like the very last second. But here is the problem - my Russian visa has expired. So, I do not know if I can actually get a visa in time to go, plus I have to accumulate a team," Novick said.
While waiting for a reaction from Kemerovo, Novick said he continues maintaining online contacts with colleagues from other Russian cities, where he worked before.
"I talked to my colleagues in Voronezh last week. They are not doing the number of cases that they would like to do, but they are operating between two and four children every week, and they are very thankful for the training and the experience that we provided for them," he said.
In September, the cardiologist communicated with doctors in the city of Nizhny Novgorod.
"They are happy with that they are doing," he said. "From the point of view of our reputation, this war in Ukraine has not impacted their view of us - I mean the help that we provided."
The Cardiac Alliance has conducted some 500 surgeries in Russia since 2008. Previously, the Cardiac Alliance performed surgeries in several Russian cities, including Voronezh and Nizhny Novgorod.
The group is comprised of medical specialists from different countries who usually work in "hot spots" around the world.
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Northrop Grumman Wins $30Mln Trident Nuclear Missile Support Contract - Pentagon
WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - Northrop Grumman has won a more than $30 million US Navy modification contract to continue its support for the Trident submarine-launched nuclear missile program, the Defense Department of announced.
"Northrop Grumman Systems Corporation - Marine Systems of Sunnyvale, California is awarded a $30,159,374 ... modification contract to provide fiscal 2023 ongoing support of the Trident II (D5) deployed Submersible Ship Ballistic Missile Nuclear and the Submarine Ship Guided Nuclear Underwater Launcher Systems," the Defense Department said in a press release on Thursday.
Northrop Grumman Marine Systems will provide technical engineering support and integration for the Trident II (D5), and Submarine Ship Guided Nuclear Attack Weapon System, the release said.
More than half of the work on the project will be performed in Sunnyvale, California (52%) with another 32% taking place in Bangor, Washington (18%) and Kings Bay, Georgia (14%), the release added.

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Hurricane Ian Claims 14 Lives in Florida, Death Toll Expected to Rise - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - The extreme weather and subsequent impacts of Hurricane Ian on Florida have left at least 14 people dead as the total cost of the storm continues to be assessed, Palm Beach Post reported.

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Officials in Sarasota County confirmed at least two deaths, Charlotte County six deaths, Lee County five deaths and Volusia County one death, the report said on Thursday.
However, crews are just beginning to dig out wreckage and debris from the storm's flooding and high winds, the report also said.
Lee County Sheriff Carmine Marceno told US media earlier on Thursday that hundreds of residents could have been killed in the storm.
US President Joe Biden said after a briefing by the Federal Emergency Management Agency that the hurricane may end up being the deadliest storm in Florida's history. Biden also said that he plans on visiting the state as soon as conditions allow to do so.
Millions of people were left without electricity after the storm made landfall as a Category 4 hurricane, bringing high winds and rainfall across the state. The storm continues to head over the southeastern United States.

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US Judge Rejects Danchenko's Motion to Dismiss Indictment - Court Document

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - US District Judge Anthony Trenga has ordered that Russian national Igor Danchenko's motion to dismiss the indictment in the case against him for lying to FBI agents during the Trump-Russia collusion probe is rejected.
"Upon consideration of the Motion, the memoranda in support thereof and in opposition thereto, the arguments of counsel at the hearing held on September 29, 2022, and for the reasons stated in open court, it is hereby ordered that Defendant Igor Danchenko's Motion to Dismiss the Indictment for Failure to State an Offense is denied," according to the order published on Thursday.
Danchenko's case will be considered by a jury during a trial that is set to begin on October 11 in the District Court of Virginia in Alexandria.
In November, Danchenko pleaded not guilty on all five counts of making false statements to the FBI about the alleged collusion between former US President Donald Trump and the Kremlin during the 2016 US presidential election.
Special Counsel John Durham, who was appointed to lead the origins of the Russia probe in 2020, revealed a court document earlier in September according to which FBI made Danchenko "a paid confidential human source" in March 2017.
The prosecution insists that Danchenko lied to the FBI about the sources of information given to British spy Christopher Steele about alleged contacts between the Trump campaign and Russian officials, including information that the Kremlin may have facilitated Trump's election. The indictment states that Danchenko did not receive such information from anyone and fabricated facts.
Danchenko provided data to former British spy Steele, who prepared, based on this data, materials of the dossier, which the US authorities were guided by in the investigation of alleged ties between the Trump headquarters and Russia. A subsequent Special Counsel investigation has proven no collusion between Trump and Russia.

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UPDATE - Family Sues Quebec Hospital for Mocking Dying Indigenous Woman - Lawyer
(Changes attribution, adds new details, background in paras 3-7)
WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - The family of Joyce Echaquan, an Indigenous woman who died in 2020 at a Quebec hospital as she was mocked by the staff, restrained and left alone, is suing the hospital and the involved staff for C$2.675 million ($1.953 million), the family lawyer told Sputnik
"More broadly, the core of the lawsuit is the fact that, as Joyce was under a medical surveillance order, she was left alone with all her four members and torso restrained, in a dorsal position and without surveillance, later leading to a cardiovascular arrest. That's the cause of death," Patrick Martin-Menard told Sputnik.
Although racism also played a part in the tragedy, and that many committed major mistakes towards Joyce, Martin-Menard said he recommended the family to sue for the circumstances of death.
"We could bring a very, very broad prosecution, targeting a large number of people, but at the end, the cause is very clear," Martin-Menard said.
On Thursday, a day after the second anniversary of her death, Martin-Menard, the legal representative of the Echaquan's family, filed a lawsuit requesting a financial compensation to the amount of $1.953 million, for the loss of Joyce's life at the hand of the hospital staff.
Targeted by the legal action, the Integrated Health and Social Services Centre (CISSS) of Lanaudiere, and two staffers, namely a doctor and a nurse.
In September 2020, Echaquan, 37, after being admitted at the CISSS of Lanaudiere, streamed on Facebook Live as the nurse and her assistant were making disrespectful comments at her. The mother of seven passed away shortly after.

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Wall Street Tumbles Anew in Yo-Yo Trade as Market Yanked by Recession Fears, Optimism

NEW YORK, September 30 (Sputnik) - Wall Street's three major stock indexes tumbled anew after surging a day earlier, as recession fears and optimism yanked the market in both directions amid the Federal Reserve's determination to fight inflation in a resilient economy.
The Dow Jones Industrial Average, Wall Street's broadest equities indicator comprising stocks of 30 large US corporations, closed down 1.5% Thursday after rising 1.9% the day prior. Year-to-date, the Dow was down 19.6%, a hair's breadth above the 20% drop that would place it in bear-market territory.
The S&P 500 Index, which represents the top 500 US stocks, settled down, wiping out all of Wednesday's gains. For the year, it showed a drop of 23.6%.

