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One of Largest-Known Lithium Deposits Found in Ex-Volcano on Nevada-Oregon Border

A mining company has published a new scientific paper claiming the McDermitt Caldera, which straddles the border between the US states of Oregon and Nevada, could contain some of the largest lithium deposits in the world. The soft metal is highly sought after as a key material in electric vehicle batteries.

The paper was published in the peer-reviewed journal Science Advances on Wednesday by three authors: Thomas Benson, Matthew Coble and John Dilles, representing Lithium Americas Corporation, GNS Science, and Oregon State University, respectively.

The trio studied the ground under the McDermitt Caldera, a vast crater formed more than 16 million years ago by the volcanic hotspot that today sits in Yellowstone National Park. At 600 square miles, the crater has long been a potent source of minerals, including mercury and uranium, and was already known to contain some lithium deposits in the Thacker Pass, where Lithium Americas won a concession in 2017.

However, the authors found by analyzing three drill core samples that the ground inside the caldera contains huge amounts of illite, smectite, and tainiolite - three minerals packed full of lithium rocks.

The group hypothesize that such high concentrations were reached by a complex mix of naturally occurring lithium in the volcanic rock, plus a later process of magma leaking from cracks in the volcano's magma chamber as the caldera's floor was forced upward, forming the Montana Mountains. Those leaks carried even more lithium up from deep inside the Earth and deposited it in the clays that line the caldera's surface.

"What's really special about this deposit is you already had a big lithium inventory to begin with, and then you have this massive influx of all this lithium-rich fluid that caused hyper lithium enrichment on a giant scale," Benson told US media.

However, they caution that the situation in the McDermitt Caldera is somewhat unique, and most former volcanic areas are not likely to contain significant lithium deposits due to other mitigating reasons.

Their study did not contain an estimate for the physical amount of lithium that could likely be mined from the deposits.

However, Lithium Americas has faced stiff resistance from local groups since it bought the concession in 2017, including the Great Basin Resource Watch and several local Native American tribes, who argue mining threatens their local water sources, sensitive wildlife, and sacred sites. In July, a federal court rejected their challenge, approving the mining company's project.

"The global search for lithium has become a form of 'green' colonialism," People of Red Mountain, a Native American organization that aims to protect the sacred site, said in an August

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statement. “The Caldera holds many first foods, medicines, and hunting grounds for tribal people both past and present.”
A soft, silvery-white metal that is both highly reactive and flammable, lithium has become increasingly valuable in recent years amid the rush to replace fossil fuel-powered automobiles with electric-powered ones, for which lithium is a key ingredient in the best batteries.
In Bolivia, which mines lithium on the Salar de Uyuni salt flats, the November 2019 coup that ousted leftist President Evo Morales in favor of a far-right, pro-US government, was widely seen as an effort to halt the country’s efforts to control lithium mining within its borders. At the time, some 70% of the world's known lithium deposits were in Bolivia.
Elon Musk, the owner of the electric vehicle maker Tesla, was popularly suspected of having a hand, or at least hugely benefiting from, the coup after resuming plans to build a Tesla factory in neighboring Brazil that would receive its lithium from Bolivia. When challenged on it on social media several months later, Musk fired back in a now-deleted post: “We will coup whoever we want! Deal with it.”
Musk later claimed the post was a joke and that Tesla gets its lithium from Australia.

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US Returning Nukes to UK Base Reveals ‘Desperation’ Behind NATO’s Standoff Strategy

The US deployment of F-35s and nuclear weapons to the UK is being cast as a response to tensions with Russia, but is in fact a consequence of long-established US plans to revive a Cold War-era strategy of nuclear standoff as a way to assert US power, a former Pentagon analyst and US Air Force commander told Sputnik.
A US newspaper has revealed the Pentagon’s plans to return US-owned nuclear bombs to the United Kingdom after a 15-year absence, with $50 million set aside for new support facilities at RAF Lakenheath north of London. The switch will parallel the replacement of aging F-16 Falcon aircraft with newer F-35 Joint Strike Fighters, stealthy jets cleared to carry B61-12 variable-yield nuclear bombs.
According to a Congressional budget request for next year, the funds will help build a 144-bed dormitory that will “house the increase in enlisted personnel as the result of the potential surety mission” - a Pentagon jargon term for the handling of nuclear weapons, according to experts.
During the Cold War, the US secured British permission to station nuclear weapons at the base for potential use against forces of the Warsaw Pact, the Soviet-led analogue to the NATO alliance that included most of the socialist states in Eastern Europe. The US also kept nuclear weapons at bases in the Netherlands, Belgium, West Germany, Italy, and Turkiye, with various agreements for local air forces to carry and deploy US-owned nuclear gravity bombs as well. At its height, the US kept 480 nuclear bombs in Europe, 110 of which were at Lakenheath.
US nuclear weapons were withdrawn from RAF Lakenheath in 2008 as part of a larger drawdown that included pulling nukes from Greece and Germany.

