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Astronomers Spot Large Helium Star Likely to Become Mysterious Magnetar

The deaths of stars can yield a variety of bizarre results, ranging from dense dwarf stars that last 100 trillion years to fast-spinning pulsars that shoot radio waves out like lighthouses, to black holes that tear the fabric of space-time itself. But few are as elusive as the magnetar: the universe's most powerful magnets.

A team of astronomers believe they may have found a "missing link" between regular stars and an elusive type of neutron star known as a "magnetar," about which little is known.

The star HD 45166 is about 3,000 light-years from Earth and has existed on star charts for more than a century. However, upon closer inspection, astronomers have found the star is highly magnetic and composed almost entirely of helium, a byproduct of the hydrogen fusion that occurs at the center of most stars and is often left behind when they die.

"This is the first time we have found a magnetic massive helium star," Tomer Shenar, lead author of the discovery and an astronomer at the University of Amsterdam, told a space news outlet.

"This is also the strongest field ever detected in a massive star that may undergo core collapse and become a neutron star."

Neutron stars are the remnant core of what was once a massive star that has since gone supernova, leaving behind a collapsed, ultra-dense core. They are called neutron stars because they are propped up against further collapse by neutron degeneracy pressure, a quantum mechanical force. They tend to be less than 20 miles across, and are thus extremely dense.

Magnetars are the most powerful magnets known to exist.

At a distance of 1,000 kilometers, their magnetic fields are so powerful that electrons cannot bind atoms together and atoms are pulled into long needle-like shapes; at 384,000 kilometers, or half the distance from the Earth to the moon, a magnetar could wipe the information from all credit cards on Earth.

However, they are short-lived, in celestial terms, with their magnetic fields wearing out after about 10,000 years. Just two dozen magnetars have actually been observed by human scientists.

As for how some neutron stars become magnetic and turn into magnetars, Julia Bodensteiner, a member of the discovery team and a research fellow at the European Southern Observatory (ESO), explained: "One possible idea is that the magnetar inherited the magnetic field from the collapsing core of its progenitor, implying that the star was magnetic beforehand. Until now, no magnetic massive stars close to the end of their evolution had been found."

However, HD 45166 may have changed that.

"Our results suggest that the magnetic star in HD 45166 will, in a few million years, collapse into a magnetar," Shenar said. "This highly magnetic star therefore provides clues as to a possible formation route of these mysterious objects."

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Shenar explained that massive helium stars are predicted to exist abundantly in our galaxy, but one so large has never been found before. The star's mass was previously calculated at 4.8 stellar masses, with 1 stellar mass being equal to the sun's mass.
"It is this conflict between observation and theory that made me and others increasingly obsessed with HD 45166 and eventually led to the hypothesis that it may be magnetic," he said.
Shenar explained that the helium star has a wildly powerful magnetic field of 43,000 gauss; by comparison, the sun's magnetic field is just 1 gauss. However, that's still pretty weak for a magnetar, which can have magnetic fields as strong as 100 trillion gauss.
The study was published on Thursday in Science Advances.

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'We're Not Going to be the Big Boy': Trump Warns US Dollar's Power 'Waning' Globally

Former US President Donald Trump is the latest figure to warn that the days of the US dollar's predominance in world trade could soon be numbered.
"Our country is going to hell and we're not going to be the big boy," Trump said during a televised interview on Thursday.
"We have power, but it's waning. In fact, it's waning in terms of our currency. And I'm not just talking about the value of our currency, I'm talking about our currency being used throughout the world."
The impact of the decline of the US dollar as the world's reserve currency is "bigger than losing any war," Trump asserted.
"You look at our airports, you look at our terminals, you look at our filthy roads and broken roads and everything else, we're like a Third World country," Trump said.
"We have something that's very powerful and that's our dollar. But you take a look at what's happening to it now with other countries not using it, and you know China wants to replace it with the yuan, and it was unthinkable with us. Unthinkable. Would never have happened. Now people are thinking about it," Trump added.
Major moves have been made in the last year by countries around the globe towards de-centering their economies on the US dollar, including adopting other currencies as modes of exchange and buying up other currencies to change the balance of their reserves away from being so heavily dependent on the US dollar.
Earlier this year, International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva acknowledged that many nations were "thinking of an alternative" to the US dollar, possibly in the form of central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) like those rolled out by Russia and China in the months since, but said she didn't see an alternative "coming any time soon."
Others, such as Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Pankin, Iran's envoy to Moscow, Kazem Jalali, and Bolivian Economy Minister Marcelo Montenegro, have anticipated much quicker shifting away from the US dollar, thanks to US sanctions blocking many countries from buying key assets, such as gas, coal, fertilizers, and electronic devices, from countries like Russia and China.

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The former US leader has mounted a renewed bid for the presidency in 2024 after having failed to stay in office in 2020, when he lost the election to now-US President Joe Biden. Trump is presently leading the pack in popularity not only among Republican candidates for the party's presidential nomination, but also compared to Democratic challengers to Biden as well.

A major theme of his 2020 and 2024 campaigns has been that only he holds the keys to halting and reversing the United States' decline, as summarized in his trademark slogan "Make America Great Again." He has cast Biden's presidency as having spoiled the gains made during his four previous years in power.

In his interview, Trump blamed Biden's energy policy for the rising cost of living and inflation of the dollar, saying that Biden curbing oil drilling on federal land and offshore was "so sad."

"Inflation was caused, in my opinion, by energy, because it's so big," Trump said. "It's like all encompassing, everything. You make donuts in the ovens and the trucks that deliver them, and no matter what you do, it's so much about energy."

"They cut it off, and again, we were drilling much more. We were a bigger force than Russia and Saudi Arabia individually," he continued. "In a year and a half, we would have been a bigger force than them combined and we would have made so much money. We would have been paying off debt, we would have been doing things that nobody's ever seen this country do."

Hurricane Hilary Positioned for Rare California Landfall, Bringing 'Catastrophic' Flooding to Desert

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The US state of California and neighboring Mexican states could be in for a major tropical cyclone in the coming days - a rarity for the arid region, which typically receives only a couple of inches of rain per year.

Meteorologists upgraded Hilary to a Category 3 hurricane late Thursday, making it the eighth named storm in the Eastern Pacific hurricane season this year. and is expected to keep strengthening into a major hurricane by Friday evening

The storm is positioned about 340 miles southwest of Mexico's Colima State and tracking to the northwest at about 14 miles per hour. It has sustained 125-mile-per-hour winds, with hurricane-force winds extending outward some 60 miles. Tropical storm-grade winds were recorded some 290 miles from the storm's eye.

At present, the US National Hurricane Center's projections for Hurricane Hilary having it slowly hooking to the north and skimming along the coast of Mexico's Baja California State on Sunday, possibly making landfall during that time or later impacting the US state of California on Monday in the Los Angeles area.

Some tracks have it passing further to the east, coming up the Baja California peninsula and impacting California's interior and neighboring US states like Arizona and Nevada.

"There's a lot of uncertainty with the storm track and the intensity of the storm, but we will likely see some impacts," Eric Boldt, the warning coordination meteorologist with the National Weather Service in the LA suburb of Oxnard, told local media. "We have to be prepared for the potential for very heavy rain, very strong winds, storm surge, large waves … This is a potentially high-impact event."

Regardless of its precise route, much of the arid region is due to receive several inches of rain, with some areas potentially receiving as much as 5 inches. For the deserts of the region, that is equivalent to several years' worth of rain in a couple of hours or days, leading experts to predict "catastrophic flooding."

Hurricanes striking the US west coast are rare, as those that venture so far north tend to be carried out to sea by the prevailing winds.

The last major storm to do so landed in Long Beach in September 1939and was dubbed El Cordonazo or The Lash of St. Francis, a nickname given to southwesterly tropical winds along the Central American coast that are notorious for bringing bad weather near the time of the Feast of St. Francis on October 4.

The 1939 storm killed nearly 50 people on land, with just as many declared lost at sea.

Boldt warned the hurricane's proximity could bring powerful winds to the entire region, which much like what happened in Hawaii last week, could become potent fans for wildfires.

A study published in the journal Science Advances on Tuesday found that hurricanes are becoming deadlier. The findings determined that between 1988 and 2019, an estimated 20,000 people died in the continental United States from direct or indirect causes of Atlantic hurricanes within one month of the storm's strike. The deaths became more frequent after 2004.

However, the study left out Caribbean islands controlled by the US, such as Puerto Rico, a frequent victim of hurricanes like Maria, which killed several thousand people when it made direct landfall as a strong Category-4 storm.

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US Denies Targeting China Through Trilateral Cooperation With Japan, S. Korea - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, August 18 (Sputnik) - The United States' renewed efforts to boost trilateral security cooperation with Japan and South Korea is "not against anyone," National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said Friday.

"I would just underscore that this summit today, this partnership, is not against anyone; it is for something. It is for a vision of the Indo-Pacific that is free, open, secure and prosperous," Sullivan said in response to a reporter's question at Camp David about China's complaint that the US was seeking to form an "Asian NATO."

