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DeSantis' Biggest Donor Pulls Back on Funding Due to 'Extremism' - Report

Andy Sabin, a metals magnate and well known Republican donor, was also thrown by DeSantis' extreme stance on abortion, and has instead, angled his support behind Senator Tim Scott, according to one report.

On Friday, a Toronto-based new agency revealed an exclusive interview with entrepreneur Robert Bigelow. Bigelow, as well as being a real estate and aerospace mogul, is one of Ron DeSantis' biggest donors in the Florida governor's race for the White House for 2024.

Bigelow, who gave $20 million to the Never Back Down Super Pac in March, said he will not give DeSantis' campaign more money, unless the Florida governor works to attract new donors, as well as adopt a more moderate approach.

"He does need to shift to get to moderates. He'll lose if he doesn't... extremism isn't going to get you elected," Bigelow told the news outlet. Bigelow then referred to DeSantis' decision to sign a bill in his state that bans abortions after six weeks, which he did following Bigelow's donation in March.

Until DeSantis can prove that he can raise funds "on his own", the entrepreneur will cease his cash flow to the Florida governor's campaign. Bigelow added that he had communicated these issues to DeSantis' campaign.

"Not until I see that he's able to generate more on his own. I'm already too big a percentage," Bigelow added. "A lot of his donors are still on the fence."

This is not the beginning of DeSantis' campaign headache, either. In his first six weeks as a presidential candidate, the Florida governor managed to burn through $7.9 million. And in mid-July, DeSantis' presidential campaign fired about a third of their staff.

At the end of June, however, the pro-DeSantis Super Pac was reported to have a combined $109 million, twice as much as former President Donald Trump's Maga Inc. Super Pac which boasts $53 million.

DeSantis, who is trailing Trump by 24 points according to a new poll, seems to be doing very little to stand out from his extremist rival.

Republican strategists have advised the governor to play to moderates in his campaign, instead of appealing to those on the right, because while Trump battles a stack of legal fights, the Florida governor is alienating voters with his extremist positions on slavery, education, abortion and immigration.

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‘They’re Not Getting Anything’: Official US Economic Numbers Belie Decadeslong ‘Great Stagnation’

While official economic numbers might look good, the reality is that for most Americans, their prospects have improved little over the last two decades, which is why US President Joe Biden has such little support, an expert told Sputnik.

The latest jobs report by the US Department of Labor showed a strong increase in jobs and a decline in unemployment, as well as an increase in hourly earnings, meaning that for the moment, the US seems to be allaying fears of an economic downturn.

The Friday report said the US economy added 187,000 jobs in July, less than the 200,000 that were expected but not enough to leave investors wary. The unemployment rate sank again to 3.5%, nearing a record-low amount. The report also said hourly earnings increased by 4.4%.

The news sent the stock market into a tailspin, erasing all gains made earlier in the day and leaving all indices with losses. However, it also reportedly solidified investors’ convictions that the Federal Reserve won’t raise interest rates at its next meeting in September.

John Ross, an author, economist, and senior fellow at the Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies at Renmin University of China, told Radio Sputnik’s Political Misfits on Friday that while the Biden administration has tried to spin the economic trends over the past 2.5 years to reflect favorably on his economic program going into an election next year, the reality is that Americans have become used to poor economic performance.

“It depends what you mean by ‘working.’ You mean, is the Biden administration preventing the US’ very slow growth rate [from] collapsing into something which is an outright recession? Maybe,” Ross said.

He noted there “isn’t much practical difference” between 0.5% growth and 0.5% contraction of the economy.

“The key situation is the US economy remains locked into very slow growth. If you take a 20-year period, its average growth rate is 2%. If we go back to the 1960s, that would’ve been regarded as disastrous: the US economy at that time was growing right about 4.4-4.5% a year. So the way that one should characterize the present situation in the US economy is really the ‘great stagnation.’”

"What people don’t realize is that the US economy since 2007 has actually grown more slowly than during the Great Depression. It’s true that in the Great Depression there was a much more spectacular collapse between 1929 and 1931, the initial fall was much bigger. But, the economy began to recover, whereas the US economy [today] is just not growing fast.”

“So, by now we’re 16 years away from 2007, which was just prior to the international financial crisis. The US economy is actually growing more slowly than in the Great Depression, but for some reason the American media is going on about how good the economy is. Of course, real wages are falling, the population doesn’t feel it, and that’s likely to be unpleasant for Biden’s electoral prospects I would think.”

“What they feel is that they’re not getting better off” over the last two decades, Ross said. “If we go back to the 1950s and the 1960s, whatever you think about American capitalism, it was churning out 3%, 4% increase in living standards every year, people felt better, and therefore there was at that time quite a lot of political stability and people were not fed up. Today, they’re not getting better.”

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“I mean, if you go up to someone and say ‘the GDP has grown by 2.6% but your real wages have fallen’, which is the case in the United States, he or she would say ‘why on Earth would I care if the GDP is growing at 2.6% if all the benefit of it is going to other people’ - which means, basically, it’s capital. So therefore, they’re not getting anything out of it and that’s why they’re discontent. If the economy was as good as Biden claims, he’d be 20% ahead of any rival in the opinion polls. But instead, his ratings are very bad and that’s because people are not better off.”
Turning to the issue of homelessness and housing costs, the hosts noted one recent study said that high housing costs in California have pushed people into homelessness, with similar things happening in New York and Washington, DC, among other major US cities.
“The situation of homelessness is getting very bad - not only in the United States, it’s getting worse here,” the UK-based commentator said. “But the truth of the matter is that the percentage of the population which is actually homeless is tiny. It’s horrible, I’m totally against it, but most people are not affected for it. What they’re hit by is, the housing costs are getting very, very high and it’s getting more and more difficult to get decent housing in America.”
“Everybody assumed that their children would live better than they did and that a young person, when they got into their 20s and got their first job, would be able to save up for 2 or 3 years, and then they’d be able to get a mortgage, they’d be able to pay for a mortgage and they’d own a house. But that’s not the case. Now, many people assume their children are going to be worse off - which is not an illusion, they may well be worse off - and the younger people find it harder and harder to get on the housing ladder. And that’s what’s really affecting the massive numbers of people.”

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Austrian PM Proposes Constitutional 'Right to Cash'

As cashless payment methods proliferate across Europe, Austrian Prime Minister Karl Nehammer has moved to legally preserve paying in the old-fashioned way, with banknotes and coins.
Speaking on Friday, the conservative Austrian leader proposed a "constitutional protection of cash as a means of payment,” saying he would direct Finance Minister Magnus Brunner and the country’s central bank to come up with a plan in the coming months to ensure a "basic supply" of cash remains in the economy.
"Everyone should have the opportunity to decide freely how and with what he wants to pay," he said. "That can be by card, by transfer, perhaps in future also with the digital euro, but also with cash. This freedom to choose must and will remain."
"More and more people are worried that cash could be restricted as a means of payment in Austria," Nehammer said, adding that people have a "right to cash."
Nehammer noted that his comments are in response to claims circulating on social media that the country could soon do away with cash payments, forcing customers to use bank cards or payment apps.

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According to the Austrian leader, €47 billion is withdrawn from ATMs every year in Austria and the average Austrian carries €102 in cash. Further, two-thirds of payments under €20 are made in cash, he said. Roughly 9.1 million people live in the Central European country, which is part of the European Union and the Eurozone.

The debate isn't new to Austria, and Nehammer's proposal was criticized by both left and right politicos. Philip Kucher, an MP from the Social Democratic Party, said the right to cash was worthless if "there won't be a single ATM left in Austria," while the right-wing Freedom Party accused the prime minister of stealing their idea.