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The Nasdaq Composite Index, which comprises marquee names in technology such as Amazon, Apple, Facebook, Netflix and Google, finished down 2.8%, overwriting the previous session's rally of 2.1%. Year-to-date, Nasdaq was down 31.4%.

"US stocks are weakening once again after hot inflation readings and another round of hawkish Fed speak," said Ed Moya, analyst at online trading platform OANDA. "Risky assets don't stand a chance of a meaningful rally if the economy continues to show resilience while inflation continues to be significantly above the Fed's Funds rate."

The Fed is bent on winning its fight against inflation and even a recession will not stop its rate hikes until prices are back to its target, Loretta Mester, the central bank's head for the district of Cleveland, said Thursday.

US inflation, as measured by the broad Consumer Price Index, or CPI, has been at four-decade highs of above 8% per annum for about a year now — more than four times the Fed's 2% target.

To fight inflation, the Fed has raised interest rates by 300 points this year, from an original base of just 25 points in February. The central bank's chairman Jerome Powell said last week that US rate hikes will 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.

Many economists have warned that the Fed could push the United States into a deep recession with the sharpest rate hikes in four decades, saying the ebullient stock market could be one of its victims.

US Gross Domestic Product, or GDP, contracted by 0.6% in the second quarter of 2022, the Commerce Department said Thursday in its final reading for the end-March to end-June period. In the first quarter, GDP declined by 1.6%. Conventionally, two straight quarters of GDP decline places an economy in a recession.

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Ottawa Invests $8.3Mln in Projects Targeting Food Waste Emissions - Environment Canada

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government will invest C$11.4 million ($8.3 million) in projects targeting the reduction of emissions from food waste, Environment and Climate Change Canada said in a press release.

"Today, Francis Drouin, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, announced on behalf of the Honorable Steven Guilbeault, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, investments of up to $1.4 million and $10 million to support Redcliff Cypress Regional Waste Management Authority and PurEnergy Inc.'s waste emissions reduction initiatives, respectively," the release said on Thursday.

The investment is expected to result in Redcliff Cypress Regional Waste Management, located in the province of Alberta, reducing its greenhouse emissions by 77,000 tonnes per year, or the equivalent of what over 23,000 vehicles emit on a yearly basis, the release said.

PurEnergy Inc., located in the province of Ontario, will build new waste facilities with the aim of diverting organic waste from landfills and convert it into biogases and fertilizers, with an

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expected reduction of 377,000 tonnes of greenhouses emissions or the equivalent of 115.000 vehicles, the release added.
The investment will come from the Low Carbon Economy Fund, a federal initiative aimed at achieving net-zero emissions in Canada by 2050, according to the release.

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US Will Non Stop Interest Rate Hikes Even in Recession - Federal Reserve Official

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - The US central banks is bent on winning its fight against inflation and even a recession will not stop its rate hikes until prices are back to its target, Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland President Loretta Mester said.
"A recession will not stop the Fed from hiking rates," Mester said in a live-streamed discussion on the US economy on Thursday. "The Fed got wrong the persistence and magnitude of inflation. Given the persistence of inflation, it is still more important to ensure that the Fed does enough."
US inflation, as measured by the broad Consumer Price Index (CPI) has been at four-decade highs of above 8% per annum for about a year now - more than four times the Fed's 2% target. To fight inflation, the Fed has raised interest rates by 300 points this year, from an original base of just 25 points in February. Fed Chairman Jerome Powell said last week that US interest rate hikes will have some way to go before the central bank considers a pause or reduction, with the likelihood of another 125 basis points being added before the end of the year.
Many economists have warned that the Fed could push the United States into a deep recession with the sharpest rate hikes in four decades.
US Gross Domestic Product contracted by 0.6% in the second quarter of 2022, the Commerce Department said Thursday in its final reading for the end-March to end-June period. In the first quarter, GDP declined by 1.6%. Conventionally, two straight quarters of GDP decline places an economy in a recession.
Fed officials like Mester, however, have argued that the US economy is far more robust than the textbook definition of a recession, pointing especially at the job market, which has been the juggernaut of the nation's recovery from the effects of the two-year long coronavirus pandemic measures.
Mester said on Thursday that "unemployment will not rise as much as in the past," even in a recession.
Unemployment among Americans reached a record high rate of 14.8% in April 2020, with the loss of some 20 million jobs after the COVID-19 breakout. Since, hundreds of thousands of jobs have been added every month, with the trend keeping up in August. Weekly jobs statistics have also been stellar, with the number of Americans filing for unemployment falling to a five-month low last week, according from Labor Department data released on Thursday.

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US House Passes Bill Establishing Food Security Office at Department of Veterans Affairs

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives passed legislation establishing an Office of Food Security at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) amid concerns about the nutrition of both past and present US military servicemembers amid high inflation.

House lawmakers on Thursday passed the "Food Security for All Veterans Act" in a vote of 376-49, sending the legislation to the Senate for consideration.

The bill establishes an Office of Food Security at the VA, whose director will be responsible for providing information to veterans about federal nutrition assistance programs and developing ways to identify and assist veterans at-risk of or experiencing food insecurity.

The legislation also mandates an annual report on veteran food insecurity be submitted to Congress by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs in consultation with the Secretary of Agriculture.

The bill comes amid criticism by some lawmakers of the Defense Department after it issued guidance to soldiers experiencing financial problems advising them to apply for federal food assistance.

The Defense Department's discretionary budget authority for fiscal year 2022 is approximately $722 billion, while total US military spending is more than $800 billion. The United States spends more on national defense than China, India, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Germany, France, Japan, South Korea and the United Kingdom combined.

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Pentagon to Set Up New Command in Germany to Streamline Military Aid to Ukraine - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - The US military plans to establish a new command post in Germany that will be responsible for streamlining security assistance to Ukraine over the coming years, the New York Times reported citing current and former senior US officials.

The report said on Thursday that the new command would carry out the decisions made by the Ukraine Defense Contact Group.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin may make a final decision on the plan in the coming weeks, the report said.

The United States may expect the crisis in Ukraine to persist for many years, the report said.

Pentagon spokesperson Brig. Gen. Patrick Ryder declined to discuss the plan with the publication but explained that the United States is continuously assessing and refining its internal posture and processes to ensure it can provide Ukraine with timely, relevant security assistance to meet its most urgent needs.