"If you look at the deliverables, if you look at the joint statement, if you look at the principles…they are not taking aim at a country. They are taking aim at an affirmative vision for how we can deliver results for the peoples of our countries, but also for people across the Pacific," Sullivan added.

He noted that the US had already been cooperating with Japan and South Korea for decades; thus, what was actually new was a framework to "stitch all of that work together."

He argued that this preexisting trilateral cooperation had helped boost economic conditions for all countries in the Indo-Pacific region, including China.

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US Extends Temporary Protected Status for Ukraine for 18 Months Through April 19, 2025

WASHINGTON, August 18 (Sputnik) - The United States has extended the temporary protected status for Ukraine for another 18 months until April 19, 2025, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said on Friday.

"The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) today announced an extension of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Ukraine for 18 months, from October 20, 2023, through April 19, 2025," the statement said.

The status is extended due to "ongoing armed conflict and extraordinary and temporary conditions" in Ukraine that prevent individuals from safely returning, it added.

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US, Japan, ROK Leaders to Commit to Multi-Year Military Exercise Planning - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, August 18 (Sputnik) – During a trilateral summit at Camp David later in the day, the leaders of the United States, Japan, and South Korea will commit to a multi-year planning process for military exercise in all domains, including air, land, sea and cyber, US National

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Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Friday.
"What the leaders will commit to today is a multi-year planning process for the military exercises in all domains, air, land, sea, undersea, cyber, etc. And that means that you will start to see a kind of momentum and inertia built into the planning processes of our three national security establishments with a horizon that extends not just a year out or three years out, but quite extensively," Sullivan said during a press briefing.

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US Takes 'Significant Steps' to Boost Security Cooperation With Japan, S. Korea - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, August 18 (Sputnik) - The United States is announcing "significant steps" to boost trilateral security cooperation with Japan and South Korea in the Indo-Pacific region, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Friday.
"We're announcing significant steps to enhance trilateral security cooperation in the region in the face of North Korean provocations, including a multi-year exercise plan, deeper coordination and integration on ballistic missile defense, and improving information sharing and crisis communication and the policy coordination that goes along with responding to contingencies in the Indo Pacific," Sullivan told reporters at Camp David.
The three nations are unveiling new economic and energy security initiatives including an early warning mechanism for supply chain disruptions, Sullivan added.
"Our three countries will announce new regional initiatives to build partner capacity throughout the Indo-Pacific, including in the maritime security domain, which will ensure that our cooperation benefits not just the people of our three countries but the people in the entire region," he said.

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Sullivan Says Training of Ukrainian Pilots Will Be Followed by Transfer of F-16s

WASHINGTON, August 18 (Sputnik) - The training of Ukrainian pilots on F-16 fight jets will be followed by the transfer of the aircraft, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Friday.
"The training will be followed by the transfer as we work with Congress to effectuate that and with our allies. We underlined, underscored, and put an exclamation point on that this week," Sullivan said during a press briefing.
Earlier this week, Secretary of State Antony Blinken sent a letter to his European counterparts in Denmark and the Netherlands on the formal approval of a third-party transfer of F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine amid the ongoing conflict with Russia, Sullivan added.

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Kirby Says 'Not True' That US-Japan-ROK Summit Seeks to Create Asian NATO

WASHINGTON, August 18 (Sputnik) - China is "overreacting" regarding the upcoming US-Japan-South Korea summit, as there are no plans to create a so-called Asian NATO, US National Security Council Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Friday.

"Not true, that's just again, I think the PRC is overreacting here," Kirby told CNN.

Kirby said that "nobody is talking about a binding alliance" between the three nations.

"Nobody's talking about an Asian NATO," he stated.

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Los Angeles Sets Up Task Force to Fight Organized Retail Theft - Mayor

WASHINGTON, August 18 (Sputnik) - Los Angeles authorities have established a task force to counter organized retail theft, according to Mayor Karen Bass' website.

"Mayor Karen Bass, the Los Angeles Police Department and regional law enforcement leaders … today announced a new regional law enforcement task force to address organized retail crimes in the Los Angeles Region," a press release said on Thursday.

Bass stressed in the press release that no Los Angeles resident should feel like it is unsafe to go shopping or open a business in Los Angeles or Los Angeles County.

The task force will aggressively investigate retail theft crimes and hold those responsible to account, the release said.

On August 12, more than 30 masked individuals stole merchandise worth over $300,000 from a luxury department store Nordstrom in Canoga Park. A suspect bear sprayed a security guard on the face and body.

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PREVIEW - US, Japan, S. Korea Leaders Head Into Camp David Summit Intent on Bolstering Security Ties

WASHINGTON, August 18 (Sputnik) - The leaders of the US, Japan, and South Korea are set to hold a historic trilateral summit at the Camp David presidential retreat in Maryland on Friday, where they are expected to unveil new security initiatives that will improve integration among the parties with a particular eye on countering threats from North Korea.

President Joe Biden will host Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and South Korean

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President Yoon Suk Yeol for the one-day summit, which marks the first trip to Camp David by any foreign leader during the Biden administration, and the first one since 2015.

The gathering also represents the first standalone summit between the three nations - the type of which a US administration official indicated would take place on an annual basis. The previous meeting of the US, Japanese and South Korean leaders took place at the G7 summit in the Japanese city of Hiroshima in May.

The meeting comes amid growing concerns over Pyongyang's increasingly ambitious nuclear program, while North Korea has expressed concerns over US sanctions and its close military cooperation with South Korea, which includes frequent joint drills.

On Monday, US media reported that the three countries are expected to announce new plans for expanded military cooperation on ballistic missile defenses amid growing concerns about the development of North Korea's nuclear program.

KEY SECURITY COMMITMENTS EXPECTED

The White House said the three countries are expected to announce "forward looking" initiatives that the Biden administration hopes will deepen trilateral cooperation.

"Our three countries will announce significant initiatives on Friday, which will help cement our trilateral cooperation going forward. These initiatives will take our trilateral relationship to new heights as we work together to deliver benefits for our people and for people across the region," White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said at a briefing earlier this week.

Kirby said the three countries will "make history" on Friday at Camp David during discussions that will touch on intensifying collaboration on defense.

"I think you're going to continue to see that sort of focus on the security front going forward to improve military interoperability and integration and coordination,"

Kirby said North Korea's missile launches will definitely be a topic of conversation between Biden and his Japanese and South Korean counterparts.

"Certainly a key reason why we all feel a need to improve that security cooperation is because of the continued provocative actions by Pyongyang and what was coming out of North Korea: the missile launches, the continued advancement of their program, the continued nuclear ambitions. All of that is of great concern," Kirby added.

One key initiative, according to a senior US administration official, will be the establishment of a mechanism for handling crisis situations.

"We are going to take steps to invest in appropriate technology to build a state-of-the-art trilateral hotline that we can to engage in moments of crisis and uncertainty," the official told reporters ahead of the summit.

In addition, Biden, Yoon and Kishida are expected to confirm their commitments to the security of Taiwan, the official added.

"There will be language in our joint statement which reaffirms and underscores our commitment to peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait," the US official said.

A joint statement on the results of the summit will include a paragraph providing for regular consultations between the countries, Japan's Asahi Shimbun daily reported this week, citing sources in the Japanese government.

The consultations are expected to be held at four levels: between the leaders, foreign ministers, defense ministers and senior government officials, the report said. The joint statement will also

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provide for the creation of four consultative bodies aimed at boosting defense cooperation.

The Camp David Principles, another document expected to be signed at the summit, will include clauses on the importance of maintaining the global order based on the rule of law and the inadmissibility of altering the status quo through the use of force, according to the report.

The leaders will also emphasize the growing importance of nuclear non-proliferation principles, the report added.

FOCUS NOT ON CHINA OR NATO

Both China and North Korea have signaled objections to the summit itself and US-Japanese-South Korea security cooperation altogether.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin on Tuesday, commenting on the upcoming summit between the leaders of South Korea, the United States and Japan, said that Beijing is opposed to certain countries uniting in exclusionary groups and "intensifying antagonism."

An Op-Ed in The Global Times on August 15 slammed the upcoming Camp David summit as a bid to create a “mini-NATO” in the region. Earlier this year, a North Korean researcher in the state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) accused the US of “cooking up the Asian version of NATO” by enhancing military cooperation with Japan and South Korea.

Kirby, however, said he would not expect any "demonstrable" discussion at Camp David about a NATO alignment with Japan and South Korea.

A discussion regarding closer integration of Japan into NATO, he added, would have to take place in the context of the alliance and it would not be appropriate to have a lengthy discussion on this matter at the trilateral summit.

Kirby. when asked about tensions over Taiwan, insisted the focus of the summit is not China, while underscoring that the US has not abandoned its "One China" policy, and does not support Taiwanese Independence.

However, he also said the US does not want to see the status quo changed unilaterally by force. The approach taken by Biden, he added, is designed to "deter conflict."