While the Eurozone nations have been increasing options for cashless payment, the European Central Bank has also committed itself to preserving cash as a payment form. The Eurosystem Cash 2030 strategy was launched in 2020.

A study published by the ECB in March found that within the Eurozone, cash is still the most frequent payment method, accounting for 59% of transactions. However, 55% of consumers said they preferred cashless payments. They also found that the value of card payments had exceeded the value of cash payments for the first time, rising to 46% of transactions.

"Monitoring these trends closely going forward is important for us, given our responsibility for issuing public money (currently in the form of cash, and possibly in the future in the form of a digital euro alongside cash) and promoting the smooth functioning of payment systems," ECB Executive Board Member Fabio Panetta, ECB Executive Board Member said in the introduction to the report.

"This will help us ensure that means of payment remain accessible to all euro area citizens, regardless of their age, income or place of residence, guaranteeing consumers' freedom to choose how they pay, even in digital transformation."

The ECB is also expected to present an outline for a legislative framework on a Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) or "digital Euro" this year. A leaked passage from the plans published by cryptocurrency news outlet CoinDesk in June showed it proposes to ban surcharges for using the digital currency and to offer "comparable" levels of privacy to withdrawing banknotes when using the digital Euro for offline payments.

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Ukraine Will Never Get NATO Membership, Only US Support as 'Anti-Russian Hedgehog'

A leading Russian foreign policy expert told Sputnik on Friday that despite Kiev's desires to be welcomed into the Western anti-Russian bloc, the NATO powers only ever intend to use the new "ally" as a bulwark in their struggle against Russia and will never treat Ukraine as an equal.

The government in Kiev has continued to pressure the Western NATO alliance to give the country firmer pledges of support, including security guarantees and entry into the alliance. At its summit last month in Vilnius, the NATO powers swore off allowing Ukrainian membership while the conflict with Russia rages, over fears of the 31-nation alliance being drawn into a direct war with Russia that would include four nuclear-armed nations.

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Dmitry Suslov, deputy director of the Center for European and International Studies at Russia's Higher School of Economics and deputy director of research at the Russian Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, told Sputnik on Friday that in fact NATO will never let Kiev into the alliance, since it only intends to use Ukraine as "an instrument" toward the US strategic goal of weakening and dismantling Russia.

"Obviously, at one point the United States promised that Ukraine will join NATO after the end of the war in Ukraine, but the United States is not ready to provide such assurances and such guarantees," Suslov said.

"The United States wants to avoid any obligations that could bring the United States into open military conflict with Russia. So by security guarantees, the United States means and implies the obligation to provide military assistance to Ukraine in the longer term, especially after the end of the war in Ukraine, beyond the military conflict itself. The idea is actually to turn Ukraine into a military hedgehog to provide military assistance, weapons training for Ukrainian troops, intel information in order to increase Ukrainian military strength up to the point that Russia would not dare to invade Ukraine. And if Russia does, then Ukraine will be able to repel and defeat Russia without the direct involvement of the United States."

"That's basically what the United States means by security guarantees to Ukraine. This generally is the so-called Israel model. It works between the United States and Israel. I mean, there is no legally binding treaty between the United States and Israel that would compel the United States to join a battle between Israel and Israeli neighbors if there is a war, but the United States provides substantial military help to Israel."

"Of course, the United States will not provide Ukraine with a military advantage, with a military edge over Russia, but basically the idea is to militarize Ukraine more and to continue militarization of Ukraine after the end of the hot war."

Suslov added that giving Ukraine that kind of long-term military assistance prevents a political resolution of the crisis because it's directly contrary to Russia's security demands that it articulated before the conflict began in February 2022.

"One of the basic Russian conditions is the demilitarization of Ukraine and an official Ukrainian security rejection of Ukrainian NATO membership aspirations and promises that Ukraine will someday join NATO. And the security assistance that the United States provides to Ukraine is absolutely contrary to those Russian demands, is contrary to the demand of demilitarization. And the United States is not willing to repeal the NATO promise to Ukraine," he said.

The policy expert noted that the US' plans for a long-term military assistance memorandum with Kiev "de-incentivizes" Russia seeking to end the conflict since Moscow is compelled to oppose such an arrangement.

"Because, of course, turning Ukraine into an even more militarized anti-Russian [country] is absolutely unacceptable for Russia," he said.

"It is absolutely clear that the United States refuses to take Russian security interests into consideration. They didn't want to do it before, back in November-December 2021, when Russia formulated the security guarantees demands for Russia. And of course the United States does not want to take Russian security concerns seriously now because they're interested in the directly opposite thing. They are interested in the continuation of the hybrid war against Russia in order to weaken Russia up to the point when Russia is no longer a great power," he explained.

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"Some people in the United States want a dismantling of Russia and a regime change, others want just a drastic weakening of the country. And the US perceives it as a means to reestablish their global hegemony, to strengthen their positions in their confrontation against China and so on and so forth. I mean, it is very important to understand that the United States does not want peace or a stable security system in Europe. They want strengthening and restoration of their hegemony, which implies a confrontation against Russia, a weakening of Russia. And Ukraine is used just as an instrument for that."

"I think that in the next several years, the West will not be ready to consider the idea of Ukrainian neutrality seriously, because if they do, it would mean that they are ready to reverse their policy, that they are ready to consider Russian security interests seriously and to resolve the crisis and to normalize their relations with Russia, which is absolutely contrary to their intentions. As I already said, their intention is continuation of a hybrid war against Russia in order either to defeat it or to weaken it drastically."

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DeSantis' Pledge to 'Slit Throat' of 'Deep State' Draws Ire of Federal Employee Union

In May, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis launched his long awaited 2024 presidential campaign, but has since had trouble making up ground against his primary rival, former US President Donald Trump.

Florida Governor and Republican presidential long shot Ron DeSantis received significant criticism for promising to "slit the throats" of government employees that he says are part of the "deep state."

"On bureaucracy, you know, we're going to have all these deep state people, you know, we're going to start slitting throats on Day One and be ready to go," DeSantis said. "You're going to see a huge, huge outcry because Washington wants to protect its own."

The violent language, made in New Hampshire during a campaign event, was denounced by the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), the largest federal employee union in the nation.

"Governor DeSantis' threat to 'start slitting throats' of federal employees is dangerous, disgusting, disgraceful, and disqualifying," AFGE President Everett Kelley said in a statement released Thursday. "Federal employees – over a third of whom are veterans now wearing their second uniform in service to their country – have dedicated their lives to serving their fellow Americans."

Kelley added that "no federal employee should face death threats from anyone, least of all from someone seeking to lead the US government," and demanded DeSantis retract his statement.

While DeSantis likely did not mean he would literally kill federal employees once elected, Kelley argues that such violent rhetoric has resulted in violent reactions in the past.

"We've seen too often in recent years – from the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 to the sacking of the Capitol on January 6, 2021 – that violent anti-government rhetoric from politicians has

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deadly consequences. Any candidate who positions themselves within that shameful tradition has no place in public office."

DeSantis has promised to fight the "deep state," something his Republican rival - former President Donald Trump, has consistently promised to do since his 2016 campaign. After Trump's campaign, the term has grown in popularity among Republicans trying to position themselves as anti-establishment, though the term has deeper roots and is not exclusive to conservatives.

Referring to the officials and administrators in government who are not elected and influence policy, particularly national security experts, Trump and now many of his fellow Republicans have insisted the "deep state" is part of a conspiracy to stop their agenda.