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Retired US Air Force Lt. Col. Karen Kwiatkowski, a former analyst for the US Department of Defense, told Sputnik on Thursday that the move wasn't necessarily a reaction to the ongoing Ukrainian conflict, but was part of a long-planned "upgrade" of NATO weapons in the UK that is part of a larger ramping-up of NATO's offensive posture over the last decade, of which the Ukrainian conflict is just one consequence.

"I see this deployment as a long planned bureaucratic 'upgrade' for the Brits and NATO and not designed to contribute to the Ukraine situation, except rhetorically," she said.

"I think this is the long-planned rollout of the F-35 as the latest replacement multi-role fighter, a US system that many NATO countries have invested in and purchased. The timeline for these deliveries is set in advance and usually delayed several times. The first four of the F-35s were delivered a few years ago," Kwiatkowski explained.

"The UK actually began increasing the number of nuclear warheads on its soil, available for sea and air launch, in 2021. This was done quietly, and the strategy could be seen as one of defense in an unstable world, in part because the US-Russia nuclear treaties have slowly been abandoned, and this signals the NATO members that they are allowed to bring in more, and more modern, nuclear weapons," the former Pentagon analyst noted. "I see this as less strategic and more opportunistic, from the perspective of UK and US defense bureaucrats and arms producers."

"The stated NATO strategy on nuclear weapons is really dependent on the US. Former US President Donald Trump from 2016-2020 asked for performance accountability and some attention to the vast US nuclear stockpile, and was willing to replace outdated and unreliable older nuclear weapons publicly. The existing nuclear limitation treaties needed to be revamped and updated, and were no longer sincere," she said, adding that "unfortunately the renewal and re-energizing of nuclear treaties is not something Biden or the military industrial establishment in the US seems interested in at this time."

Kwiatkowski said the UK and rest of NATO are a "captive market for the US military-industrial complex," leading to the widespread adoption of sub-par weapons like the F-35 and reliance on outdated strategies, including Cold War-era nuclear confrontations.

"I don't see a major pushback in Britain regarding the F-35 or even more nuclear weapons, unless it is to begin to change their parliament. The leadership of the UK seems very comfortable with fighting Russia indirectly, and until this false idea of winning a nuclear fight is more widely rejected among parliament - and those MPs less dependent and politically allied with the US agenda - the domestic reaction will be muted, and the consequences are that insecurity and vulnerability of Britain will continue to increase," she said.

"I would say this even without the Ukraine situation and the NATO proxy war - US weapons systems are no longer the best, and the F-35 is a prime example of a expensive and unreliable product, riding on the US past reputation for excellent weapons production and design, a reputation that is itself at the end of its lifecycle. A main reason for NATO is to serve as a captive market for the US military industrial complex, which is served daily by the Congress and most presidents."

The former Pentagon analyst recalled the adage that "history doesn't repeat, but it rhymes," noting that Cold War-era rhetoric is being revived by neoconservative politicians in the US and Europe who are increasingly distant from both the era they are harkening back to, as well as the attitudes of their own populations.

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“Americans as a population don't share the neocon philosophy, and a large number of them remember Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, decades of war for those same Cold War reasons - with nothing but destruction and damage and waste to show for it. Younger people pay little attention to either history or government messaging, and while they don't know history, they do have a sense that the world is accessible and understandable, and a significant minority see themselves as global citizens, rather than us and them,” she explained.

“On top of that, Americans are facing a time of shared and growing anger at their own government, and have become sensitized to its active manipulation of the population,” she added.

“Having said that, it is dangerous when simple, exclusionary evil-enemy versus saintly-homeland language dominates. Peace becomes impossible to negotiate, as we have seen so far with the Ukraine-Russia conflict. Truth is so consistently denied, and the investment of time and energy on lies means that when the truth eventually wins out, as it always does, political leadership and parties invested in those lies lose everything.”

Kwiatkowski said the messaging around the F-35 deployment to the UK was likely designed to “raise the stakes in Ukraine” and to send a message to “Russia - and the BRICS as well - that the US is serious and capable.” However, the choice of the deeply troubled F-35 platform showed the US is, in fact, neither.