One US official refused to confirm if the hotline that will be setup would also be used in case China attacks Taiwan.

“The discussions that are undertaken between the three countries involve the security situations in the broader Indo-Pacific region,” the official said when pressed on military support for Taiwan.

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US, Japan, S. Korea to Confirm Commitments to Security in Taiwan Strait - Official

WASHINGTON, August 18 (Sputnik) - Leaders of the United States, South Korea and Japan, during their trilateral meeting in Camp David on Friday, will confirm their commitments to the security in the Taiwan Strait, a senior US administration official told reporters.

"There will be language in our joint statement which reaffirms and underscores our commitment to peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait," the official said ahead of the summit.

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He noted that the three sides pledged to establish a trilateral hotline to discuss possible crises in the time of uncertainty but declined to say if they would use this line to talk about a possible Chinese attack on Taiwan.

"The discussions that are undertaken between the three countries involve the security situations in the broader Indo-Pacific region," the official added.

The US-South Korea-Japan summit on Friday will be the first time the leaders of the three countries have met outside of a multilateral event. US President Joe Biden will host South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol and Japanese leader Fumio Kishida at Camp David, the US presidential retreat located about 60 miles from Washington, D.C.

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US, Japan, S. Korea to Invest in Hotline for 'Moments of Crisis' - Senior Official

WASHINGTON, August 18 (Sputnik) - The United States, South Korea and Japan plan to invest in a trilateral hotline to engage in moments of uncertainty, a senior US administration official told reporters.

“We are going to take steps to invest in appropriate technology to build a state-of-the-art trilateral hotline that we can to engage in moments of crisis and uncertainty,” the official said ahead of Friday's trilateral US-South Korea-Japan summit in Camp David.

Leaders of the three countries will “take a pledge” to consult with each other in the event of a crisis or other significant circumstances, the official added.

Later today, US President Joe Biden will host South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol and Japanese leader Fumio Kishida at Camp David, the US presidential retreat located about 60 miles from Washington DC. The US-South Korea-Japan summit will be the first time the leaders of the three countries have met outside of a multilateral event.

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US, Japan, S. Korea Leaders to Commit During Friday Summit to Meeting Annually - Official

WASHINGTON, August 18 (Sputnik) - The leaders of the United States, South Korea and Japan will underscore during their trilateral summit at Camp David on Friday their commitment to maintaining such discussion on an annual basis, a senior Biden administration official said.

"I think you will see that three leaders will commit that future leaders will meet on an annual basis," the official said ahead of the meeting.

However, the official added there is no information on when the following meeting will take place. "I do not think we made formal decisions for next year," the official said.

The US-South Korea-Japan summit will be the first time the leaders of the three countries have met outside of a multilateral event.

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US President Joe Biden will host South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida at Camp David in the US state of Maryland near Washington.

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Trump Says He Nixed Georgia Election Fraud Presser to Put 'Evidence' in Legal Filings

WASHINGTON, August 18 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said he is canceling a presser about election fraud allegations in Georgia because his lawyers would prefer putting the so-called evidence in legal filings.

Trump had planned to release a detailed report on alleged 2020 election fraud in Georgia at a news conference on August 21.

"Rather than releasing the Report on the Rigged & Stolen Georgia 2020 Presidential Election on Monday, my lawyers would prefer putting this, I believe, Irrefutable & Overwhelming evidence of Election Fraud & Irregularities in formal Legal Filings as we fight to dismiss this disgraceful Indictment by a publicity & campaign finance seeking D.A., who sadly presides over a record breaking Murder & Violent Crime area, Atlanta. Therefore, the News Conference is no longer necessary!" Trump said Thursday on Truth Social.

Earlier this week, a grand jury in the state of Georgia indicted Trump with 13 criminal charges related to an investigation alleging he attempted to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election. Eighteen other associates were also charged in the indictment. Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis said Trump and associates had until August 25 to surrender voluntarily.

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Trump Lawyers Request April 2026 Start Date in Federal Election Case - Filing

(Updates with details in paras 4-6)

WASHINGTON, August 18 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump's legal team is requesting his federal election interference case begin on April 2026, court documents revealed.

"President Trump respectfully requests the Court schedule this case to begin on the April 2026 trial calendar," the document stated on Thursday.

Trump is charged with four criminal charges in connection to his alleged role in efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 US presidential election.

The defense team also argues that it needs a substantial amount of time to prepare for its defense, especially as it prepares to review 11.5 million pages of documents produced by the federal prosecutors. The process to download the files is going to take the defense team several days due to the size of the database, according to the court documents.

In addition, Trump argues that his trial date proposal allows him to juggle five other pending legal cases as well, including his state election interference case in Georgia and the federal

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classified documents case in Florida.
Trump's legal team, according to court documents, expects it will take four to six weeks to present their defense in the case, same as federal prosecutors estimate for their presentation.

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Trump Lawyers Request April 2026 Start Date in Federal Election Case - Filing

WASHINGTON, August 18 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump's legal team is requesting his federal election interference case begin on April 2026, court documents revealed.
"President Trump respectfully requests the Court schedule this case to begin on the April 2026 trial calendar," the document stated on Thursday.
The document also said Trump's team estimates the defense will take up to six weeks, the same amount of time afforded the government.
Trump is charged with four criminal charges in connection to his alleged role in efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 US presidential election.

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Chinese Property Firm Evergrande Files Chapter 15 Bankruptcy in New York - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 18 (Sputnik) - Chinese property firm Evergrande filed for Chapter 15 bankruptcy in New York, CNN reported citing court documents.
The report on Thursday explained that the Chapter 15 bankruptcy filed by Evergrande allows a US bankruptcy court to get involved to protect American assets from creditors while a restructuring deal takes place elsewhere.
Bloomberg News reported, citing court documents, that the Chinese firm is in middle of restructuring proceedings in Hong Kong and the Cayman Islands.
The Chinese firm defaulted on its debt in 2021, owing some $340 billion be the end of 2022.
Evergrande's financial struggles created a property crisis in China's economy.

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US Could Cease to Exist in Event of Conflict With Allied Russia, China - Ramaswamy

WASHINGTON, August 18 (Sputnik) - The United States could cease to exist in the event of a war against Russia and China, 2024 Republican presidential hopeful Vivek Ramaswamy said in an interview with Tucker Carlson.

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"I think there's a chance that if we enter war with nuclear, allied Russia and China, the United States as we know it, we may take a risk of it ceasing to exist," Ramaswamy said on Thursday.
The United States lacks nuclear defense capabilities and security efforts have not been focused on homeland defense for a long time, Ramaswamy said.
Washington is incentivizing China to pursue unilateral reunification with Taiwan by driving Beijing closer to Moscow and cementing a military alliance between them, Ramaswamy said.
The United States ought to negotiate an end to the conflict in Ukraine in an effort to pull Russia away from China, Ramaswamy said.
Washington's defense commitments to Taiwan should depend on whether the United States has achieved semiconductor independence from the island, Ramaswamy also said, adding that he believes domestic semiconductor independence can be achieved within his first term if elected resident in 2024.

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Republican US Presidential Hopeful Ramaswamy Says Lost Donors Over His Stance on Ukraine

* WASHINGTON, August 18 (Sputnik) - Republican US presidential hopeful Vivek Ramaswamy said in an interview with Tucker Carlson that he has lost prospective campaign donors due to his stance on the conflict in Ukraine.
"There's no doubt that I have lost otherwise willing and interested donors, or potential megadonors, to my campaign over my position on Ukraine," Ramaswamy said on Thursday.
The United States has no discernible national interest in involving itself in the Ukraine conflict, Ramaswamy said.
However, there is a bipartisan, institutional consensus among US officials to avoid confronting facts about Ukraine, Ramaswamy added.
Washington is driving Russia further into a military alliance with China, and a conflict against Russia and China could result in the United States ceasing to exist, Ramaswamy said.
Washington ought to negotiate an end to the conflict in Ukraine in an effort to pull Moscow away from Beijing in a peace deal that ought to include guarantees Ukraine will not join NATO, Ramaswamy said.
Although Ramaswamy lost potential campaign donors due to his foreign policy positions, billionaire tech entrepreneur Elon Musk responded to the interview with Carlson, calling Ramaswamy a "very promising candidate."
Ramaswamy is currently polling third among Republican presidential candidates, behind former US President Donald Trump and Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, according to FiveThirtyEight primary poll averages. The first Republican primary debate is scheduled for Wednesday.

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with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Official Confirms Approval of Sending F-16 Jets From Denmark, Netherlands to Ukraine

WASHINGTON, August 18 (Sputnik) - A US official confirmed to Sputnik that the Biden administration approved sending F-16 fighter jets from Denmark and the Netherlands to Ukraine as soon as Ukrainian pilots complete training how to operate the aircraft.

"Can confirm," the US official said on Thursday. "We are committed to standing with Ukraine for as long as it takes."