DeSantis is firmly entrenched in the second position in the Republican primary, leading the third-place candidate Vivek Ramaswamy by around 7.5 points according to poll aggregators, but he remains far behind Trump, who has a chokehold on the Republican primary and leads DeSantis by anywhere from 30 to 52 points depending on the poll and how many candidates are included.

In fact, DeSantis receives roughly the same amount of support among likely Republican primary voters as Robert F. Kennedy Jr. gets from likely Democratic primary voters, with the caveat that the Republican field is far more crowded.

The DeSantis campaign is largely seen as attempting a reboot following its own culling of its campaign staff. Last month, the campaign fired more than 40% of its original staff amid complaints the campaign was burning through cash at an unsustainable rate.

This also was not the first time DeSantis promised in an interview to "slit throats" should he become president. Last week, he promised to hire a defense secretary that would not be a typical recently retired officer because they "may have to slit some throats, and it's a lot harder to do that if these are people that you've trained with in the past."

Meanwhile, Trump is promising his own actions should he return to the White House. After being indicted for the third time on Thursday, Trump posted on his Truth Social account on Friday that "IF YOU COME AFTER ME, I'M COMING AFTER YOU!"

The former reality TV star did not clarify who specifically he planned to come after, or what he planned to do to them, but his previous post included a campaign ad attacking current US President Joe Biden and the various district attorneys who indicted him and special counsel Jack Smith who headed up the investigation into Trump's classified documents case.

The eyebrow-raising message has since caught the eye of Smith, who appealed late Friday to the federal judge overseeing the election interference case. The special counsel requested a protective order for evidence, arguing a gag order was necessary in light of Trump's recent and past commentary over his legal cases.

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Report: Just Eight of 32 Ukrainian Pilots Ready for F-16 Training Amid Language Barrier Snag

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The United States initially opposed sending F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine, before it relented to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's demands for the plane in May.
Eight Ukrainian pilots have been selected to participate in the first run of training on the American-made F-16 fighter jet.
An unnamed US official who spoke to Western media detailed that eight pilots were selected because of their fluency in English, while another 20 pilots that speak some English were selected to be sent to the United Kingdom for language courses as soon as later this month.
An additional four pilots were also selected to be part of the program, for a total of 32, though their status and English-speaking ability were not clarified.
It is unknown when the training will start. According to reports, the US is waiting for a formal training plan to be presented by European allies, which the US will have to approve. Earlier this week it was reported that training equipment, including F-16 flight simulators and training manuals, still have to be transferred to Europe before training can begin.
Officials for US President Joe Biden earlier relayed to American media that they were hopeful the proposal from European countries will come in the next few weeks.
Eleven NATO countries have pledged to support the training, which is expected to primarily take place in Denmark and Romania. US officials have insisted the F-16 be only used in the defense of Ukraine and not be used to attack Russian targets outside of Ukraine's pre-2014 borders. However, the Kiev regime has been increasing attacks inside Russia, including drone attacks inside Moscow.
The F-16 is joining a growing list of Western weapons that the United States and NATO countries initially refused to send to Ukraine, only to backtrack on those statements as the special military operation has continued.
The list includes the Patriot missile system, NASAMS, HIMARS, Bradley fighting vehicles, Leopard II tanks, depleted uranium shells and cluster bombs, among other munitions.
None of these alleged "game changing weapons" have allowed Ukraine's much-hyped counteroffensive to make significant gains two months after it began.
In February, Biden remarked during an interview that Ukraine "doesn't need F-16s now," with a top Pentagon official, Colin Kahl, stating the following month that it would take two years to properly train and equip Ukrainian pilots.
An internal Air Force memo about a hypothetical training program created earlier this year said the expedited training schedule for Ukrainian pilots could be completed in four or five months.

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War Hawk Bolton Asserts Trump Would Withdraw US From NATO if Reelected

In July 2022, John Bolton admitted to planning coups while defending former US President Donald Trump's alleged role in the January 6, 2021 riots, saying "as somebody who has helped plan coups d'etat — not here but, you know, other places — it takes a lot of work, and that's not what [Trump] did."

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John Bolton, who once served as former US President Donald Trump's top national security adviser, recently said that Trump would likely withdraw the US from the NATO military bloc if ever reelected.

Bolton, widely considered to be a foreign policy war hawk, was speaking to a conservative US media outlet on Thursday following an op-ed he penned that was published on Tuesday. In both the interview and op-ed, Bolton criticized the Trump administration for not being aggressive enough in his foreign policy, including in Iran, North Korea, Afghanistan and the administration's failed attempts to overthrow the democratically-elected leader of Venezuela, Nicolas Maduro.

During the interview, Bolton said Trump "threatened the existence of NATO" in his first term and would "almost certainly withdraw from NATO" if elected again in 2024.

Bolton served as Trump's top national security adviser until he was ousted in September 2019 over disagreements with the then-president over foreign policy, particularly in Afghanistan, North Korea and Iran. Media reports have indicated the United States was within "minutes" of attacking Iran under Bolton's tenure.

In the past, Bolton has advocated for wars or regime change in Libya, Syria, Yemen, Cuba and the aforementioned Venezuela, where the Bolton/Trump ouster plan failed spectacularly. He was also a director for the Project for a New American Century, which advocated regime change in Iraq, Iran and Syria as far back as 1997.

Bolton also criticized Trump's decision to pull out of Afghanistan after nearly 20 years of bloody conflict, saying it was a "disastrous mistake for America and for national security in the world."

Likewise, in his op-ed, Bolton warned Trump may not be enough of a war hawk in foreign policy during a second term to satisfy Bolton.

He opined that "despite increasing defense spending in his first term, Trump could freeze or slash military budgets next time," cautioning that Trump may prefer to focus on "civilian infrastructure projects" instead.

When asked about Ukraine, Bolton said that he is "worried about the [US President Joe] Biden administration's staying power," and said the same about "a lot of Europeans."

Trump has pledged to end the bloodshed in Ukraine by forcing both sides to the table. The Biden administration has provided over $100 billion in military and other aid to Ukraine during the conflict and is the largest benefactor of the Kiev regime. Meanwhile, a recent poll of US residents indicated the majority want to end the country's aid to Ukraine.

Bolton also served as the recess ambassador to the UN under the George W. Bush administration, despite previously saying that if the UN headquarters "lost 10 stories, it wouldn't make a bit of difference." He has long argued against that organization's existence and the United States' participation in it.

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Trump Pleads Not Guilty to Superseding Indictment Over Classified Docs Case

Former reality TV star and US President Donald Trump has been accused of mishandling government documents and attempting to prevent their return to US officials. In August 2022,

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the FBI raided Trump's Mar-a-Lago, Florida estate, recovering over 11,000 files, including over 100 with classified markings.

Former US President Donald Trump pleaded not guilty and waived his right to personally appear at his arraignment for a superseding indictment that added new charges in the classified documents case.

Trump entered the plea through a court filing, which allows him to not appear in court during his scheduled August 10 arraignment on the new charges. The new charges relate to his and co-defendants - Trump butler Walt Nauta and Mar-a-Lago maintenance worker Carlos de Oliveira - alleged attempts to destroy surveillance footage from the estate.

Nauta has not yet entered a filing pleading to the charge or waiving his right to appear.

On Thursday, special counsel Jack Smith asked Judge Aileen M. Cannon for a hearing on whether Nauta's lawyer, Stanley Woodward, has too many conflicts of interest to properly represent Nauta.

A court filing issued on Wednesday states Woodward previously represented seven witnesses that prosecutors have interviewed, including two who may be called by the government to testify in the case.