“There is a kind of desperation revealed here, and this is the message that is unintentionally being sent. It is that desperation on the US/NATO organizational and leadership side that worries me. WWI occurred due to misjudgements of non-elected bureaucrats and the 19th century ambitions of fading royalty in a changing world they did not understand or welcome. I'm concerned that the same thing is happening today, this time centered in Washington, DC.”

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Trump Pleads Not Guilty, Files Motion to Separate From Co-Defendants in Georgia Election Case

Across four separate, mostly unrelated cases, former US President Donald Trump faces 91 criminal charges with the potential to land the 77-year-old in prison for hundreds of years. Trump and his supporters have claimed the charges are political and aim to remove the GOP presidential frontrunner from the 2024 race.

Trump entered a “not guilty” plea in the Georgia election meddling case on Thursday, waiving his right to appear at his arraignment in a Fulton County courthouse to hear the charges in-person on September 6.

He was indicted two days earlier with four criminal counts: conspiracy to defraud the United States, conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding, obstruction of and attempt to obstruct an official proceeding, and conspiracy against rights.

He is one among 18 co-defendants charged with participating in a “criminal enterprise” to overturn the results of the November 2020 US presidential election, which Trump lost to Joe

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Biden, in an attempt to keep Trump in power after January 20, 2021, when Biden was to be sworn in.

"Despite having lost, the defendant was determined to remain in power," the indictment says of Trump. "So for more than two months following election day on Nov 3, 2020, the defendant spread lies that there had been outcome-determinative fraud in the election and that he had actually won."

According to federal prosecutors, among those efforts was an attempt to change the election results in Georgia and deliver the Peach State's 16 Electoral College votes to Trump, which they say violated the state's racketeering laws.

However, Trump broke from his co-defendants on Thursday, filing a motion to separate his case "from those of his co-defendants who have demanded a speedy trial" and who have a trial date set on October 23, 2023.

The arraignment follows his surrender at Georgia's Fulton County Jail last week and release on $200,000 bond on related charges. The highly anticipated mugshot, seen by Democrats as a moment of triumph, was successfully spun by Trump's presidential campaign into a major fundraising event, netting the candidate more than $7 million in donations in the days that followed.

Trump was previously indicted in the Georgia election case earlier this month with 13 other felonies under the state's Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act, which allows individual actions to be connected to wider conspiracies.

He also faces criminal allegations in three other cases: that he mishandled secret documents by storing them at his Mar-a-Lago estate; that he falsified business records to cover up a hush-money payment to an adult film actress ahead of his 2016 presidential run; and also that he conspired to overturn the results of the 2020 election with the events that unfolded in Washington, DC, on January 6, 2021, when thousands of his supporters stormed the Capitol and temporarily dispersed Congress.

Together, they total some 91 charges that could collectively yield more than 700 years in prison sentences.

Trump has denounced these as a "witch hunt" aimed at shutting down his challenge to US President Joe Biden in the November 2024 presidential election. While the Republican Primary race is far from over, Trump is the clear leader, with over half the GOP voting base favoring him over any other candidate. However, the US Department of Justice has maintained it has pursued the charges in good order.

"In November last, I appointed Jack Smith as special counsel to take on the ongoing investigation in order to underline the department's commitment to accountability and independence," US Attorney General Merrick Garland said last month. "Mr. Smith and his team of experienced, principled career agents and prosecutors have followed the facts and the law wherever they lead."

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Astronomers Spot Exoplanet With Longest Orbit Yet

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A group of astronomers hunting planets beyond our solar system - that is, exoplanets - have continued to push the envelope of detectable types of planets using our limited technology, which presently favors spotting big worlds that orbit close to their parent stars.

The latest exoplanet find by astronomers was recently identified as TOI-4600c, a Saturn-sized world about 815 light-years from Earth.

According to the published findings, TOI-4600c orbits its parent star further away than any other exoplanet ever spotted by humans, and is among the coldest we have spotted as well.

The alien world was detected using NASA's Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS), a space telescope that took over the exoplanet-hunting mission after the Kepler telescope was retired in 2018.

TOI-4600c orbits its star, a K-type orange dwarf star, every 482.82 Earth days, or roughly 16 Earth months. Further, its temperature is a frigid negative 110 degrees Fahrenheit (negative 78 degrees Celsius).

The star has another planet even closer, dubbed TOI-4600b, which is between the sizes of Neptune and Saturn and orbits the star every 82.69 days, with a surface temperature of about 170 degrees Fahrenheit (70.67 degrees Celsius).