Earlier this week, Ukrainian Air Force Command spokesperson Yuriy Ignat said Ukraine does not expect to receive US-made F-16 jets this fall or winter despite "high hopes" to obtain such aircraft.

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Maui, Hawaii Wildfires Death Toll, Speed Rate Unprecedented - Red Cross Official

WASHINGTON, August 18 (Sputnik) - The number of fatalities and rate of speed of the wildfires that swept across the Hawaiian island of Maui killing at least 11 people with more than 1,000 still missing is unprecedented in history, a senior official of the US Red Cross told a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) press conference.

"This is unprecedented, the level of fatality and the speed at which the fire moved," American Red Cross Vice President Brad Kaiserman told reporters in a FEMA Federal Response and Recovery Update on the Maui Wildfires.

According to the most recent official US reports, 111 people have been confirmed killed in the fires. On Wednesday, Hawaiian Governor Josh Green told CNN that more than 1,000 residents were still unaccounted for. Most of the devastated area has yet to be thoroughly searched for bodies, local officials said.

"We will put folks in hotels for as long as it takes till we get [replacement] housing. ...We are prepared for stays of seven to eight months for survivors to be maintained in hotels, Kaiserman added.

Many survivors have been staying in tent encampments and parking lots while hotel accommodation space was found for them and a financial assistance program for survivors who lost their homes will begin next week, the Red Cross official said.

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Georgia State Senator Asks for Emergency Session to Impeach District Attorney Fani Willis

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WASHINGTON, August 18 (Sputnik) - Georgia State Senator Colton Moore wrote a letter to Governor Brian Kemp requesting an emergency legislative session to impeach and defund District Attorney Fani Willis.

"[A]n emergency exists in the affairs of the state, requiring a special session to be convened under that section, for all purposes, to include, without limitation, the review and response to the actions of Fani Willis," Moore said in the letter, which he also posted on his X account.

Willis indicted former President Donald Trump in Fulton County earlier this week, drawing outcry from Trump supporters and other citizens.

"I am demanding that we defund her office until we find out what the hell is going on. We cannot stand idly by as corrupt prosecutors choose to target their political opposition," Moore said.

Trump and 18 co-defendants are accused by a grand jury of conspiring to overturn the 2020 election results in Georgia.

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Messi Says He Does Not Think About UEFA Best Player Award After Wining World Cup

WASHINGTON, August 18 (Sputnik) – Famous football player Lionel Messi said that he does not think “a lot” about getting the UEFA best player of the year award after winning the World Cup.

UEFA announced earlier on Thursday that Messi, who recently started playing for Inter Miami, was selected among three nominees to win the 2022/23 UEFA Men's Player of the Year award along with two Manchester City players, Kevin De Bruyne and Erling Haaland.

“I was lucky enough to get all the trophies in my career, and after getting the World Championship, that was missing, I do not think much about that trophy,” Messi told reporters during a news conference in Miami.

The player noted that collective prizes are most important, and he is still enjoying the win in the 2022 World Cup with the Argentine national team.

At the same time, he stressed that the UEFA award is a very important trophy because it is a recognition of players’ achievements.

The winners of the UEFA awards will be announced on August 31 in Monaco during the draw ceremony for the 2023/24 UEFA Champions League group stage.

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US Approves Sending F-16 Jets to Ukraine From Denmark, Holland - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 18 (Sputnik) - The United States approved transferring F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine from Denmark and the Netherlands as soon as Ukrainian pilots complete their training on how to operate the aircraft, Reuters reported.

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According to the report on Thursday, the United States formally assured Denmark and the Netherlands that it will expedite approval of all necessary third-party transfer requests of F-16 jets to Ukraine when appropriate.

The F-16 jets can be sent to Ukraine as soon as the first set of Ukrainian pilots complete their training, the report said.

The White House and the departments of State and Defense did not immediately respond to Sputnik's request for comment on the matter.

Earlier on Thursday, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said the United States is working "very closely" with partners to see if third parties can deliver F-16 jets to Ukraine.

Ukrainian Air Force Command spokesperson Yuriy Ignat said Ukraine will not receive US-made F-16 jets this fall or winter despite high hopes for these particular aircraft to defend its airspace.

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White House Says Has No Updates on US Citizen Gene Spector's Court Case in Russia

WASHINGTON, August 18 (Sputnik) - The US government has no updates on the court case of Gene Spector, who was arrested by the Russian authorities on suspicion of espionage, National Security Council Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said.

"We just do not have any updates," Kirby told CNN on Thursday.

Earlier in the day, the Lefortovo district court of Moscow said Spector was arrested in a case related to espionage.

Kirby noted that the US government is still obtaining information about the case.

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Trump Says US Dollar Losing Global Reserve Currency Status Worse Than Losing War

WASHINGTON, August 18 (Sputnik) - The United States would suffer more from losing the US dollar as the world's reserve currency than it would from losing a war, former US President Donald Trump said in an interview with Fox Business.

"I think it's bigger than losing any war," Trump said on Thursday, when asked whether he wants to prevent de-dollarization of the world economy. "China wants to replace it with the yuan… and if that happens, it would be one of the worst things to happen to this country in 200 years."

Losing the US dollar as the world reserve currency would bring the US down to a level that is not necessarily "recoverable," Trump said.

Trump, who is pursuing the 2024 Republican Party presidential nomination, said he would not reappoint Jerome Powell as Chair of the US Federal Reserve, which handles monetary policy. The US would have seen much higher interest rates under the Trump administration had the former president not been so "tough" on Powell, Trump said.

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Trump would dissuade China from pursuing de-dollarization by threatening tariffs and trade reductions, the former president also said.

Trump reiterated his 2016 campaign slogan of “Make America Great Again,” claiming that the US is no longer great under US President Joe Biden and has become a “laughing stock” around the world.

Biden is simultaneously the most corrupt and incompetent president in US history, Trump added.

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US Working With Allies on Third Parties Delivering F-16 Fighter Jets to Ukraine - Kirby

WASHINGTON, August 18 (Sputnik) - The United States is working "very closely" with partners to see if third parties can deliver F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine, National Security Council Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said.

"We are still working with coalition of partners to see what third-party transfers can be available in terms of F-16s. We want to get in them as soon as possible," Kirby told CNN on Thursday.

Washington is also working with its European allies on training Ukrainians to operate the jets though is has made it mandatory to have enough Ukrainian pilots with good knowledge of the English language, Kirby said.

"We think that that training is going to be able to get started relatively soon," Kirby added.

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SPUTNIK TOP STOREIS OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, August 18 (Sputnik) -

RUSSIA-IRAN TALKS

* Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday held a telephone conversation with his Iranian counterpart Ebrahim Raisi and discussed the expanding interaction in international and regional affairs, the Kremlin said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* Ukraine has lost up to 310 soldiers in the Donetsk area over the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

* The United States is interested in prolonging the conflict in Ukraine and so Washington encourages Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s sense of self-importance, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has said.

* Belarus will refrain from joining armed hostilities on the territory of Ukraine unless Ukrainians

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cross the state border, Lukashenko said.
* The information provided by Ukraine to the United States indicates that they are using cluster munitions appropriately, Pentagon spokesman Pat Ryder said on Thursday.
* NATO's position on Ukraine's accession to the alliance has not changed, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said, commenting on remarks by Stian Jenssen that Ukraine could potentially become a NATO member in exchange for ceding part of its territory to Russia.

TRUMP COURT CASE
* The US Federal Protective Service charged a Texas woman for threatening to kill the judge overseeing a criminal case on former US President Donald Trump's alleged attempts to overturn the 2020 election results and a democratic congresswoman, according to a criminal complaint unveiled on Thursday.
* Investigators in Fulton County, Georgia, are working closely with law enforcement agencies to track down the origin of threats against members of the grand jury that indicted Trump in the 2020 election meddling case, the sheriff's office said.

RUSSIA SPACE PROGRAMS
* The first launch of the Soyuz-5carrier rocket, which is currently being developed by the Samara-based Rocket and Space Center Progress, is scheduled for December 2025, the developer said on Thursday.
* Russia's Luna-25 automatic landing module has taken it's first images pf the Lunar surface, space agency Roscosmos said.

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Ukraine Recruits Asocial Mercenaries Worldwide as Western Ones Dwindle - Polyanskiy

UNITED NATIONS, August 17 (Sputnik) - The Ukrainian military is recruiting mercenaries from asocial elements of society around the world to fight for the Kiev regime because the number of Western mercenaries in Ukraine is dwindling, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Thursday.
"Recently, we learned that the Main Directorate of Intelligence of Ukraine is recruiting all over the world, including in Latin America, and also asocial elements that are prepared to fight for much less money," Polyanskiy said during a UN Security Council meeting.
The Western mercenaries are beginning to realize that they are considered "cannon fodder" by the Ukrainian leadership, Polyanskiy said.
The Russian diplomat pointed out that Western-supplied arms are leaking out of Ukraine due to the corruption of the country's military.
The responsibility for the situation lies with the Western suppliers of weapons to Ukraine, Polyanskiy added.