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The Defense Department has committed more than $16 billion in military assistance to Ukraine, consisting of weapons provided immediately from US stockpiles and other weapon contracts that may take up to three years to complete.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY
WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) -

ATTACKS ON NORD STREAM PIPELINES
* Damage assessment of the sabotaged Nord Stream pipelines 1 and 2 has been planned after receiving official permits given that access can only be allowed after pressure is stabilized and the leakages stop, the pipelines' operator Nord Stream AG said on Thursday.
* Russia is not involved in the Nord Stream incidents and has never announced its alleged unwillingness to supply energy resources to Europe despite Western sanctions, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.
* The European Union will make a decision regarding measures in response to the gas leak incident at the damaged Nord Stream pipelines after receiving investigation results, EU Commission Deputy spokeswoman Dana Spinant said.
* The scale of destruction at the Nord Stream gas pipelines indicates that it was some kind of a terrorist act, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.
* Russia and the United States do not maintain substantive contacts through their special services, but the emergency situation with the Nord Stream gas pipelines requires an active and operational cooperation, Peskov said.

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS
* UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said on Thursday the annexing of Ukrainian territory by Russia after holding referenda there has "no legal value" and should be condemned.
* A ceremony of signing agreements on the accession of the Luhansk and Donetsk people's republics, as well as Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions to Russia will be held in the Kremlin on September 30, with Russian President Vladimir Putin scheduled to participate in the event, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.
* US Senators Lindsey Graham and Richard Blumenthal introduced legislation that would cut off US aid to any country that recognizes the results of referendums to incorporate four Ukrainian territories into Russia.

SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA
* The new EU sanctions of September 18 led to the early revocation of the export license from the TurkStream operator, but do not limit the continuation of gas transportation, the pipeline's operator, South Stream Transport B.V., said.
* Poland imposed sanctions on Gazprom Export, including the freeze of all assets, the country's interior ministry said.

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* A US grand jury unsealed an indictment charging Russian tycoon Oleg Deripaska and three co-defendants with various charges, including conspiracy to violate sanctions on Russia, destruction of records, and making false statements, among others.

PUTIN-ERDOGAN TALKS
* Russian President Vladimir Putin informed Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan about the results of the September 23-27 referendums in the liberated territories on joining Russia, the Kremlin said on Thursday.
* Putin, in a conversation with Erdogan, gave a fundamental assessment of the unprecedented act of sabotage, an act of international terrorism against the Nord Stream gas pipelines, the Kremlin said.
* Putin and Erdogan drew attention to the need to implement the "food deal," including the removal of barriers to supplies from Russia to global markets, the Kremlin said.
* At the beginning of a phone conversation with Putin, Erdogan expressed condolences over the tragic consequences of a terrorist attack at a school in Izhevsk, the Kremlin said.
* Erdogan, in a phone conversation with Putin, asked him to give a chance to talks with Kiev, with Ankara being ready to become a mediator.

US-RUSSIA DIALOGUE ON NEW START TREATY
* Moscow and Washington are engaged in a dialogue on resuming inspections under the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) treaty and holding a face-to-face meeting of the consultative commission, Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Thursday.
* Some of the problematic issues that were discussed with the United States on the topic of inspections under the New START were resolved, and significant progress has been made on the rest, Zakharova said.

NORTH KOREA MISSILE TEST LAUNCH
* A missile supposedly launched by North Korea has landed outside Japan's exclusive economic zone, with no damage reported, the Kyodo news agency reported on Thursday, citing a government source.
* North Korea on Thursday test fired another missile for the second day in a row amid US-South Korean naval exercises, the Yonhap news agency reported, citing South Korean military.
* The United States condemns North Korea's latest ballistic missile test launches and urges Pyongyang to engage in dialogue, US State Department deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel said.

MONTENEGRO-RUSSIA DIPLOMATIC DISPUTE
* The Montenegrin authorities on Thursday declared six diplomats from the Russian embassy personae non gratae, the country's foreign ministry said.
* Russia will respond to the expulsion of six diplomats from the Montenegro, the Russian Foreign Ministry told Sputnik.

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State Dept. Inspector General Says Launching Audit of US Humanitarian Aid to Ukraine

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - The US State Department Office of Inspector General (OIG) is launching a project to audit the humanitarian assistance sent to Ukraine amid Russia's special military operation, the OIG said on Thursday.
"This project has two objectives: [First,] to describe the Department's humanitarian assistance response for people impacted by the situation in Ukraine and [second,] to determine whether the Department implemented Ukraine related humanitarian assistance in accordance with Department policies, guidance, and award terms and conditions to ensure funds achieve the intended objectives," the OIG said in a statement.
The United States has increased humanitarian funding for Ukraine by 79% between fiscal years 2021 and 2022, the statement said.
The increase in funding likewise increases interest in providing effective oversight of how the State department uses taxpayer funds, the statement added.
There were 17.7 million people in need of humanitarian assistance as of August, according to the statement.

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Former NSA Employee Charged With Trying to Send Secrets to Foreign Country - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - A former National Security Agency (NSA) employee has been charged with three violations of the Espionage Act for allegedly attempting to send sensitive defense-related information to a foreign government, the US Justice Department said on Thursday.
"Jareh Sebastian Dalke, 30, was an employee of the National Security Agency (NSA) where he served as an Information Systems Security Designer," the Justice Department said in a statement. "Dalke used an encrypted email account to transmit excerpts of three classified documents he had obtained during his employment to an individual Dalke believed to be working for a foreign government."
Dalke allegedly began communicating with an FBI Online Covert Employee (OCE) in late July through encrypted email. Dalke left the NSA due to the agency's inability to give him the time off needed to address family illness, according to an affidavit in support of the charges.
The OCE reached out to an email address believed to belong to Dalke in late July, saying that they had been informed to contact him. An individual believed to be Dalke responded on August 1, beginning a series of correspondences that culminated in the transmission of three classified documents to the OCE, the affidavit said.

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The documents were provided to demonstrate “legitimate access and willingness to share,” the affidavit cited the OCE as saying.
The NSA then conducted an internal audit to determine who had accessed the specific documents, concluding that Dalke was the only person to have printed all three, the affidavit said.
The individual believed to be Dalke claimed to have reached out to multiple channels to gain a response about exfiltrating information, including submissions to a so-called “deep web” site maintained by Russia’s Foreign Intelligence Service, the affidavit said.
The OCE then requested the email account owner send their preferred cryptocurrency address to receive payment. The person also requested proof that the OCE was a member of the foreign government they claimed to represent, asking for a posting through media services to confirm, the affidavit said.
Later in August, financial records indicate that money traced through the cryptocurrency payments had been deposited into an account allegedly held by Dalke, the affidavit also said.
The FBI maintained communication with the individual, setting up a sting for September 28, the affidavit also said.
The Justice Department pointed out that Dalke was subsequently arrested by the FBI after showing up at the sting location specified to the email account owner, where he was supposed to transmit more sensitive information.
If found guilty, Dalke faces a sentence of up to life in prison and may even be given the death penalty.