Trump and Nauta were originally charged with alleged mishandling and retaining government documents after Trump left the White House, and attempting to keep those records from being returned to US officials. Those charges continued to be pursued by prosecutors and both Trump and Nauta have pleaded not guilty to those charges as well.

De Oliveira appeared in court on Monday after being added to the case last week. He has not yet entered a plea and was released on bond. He is scheduled to enter his first plea in the case on August 10.

Trump has two other active indictments. One stems from allegedly falsifying business records related to a hush money payments sent to adult film star Stormy Daniels that were misclassified as legal fee payments. The second is tied to his alleged efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election.

The former commander-in-chief has pleaded not guilty to all charges in both cases. He also continues to be under investigation in Georgia for his and his allies' alleged attempts to overturn the election specifically in that state.

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DeSantis Says 'Of Course' Trump Lost 2020 Election

WASHINGTON, August 7 (Sputnik) - Florida governor and presidential candidate Ron DeSantis has said that former US President Donald Trump undoubtedly lost the 2020 election and Joe Biden is a lawful president of the country.

"Of course, he [Trump] lost. Joe Biden is the president," DeSantis told NBC News in an interview released on Monday.

At the same time, DeSantis added he disagrees with the news media and those people who are calling the 2020 presidential election perfect.

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Both Trump and DeSantis announced their plans to compete in the 2024 campaign from the Republican party, but the former US president enjoys three times as much support as the Florida governor in the Republican presidential race, according to a poll by The New York Times and Siena College published in late July.

Fifty-four percent of Republicans said they would vote for Trump, and 17% said they would back DeSantis. They are followed by former Vice President Mike Pence, former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley, and Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina, each scoring 3% support.

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US Troops Didn't Question Japan's Atomic Bombings, Morality Issue Came Up Later - Veteran

WASHINGTON, August 6 (Sputnik) - American soldiers did not question President Harry Truman's decision to drop atomic bombs on Japan at the time, and the issue of morality came up years later, US WWII veteran Frank Cohn told Sputnik.

On August 6, 1945, the US dropped the world's first deployed atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. Three days later, a second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki.

"There was great relief by the troops when this news was published, because we had been alerted that many of us were going to be shipped to the Pacific command in advance of the invasion of Japan. And with this bomb it was obvious that the war was going to be over and we will not have to go to the Pacific. There was no question for the troops that this bomb was a necessity at that time," Cohn said.

The issue of morality came up much later, the veteran observed.

"Now years later, the question came up again and there were many who claimed that the bomb should not have been used, that a demonstration might have been sufficient … More and more people, particularly the younger generation, say that the bomb was evil and should never have been used. But those people were not in the military in those days," Cohn continued.

He said the US estimated at the time that a full-scale invasion of Japan would have caused millions of casualties on both the American and Japanese sides, far more than the number killed in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

"While the loss of so many innocents is indeed a tragedy, events would have been worse had we not used the bomb under those circumstances," the 98-year-old retired US Army colonel argued. "That the bomb should be avoided presently is just about everybody's agreement."

The atomic bombing of Hiroshima killed 140,000 people. An estimated 74,000 were killed in Nagasaki. The vast majority of the victims were civilians.

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US, Russia Should Avoid Nuke Threat Rhetoric, Keep Dialogue on Risk Reduction - Think Tank

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WASHINGTON, August 6 (Sputnik) - The United States and Russia should avoid any nuclear threat rhetoric and enter a serious dialogue on risk reduction, Arms Control Association Executive Director Daryl Kimball told Sputnik, reflecting on the lessons to be learnt from the first and only use of nuclear weapons in world history in 1945.

On August 6, 1945, the US dropped the world's first deployed atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. Three days later, a second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki.

"The only sane way out of the deadly game of nuclear deterrence is for [Russian President Vladimir] Putin and [US President Joe] Biden to refrain from any nuclear threat rhetoric — of any kind — and to immediately direct their emissaries to engage in a serious dialogue to reduce nuclear risks and cut their nations' bloated nuclear arsenals, as both are required to do under Article VI of the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty," Kimball said.

Kimball called the two anniversaries "solemn reminders" that any threats to use nuclear weapons are unacceptable. He also pointed out the destructive power of nuclear weapons.

"If a Russian or U.S. President were to use nuclear weapons in a conflict in Europe today, for any reason, there is no guarantee it would not escalate and eventually involve the use of hundreds of nuclear weapons, many times more powerful than those that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It is estimated that such a war could lead to more than 90 million deaths and injuries within hours," Kimball said.

In Hiroshima, 140,000 people died as a result of the atomic explosion and its consequences, and 74,000 in Nagasaki. The vast majority of the victims of the US atomic bombings were civilians.

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Boeing Wins $145Mln Deal to Build Trainers for Navy P-8 Poseidon Aircraft - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 5 (Sputnik) - Boeing has received a more than $145 million US Navy order to supply hardware and software upgrades for P-8 Poseidon aircraft trainers, the Defense Department announced.

"The Boeing Company [of] St. Louis, Missouri is awarded a $145,716,027 ... order [for] hardware and software upgrades, as well as all the necessary development, testing, integration, delivery and installations for ... P-8 aircraft trainers," the Defense Department said in a press release on Friday.

The project will include providing an operational flight trainer, a weapons tactic trainer, a mission systems desktop trainer, and the training systems support center for the Navy, the release said.

Most of the work on the project will be performed in St. Louis in the US state of Missouri (80%) with the rest being carried out in Jacksonville, Florida (10%) and Whidbey Island, Washington (10%) and is expected to be completed in March 2026, the release added.

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Textron Wins More Than $240Mln US Navy Contract to Build Five Hovercraft - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 5 (Sputnik) - Textron Systems has won an almost quarter of a billion dollar contract to build five new ship-to-shore connecting hovercraft for the US Navy, the Defense Department announced.

"Textron Systems Corporation [of] New Orleans, Louisiana is awarded a $241,371,747 ...contract for five future Ship to Shore Connector Landing Craft Air Cushion 100 Class craft," the Defense Department said in a press release on Friday.

More than half the work on the project will be performed in New Orleans, Louisiana (22%); Herndon, Virginia (21%); Milford, Ohio (14%) and Gloucester in the United Kingdom (12%), the release said.

Other work on the contract will be carried out at Twinsburg, Ohio; Huntington Beach, California; Cincinnati, Ohio; Portsmouth, Virginia; Gold Beach, Oregon; Davenport, Iowa; Jupiter, Florida; Goleta, California; Chanhassen, Minnesota; Painesville, Ohio and Gulfport, Mississippi and is expected to be completed by October 2025, the release added.

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Pentagon Makes $1.31Mln Deal to Get Titanium Casting for US Air Force Jets - Release

WASHINGTON, August 5 (Sputnik) - The US government has made an agreement with the Selmet Company to get a rapid supply of titanium castings needed to manufacture jet engines for the US Air Force's four main combat jet fighters, the Defense Department announced.

"The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Industrial Base Policy, through its Manufacturing Capability Expansion and Investment Prioritization (MCEIP) office, entered into an agreement with Selmet, a Consolidated Precision Products company to support the production of specialty titanium castings used for key components for turbine engines for the F-15, F-16, F-22 and F-35 aircraft," the Defense Department announced in a press release on Friday.

The $1.31 million agreement was concluded under the authority of the Defense Production Act and it will use funds reserved for the Additional Ukraine Supplemental Appropriations Act, the release said.

The agreement will enable Selmet to procure and install specialty equipment required to produce complex titanium castings, the release said.

"The project reduces the risk of supply chain disruptions for the turbine engines supporting some of our military's most essential fighter aircraft," the release added.