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US Senate Panel New Records Shows Credit Suisse Failed to Fully Probe Nazi-Linked Accounts

WASHINGTON, August 17 (Sputnik) - The US Senate Budget Committee announced on Thursday that it obtained newly unredacted records that show Credit Suisse did not fully investigate its past service to Nazi clients.

"Pursuant to subpoena, the Budget Committee obtained records, which it released in April 2023, that brought to light new evidence that Credit Suisse's internal investigation into its historical Nazi ties was hampered by scoping restrictions and resulted in incomplete findings," the Budget Committee said in a press release.

Available records revealed that Credit Suisse, which is now part of UBS Group AG, maintained nearly 100 previously undisclosed Nazi-linked accounts, the release said.

Some of the Nazi-linked accounts remained open until 2020, the release added.

In light of the congressional probe, Credit Suisse has agreed to review its potential support for Nazis fleeing justice following World War II, the release said.

However, even after repeated requests from the Budget Committee, the bank failed to fully explain the exact scope of its ongoing internal investigation, the release added.

Credit Suisse expects its internal investigation into the matter to be completed by September 30, according to the release.

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Kiev Regime Pressing Ukrainians to Commit 'Suicide' for Western Interests - Polyanskiy

UNITED NATIONS, August 17 (Sputnik) - The government in Kiev is pressing the Ukrainian people to commit national suicide on behalf of Western interests, First Deputy Permanent Representative of Russia to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Thursday.

"The people of Ukraine are starting to understand very well that the Kiev regime is pressing it to engage in suicide for Western countries' agenda," Polyanskiy said during a UN Security Council meeting.

The Ukrainian military with the support of Western backers is turning Ukraine into an uninhabitable territory due to unexploded ordinances and environmental contamination, Polyanskiy said.

Polyanskiy also questioned whether the United States and Ukraine would be better served by spending billions of US taxpayer dollars on domestic issues instead of propping up the government in Kiev.

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No Indication Russia Made Decision to Use Nuclear Weapons in Ukraine – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 17 (Sputnik) – The United States is not going to change its nuclear posture amid reports of the movement of tactical nuclear weapons from Russia to Belarus and also has not seen any indication that Moscow is planning to employ nuclear weapons in the ongoing conflict with Ukraine, Pentagon press secretary Pat Ryder said on Thursday.

"We have not seen anything that would cause us to change the posture of our own strategic forces, nor have we seen any indication that Russia has made a decision to employ nuclear weapons as it relates to the conflict in Ukraine," Ryder said during a press briefing.

Earlier in August, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said that more than half of Russian tactical nuclear weapons that are supposed to be stationed in Belarus have already been delivered and dispersed throughout the country.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said in mid-June that Moscow had transferred the first batch of the nuclear warheads to Belarus and would complete the transfer of tactical nuclear weapons by the end of the year. Putin said the deployment was an element of deterrence and a signal to those thinking of inflicting a strategic defeat on Russia.

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US Congressman Says Hearing on UFOs 'Almost Didn't Happen' Due to Pushback From Agencies

WASHINGTON, August 17 (Sputnik) - A recent US House Oversight Committee hearing on unidentified anomalous phenomena (UAP, also known as UFOs) nearly failed to occur due to pushback from US government agencies, US Congressman Jared Moskowitz said on Thursday.

"That hearing almost didn't happen. There were outside forces trying to prevent that hearing from ever happening," Moskowitz said during an event hosted by The Hill. "There were agencies that didn't want that hearing to happen."

Last month, the US House Oversight Committee held a hearing on UAP, which featured testimony from two former US military pilots and a former US intelligence official.

The witnesses testified to the existence of UAP, potential threats they pose to the United States and a secret government program that has collected crashed UAP, including non-human biological material.

Lawmakers have since pushed for the formation of a select committee to address the issue of UAP and pursue disclosure to the public. Members of Congress are also in talks to add bolstered whistleblower protections in the reconciled version of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), Moskowitz said.

Moreover, lawmakers are considering a Congressional Delegation or committee field hearing to

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a US government site with purported ties to UAP, Moskowitz said.
However, there may not be enough “bandwidth” left in Congress ahead of the 2024 US elections to adequately pursue the subject of UAP, Moskowitz added.

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Fulton County Trying to Track Origin of Threats Against Trump Grand Jury - Sheriff Office

WASHINGTON, August 17 (Sputnik) - Investigators in Fulton County, Georgia, are working closely with law enforcement agencies to track down the origin of threats against members of the grand jury that indicted Donald Trump in the 2020 election meddling case, the sheriff's office said on Thursday.
"The Fulton County Sheriff's Office is aware that personal information of members of the Fulton County Grand Jury is being shared on various platforms. As the lead agency, our investigators are working closely with local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies to track down the origin of threats in Fulton County and other jurisdictions," the sheriff's office said in a statement.
The Fulton County Sheriff's Office stressed it is committed to responding swiftly to any credible threats and to ensure the safety of the individuals who performed their civic duty.
The statement comes after the personal information of the grand jury members responsible for indicting former President Trump was posted online on fringe websites.
Earlier this month, the Georgia grand jury indicted Trump and 18 of his co-defendants on charges linked to alleged efforts to overturn 2020 US presidential election results. Trump has denied the allegations and reiterated that the Georgia elections were rigged.

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Trudeau to Hold Emergency Meeting as N.W.T Capital Evacuates Over Wildfires – Reports

WASHINGTON, August 17 (Sputnik) – Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has convened an emergency meeting amid the ongoing wildfires in the Northwest Territories which have forced the evacuation of its capital Yellowknife, CBC reported on Thursday.
Trudeau has convened a high-level emergency meeting over the wildfires in N.W.T which have forced the evacuation of the 22,000 inhabitants of its capital city Yellowknife, the report said citing a source speaking on background.
The source noted that the meeting summoned by Trudeau will be comprised of the Incident Response Group made of high-ranking officials and cabinet ministers, further adding that its nature is of the “most serious” type the Prime Minister could hold, the report said.
The report continued adding that the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) have no details on the role the 120 servicemen deployed in the N.W.T will play on the ongoing evacuations but noted that four military aircrafts could be involved in the operations.

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Late Wednesday, the Northwest Territories Environment Minister Shane Thompson ordered the evacuation of Yellowknife, while making clear that the city was not in direct wildfire danger.
In June, Canadian Defense Minister Bill Blair, then Minister of Emergency Preparedness acknowledged that this season's wildfires were the worst in the country's entire history.

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Data From Ukrainians Indicate Kiev Living Up to Commitment on Cluster Bombs - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 17 (Sputnik) - The information provided by the Ukrainians to the United States indicates that they are using cluster munitions appropriately, Pentagon spokesman Pat Ryder said on Thursday.
"All indications are right now, based on the information that the Ukrainians are providing to us on using those weapons that they're living up to their commitment--that they're using those weapons appropriately. And so there's no concerns from our perspective," Ryder told reporters.
The US has a variety of means to gather information, apart from reports from the Ukrainians, he said.
There are no indications that Ukraine is using these weapons in ways that would target civilian population, the spokesman added.

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Whelan Unlikely to Be Released Soon - Family

WASHINGTON, August 17 (Sputnik) - The family of former US Marine Paul Whelan, who is serving a prison sentence in Russia for espionage, said on Thursday it does not expect his release any time soon.
"Whatever the resolution of Paul's case is, it is unlikely to be in the short term," Whelan's brother, David, said in a statement.
The family should instead focus on surviving until 2034 when Paul will be released after completing his sentence, the statement said.
David Whelan has no details of Wednesday's phone call between Paul and Secretary of State Antony Blinken, but he reiterated that his brother conveyed to his parents it was a good call and a frank discussion about the current status of his detention.
Blinken's call sent a message that the US government is committed to releasing Paul, David added.
Paul Whelan, a former US Marine, was arrested in Moscow in December 2018 and subsequently sentenced to 16 years in prison on espionage charges. Whelan, who is also a citizen of Canada, Ireland and the United Kingdom, has maintained his innocence, insisting that

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he came to Russia to attend a friend's wedding.

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US House Panel Subpoenas FBI Chief, Attorney General in Probe Into Big Tech Collusion

WASHINGTON, August 17 (Sputnik) - US House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jim Jordan announced on Thursday that he issued subpoenas to FBI Director Christoper Wray and US Attorney General Merrick Garland in connection to the panel's investigation into the US government's alleged collusion with big tech on censorship.

"Today, House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jim Jordan issued subpoenas to Federal Bureau of Investigation Director Christopher Wray and Attorney General Merrick Garland of the Department of Justice related to the Committee's ongoing censorship investigation," Jordan's office said in a press release.

The release said the subpoenas are requesting records of communication between the FBI and DOJ, privates companies, and other third-party groups related to content moderation and the suppression of disfavored speech online.