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Pentagon Says Won't Get Ahead of Nord Stream Leak Probe After Reports US Jets Circled Site
(Update with more details, background in paras 3-10)
WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - The United States will not speculate or get ahead of an investigation by European partners of the apparent sabotage of the Nord Stream 1 and 2 gas pipelines, a Defense Department spokesperson told Sputnik on Thursday in response to reports that US aircraft circled the site of the incident throughout September.
Data from Flightradar24 analyzed by Sputnik showed that US military helicopters prior to the incident regularly circled for hours around the area where the gas leaks occurred on the Nord Stream pipelines near Bornholm Island.
"We are not going to speculate or get ahead of European efforts to investigate the cause," the spokesperson said. "We stand ready to support European efforts to mitigate potential environmental impact."
According to Flightradar24 data, at the beginning of September, a US Navy Sikorsky MH-60R Seahawk helicopter loitered over the location of pipelines in the Baltic Sea near Bornholm for three days in a row - September 1, 2 and 3.
On Flightradar24, it is shown as an unidentified aircraft, even without a helicopter icon, however, the 24-bit ICAO code indicated in the description makes it possible to unambiguously establish

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the model - Sikorsky MH-60R Seahawk, as well as that it belongs to the US military. This code is verified through open resources that collect data on military aircraft.
Moreover, the US helicopter, judging by the trajectories on Flightradar24, flew into the area of loitering over the Nord Stream pipelines from Gdansk in Poland.
On September 2, almost in parallel with the US military aircraft's flight, a military helicopter NH90 of the Dutch Navy was flying in the vicinity of Bornholm Island, probably observing the activities of the Americans.
US helicopters, according to Flightradar24, also flew over the branches of the pipelines on September 10 and September 19. On the night of September 22-23 and September 25-26, US military pilots in Sikorsky MH-60R Seahawk helicopters were in the air for a long period of time near the area of the future leaks.
In all cases, the trajectories of the US military aircraft speak of observation flights or loitering with other targets over a specific section of the area in the Baltic Sea. Helicopters that made sorties on the night of September 22-23 and 25-26 have especially confusing tracks.
On Monday, September 26, incidents occurred simultaneously on the two pipelines, causing fall of pressure and leaks, one of which near Bornholm Island. Swedish authorities said they detected several explosions while officials from several countries, including Poland, said the incidents amount to sabotage.

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Six US States File Suit to Challenge Biden's Student Debt Relief

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WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) – Six US states filed a lawsuit to block the Biden administration's decision to cancel student loan debt, the Missouri Attorney General's Office said on Thursday.

"Today, Missouri Attorney General Eric Schmitt joined five other states in filing a challenge to the Biden Administration's student loan cancellation program in federal court in Missouri," the statement read.

The group, which also includes the states of Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, and South Carolina, asks the court for an immediate temporary restraining order to pause the program.

"Prompt relief is being sought because the Biden Administration has indicated it will start cancelling loan balances as early as next week," the statement added.

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.

"The Biden Administration's executive action to cancel student loan debt was not only unconstitutional, it will unfairly burden working class families and those who chose not to take out loans or have paid them off with even more economic woes," Schmitt said. "The Biden Administration's unlawful edict will only worsen inflation at a time when many Americans are struggling to get by."

The lawsuit said that the Biden administration acted without Congressional approval.

"Determined to pursue across-the-board debt cancellation and stymied by repeated failures to achieve that goal through legislation, the Administration resorted to a federal law whose purpose is to provide relief to individuals who have suffered from an emergency like the 9/11 terrorist attacks or who must serve their country overseas in the military," the document said.

The overall cost of implementing this initiative could rise to more than $1 trillion, according to the lawsuit.

The new suit is the second attempt to dispute Biden's initiative in several days. The Pacific Legal Foundation, a nonprofit libertarian law firm, filed a similar suit with the US District Court for the Southern District of Indiana on Tuesday.

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UPDATE - US Indicts Russian Tycoon Deripaska, 2 Co-Defendants for Conspiracy to Violate Sanctions

(Updates with additional information in paras 5, 6, 10)

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - A US grand jury on Thursday unsealed an indictment charging Russian tycoon Oleg Deripaska and three co-defendants with various crimes, of which two co-defendants - in addition to Deripaska - with a conspiracy to violate sanctions imposed on Russia.

"On or about April 6, 2018, the United States government imposed sanctions on Russian citizen Oleg Vladimirovich Deripaska … the defendant, and a company he controlled called 'Basic Element,'" a court document said. "Yet, for over four years afterwards, and in violation of those sanctions, Deripaska continued to retain Olga Shriki and Natalia Mikhaylovna Bardakova … the

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defendants, to provide hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of services for his benefit in the United States."

Shriki is also charged with obstruction of justice because she allegedly deleted electronic records related to her role in Deripaska's sanctions evasion scheme after she was subpoenaed to provide the records to the grand jury, the indictment said. She was arrested earlier on Thursday.

In addition, Bardakova, and the third co-defendant - Ekaterina Voronina - have both been charged with making false statements to FBI and Homeland Security Department agents, respectively, the indictment said.

In 2020, Voronina, with the assistance of Shriri and Bardakova, entered the United States to give birth to a child she conceived with Deripaska in order for the child to be automatically granted US citizenship, the indictment said.

It is also alleged that Shriki and Bardakova facilitated Voronina's return to the United States in 2022 in order to give birth to a second child she conceived with Deripaska, the indictment also said.

The US Justice Department issued a statement saying Deripaska, Bardakova and Shriki have been charged with one count of conspiring to violate and evade US sanctions and face a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison if found guilty.

Shriki is also charged with one count of destruction of records and faces a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison, while Bardakova and Voronina are each charged with one count of making false statements to federal agents, which carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison.

According to the indictment, Deripaska, Bardakova and Shriki must also forfeit the property obtained as a result of the sale of a music studio in California for slightly more than $3 million and expatriated to a Russia-based account allegedly belonging to a Deripaska company.

The indictment charges Shriki with facilitating for Deripaska's benefit in or about 2019 the sale of the music studio.

In March, a US appeals court rejected Deripaska's appeal claiming the sanctions placed on him in 2018 were unlawful, according to a separate court filing.

In October 2021, FBI raided the homes linked to Deripaska in New York and Washington, in search of documents related to Gracetown Inc. The latter is a company that has managed property tax payments since 2013 on a Greenwich Village townhouse linked to the Russian businessman.

The United States introduced sanctions on Deripaska and dozens of other Russian individuals and entities in April 2018 for their alleged ties to the Russian government, which Washington has repeatedly accused of allegedly undertaking "malign activities."

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US Senate Passes Bill to Avoid Government Shutdown, Authorize $12.4Bln in New Ukraine Aid

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WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - The US Senate on Thursday passed legislation to fund the US government and avoid a shutdown, as well as authorize $12.4 billion in new funding for Ukraine-related areas.

Senate lawmakers passed the legislation in a vote of 72-25, with 60 votes needed to advance the bill. Three senators did not vote.

The legislation, which now heads to the House of Representatives for consideration, would maintain fiscal year 2022 funding levels through December 16, avoiding a government shutdown set to start on midnight Friday.