Industrial Base Policy is the principal advisor to the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment for developing Defense Department policies for the maintenance of the United

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States defense industrial base, according to the release.

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US Charges Israeli National With Smuggling, Using Illegal Workers - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 5 (Sputnik) - The US government has charged an Israeli national with smuggling and using illegal workers, the Justice Department announced in a press release.

"An Israeli national made his initial appearance in federal court today for charges stemming from smuggling, harboring and employing illegal workers," the release said on Friday. "According to court documents, Shai Cohen, 39, allegedly organized, led, and worked with others to recruit and facilitate the illegal entry of Israeli citizens into the United States under false pretenses."

Cohen and his co-conspirators allegedly assisted noncitizens in fraudulently obtaining B-1/B-2 tourist/visitor visas by misrepresenting the true purpose of their travel to the United States, which was illegal employment, the release said.

"Cohen and his co-conspirators are alleged to have assisted the noncitizens with travel to the United States. Upon arrival, the noncitizens were employed at various kiosks owned and operated by Cohen in malls in Virginia and Maryland," the release said.

The noncitizens who engaged in illegal employment were allegedly paid under-the-table cash payments or money sent to stored value payment cards, the release added.

Cohen was arrested in Israel and in August 2023, he was extradited to the Eastern District of Virginia, according to the release.

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US Welcomes 'Professional Approach' of Nuclear States at Strategic Risk Reduction Talks

WASHINGTON, August 5 (Sputnik) - The United States welcomes the "professional approach" of five nuclear-armed states, including Russia and China, at the Strategic Risk Reduction talks in Vienna, the US State Department said.

The United States organized a working-level expert meeting with delegations from Russia, China, France and the United Kingdom on August 2.

"Participants discussed strategic risks and measures to reduce those risks. They welcomed the professional approach of the delegations and noted the significance of the substantive and informative expert-level discussions over the course of the last year," the statement said on Friday.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, August 5 (Sputnik) -

NIGER DEVELOPMENTS

* The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has developed a plan for a possible military intervention in Niger, including when and how the forces will be deployed, Reuters reported on Friday, citing ECOWAS Commissioner Political Affairs, Peace and Security Abdel-Fatau Musah.
* Meddling of non-African nations, including the US, is unlikely to contribute to the improvement of the situation in Niger, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.
* The Nigerian military was told to be prepared for possible deployment to neighboring Niger, where the military took over last week, without a formal mobilization order, US media reported.

POLAND-BELARUS TENSIONS

* The Belarusian Foreign Ministry confirmed to Sputnik on Friday that it received Poland's note with its evidence of alleged violations of the state border by Belarusian helicopters, but the document does not contain any compelling evidence.
* Poland tends to escalate tensions and make provocations, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said when asked about Warsaw's accusations against Minsk over helicopters.

ENERGY MARKETS

* Russia is fully committed to agreements reached within the framework of the OPEC+ alliance, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said on Friday.
* The next meeting of the OPEC+ Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee (JMMC) will take place on October 4, OPEC said.

GRAIN EXPORTS AGREEMENT

* The direct channel between the Russian Agricultural Bank and the US JP Morgan, which the West and the UN portray as alternative to SWIFT, was closed on August 2, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Friday.
* The US should help implement the part of the grain deal that concerns obligations to Russia rather than just promise to do so, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

TRUMP COURT CASE

* Former US President Donald Trump pleaded not guilty to new charges in a superseding indictment in his classified documents case, court documents revealed on Friday.
* Trump called for the Supreme Court to "intercede" on his behalf, after being charged in a third criminal indictment this year.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* The Chinese special envoy for Eurasian affairs Li Hui will participate in a meeting on the

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Ukrainian conflict resolution hosted by Saudi Arabia, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said on Friday.

* The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) experts have been given access to rooftops of reactor buildings at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP), the IAEA said, adding that mines or explosives have not been observed at the facility.

* Ukrainian forces have lost over 43,000 soldiers on the line of contact since the start of its counteroffensive in June, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

SITUATION IN SYRIA

* At least 200 militants of the terrorist Turkistan Islamic Party (banned in Russia) are undergoing training in the Idlib de-escalation zone in Syria, Russian Defense Ministry Center for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in Syria deputy head Vadim Kulit said on Friday.

* US-led coalition drones breached deconfliction protocols 11 times in Syria in the past day, Kulit said.

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Oil Up 6th Straight Week as Saudis Announce Another Production Cut for September

NEW YORK, August 4 (Sputnik) - Crude prices closed up for a sixth week in a row, responding to another production cut announced by Saudi Arabia as the major oil producer and OPEC head showed further determination to cause a supply squeeze to achieve a price of around $100 per barrel.

Crude has rallied from lows of under $65 a barrel in May to above $85 this month on a production cut of a million barrels per day pledged by the Saudis for July and August. On Thursday, a day before members and allies of OPEC gathered for a virtual meeting, the Saudis announced another export reduction of similar size for September.

Responding to that, US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude settled Friday's trade up $1.27, or 1.6%, at $82.82 per barrel. The session high for WTI was $83.23, a peak not seen since early April. For the week, the US crude benchmark rose 2.8%, adding to July's gain of nearly 16%.

The London-based Brent crude settled its US trading session up $1.10, or 1.3%, at $86.24 per barrel. The intraday peak for Brent was $86.64 - the highest since mid-April. For the week, the global oil benchmark gained almost 2%, after running up nearly 14% for July.

"Oil is at a three-month high and starting to attract more buyers," Ed Moya, analyst at online trading platform OANDA, said. "The crude price rally could continue since the US economy remains resilient and if China's data next week confirms that part of the world's crude demand is growing. The $85 level should provide key resistance for WTI crude, but if that doesn't slow the rally, every trader will have their eyes on the $90 level."

In addition to Saudi Arabia announcing a production cut, Russia also announced that it would reduce its output by 300,000 barrels per day in September, adding to the bullishness of the oil market.

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US Monitors Reports of Potential Intervention in Niger, Calls for Diplomacy - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - The United States is monitoring reports about possible intervention in Niger by neighboring Nigeria over the ongoing military coup but reiterates its call for a diplomatic solution to the situation, a Defense Department spokesperson told Sputnik on Friday.

According to media reports, Nigerian President Bola Tinubu wrote a letter to his country's Senate asking its members to support a regional military intervention in Niger in response to the military coup.

"We continue to monitor this fluid and evolving situation and reiterate our focus on a diplomatic solution," the spokesperson said when asked about the Pentagon's reaction to reports about Tinubu's efforts.

Nigeria now holds the rotating presidency of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Earlier on Friday, ECOWAS said that military intervention in Niger would be the last resort, but the organization must be ready for it. The ECOWAS delegation dispatched to Niger by Tinubu on Thursday left the country the next day without having the opportunity to meet with the rebels' leader.

On July 26, Niger's presidential guard ousted and detained President Mohamed Bazoum. The guard's commander, Gen. Abdourahmane Tchiani, proclaimed himself interim leader and the president of the caretaker National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland (CNSP).

Bazoum, in an op-ed published in the Washington Post on Thursday, said he has been taken hostage by the military coup in the country and called on the US and international community to help restore constitutional order in Niger.

Bazoum further said the military coup has no justification, and if it succeeds, it will have devastating consequences for Niger, the region, and the entire world.

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US, Ukraine Identify English-Speaking Pilots to Participate in F-16 Training- Reports

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - The United States and Ukraine have identified a number of English-speaking Ukrainian pilots to participate in F-16 training courses, although further language training may be needed, Politico reported on Friday.