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US Citizenship and Immigration Services Says to Reopen Office in Havana

WASHINGTON, August 17 (Sputnik) - The US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) announced on Thursday it will reopen an international field office in Havana, Cuba to assist with immigration casework and benefits after a six-year pause.

"U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services will reopen an international field office in Havana, Cuba. The new office will assist with U.S. immigration casework and benefits, including interviews and processing of pending Cuban Family Reunification Parole cases and Form I-730, Refugee/Asylee Relative Petition," USCIS said in a press release.

The new office will also be engaged in refugee processing and collecting biometrics for U visa petitions, the release added.

Immigrant visa processing in Havana was discontinued in 2017 and has since been carried out in the Guyanese capital Georgetown.

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US Remains Ready to Defend Nation, Allies Regardless of New START Future - STRATCOM

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WASHINGTON, August 17 (Sputnik) - The United States is prepared to safeguard the country and its allies even if the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) collapses, Gen. Anthony Cotton, commander of US Strategic Command, told Sputnik.

"My responsibility is to ensure USSTRATCOM remains ready to deter strategic attack through a safe, secure, effective, and credible global combat capability, and when directed, is ready to prevail in any conflict," Cotton said. "Let me assure you we remain ready to defend our Nation and our Allies and partners."

Cotton's comments came in response to a question on how Russia suspending its participation in the treaty affects STRATCOM's planning and what the command's position is regarding the future of New START.

"For any questions related to New START, I refer you to the U.S. State Department," he said.

Cotton said on Wednesday that the US is reviewing whether it can meet the challenges that may present themselves after the New START arms control treaty expires in 2026.

New START is the last remaining treaty capping US and Russian nuclear arsenals. In February this year, Russia suspended its participation in the accord over the US's involvement in Ukraine, pausing on-site inspections and biannual data updates or notifications. Three months later, the US followed suit. Both sides, however, say they continue to abide by New START's numerical limits.

The US still wants to maintain New START with Russia given that the accord is in the interest of both countries, Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security Bonnie Jenkins said in July.

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Beijing Building New Airstrip in S.China Sea Undermines Regional Security - US State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 17 (Sputnik) - The United States believes that China's construction of a new airstrip in the South China Sea undermines security in the region, US State Department spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Thursday.

"These kinds of activities undermine the peace and security of the region," Patel said during a press briefing. "Beijing has offered no coherent legal basis claims in the South China Sea and in the name of enforcing its expansive and unlawful maritime claims in the South China Sea."

Beijing's reclamation and militarization of disputed outposts in the South China Sea and its willingness to use coercion along with other provocative actions undertaken to enforce its expansion is unlawful in the South China Sea, Patel added.

Earlier this week, media reported that Beijing appears to be building an airstrip on an island in the South China Sea that is also claimed by Vietnam and Taiwan.

According to reports, the airstrip is on Triton Island in the Paracel islands group, but is modest in size compared to others constructed by China in the South China Sea.

Beijing has long disputed ownership of a number of hydrocarbon-rich islands in the South China Sea with several Asia-Pacific countries. The territories include the Paracel archipelago, also known as the Xisha Islands, the Spratly Islands and the Scarborough Shoal.

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In July 2016, following a lawsuit filed by the Philippines, the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague ruled that China had no grounds for territorial claims in the South China Sea. According to the court, the disputed territories of the Spratly archipelago are not considered islands in the legal sense, but rather rocks or low-tide elevations which do not form an exclusive economic zone. Beijing has said that it did not consider the decision of the court valid and did not recognize it.

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US Calls on Waring Parties in Sudan's Darfur to Cease Renewed Fighting - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 17 (Sputnik) - The United States calls on the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces to cease renewed fighting in Sudan's Darfur, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Thursday.

"The United States calls on the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) to cease renewed fighting in Nyala, South Darfur, and other populated areas, which have caused death and destruction," Miller said in a press release.

The conflict is senseless and has no acceptable military solution, Miller added.

The State Department is particularly alarmed by reports of indiscriminate shelling carried out by both the RSF and SAF that have caused civilian casualties, Miller added. Both sides must comply with international humanitarian law, Miller stressed.

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UN Will Continue to Work with De-Facto Authorities in Niger to Serve People - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, August 17 (Sputnik) - The United Nations will continue its contacts with the de-facto authorities in Niger to continue its work inside the country, the UN Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Thursday.

“As in all of these similar situations, there are operational contacts to make sure that our humanitarian activities can work,” Dujarric told a briefing. “In places where there have been non-democratic changes of governments or outright coups, we will continue to work with de facto authorities or whoever's in charge to ensure that our work can continue, that we can continue to serve the people and that our staff is safe,” Dujarric told a briefing.

Humanitarian deliveries are ongoing and there have been a few flights, he added.

A coup took place in Niger on July 26. President Mohamed Bazoum was ousted and detained by his own guard, led by Gen. Abdourahamane Tchiani. Following the coup, ECOWAS suspended all financial aid to Niger, froze rebels' assets and imposed a ban on commercial flights to and from the country. In early August, ECOWAS leaders agreed during the summit in Abuja to activate a standby force to potentially force the Nigerien military to reinstate Bazoum.

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Citizen of Canada, France Receives 22 Years for Mailing Ricin to Trump - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 17 (Sputnik) - A dual citizen of Canada and France has received a sentence of 22 years in prison for mailing the poisonous toxin ricin to then-US President Donald Trump, the Justice Department announced on Thursday.

"Pascale Cecile Veronique Ferrier, 56, a dual citizen of Canada and France, was sentenced today to 262 months in prison for sending threatening letters containing homemade ricin (a toxin), in September 2020, to the White House and then-President Donald Trump, as well as to eight Texas State law enforcement officials," the Justice Department said in a release.

Ferrier pleaded guilty on January 25 to prohibitions with respect to biological weapons in two separate criminal cases in Washington and in the Southern District of Texas, the release said.

"According to court documents, Ferrier admitted that she made ricin at her residence in Quebec, Canada, in September 2020. ... Ferrier placed the ricin in envelopes containing letters she wrote to then-President Trump at the White House," the release added.

Ricin is a deadly poison made from the waste material left over from processing castor beans, according to the release.

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US Home Lending Rates Exceed 20-Year Highs as Federal Reserve Plows on With Rate Hikes

WASHINGTON, August 17 (Sputnik) - US mortgage rates, which determine what borrowers pay for housing loans, have shot up to more than 20 year highs, potentially affecting further the affordability of Americans in acquiring a home, the national agency overseeing such lending said Thursday.

The 30-year rate for a fixed-rate mortgage was 7.09% while the 15-year rate was 6.46%, said Freddie Mac, an agency established by the US Congress in 1970 to support the nation's housing finance system and to help ensure a reliable and affordable supply of mortgage funds for Americans.

The last time the 30-year fixed-rate mortgage exceeded 7% was in November, when it peaked at 7.08%, just below the current level.

While Freddie Mac did not say it, the latest spike in mortgages comes after the 11th hike in interest rates carried out by the Federal Reserve last month since the central bank began tightening US monetary policy in March 2022 to respond to runaway inflation triggered by the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020. The Fed has added 5.25% to interest rates from a base point of just 0.25% in February 2022.

"The economy continues to do better than expected and the 10-year Treasury yield has moved up, causing mortgage rates to climb," Freddie Mac said in a statement referring to returns on US

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bonds, also influenced by interest rates.

While demand for homes has been impacted by what it termed as “affordability headwinds”, Freddie Mac said the other problem really affecting home buyers in the United States was the lack of supply. “Low inventory remains the root cause of stalling home sales,” it added.

Sales of pre-owned homes in the United States hit 14-year lows in July as demand continued to outstrip supply, sending prices to near record-highs, the National Association of Realtors said Thursday. “There are simply not enough homes for sale,” Lawrence Yun, chief economist at the realtors association, said. “The market can easily absorb a doubling of inventory.”

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Pentagon Establishes Panel to Bolster Readiness Against Biological Threats - Report

WASHINGTON, August 17 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Defense (DoD) said on Thursday that it has established the Biodefense Posture Review to bolster its readiness against potential biological threats.

"This inaugural DoD Biodefense Posture Review (BPR) initiates key reforms... to posture DoD to counter biothreats through 2035," the report said. "Developments in biological technology (biotechnology) are driving an increase in the scope and diversity of biothreats that DoD could face in the next decade."

The report said emerging infectious diseases are expected to develop and spread more frequently, which potentially threatens the readiness of US forces.

Among the several goals the Biodefense Posture Review hopes to achieve are clarifying the missions, priorities, roles, responsibilities, authorities and the capabilities needed to enable biodefense, the report said.

The Defense Department will also seek through the BPR to align policies, authorities, research, development and acquisition responsibilities, investments, and force structure to meet its biodefense requirements, the report added.

In addition, the Defense Department wants to enhance early warning and understanding to counter biothreats, speed response time to mitigate the impact on US readiness as well as improve strategic coordination and collaboration to enhance biodefense, according to the report.