By comparison, Jupiter, which takes 12 Earth years to complete a single orbit, has a surface temperature of negative 238 Fahrenheit (negative 150 Celsius). Thus, when gas giants are found to be orbiting closer to their parent stars and have much higher surface temps, astronomers dub them "warm" or "hot" Jupiters, with the latter typically being so close to their star that they become tidally locked, zipping around the star in just a few Earth hours or days at most.

According to science-oriented media reports, most exoplanets that Earthlings have spotted so far have orbital periods of less than 40 days, meaning most gas giants fall into the warm or hot Jupiter category.

TOI-4600b and c are both considered "warm" Jupiters, but are among the coldest yet found.

TESS and other exoplanet-hunting telescopes have also spotted rocky, Earth-like worlds with even colder surface temperatures.

Ismael Mireles, a graduate student at the University of New Mexico and the lead author of the study, said in a statement that astronomers were particularly excited about the find because "based on what we know about the exoplanets we found, so far, nothing really looks like the solar system," with a group of inner rocky worlds and the gas giants orbiting further out. "So we want to find out how these different types of systems formed and migrated."

Katharine Hesse, a technical staff member at MIT's Kavli Institute for Astrophysics and Space Research and one of the co-authors, added it was "relatively rare" to find two "giant planets" in the same star system.

"We're used to seeing hot Jupiters that are close in to their stars, and we usually don't find companions to them, let alone giant companions," she said. "This system is a more unique configuration."

The team's paper was published on Wednesday in The Astrophysical Journal Letters.

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Over 200,000 People Remain Without Power After Hurricane Idalia Ravages Florida, Georgia

The storm barreled through Florida on Wednesday, splitting trees, destroying buildings, and submerging infrastructure and vehicles in heavy rains. Footage from the ground also captured sailboats being lifted by high water levels and crashing into infrastructure.

Over 200,000 people remain without power across Florida and Georgia in the aftermath of Hurricane Idalia, which made landfall as a Category 3 cyclone after reaching maximum sustained winds of 125 miles per hour.

Floridians are continuing to deal with the fallout caused by the powerful storm, many of whom are struggling without electricity after Idalia made its landfall early Wednesday along the state's Big Bend near Keaton Beach - a region located just southeast of Tallahassee, but north of the Tampa metro area.

Over 300,000 homes and businesses were left without power along the coast of Florida, as well as in Georgia and North Carolina shortly after the impact of Hurricane Idalia. However, more than 24 hours after landfall, some 139,938 Floridians, 60,758 Georgians and 2,236 residents in North Carolina were still without power, according to PowerOutage.us.

Tampa Electric, a power company in Florida, was able to secure about 3,000 workers, including line crews, tree trimmers and damage assessors, prior to the storm.

"The weather impact was not as severe as anticipated, and our crews were able to work through the night to restore customers during the storm," said Archie Collins, the company's CEO.

As well as leaving thousands without power, the storm also left roads littered with debris and the fear of severe flooding.

At least three deaths were reported following the hurricane. One individual was killed in Georgia after a tree fell on a vehicle, according to a state official. In Florida, authorities said two men were also killed in separate rain-related crashes just hours before the storm impacted the state.

Idalia is reported to be one of the strongest hurricanes ever to hit the densely forested, rural region that is the Big Bend, and forced nearly half of the state's 67 counties to implement evacuation orders hours before the storm. Luckily, as the storm began to blow towards Georgia, it quickly began to dissipate and was downgraded to a tropical storm by Wednesday afternoon.

However, the storm surged in the eastern parts of North Carolina, bringing heavy rainfall and deadly flash flooding to the region. According to Deanne Criswell, the Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator, the storm left some areas of the region doused in 10 inches of rain, as well as a 15-foot storm surge that was deemed "life-threatening."

The powerful cyclone also prompted residents of North Carolina to be also placed under a tornado watch, which was subsequently lifted at 4 a.m. ET on Thursday.

"We're hoping for the best and preparing for the worst," North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper said on Wednesday. "We expect winds, rain and flooding to continue to impact our state even into Saturday."

US President Joe Biden has indicated he will be traveling to Florida on Saturday to assess the damages in addition to pledging support for hard-hit communities.

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‘Going To Be Here Until Midnight’: Trump Reportedly Rambled Non-Stop During NY Deposition

Last year, New York Attorney General Letitia James claimed the Trump Organization illegally increased their profits by hundreds of millions of dollars by exaggerating the value of their properties.