"I'm glad we came to a timely conclusion and didn't go right up to the brink and risk a shutdown," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said on Thursday during floor remarks.

The Congress will now seek to pass a full-year spending bill in December, Schumer also said.

Opposition to the bill by Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell over the inclusion of energy production permitting reforms was lifted after the measures were removed by request of their sponsor, Senator Joe Manchin.

The legislation would also authorize approximately $12.4 billion in new Ukraine-related funding, including $4.5 billion in economic assistance for Kiev, $3 billion in security aid, $2.8 billion for US European Command and $1.5 billion to replenish US weapons stocks.

The bill would also authorize $3.7 billion in US military equipment, including from stocks replenished by the legislation, to be sent to Ukraine using Presidential Drawdown Authority.

Additionally, the bill allocated $540 million to increase critical munitions production, $35 million for nuclear incident preparedness and $2 million for an Inspector General report on Ukraine assistance monitoring.

"Of particular importance is the money to Ukraine," Schumer also said on Thursday. "American weaponry and help has helped them turn the tide of the war. We cannot stop now, and we're not going to."

The bill also funds domestic initiatives such as low-income heating assistance, disaster relief and investigative activities associated with Afghan resettlement operations.

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US Imposes New Iran-Related Sanctions on 10 Entities, One Vessel - Treasury

(Adds details in paras 3-6)

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - The United States is sanctioning one vessel and 10 entities from China, Iran, India and the United Arab Emirates for violating Iran-related sanctions, the US Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) said on Thursday.

"The following [IRAN-EO13846] entries have been added to OFAC's SDN List: CLARA SHIPPING LLC...IRAN CHEMICAL INDUSTRIES INVESTMENT COMPANY PUBLIC JOINT STOCK...MIDDLE EAST KIMIYA PARS CO....ML HOLDING GROUP LIMITED...SIERRA VISTA TRADING LIMITED...SOPHYCHEM HK LIMITED...TIBALAJI PETROCHEM PRIVATE LIMITED...VIRGO MARINE...WS SHIPPING CO. LTD....ZHONGGU STORAGE AND TRANSPORTATION CO., LTD.," OFAC said in a notice.

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The United States also sanctioned the GAS ALLURE vessel for violating Iran-related sanctions as well, OFAC said.
The Treasury Department said in a press release that these sanctioned companies facilitated the sale of hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of Iranian petrochemicals and petroleum products to end users in South and East Asia.
US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a separate statement that the United States will continue to accelerate its enforcement of sanctions on Iran's oil sales as Tehran continues to accelerate its nuclear program in violation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). These enforcement actions will continue on a regular basis with an aim to severely restrict Iran's oil and petrochemical exports, Blinken said, warning that anyone involved in facilitating these sales and transactions should cease and desist immediately if they want to avoid US sanctions.

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US Indicts Russian Tycoon Deripaska, 2 Co-Defendants for Conspiracy to Violate Sanctions
(Updates with more details, background in paras 3-12)
WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - A US grand jury on Thursday unsealed an indictment charging Russian tycoon Oleg Deripaska and three co-defendants with various crimes, of which two co-defendants - in addition to Deripaska - with a conspiracy to violate sanctions imposed on Russia.
"On or about April 6, 2018, the United States government imposed sanctions on Russian citizen Oleg Vladimirovich Deripaska … the defendant, and a company he controlled called 'Basic Element,'" a court document said. "Yet, for over four years afterwards, and in violation of those sanctions, Deripaska continued to retain Olga Shriki and Natalia Mikhaylovna Bardakova … the defendants, to provide hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of services for his benefit in the United States."
Shriki is also charged with obstruction of justice because she allegedly deleted electronic records related to her role in Deripaska's sanctions evasion scheme after she was subpoenaed to provide the records to the grand jury, the indictment said. She was arrested earlier on Thursday.
In addition, Bardakova, and the third co-defendant - Ekaterina Voronina - have both been charged with making false statements to FBI and Homeland Security Department agents, respectively, the indictment said.
Voronina is alleged to have been trying to enter the United States to give birth to a child she conceived with Deripaska in order for the child to automatically be granted US citizenship, the indictment said.
It is also alleged that Shriki and Bardakova facilitated Voronina's return to the United States in order to give birth, the indictment also said.
The US Justice Department issued a statement saying Deripaska, Bardakova and Shriki have been charged with one count of conspiring to violate and evade US sanctions and face a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison if found guilty.

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Shriki is also charged with one count of destruction of records and faces a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison, while Bardakova and Voronina are each charged with one count of making false statements to federal agents, which carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison.
According to the indictment, Deripaska, Bardakova and Shriki must also forfeit the property obtained as a result of the sale of a music studio in California for more than $3 million and expatriated to a Russia-based account allegedly belonging to a Deripaska company.
In March, a US appeals court rejected Deripaska's appeal claiming the sanctions placed on him in 2018 were unlawful, according to a separate court filing.
In October 2021, FBI raided the homes linked to Deripaska in New York and Washington, in search of documents related to Gracetown Inc. The latter is a company that has managed property tax payments since 2013 on a Greenwich Village townhouse linked to the Russian businessman.
The United States introduced sanctions on Deripaska and dozens of other Russian individuals and entities in April 2018 for their alleged ties to the Russian government, which Washington has repeatedly accused of allegedly undertaking "malign activities."

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US State Department Says Has No Update on New START Talks With Russia

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - US State Department deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Thursday that he has no update on the possible resumption of dialogue between the United States and Russia on matters concerning the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) treaty.
"About New START talks, I don't have any additional updates to provide there," Patel said during a press briefing.
The Russian Foreign Ministry said earlier on Thursday that the United States and Russia are currently discussing resuming inspections under the New START Treaty and plan to soon hold an in-person bilateral meeting of the consultative commission.

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State Dept. Confirms US Citizen Killed in Rocket Attack in Iraqi Kurdistan Wednesday

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - US State Department deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel on Thursday confirmed that a US citizen was killed in a rocket attack earlier this week in Iraq.
"We can confirm that a US citizen was killed as a result of a rocket attack in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region yesterday, but due to privacy considerations, I don't have any further comments to provide," Patel said during a press briefing.

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US Condemns N. Korea's Latest Missile Launches, Calls for Dialogue - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - The United States condemns North Korea's latest ballistic missile test launches and urges Pyongyang to engage in dialogue, US State Department deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Thursday.
"The United States condemns the DPRK's [North Korea's] multiple ballistic missile launches," Patel said during a press briefing. "We remain deeply committed to a diplomatic approach with the DPRK and call on the DPRK to engage in dialogue."