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UN Should Not Allow US, Allies to Use Human Rights as Pretext for Meddling - Russian Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, August 17 (Sputnik) - The United Nations should not allow the United States and its allies to use the issue of human rights as a pretext for meddling in the internal affairs of other states, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the world body Dmitry

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Polyanskiy said on Thursday.

"We're convinced that our council and the United Nations in general must not indulge the policy of the United States and its allies to use human rights as a pretext for interfering in the internal affairs of states," Polyanskiy said during a meeting of the UN Security Council on the human rights situation in North Korea.

Polyanskiy said the policy of interfering in the internal affairs of sovereign states is the main threat to peace and security throughout the world, something several countries across different regions have firsthand experience with, and no amount of maneuvering by the United States would fool anyone.

The Russian diplomat emphasized that the attempts by the United States and its allies to advance their political agenda by increasing pressure on North Korea are hypocritical and a diversion from their escalatory actions on the Korean Peninsula.

"They [United States] are the ones creating a real threat to international peace and security," Polyanskiy said.

The decision to convene a meeting of the UN Security Council on the human rights situation in North Korea was unjustified and contrary to its mandate given that this issue does not fall under its authority, Polyanskiy said.

North Korea continues to be under severe unilateral sanctions that have caused great suffering to its population, he added.

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China Opposes UNSC Consideration of Human Right Situation in N. Korea - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, August 17 (Sputnik) - China is opposed to the UN Security Council's consideration of the human rights situation in North Korea, as its primary responsibility is the maintenance of international peace and security, Chinese Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Geng Shuang said on Thursday.

The UN Security Council convened earlier in the day to address the human rights situation in North Korea.

"China opposes the Council's consideration of the human rights situation in the DPRK [North Korea]. That position is crystal clear," Geng said.

The Chinese diplomat pointed out that the primary responsibility of the UN Security Council, according to the UN Charter, is to maintain international peace and security, not address human rights issues.

"The human rights situation in DPRK [North Korea] does not pose a threat to international peace and security," Geng said.

The UN Security Council should instead focus on fulfilling its role and that of the UN Charter, which is to promote peaceful outcomes to disputes, resolve geopolitical confrontations and address pressing threats to international peace and stability, he also said.

Geng noted that tensions have been increasing in the Korean Peninsula for some time resulting in heightened tensions.

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"All parties should emphasize calm and restraint," Geng said, adding that they should refrain from provocations and escalatory rhetoric.

The Security Council's hype over the human rights issue in North Korea is an attempt to divert attention, evade responsibilities and exert pressure on Pyongyang, which would not help in resolving the situation in the country, Geng added.

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Canada, Quebec to Allocate $475.6Mln to Build New Ford EV Plant - Innovation Ministry

WASHINGTON, August 17 (Sputnik) - Canada and its province of Quebec will jointly allocate C$644 million (US$475.6 million) for the construction of a battery material production facility to be built by a Ford Motor, EcoProBM and SK On consortium, the Ministry of Innovations said in a statement on Thursday.

"Today, the Honorable Francois-Philippe Champagne, Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Francois Legault, Premier of Quebec, and Pierre Fitzgibbon, Quebec Minister of Economy, Innovation and Energy, announced funding of $644 million for the construction of a new battery materials production plant in Becancour. This facility will be built by a consortium formed by the Ford Motor Company and South Korea's EcoProBM and SK On," the statement said.

The project value surpasses C$1.2 billion (US890 million) and will generate 345 jobs as well as ensure the production of 45,000 tonnes of cathode active materials on a yearly basis, the statement said.

Operations at the new facility are expected to begin in the first half of 2026 and Ford will be the recipient of the facility's output, the statement said.

"The materials will supply batteries for Ford's future electric vehicles," the statement added.

Through the Canadian government Strategic Innovation Fund and Investissement Quebec, Ottawa and their provincial counterparts will equally contribute C$322 million ($US238 million), according to the statement.

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UN Says Offers of Humanitarian Support Remain 'Largely Rebuffed' by North Korea

UNITED NATIONS, August 17 (Sputnik) - North Korea continues to decline UN offers of humanitarian assistance, despite food insecurity and other issues, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk said on Thursday.

"To date offers of humanitarian support have been largely rebuffed, or made impossible owing to border closures. International humanitarian actors, including the United Nations Country Team, remain barred from the country, along with almost all other foreign nationals," Turk told

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the UN Security Council during a discussion on human rights in North Korea.

A large portion of the country's population, meanwhile, suffers from low levels of food consumption and poor dietary diversity, with food security expected to remain fragile due to "persisting economic constraints and agricultural shortfalls," he said, citing the UN Food and Agriculture Organization.

Turk also mentioned reports of starvation in some parts of the country.

North Korea's authorities "acknowledge some of these challenges" and have expressed openness to international cooperation to tackle them, but still largely decline offers of assistance, according to the commissioner.

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Musk Says Zuckerberg Declined Charity Fight in Italy But 'Always Ready' for Match

WASHINGTON, August 17 (Sputnik) - Billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk said on Thursday that rival tech executive Mark Zuckerberg declined an offer to put on a fight for charity in Italy, despite receiving the support of Italian Minister of Culture Gennaro Sangiuliano.

"I would like to thank Minister Sangiuliano for his kindness and willingness to organize our entertainment, cultural and charitable event in Italy," Musk said via the social media platform X. "Zuckerberg declined the offer, as he is not interested in such an approach."

However, Musk added that he is "always ready" for a fight with Zuckerberg.

Last week, Sangiuliano said that he spoke with Musk about holding the charitable event in Italy, noting that it would not take place in Rome.

Musk said the event would promote Ancient Roman history with the support of professional historians and the proceeds go to children's hospitals in Italy and to organizations that support veterans in the United States.

Zuckerberg declined to participate in the proposed event because it would not involve the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), one of the leading mixed martial arts organizations in the world. Both Musk and Zuckerberg have trained with UFC fighters in preparation for their potential match.

The two businessmen have been hinting at a fight with one another in recent months, with each blaming the other for its delay. Earlier this week, Zuckerberg accused Musk of avoiding setting a firm date for the fight. Musk, in turn, called Zuckerberg a "chicken" and claimed to be ready to show up at his house for a private match, although Zuckerberg was purportedly away on travel.

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Pentagon Research in Ukraine Should Be Assessed by Relevant Int'l Bodies - Russian Embassy

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WASHINGTON, August 17 (Sputnik) - The bio-research activity launched by the US Defense Department in Ukraine requires an appropriate legal assessment, including from relevant international bodies, the Russian Embassy in the United States said on Thursday.

" Of particular concern is the activity deployed by the Pentagon in Ukraine. The United States has involved dozens of state institutions and private companies of the country in its projects," the Russian Embassy said in a statement. "Civilians and military personnel of the republic became donors of biomaterial and simply experimental subjects. There is no doubt that such actions require an appropriate legal assessment, including from relevant international structures."

The international community continues to raise questions about the uncontrolled dual-use research under the auspices of the US Defense Department and Russia has repeatedly pointed to "gross violations" by the United States of its obligations under the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention.

"Washington ignores the claims, justifying itself with a certain humanitarian component of its programs," the statement said. "We emphasize that there is no question about any good goals of the projects of the US Defense Department. Evidence of US work with potential agents of biological weapons is available and they are far from isolated as well as evidence of attempts to deliberately enhance the properties of pathogens of economically significant infections."

Under the guise of monitoring disease, the United States has scattered brazenly and with impunity illegal laboratories around the world, the statement said.

The Russian Embassy emphasized in the statement that such institutions have been densely built up on the perimeter of Russia's borders.

"The task is obvious - to be able to create crisis situations of a biological nature at the right time, form artificial foci of infections. In other words, to manage epidemics, putting them at the service of their own interests," the statement said.

The facts published by the Russian Ministry of Defense about the United States' illegal military-biological activities should make one think again about Washington's true goals and objectives, the statement said.

"Questions are also multiplying among ordinary Americans, demanding clarifications from the government on the sponsored programs," the statement said. "It is high time for Washington to admit that if on the multilateral 'platforms' it is still possible to enlist the support of like-minded people and to silence those who have doubts, then the claims of their own population cannot be avoided."

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US Sanctions 4 Russian Nationals Allegedly Involved in Navalny Poisoning - Treasury

WASHINGTON, August 17 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed sanctions on four Russian nationals for their alleged roles in poisoning of opposition politician Alexey Navalny in 2020, the US Department of the Treasury said on Thursday.

“Today, OFAC [Office of Foreign Assets Control] sanctioned Alexey Alexandrovich Alexandrov,

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Konstantin Kudryavtsev, Ivan Vladimirovich Osipov and Vladimir Alexandrovich Panyaev, all of whom were involved in the poisoning of Navalny," the Treasury Department said in a press release.

It is alleged by the United States that Alexandrov, Kudryavtsev, and Osipov have either worked within or collaborated with the Federal Security Service (FSB) Criminalistics Institute and were the main perpetrators of Navalny's poisoning the release said.