The US and Ukraine have tapped eight Ukrainian pilots who are fluent in English and prepared to start training as soon as instruction plans are finalized, the report said, citing a US official and a source familiar with Ukraine's planning.

In addition, 20 pilots that speak some English may begin language classes in the United

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Kingdom as soon as this month, the US official reportedly said. A total of 32 Ukrainian pilots have been identified to possibly participate in the F-16 training, the report said.

However, the need for proficiency in English has proven a challenge, the report added.

A group of NATO countries will assist in teaching the Ukrainian pilots how to fly F-16s after finalizing a training plan, which must be approved by the US, the report said. The US is hopeful that the proposal could come in the next several weeks, the report said.

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California Judge Arrested After His Wife Found Fatally Shot - Police

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - Orange County Superior Court Judge Jeffrey Ferguson has been arrested after his wife was found fatally shot, the Anaheim Police Department said on Friday.

"Homicide detectives have arrested 72-year-old Anaheim resident Jeffrey Ferguson for the murder of his wife," the Anaheim Police Department said in a statement.

The incident occurred on Thursday night when the police arrived at the Fergusons' residence after receiving reports of a shooting.

Officers found 65-year-old Sheryl Ferguson inside the home with at least one gunshot wound and was pronounced dead at the scene, the statement added.

The police contacted Jeffrey Ferguson and arrested him for murder without incident, the statement added.

The judge was placed in a local detention facility in lieu of $1 million bail, according to the statement.

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US Will Pursue Enforcement Actions to Ensure Adherence to Myanmar Sanctions - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - The United States will pursue enforcement actions to ensure compliance with sanctions imposed on banks controlled by the military of Myanmar earlier this year, State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Friday.

In June, the US sanctioned two banks controlled by Myanmar's military regime, Myanma Foreign Trade Bank (MFTB) and Myanma Investment and Commercial Bank (MICB), for their role in facilitating transactions for the military.

The US Treasury Department issued a general license allowing entities to wind down transactions with MFTB and MICB before August 5.

"Following the expiration of General License 5 on August 5 at 12:01 am (EST), the United States will continue to carefully monitor compliance and scrutinize transactions with an MFTB or MICB nexus to counter evasion or other behavior that contravenes the intent of these

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designations and US policy. We will pursue enforcement actions as appropriate," Miller said in a statement.

The US will not waiver in its support for the people of Myanmar in their pursuit of a democratic future, the statement said.

The US will continue to engage with partners and allies to constrain the Myanmar government's ability to utilize the international financial system, the statement added.

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Trump Pleads 'Not Guilty' to New Charges in Classified Documents Case - Court Documents

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump pleaded not guilty to new charges in a superseding indictment in his classified documents case, court documents revealed on Friday.

"I Donald J. Trump am charged by indictment with an offense or offenses under the United States Code. I have received a copy of the indictment and the plea is NOT GUILTY to the charged offense(s)," the court document stated.

Three additional charges were recently added against Trump in this case related to obstruction and willful retention of national defense information. Trump previously pleaded not guilty to 37 other criminal charges in this case.

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US Wants Russia to Clarify Demands to Revive Grain Agreement - Senior State Dept. Official

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - The United States wants Russia to clarify its demands for reviving the grain exports agreement, formally known as the Black Sea Initiative, US State Department Sanctions Office head James O'Brien said on Friday.

On July 18, the United Nations-brokered agreement to secure a humanitarian Black Sea Corridor to enable grain exports from Ukrainian ports expired because Russia did not renew its participation in the deal. Moscow said the agreement's provisions to facilitate Russian grain and fertilizer exports had not been implemented.

"What is the solution to this? I think a few things. The first point is that Russia needs to be clear what it is asking for," O'Brien said. "It has put forth a number of different demands, all of them having to do with various Russian institutions not getting services from the private sector."

O'Brien said the United States has made clear that it is prepared to help address Russia's concerns, but it is not clear what Moscow regards as a success because it is exporting a record amount of grain.

The US official pointed out that this past year, the Russian grain association said exports had reached 61.8 million tons of grain, which may be up to 15% higher than any year before.

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O'Brien also said he is optimistic that Ukrainian grain will reach global markets, but it will take some time and may involve some costs.

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Austin, Polish Defense Minister Discuss Wagner Group's Presence in Belarus - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin and Polish Defense Minister Mariusz Blaszczak discussed by phone Wagner Group's presence in Belarus, spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Friday.

"The leaders … discussed the Wagner Group's new presence in Belarus and mutually committed to continue monitoring the situation closely," Ryder said.

Austin also reaffirmed US support for Poland's response to the alleged August 1 incursion into Polish airspace by Belarusian aircraft.

On Tuesday, the Polish Defense Ministry said that two Belarusian helicopters intruded into the country's air space. On Wednesday, the Belarusian Defense Ministry said that Minsk provided Warsaw with objective control data on the absence of any grounds for the accusations.

The Belarusian Foreign Ministry confirmed to Sputnik earlier on Friday that it received Poland's note with its evidence of the alleged violation of the state border by Belarusian helicopters, but it says the document does not contain any compelling evidence.

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US, Partners Call for End to Ethnic Violence in Sudan's Darfur Region - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - The so-called Troika group of countries has called for an end to ethnic violence in Sudan's Darfur region, the US State Department said on Friday.

"The Troika (Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States) condemn in the strongest terms the ongoing violence in Darfur, especially reports of killings based on ethnicity and widespread sexual violence by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and allied militias," the State Department said in a press release. "We call on all parties to immediately cease attacks and prevent the further spread of fighting."

The Troika parties call for full access to conflict-affected areas so that abuses can be properly investigated and so that humanitarian aid can reach people who urgently need it, the release said.

The State Department said those responsible for the violence must be held to account and added that there is grave concern about reports of a military build-up near El Fasher, North Darfur and in Nyala, South Darfur.

The Troika countries urge the RSF and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) to negotiate an end to their conflict, the release said.

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The United States and its Troika partners also call on security forces to relinquish their hold on power to a civilian transitional government, the release added.

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US Identifies Gilgo Beach Murders Victim Who Went Missing 27 Years Ago

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - The task force investigating a series of murders that happened between 1996 and 2011 in Gilgo Beach, Long Island, New York has identified a victim that went missing over two decades ago, Suffolk County District Attorney Ray Tierney said on Friday.

"Today we are here to announce that, as part of the Gilgo Task Force reexamination of all the evidence in the case, we are able to identify our Fire Island Jane Doe as Karen Vergata, who was 34 years old at the time of her disappearance," Tierney told reporters.

"Fire Island Jane Doe" is one of the names that law enforcement was using for the victim before identification.

Tierney noted that Vergata, who was a Manhattan resident, went missing on approximately February 14, 1996. One set of her remains was found in 1996, and a skull was discovered 15 years later in a different place.

"It is important to note that there are no charges at this time," the district attorney said.

US media reported in July that authorities took into custody a suspect in the serial killings. The suspect is Rex Heuermann, 59. He was charged with the murders of three of the Gilgo Beach victims. The sex workers Melissa Barthelemy, Megan Waterman and Amber Costello disappeared in 2009-2010, and their bodies were found on Long Island in 2010.

The arrest became the first one in the case, which has remained unresolved for years and involves nearly a dozen sets of human remains found in Gilgo Beach.

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Blinken, Ethiopian Prime Minister Discuss Restarting US Food Assistance - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken discussed with Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed the possibility of restarting US food assistance to the African country, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Friday.