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Biden Says Will Visit Florida Following Hurricane Ian Destruction When Conditions Allow

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Thursday said he plans to visit Florida when conditions allow in order to thank disaster response crews working across the state to address what may end up being the deadliest storm in Florida history.
"Everyone hard at work in Florida right now deserves our thanks, and when the conditions allow it, I'm going to be going to Florida to thank them personally, so we don't get in the way," Biden said during remarks at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) headquarters in Washington.
Biden also warned energy companies not to raise prices due to the impact of the hurricane on production, with only 2% of daily production expected to be affected, according to the president. Officials will be instructed to investigate reports of raised prices as price gouging, Biden said.
FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell also delivered remarks alongside Biden, during which she warned that Hurricane Ian still poses life-threatening risks to areas across Florida and the southeastern United States as it continues to move across the area.
"This could be the deadliest hurricane in Florida's history. The numbers are still unclear, but we're hearing early reports of what may be substantial loss of life," Biden also said during his remarks.
Hurricane Ian, which made landfall as a Category 4 storm, has left almost 2.6 million people in the state without electricity as of Thursday morning, according to the PowerOutage.us web portal.

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US Imposes New Iran-Related Sanctions on 10 Entities, One Vessel - Treasury

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"The following [IRAN-EO13846] entries have been added to OFAC's SDN List: CLARA SHIPPING LLC...IRAN CHEMICAL INDUSTRIES INVESTMENT COMPANY PUBLIC JOINT STOCK...MIDDLE EAST KIMIYA PARS CO....ML HOLDING GROUP LIMITED...SIERRA VISTA TRADING LIMITED...SOPHYCHEM HK LIMITED...TIBALAJI PETROCHEM PRIVATE LIMITED...VIRGO MARINE...WS SHIPPING CO. LTD....ZHONGGU STORAGE AND TRANSPORTATION CO., LTD.," OFAC said in a notice.
The United States also sanctioned the GAS ALLURE vessel for violating Iran-related sanctions as well, OFAC said.
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UN Chief Expresses Concerns to Russian Envoy Regarding Referenda in Ukraine

UNITED NATIONS, September 29 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has talked with the Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia and expressed concern regarding the referenda held on Ukrainian territories and their annexation by Russia, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Thursday.
"The Secretary General has expressed his concerns to the Russian side and regarding the proceedings around the annexation in a conversation with Ambassador Nebenzia yesterday and contacts will continue," Dujarric said during a press briefing.
This is a reminder for every United Nations member state to uphold international law, Dujarric added.
Earlier on Thursday, Guterres said that any annexation of Ukrainian territory by Russia would have "no legal value."
The Russian mission to the United Nations has requested a UN Security Council meeting that is scheduled to be held on Friday afternoon. The topic of discussion will be the attacks on the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines, however, the referenda are also likely to be discussed.

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US Army Major, Doctor Wife Charged in Plot to Give Russia Military Medical Info - Filing
(Adds details in paras 3-5)
WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - A US Army major and his wife, an anesthesiologist doctor, have been charged for allegedly conspiring to provide American military medical information to the Russian government, court documents revealed on Thursday.

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"The object of the conspiracy was to provide IIHI [individually identifiable health information] related to patients at Fort Bragg and Medical Institution 1 to an individual that [ANNA] GABRIELIAN and [JAMIE LEE] HENRY believed to be working for the Russian Government, in order to assist the Russian government by demonstrating: 1) the level of GABRIELIAN and HENRY's access to IIHI of US personnel, 2) GABRIELIAN and HENRY's willingness to provide IIHI to the Russian government, and 3) the potential for the Russian government to gain insights into the medical conditions of individuals associated with the US government and military, to exploit this information," the court document said.

Gabrielian and Henry allegedly committed to aid the Russian government on August 17, which is when Gabrielian was approached by an undercover FBI agent posing as an individual associated with the Russian government, the court documents said.

Gabrielian told the undercover agent that she had reached out directly to the Russian Embassy by email and phone offering Russia her and her husband's assistance, the court documents said. Gabrielian told the undercover agent that she was motivated by patriotism toward Russia to provide any assistance she could to Russia, even if it meant being fired or going to jail, the court documents said.

On August 31, Gabrielian and Henry provided the undercover agent with records of seven patients at military medical hospitals, some of which could be exploited by Russia according to Gabrielian, the court documents said.

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US Indicts Russian Tycoon Deripaska, 2 Co-Defendants for Conspiracy to Violate Sanctions

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) – A US grand jury on Thursday unsealed an indictment charging Russian tycoon Oleg Deripaska and three co-defendants with various charges, including conspiracy to violate sanctions on Russia, destruction of records, and making false statements, among others.

"On or about April 6, 2018, the United States government imposed sanctions on Russian citizen Oleg Vladimirovich Deripaska, …, the defendant, and a company he controlled called 'Basic Element'," a court document said. "Yet for over four years afterwards, and in violation of those sanctions, Deripaska continued to retain Olga Shriki and Natalia Mikhaylovna Bardakova, …, the defendants, to provide hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of services for his benefit in the United States."

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Family Sues Quebec Hospital for Mocking Dying Indigenous Woman - Reports

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WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) – The family of Joyce Echaquan, an Indigenous woman who died in 2020 at a Quebec hospital as she was mocked by the staff, is suing the hospital and the involved staff for C$2.7 million ($2 million), Global News reported on Thursday.
According to the report, Joyce's family is suing a Joliette hospital, and all the personnel involved in the incident surrounding her death.
The lawsuit was filed by Patrick Martin-Menard, the legal representative of the family, who said this was about rendering justice for the loss of the family member, the report added.
In September 2020, Echaquan, 37, recorded herself from her bed at a hospital located in the city of Joliette as the nurse and her assistant were making disrespectful comment at her. The mother of seven passed away shortly after the incident.
On Wednesday, the family marked two years since her death.

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Biden Administration Plans Executive Action to Protect DACA Recipients - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden is preparing to sign an executive order that would protect children of immigrants who entered the United States illegally from being deported, NBC News reported on Thursday.
The White House is preparing to take executive action to protect hundreds of thousands of immigrants known as "Dreamers," the report said, citing sources close to the Biden administration.
The report said Biden administration plans to act in anticipation of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals to rule to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which allows the children of the illegal immigrants to live and work in the United States.
The report said planning in the White House has resumed as the Biden administration expects the federal court to rule within several days and end the DACA program.
The US Supreme Court has also signaled that it would also rule to end the DACA program should the Biden administration appeal the expected federal court ruling, the report added.

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US Senators Introduce Bill to End Aid to States Recognizing Russia Accession Referendums

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) – Senators Lindsey Graham and Richard Blumenthal introduced legislation on Thursday that would cut off US aid to any country that recognizes the results of referendums to incorporate four Ukrainian territories into Russia.
"Senator Graham and I are introducing today legislation that would very simply immediately require cutting off economic and military aid to any country that recognizes Vladimir Putin's illegal annexation of four regions of Ukraine," Blumenthal said at a press conference.

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He added the legislation would come in the forms of a standalone bill and an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act.