Panyaev is designated for being an FSB operative who allegedly tailed Navalny on multiple occasions prior to the attack, the release added.

All four individuals were previously sanctioned by the United States in August 2021 for acting on behalf of the FSB.

In parallel with the US Treasury's action, the State Department also announced its sanctions in the form of visa restrictions against these four individuals.

On August 20, 2020, Navalny fell ill on a domestic Russian flight. He was initially treated in the Siberian city of Omsk, where the plane made an emergency landing. Based on the results of the examinations, the Omsk doctors concluded that Navalny had a metabolic disorder, while no poison substances were found in his blood and urine.

Several days later, Navalny was flown to the Charite hospital in Berlin for further treatment. The German government claimed that doctors found traces of a nerve agent of the Novichok type in his system. A number of countries and media outlets speculated that there was evidence of foul play by Moscow. Russia has since denied any involvement in the case.

Moscow has said it believes the incident was a provocation aimed at discrediting Russia, since Berlin is yet to show any tangible evidence in support of its claims. Moscow has also pointed out multiple times that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons ignored Russian requests for assistance, hindering the investigation.

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US Sanctions Two Syrian Militias, Leaders for Human Rights Abuses –Treasury

WASHINGTON, August 17 (Sputnik) – The United States sanctioned two Syria-based armed militias and three members of their leadership on Thursday for human rights abuses in the Afrin region of northern Syria, the Treasury Department said in a press release.

"Today's action demonstrates our continued dedication to promoting accountability for perpetrators of human rights abuses, including in Syria," Brian Nelson, under secretary of the US Treasury's Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, said in the release.

The sanctioned militias are the Suleiman Shah Brigade and the Hamza Division, which operate in the Afrin region of Syria. The region is largely controlled by a patchwork of armed groups, many of which use violence to control the movement of goods and people in their respective territories, exacerbating the suffering caused by years of civil war.

The Suleiman Shah Brigade is a prominent element of the armed opposition to the Syrian government and a component of the Syrian National Army, a coalition of Syrian armed opposition groups. It exerts significant control over the civilian population in the Afrin region,

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allegedly subjecting the populace to abductions and extortion and targeting Kurdish residents.
The Treasury sanctioned the brigade's leader, Mohammad Hussein al-Jasim, also known as Abu Amsha, and his younger brother Walid Hussein al-Jasim, who also holds a leadership role. It also sanctioned Al-Safir Oto, a car dealership owned by Abu Amsha that provides an investment outlet.
The Hamza Division, another armed opposition group operating in northern Syria, has been involved in abductions, theft of property, and torture. It also operates detention facilities in which it houses abductees for ransom.
The Treasury sanctioned its leader Sayf Boulad Abu Bakr. During his tenure, the Hamza Division has been accused of brutal repression of the local population, including kidnapping Kurdish women and severely abusing prisoners, at times leading to their death.

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White House Says Has Seen Reports on Hawaii's Failure to Prepare for Deadly Wildfires

WASHINGTON, August 17 (Sputnik) - White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said on Thursday that the Biden administration has seen the reports of a lack of preparation and resources to combat wildfires in the US state of Hawaii, after the fires claimed the lives of at least 111 people.
"Those are incredibly important questions to ask, and they should be asked. We are certainly wanting to make sure we get to the bottom of what happened here," Jean-Pierre said during an interview with CNN. "We've seen the reports, obviously. I understand the state attorney general has opened up an investigation."
Earlier on Thursday, The Wall Street Journal reported that Hawaiian Electric concluded years ago that it needed to improve the safety of its power lines to help prevent wildfires. However, the company took little such action and now faces criticism amid growing evidence pointing towards their equipment as a source of the wildfires, the report said.
Moreover, a Maui county commission warned local and state officials in July 2021 of the increasing threat of wildfires, the report said.
The death toll from the fires currently stands at 111, with the number expected to rise as investigations continue. The wildfires are the deadliest in the United States since 1918.
Jean-Pierre said the Biden administration is committed to providing assistance to Hawaii for as long as recovery efforts take.

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Fewer Americans Think COVID-19 Pandemic Over as New Eris Variant Spreads - Poll

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WASHINGTON, August 17 (Sputnik) - Americans are now less convinced that the COVID-19 pandemic is over than they were three months ago as the new Eris variant spreads across the world, according to the latest Axios/Ipsos American Health Index released on Thursday.

Last week, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the new strain as a "variant of interest," noting that the first cases of Eris were detected in February.

"As the new Eris Covid variant spreads, half of Americans agree the pandemic is over – down from 62% in mid-May, but on par with attitudes in the inaugural Axios/Ipsos American Health Index in February (47% agree)," Ipsos said.

A total of 46% are concerned about the recent uptick in COVID-19 cases, versus 53% of those who are not.

At the same time, most Americans are not going to change their behavior and return to COVID-related protocols. More than eight in ten (82%) have not taken an at-home COVID-19 test in the past week, and only 15% report masking at least sometimes in public, compared to 23% in May and 30% in February.

The poll also noted that only 2% see COVID-19 as a number 1 public health threat to America. Opioids and fentanyl are, in contrast, seen as the primary public health threat by 26% of Americans, followed by obesity (23%) and access to guns or firearms (20%).

The survey was conducted from August 11-14 among 1,162 US adults.

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House Oversight Requests Unredacted Communications of Then-VP Biden on Ukraine, Burisma

WASHINGTON, August 17 (Sputnik) – Chairman of the House Oversight Committee James Comer on Thursday sent a letter to the National Archives requesting all unredacted communications of then-Vice President Joe Biden, including pertaining to his pseudonym email address “Robert L. Peters.”

“The Committee seeks unrestricted special access under the PRA [Presidential Records Act] to Case Number 2023-0022-F, entitled 'Email Messages To and/or From Vice President Biden and Hunter Biden related to Burisma and Ukraine,' which has been published on NARA [the National Archives and Records Administration]'s website,” the letter reads.

Besides the documents related to Ukraine and Burisma, Comer is also requesting all communications that have Vice President Joe Biden’s pseudonyms on them, including Robert Peters, Robin Ware, and JRB Ware, according to the letter.

Moreover, Comer wants to see all documents with Hunter Biden, Eric Schwerin, or Devon Archer’s names on them, as well as all drafts of then-Vice President Biden's speech delivered to the Ukrainian parliament on December 9, 2015, the letter said.

Comer is currently leading House investigations into alleged influence peddling and criminal activity by the Biden family, as well as the alleged weaponization of the federal government and justice system to their benefit.

Earlier in August, Comer revealed a third batch of financial documents that showed evidence

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that the Biden family received millions of dollars from foreign businessmen in Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan during Joe Biden's vice presidency in 2014.

Two previous packages of financial documents were released in March and May. They highlighted Biden's family use of the Robinson Walker, LLC account to receive money from a certain Chinese entity and dealings in Romania as well as the family's partnership with Chinese entities closely tied to the Chinese Communist Party.

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Trump May Skip 1st Republican Presidential Debate, Provide Alternative Program - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 17 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump is considering skipping the first Republican Party presidential debate next week and providing alternative programming at the same time, CNN reported on Thursday.

Trump is leaning toward not attending the Republican debate, the first of the 2024 US presidential election cycle, the report said, citing three sources familiar with the former president's plans.

Instead, Trump has been considering different ways to counterprogram the debate and has floated the idea of sitting down for an interview with former Fox News host Tucker Carlson or other news programs, the report said.

Trump has not done any preparations for the debate, although he may still ultimately decide to participate, but he does not need to prepare to debate, the report said citing one source.

Trump believes he is far enough ahead in primary polling to skip the debate with other prospective candidates, the report said.

Moreover, Trump could surrender himself to the authorities in the state of Georgia next week over charges linked to alleged efforts to overturn 2020 US presidential election results, which could also prevent his appearance at the debate, the report added.

Five other Republican presidential contenders have qualified for the first debate: Florida Governor Ron DeSantis; former US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley; entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy; US Senator Tim Scott and North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum, according to the report.

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Canada International Trade Minister to Attend ASEAN Meetings in Indonesia - Global Affairs

WASHINGTON, August 17 (Sputnik) – Ottawa will send its Minister of International Trade Mary Ng to attend the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) meetings in Indonesia from August 18-20, Global Affairs Canada said on Thursday.

"The Honourable Mary Ng, Minister of Export Promotion, International Trade and Economic

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Development, announced today that she will attend the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Economic Ministers (AEM) Meeting, being held from August 18 to 20, 2023, in Semarang, Indonesia," the foreign ministry's statement said.

During the AEM meetings and a related event, Ng will address opportunities to strengthen ties between Canada and ASEAN member states by increasing trade and investment, the statement said, through its Indo-Pacific Strategy.

Ng will meet with several other ministers to discuss areas of collaboration to be prioritized, with a particular focus on advancing negotiations on an ASEAN-Canada free trade agreement, and the conclusion of a Strategic Partnership between Ottawa and the organization, this year.

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