In June, the United States announced it suspended food aid to Ethiopia after US officials uncovered widespread theft in the country.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke today with Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed on advancing peace, prosperity, and stability in Ethiopia," Miller said in a press release. "The Secretary and Prime Minister discussed establishing a humanitarian aid distribution system with strengthened oversight to meet the shared goal of restarting food aid as soon as possible."

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More than 20 million people in Ethiopia depend on food assistance, according to media reports.
Moreover, Blinken noted progress in Ethiopia's efforts to implement the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in northern Ethiopia, but expressed concern regarding the situations in the Amhara and Oromo regions.
Regarding the Horn of Africa, Miller said Blinken affirmed full US support for a diplomatic resolution on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and expressed appreciation for Ahmed's leadership in regional efforts to resolve the crisis in Sudan.

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US Names Astronauts Crew to Join International Space Station Operations in 2024 - NASA

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - NASA announced on Friday the four-person crew, including a Russian cosmonaut, to join the International Space Station (ISS) for a long duration mission next year.
"Four crew members now are assigned to launch on NASA's SpaceX Crew-8 mission for a long-duration stay aboard the ISS," the US space agency said in a press release.
The crew consists of NASA astronauts - commander Matthew Dominick, pilot Michael Barrett and mission specialist Jeanette Epps and Roscosmos cosmonaut and mission specialist Alexander Grebenkin, the release said.
The four will join Expedition 70 and 71 crew members aboard the ISS in early 2024 to conduct a wide-ranging set of operational and research activities, the release said.
This will be the first spaceflight for Dominick and Epps, but Barratt's third trip to the ISS, the release added.
Grebenkin, who graduated from Irkutsk High Military Aviation School in Russia, also is flying on his first mission, according to the release.

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US Nuclear Submarine Visits Australia to Boost AUKUS Security Team-Up Plan - Navy

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - A US nuclear-powered submarine has paid the first visit of such vessels to Australia since the two countries joined with the United Kingdom in the so-called AUKUS security pact, the US Navy announced in a press release.
"USS North Carolina (SSN 777) docked at HMAS Stirling, a naval base in Western Australia, today following participation in Talisman Sabre 2023," the release said.
The North Carolina's call was the first visit by a Virginia-class fast attack submarine to Australia since the announcement by the leaders of three countries of the AUKUS optimal pathway, the release said.
On March 13 the AUKUS partners announced an optimal pathway to produce a

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nuclear-powered submarine capability in Australia at the earliest point while ensuring all three countries maintain the highest non-proliferation standards.

"These port visits are an essential step for Australia to build the necessary operational capabilities and skills to steward and operate its own fleet of nuclear-powered attack submarines," Abe Denmark, Senior Advisor for AUKUS to Australia's Secretary of Defense, said in the release.

The US Navy plans to pay increased nuclear submarine port visits aimed to expand Australia's knowledge of the vessels ahead of establishing Submarine Rotational Force-West (SRF-W) as early as 2027, when it will establish a rotational presence of up to four US Virginia-class submarines and one UK Astute class submarine at HMAS Stirling, the release said.

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US Condemns Conviction of Russian Opposition Figure Navalny for Extremism - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - The United States condemns a Russian court's decision to convict political opposition figure Aleksey Navalny on extremism charges and sentence him to 19 years in prison, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Friday.

"The United States condemns a Russian court's further sentencing and conviction of opposition politician and anti-corruption campaigner Aleksey Navalny to an additional 19 years in prison on unfounded charges of so-called 'extremism,'" Miller said in a statement.

Earlier on Friday, the Moscow City Court sentenced Navalny to 19 years in a maximum security prison for establishing an extremist community, financing extremist activities and other crimes. The prosecutors requested a 20-year prison sentence.

Navalny's trial was "unjust" due to restrictions placed on court proceedings and access to evidence, the statement said.

The United States has repeatedly accused Russia of pursuing criminal charges against Navalny in retaliation for his political activities.

The United States condemns the continued detention of Navalny and more than 500 other individuals that Washington has designated as political prisoners in Russia, the statement said.

The United States will continue to closely follow Navalny's case and advocate for his release, the statement added.

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US Rates to Stay 'Restrictive' Into 2024 as Wages Still Strong - Atlanta Fed's Bostic

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - US interest rates are likely to stay "restrictive" into next year as wages of Americans are still stronger than expected and could fuel inflation, Raphael Bostic, Federal Reserve chief for the region of Atlanta, said Friday.

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"My outlook is that we'll still be in a restrictive territory well into 2024, and it'll just take a while," Bostic told Bloomberg Television. "It doesn't surprise me that wages are still strong. During this whole high-inflation period, worker wages have trailed inflation for quite some time. And so we're still in that catch-up period, and I expect that we will still see strong wages."

Bostic's remarks came after the Labor Department reported on Friday that the US economy added 187,000 jobs in July, the smallest expansion of its kind in 2-½ years, as the Fed neared in its goal of bringing inflation back to levels that existed before the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.

The Fed has identified runaway jobs growth and correspondingly higher wages as among reasons for inflation hitting 40-year highs of more than 9% a year in June 2022, from a pre-pandemic rate of around 2% in 2019. Last month, inflation hovered at 3% per annum.

But while June's jobs growth itself was encouragingly smaller compared with May's expansion of 306,000, wages were still higher than what the central bank desired.

Average hourly earnings grew 4.4% year-on-year in June versus a projected 4.2%, the Labor Department said. The Fed says non-stop wage growth since the pandemic has enabled Americans to spend more than before. That, and trillions of dollars of pandemic relief spending by the government, led to runaway inflation between late 2021 and middle of last year.

The Fed, in response, has added a total of 5.25% since March 2022 to key lending rates, which previously stood at just 0.25%.

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US 'Absolutely Concerned' About China's Investments in Latin America - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - The United States is concerned about China's increased investment in the critical infrastructure of Latin America, US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) head Laura Richardson said on Friday.

"I am absolutely concerned about that," Richardson said during a discussion at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Richardson pointed out that China is "at the top of the list" as a pacing challenge for the United States in Latin America.

The SOUTHCOM chief expressed concern over China's increased activities at such strategic waterways as the Panama Canal and the Strait of Magellan.

Richardson also said China could use the capacities there to reach not only civilian goals but military goals as well.

"The PRC [People's Republic of China] is building capability in these waterways," she said.

China has no military bases in Latin America but it is very likely that Beijing will establish them in the future, Richardson added.

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US, China to Open New Lines of Communication – Reports

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) – The US and China plan to open new lines of communication on contentious matters by creating working groups, The Financial Times reported on Friday, citing three unnamed sources.

The sources said two new working groups would focus on Asia-Pacific regional issues, including maritime issues, and a possible third would have a broader focus.

Officials are expected to work out the details in the coming months.

A fourth source said the two governments had yet to reach a final decision, noting that they were not seeking to reestablish the formal "dialogues" from previous administrations.

Yang Tao, director general of the Chinese Foreign Ministry's North American and Oceanian Affairs Department reportedly discussed the matter when he met with State Department officials in Washington on Monday.

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Cyberattack Hits Prospect Medical Health Facilities Across Five US States – Reports

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - A cyberattack disrupted healthcare facilities across five US states on January 3, with primary care services still closed at many facilities on Friday, according to Associated Press.

The attack affected clinics and hospitals operated by California-based Prospect Medical Holdings, which has facilities not only in California, but also Texas, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Pennsylvania.

On Thursday, some emergency rooms were closed, ambulances diverted, elective surgeries, outpatient appointments, and other services suspended.

Prospect Medical said on Friday that it had launched an investigation into the attack, with the help of third-party cybersecurity specialists.