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US Army Major, Doctor Wife Charged in Plot to Give Russia Military Medical Info - Filing

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - A US Army major and his wife, an anesthesiologist doctor, have been charged for allegedly conspiring to provide American military medical information to the Russian government, court documents revealed on Thursday.
"The object of the conspiracy was to provide IIHI [individually identifiable health information] related to patients at Fort Bragg and Medical Institution 1 to an individual that [ANNA] GABRIELIAN and [JAMIE LEE] HENRY believed to be working for the Russian Government, in order to assist the Russian government by demonstrating: 1) the level of GABRIELIAN and HENRY's access to IIHI of US personnel, 2) GABRIELIAN and HENRY's willingness to provide IIHI to the Russian government, and 3) the potential for the Russian government to gain insights into the medical conditions of individuals associated with the US government and military, to exploit this information," the court document said.

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UN Chief Says Russia Annexing Ukrainian Territory Has 'No Legal Value'

UNITED NATIONS, September 29 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said on Thursday the annexing of Ukrainian territory by Russia after holding referenda there has "no legal value" and should be condemned.
"Any decision to proceed with the annexation of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions of Ukraine would have no legal value and deserves to be condemned," Guterres said during a briefing.
The United Nations believes that the decision by Russia to go forward with annexing Ukrainian territory will further jeopardize the prospects for peace, Guterres added.

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US Mortgage Rates Up 6th Straight Week Amid Fed Interest Rate Hikes - Freddie Mac

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WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - US mortgage rates rose for a sixth week in a row last week, increasing the burden on home buyers already hit by five interest rate hikes by the Federal Reserve this year, the national mortgage agency Freddie Mac said on Thursday.
"The uncertainty and volatility in financial markets is heavily impacting mortgage rates," Freddie Mac Chief Economist Sam Khater said in a statement. "Our survey indicates that the range of weekly rate quotes for the 30-year fixed-rate mortgage has more than doubled over the last year. This means that for the typical mortgage amount, a borrower who locked-in at the higher end of the range would pay several hundred dollars more than a borrower who locked-in at the lower end of the range."
The benchmark 30-year fixed-rate for home buyers averaged 6.7% last week compared with the previous week's 6.29%. A year ago, that rate averaged 3.01%, according to Freddie Mac.
"The large dispersion in rates means it has become even more important for homebuyers to shop around with different lenders," Khater said.
The Fed has raised interest rates by 300 percentage points from a base of just 25 in February in a bid to fight inflation at four-decade highs. The US central bank said it has some way to go before it can consider a pause or reduction in rates and another 125 percentage points will likely be added before the end of this year.
Fed officials say demand for homes has been one of the contributors to runaway 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 2008-2009 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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Biden Amends Alaska Disaster Declaration After Major Storm, Increases Aid - White House

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden amended a disaster declaration linked to a major storm that hit the state of Alaska earlier this month in order to increase the amount of available federal aid, the White House said on Thursday.
"Today, President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. made additional disaster assistance available to the State of Alaska by authorizing an increase in the level of federal funding for emergency protective measures undertaken in the State of Alaska as a result of a severe storm, flooding, and landslides during the period of September 15 to September 20, 2022," the White House said in a statement.

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The initial disaster declaration issued on September 23 made federal funding available at 75% of total eligible costs, the statement said. The updated declaration increases the federal share for emergency protective measures to 100% of total eligible costs for the first 30 days of the incident period, according to the statement.
Coastal communities in Alaska were hit by the remnant of a typhoon earlier this month, which resulted in flooding and high-wind damage to homes and other essential infrastructure.
The updated disaster declaration comes as the federal government also begins to respond to the impacts of Hurricane Ian in Florida, which has left almost 2.6 million people in the state without electricity as of Thursday morning, according to the PowerOutage.us web portal.

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Blinken Congratulates American Elected to Head UN Telecoms Union

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Thursday congratulated American Doreen Bogdan-Martin on her election to lead the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), a UN agency responsible for matters related to information and communication technologies.
Bogdan-Martin beat Russia's Rashid Ismailov in the election to head the ITU.
"I congratulate Doreen Bogdan-Martin on her historic election to serve as the next Secretary General of the International Telecommunication Union," Blinken said in a statement. "The United States strongly supports the ITU's vision and looks forward to working with Ms. Bogdan-Martin to close the digital divides, connect the 2.7 billion people who remain without reliable access to the Internet, and chart a course for the ITU that expands cooperation among all relevant stakeholders."
Bogdan-Martin, as the first woman elected to the position, increases the body's inclusivity and representation, Blinken added.
The United States supported Bogdan-Martin's campaign as a reflection of the Biden administration's determination to ensure international organizations are run well, responsive to their members and accountable for their performance, Blinken also said.

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US Jobless Claims Hit 5-Month Low Complicating Inflation Fight - Labor Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - US unemployment claims hit a five-month low last week, the Labor Department said on Thursday, highlighting the Federal Reserve's challenge in subduing inflation amid increasing job security in the United States.

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Jobless claims for the week that ended on September 24 totaled 193,000, a decrease of 16,000 from the previous week's downward-revised total and below the average forecast of 215,000 from economists polled by US media.

The figure was the lowest since the week to April 23 and is the first time since early May that claims fell beneath the 200,000 mark.

"The recent decline in layoffs flies in the face of the Fed's efforts to soften up labor market conditions and knock inflation back down toward its 2% target," Jim Baird, chief investment officer at Plante Moran Financial Advisors said in comments carried by CNBC. "The capital markets have heard the Fed and investors are feeling the pain. But the jobs market? For now at least, it's not listening."

US inflation, as measured by the broad Consumer Price Index (CPI) has been at four-decade highs of above 8% per annum for about a year now - more than four times the Fed's 2% target.

The Fed's own preferred inflation tracker, the Personal Consumption Expenditures Price (PCE) index, has also been higher than expected. The PCE index grew by 7.3% year-over-year in the second quarter - above the 7.1% reading in the prior two quarterly estimates and just off the 7.5% gain in the first quarter.

To fight inflation, the Fed has raised interest rates by 300 points this year, from an original base of just 25 points in February. The central bank's Chairman Jerome Powell said last week that US interest rate hikes will 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.

But the Fed's interest rate hikes have not had as much impact as intended on the Americans' ability to pay higher prices thanks to job security in a labor market where two positions existed for every unemployed person.

The jobs market has been the juggernaut of the US economy over the past two years, powering its recovery from the coronavirus pandemic measures.

Unemployment among Americans reached a record high rate of 14.8% in April 2020, with the loss of some 20 million jobs after the COVID-19 breakout. Since then, hundreds of thousands of jobs have been added every month, with the trend keeping up in August. September's jobs numbers are due on October 7.