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Ex-Biden Partner Says Family's Ties to Burisma Part of Broader Influence Battle in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - Hunter Biden's presence on the board of Ukrainian energy company Burisma occurred in conjunction with broader efforts by the United States and other countries to develop influence networks in Ukraine, former Biden business partner Devon Archer said on Friday.

Archer worked alongside Biden in developing a relationship with Burisma, which was under

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investigation by then-Prosecutor General of Ukraine Viktor Shokin. Shokin was later fired from the position after pressure from officials including then-US Vice President Joe Biden.

"That's the prize, being able to have, whether it's on speakerphone or in person, to have that person [Joe Biden] in direct contact… The prize is that contact and that access to power," Archer said in an interview with Tucker Carlson, when asked about Hunter Biden's role on Burisma's board.

Joe Biden joined Hunter Biden and his business associates more than 20 times either in person or via speakerphone, Archer said earlier this week in testimony to lawmakers.

The interactions between Joe Biden and his son's business associates constituted an "abuse of soft power," Archer said in a previous interview with Carlson.

There was constant pressure to leverage the "Biden brand" and ties to the US government to help Burisma, Archer said.

However, the connection that Biden forged between Burisma and the US government was among a number of efforts by the US and other foreign actors to establish ties and influence in Ukraine, Archer said.

"I think obviously it's an important part of the world for different factions, different opposing East-West types of views. So yes, there were a lot of Americans lobbying: the US Agency for International Development, State Department officials," Archer said, when asked if there were other US efforts to influence Ukraine at the time of Biden's involvement with Burisma. "There is a lot of interest in Ukraine and who controls Ukraine."

Acting US Deputy Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, who served as Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs from 2013-2017, had a particular amount of influence in Ukraine, Archer said.

Entities operating in Ukraine constantly tried to gain Nuland's favor, Archer said, adding that she was somebody you "wanted on your good side."

Archer's testimony to Congress and public interviews come amid investigations by lawmakers into potential criminal activity by the Biden family, including bribery and influence peddling. Joe Biden has denied discussing foreign business deals with his son.

US House Oversight Committee Chairman James Comer said that Archer's testimony confirms that Joe Biden's claims of non-involvement are false.

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US, Mongolia Sign Economic Cooperation Roadmap - State Department

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - The United States and Mongolia signed on Friday an Economic Cooperation Roadmap that Secretary of State Antony Blinken said would bolster critical minerals for the transition into clean energy.

"The roadmap that we'll be signing will, I think, strengthen even more our trade and investment relationship, including on the clean energy transition and things like critical minerals," Blinken said at the signing ceremony.

The economic cooperation roadmap is intended to bolster the "strategic third neighbor

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partnership" between the US and Mongolian governments.
The countries also signed on Friday an Open Skies Agreement to facilitate the exchange of air services and civil aviation technical assistance.

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Pentagon Chief Says Senate's Hold on Pentagon Promotions Undermines Military

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said on Friday that the Senate's hold on the Pentagon's promotions is undermining the country's military and global leadership.
"Unfortunately, today for the first time in the history of the Department of Defense, two of our services will be operating without Senate-confirmed leadership ... The failure to confirm our superbly qualified senior uniformed leaders undermines our military ratings. It undermines our retention of some of our very best officers, and it is upending the lives of far too many of their spouses, children and loved ones," Austin said during a relinquishment ceremony at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, Virginia.
Austin said that resolving the issue is vital to ensure the retention of the trust and confidence from US allies and partners, as well as the military's global leadership.
The secretary expressed his confidence that the US Senate would meet its responsibilities and approve the 41st Chief of Staff.

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Pentagon Says Hopes for Diplomatic Resolution in Niger

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - The United States hopes that the situation in Niger will be resolved diplomatically, Pentagon spokesperson Sabrina Singh said on Friday.
"We hope that things can be resolved diplomatically," Singh told Fox News.
Singh noted that "some American citizens" are leaving the country but pointed out that the embassy continues working and US servicemembers are cooperating with their Nigerien counterparts.
When asked if Niger will move "more towards Russia" after the military takeover, Singh said that the US is not going to change its force posture in the country.
"Our force posture has not changed in Niger," she stated.
On Wednesday, the US State Department said it had ordered the departure of non-emergency government employees and their family members from the Embassy in Niger. The US has about 1,000 troops on the ground in the country, according to the Pentagon.
On July 26, the Nigerien presidential guard overthrew President Mohamed Bazoum. On Sunday, ECOWAS gave Niger's coup leaders one week to reinstate the detained president to

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power, warning of the use of force otherwise.

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Over Half of Americans Oppose Additional US Funding for Ukraine - Poll

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - Over half of Americans oppose Congress authorizing additional funding to support Ukraine in its conflict with Russia, according to a CNN poll published on Friday.

In total, 55% of Americans are against Congress authorizing more funds for Ukraine, while 45% believe it should authorize such funding, according to the poll conducted by SSRS.

Fifty-one percent say that Washington has done enough to help Kiev, but 48% disagree. The latter number is 14 percentage points down from the 62% of those who felt the US should have been doing more, according to a poll conducted in the early days of Russia's special military operation.

When asked specifically about types of assistance the US could offer Kiev, only 17% say they would support sending American troops to the battlefield, and 43% prefer providing weapons. Almost two-thirds (63%) said the US could provide intelligence information and about a half (53%) favored military training.

The survey showed a partisan divide among Americans, with 71% of Republicans opposing Congressional authorization of additional funding. At the same time, 62% of Democrats favor additional funding.

The survey also showed that only 43% of Americans approve of the way US President Joe Biden is handling the relationship with Russia, while 56% disagree.

The poll was conducted nationwide from July 1-31 among 1,279 adults.

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UPDATE - US Adds 187,000 Jobs in July in Below-Forecast Growth That Aids Fed’s Inflation Fight

(Updates to add comments, details and context in paragraphs 4-8)

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - The US economy added 187,000 jobs in July, the smallest expansion of its kind in 2-½ years, according to Labor Department data on Friday that showed the Federal Reserve getting closer in its bid to bring inflation back to levels that existed before the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.

Economists polled by US media had expected a jobs growth of 200,000 for last month, from a previously published 209,000 for June which the Labor Department now revised down to 185,000. While the revision meant that jobs effectively grew by only 2,000 in July, it was also a sign that the labor market had begun cooling significantly from last month itself versus May’s

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final figure of 306,000.

The Fed has identified runaway jobs growth and correspondingly higher wages as among reasons for inflation hitting 40-year highs of more than 9% a year in June 2022, from a pre-pandemic rate of around 2% in 2019. Last month, inflation hovered at 3% per annum, bringing the Fed closer to its target of returning it to 2%.

But while June's jobs growth itself was encouragingly smaller compared with May's, wages were still higher than what the central bank probably wished for, economists said.

July's smaller headline growth in jobs "is showing what the Fed wants to see — a gradual cooling," economist Adam Button said in a post on the ForexLive forum. "But the pickup in wages is a problem."

Average hourly earnings grew 4.4% year-on-year in June versus a projected 4.2%, the Labor Department said. The Fed says non-stop wage growth since the pandemic has enabled Americans to spend more than before. That, and trillions of dollars of pandemic relief spending by the government, led to runaway inflation between late 2021 and middle of last year.

The US economy initially lost some 20 million jobs to lockdowns triggered by the pandemic but has expanded without stop the past 2-½ years, with the 185,000 added for June being the smallest jobs growth since February 2021.

Unemployment also edged lower last month to 3.5%, from July's 3.6%. The Fed regards a jobless rate of 4% and below as maximum employment. Current records show US unemployment to be at its lowest in more than 50 years.

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