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US Q2 GDP Down 0.6% in Final Reading - Commerce Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - US Gross Domestic Product contracted by 0.6% in the second quarter of 2022, the Commerce Department said Thursday in its final reading for the period that confirmed the country was in a recession, on paper at least.

"Real gross domestic product (GDP) decreased at an annual rate of 0.6 percent in the second quarter of 2022, following a decrease of 1.6 percent in the first quarter," the Bureau of Economic Analysis, a unit within the Commerce Department, said in a news release.

Conventionally, two straight quarters of GDP decline place an economy in a recession.

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Officials at the Federal Reserve have, however, argued that the US economy was far more robust than the textbook definition of a recession, pointing especially at the nation's jobs market, which has been the juggernaut of its recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.
Unemployment among Americans reached a record high rate of 14.8% in April 2020, with the loss of some 20 million jobs after the COVID-19 breakout. Since then, hundreds of thousands of jobs have been added every month, with the trend keeping up in August. Weekly jobs statistics have also been stellar, with the number of Americans filing for unemployment falling to a five-month low last week, according to data on Thursday from the Labor Department.

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EU Lawmaker From Poland Deletes Tweet Thanking US for Damaging Nord Stream Pipeline
WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - Radoslaw Sikorski, a member of the European Parliament and former Polish foreign minister, has deleted the "Thank you, USA" tweet he posted in response to the explosions at Russia's Nord Stream 1 and 2 gas pipelines earlier this week.
The original tweet also contained a picture of a big bubbling circle on the surface of the Baltic Sea off the coast of Denmark due to a natural gas leak from the damaged pipeline.
However, Sikorski did not delete another tweet that read "As we say in Polish, a small thing, but so much joy" with the same picture of the bubbling water attached.
The tweet generated controversy, with many wondering what the Polish lawmaker meant by publishing it.
On Monday, Nord Stream AG pipeline operator told Sputnik that a dispatcher had registered a rapid gas pressure drop on Line A of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. The incident occurred in Danish waters near the island of Bornholm. The operator later said that a pressure drop had been registered on both strings of the Nord Stream 1 pipeline. The Swedish and Danish authorities said they had detected undersea explosions, with the consensus being that the incident resulted from sabotage.

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Biden, DeSantis Discuss Steps to Support Florida in Response to Hurricane Ian

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden has discussed ongoing efforts to respond to Hurricane Ian in a call with Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, the White House announced on Thursday.
Hurricane Ian made landfall in Florida on Wednesday. Biden declared a "major disaster" in this state.

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"The President spoke this morning with Governor Ron DeSantis of Florida to discuss the steps the Biden-Harris Administration is taking to support Florida in response to Hurricane Ian, including the issuance of a Disaster Declaration this morning," the press release said.
Biden told DeSantis he is sending the FEMA Administrator to Florida on Friday to check in on response efforts and see where additional support is needed.
"The President and Governor committed to continued close coordination," the release added.
As of Thursday morning, the hurricane has left almost 2.6 million people without electricity in Florida, the PowerOutage.us web portal said. Another 240,000 customers have experienced power outages in Puerto Rico, while over 15,500 people are without power in Georgia and both Carolinas.

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US Pledges $810Mln in Aid for Pacific Islands, Says Will Recognize Cook Islands and Niue
WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - The United States will allocate $810 million in additional assistance for the Pacific islands and recognize Cook Islands and Niue, the White House said on Thursday.
"The United States has directly provided over $1.5 billion to support the Pacific Islands over the past decade and today has announced over $810 million in additional expanded programs," a fact sheet said. "These initiatives seek to improve the lives and wellbeing of all Pacific Islanders by expanding diplomatic engagement, including through the historic announcement that the United States will recognize Cook Islands and Niue, following appropriate consultations; combatting the climate crisis; launching a new Trade and Investment Dialogue; providing development assistance; enhancing maritime security; expanding educational opportunities; enhancing security, health, and digital capacity; and addressing painful legacies of war."
The new initiatives include a 10-year $600 million Economic Assistance Agreement request to Congress and the administration's Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, which will deliver "game-changing" projects in the region.
In addition, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) will open a Pacific regional mission in Suva, Fiji by September 2023, and boost its presence in Papua New Guinea via a country representative office.
"Peace Corps volunteers will return to Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, and Vanuatu to support communities on education, health, community economic development, and climate action," the White House said. "Additionally, the Peace Corps is finalizing its assessment of Solomon Islands and exploring options for returning to other Pacific countries."

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US Ambassador Calls on China to Reopen Dialogue with US

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WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - US Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns called on Beijing on Thursday to restart talks it cut off in retaliation for US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's controversial visit to Taiwan in August.

"Our message to the Chinese is let's talk, open these dialogues and let's move forward," Burns said at the Milken Institute Asia Summit.

Burns said the US and China still needed to cooperate on issues such as climate change and health despite their differences.

At the same time, Burns said the US would not accept China changing the status quo on Taiwan. He added that the US had also made it clear, publicly and privately, that it was closely monitoring whether China was providing Russia with military support or support with evading sanctions.

Burns also said the US did not want to decouple from China, encouraging Americans to continue investing there as along as it did not violate national security interests.

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Americans' Trust in Supreme Court Drops to Record Low – Poll

\WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) – Forty-seven percent of US adults have trust in the US Supreme Court, dropping 20 percentage points in two years to reach a historic low, according to a Gallup poll released Thursday.

The figure is the lowest by six percentage points since Gallup began tracking trust levels in 1972. The drop was driven largely by Democrats – with just 25%, down from 50% a year ago – reporting a "fair amount" or "great deal" of trust in the court.

The poll also found that a record-high 58% of US adults disapproved of the Supreme Court's performance. Approval also fell to a record-tying-low of 40%. However, Republican approval has increased to 60% since a year ago.

A record-high 42% of Americans believe the court is "too conservative," with 71% of Democrats and 46% of independents falling in this group. Fifty-eight percent of Republicans say the court's ideology is "about right."

Gallup's annual governance survey was conducted September 1-6.

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Hurricane Ian Causing 'Catastrophic Flooding' in Florida, Threatens 3 More States – NHC

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) – Hurricane Ian is provoking "catastrophic flooding" in Florida, and threatens Georgia, South and North Carolina, the National Hurricane Center (NHC) said on Thursday.

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"Ian producing catastrophic flooding over East-Central Florida. Forecast to produce life-threatening flooding, storm surge and gusty winds across portions of Florida, Georgia and the Carolinas," the NHC said in an advisory.

The National Weather Service has issued special weather advisories and warnings for at least nine cities across the region.

As of Thursday morning, the hurricane has left almost 2.6 millions of people without electricity in Florida, the PowerOutage.us web portal said. Another 240,000 customers have experienced power outages in Puerto Rico, while over 15,500 people are without power in Georgia and both Carolinas.

Hurricane Ian made landfall in Florida on Wednesday. US President Joe Biden declared a "major disaster" in this state.

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