A transcript of a deposition recently revealed that former US President Donald Trump rambled so frequently throughout a formal interview that a lawyer with the Office of the New York Attorney General griped: “We’re going to be here until midnight.”

The deposition was made public ahead of Trump's September 22 hearing over a state lawsuit that accuses the former commander-in-chief of engaging in business fraud practices that saw his net worth skyrocket by some $2 billion.

The attorney general's case against Trump indicates the former president, as well as his two eldest sons, and two of his former top executives repeatedly inflated his net worth in financial filings made on behalf of the Trump Organization. Prosecutors argue that by doing so, it helped Trump deceive banks into extending lower-cost loans that saved him hundreds of millions of dollars in interest.

During the seven-hour deposition, Trump rambled about various topics including his “beautiful” marble bathrooms, a reference to the historical figure George Washington, and boasted that he could have done more sales than “ever” during his presidency.

When asked how his children’s roles in the Trump Organization changed after he was elected to the US presidency, Trump strayed from the answer and began to talk about North Korea.

“I was interested in solving the problem with North Korea, which was ready to blow up, and solving the problems we had with China, who was just ripping us off left and right, and making sure that Russia never went into Ukraine, which they didn’t, under our auspices and, you know, a lot of other things,” Trump said as part of his lengthy response.

When the former president was asked to clarify his answer, he continued to pile details onto his response.

“I think you would have a nuclear holocaust, if I didn’t deal with North Korea. I think you would have a nuclear war, if I weren’t elected. And I think you might have a nuclear war now, if you want to know the truth,” Trump said.

The attorney general's lawyer, Kevin Wallace, then responded: “I’m not going to use my seven hours on nuclear war.”

When asked how involved he was in his family’s business dealings during his presidency, Trump launched into another lengthy answer in which he boasted about the properties that the Trump Organization owns.

“We have properties that make money, but you can sell for many, many times because of the quality of the property like a Turnberry in Scotland,” said Trump, who complained several times that the lawsuit was "unfair."

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“I think Turnberry would be a case in Scotland. We had — it’s part of the Rota. The Rota is, I believe, the seven courses that played the British opening, which is called the Open Championship, which is the biggest of all tournaments. And that's one of the places - one of the seven - I believe it's seven - that are approved for it. And they've been approved for a hundred years, as they've been approved for a long time. You just don't get on the list.”

His lengthy response continued as he described hypothetical real estate deals and sales, as well as past real estate purchases.

At one point in his deposition Trump stated: "If you look—I mean, I became president because of the brand, okay. I became president. I think it's the hottest brand in the world,” he answered when asked if he had considered development on one of his properties.

“I did an NFT deal the other day. Everyone is saying - a few months ago everyone was saying the NFTs are dead. And it was dead. People are saying, what are you doing in NFTs? It sold out in less than a day. It was supposed to take six months. It sold out in less than a day.”

At some point, one of the lawyers said: “I don't feel like we need to spend a lot of time on your brand value, because it is not part of the statement. The banks didn't want that.” In response, Trump seemed to panic, saying: “It is part of my statement. I just didn’t include it. But if I wanted to include it, my statement would have been double.”

At one point during the deposition, the lawyers appeared to turn on each other, with Trump’s lawyer, Chris Kise, saying: "We’re going to be here until midnight if you keep asking questions that are all over the map.”

To which Wallace said: “Chris, we’re going to be here until midnight if your client answers every question with an eight-minute speech. So let’s get down to business.”

Wallace then addressed a primary topic in the lawsuit. "I just want to go back to a couple of things you said. ...The first is, you said, 'I didn't need banks for the most part.' So why did you use banks?"

"Because you do it. It's better tax-wise," Trump said. "You do it."

Trump then went on to claim he paid off all of his loans, and that prior to the ongoing lawsuit by James' office, banks wanted to do business with him “so badly.”

"Politics hurt. When I get sued by you — fortunately, I don't need banks," Trump continued. "I mean, paid off all that stuff that you used to talk about. I paid it off."

"What would your considerations be when you're deciding whether or not I'm going to use a bank or I'm going to borrow money for this project?" Wallace asked.

But Kise objected to the question, saying that "before he was president covers from the 1950s all the way to 2017." To which Wallace noted the inquiry "was clear until you decided to mess it up." It was only then that Kise retorted with: "No, it wasn't."

"He understood it and was able to answer it," Wallace said. "So, if you want to object, say object. Don't sit — don't try to make the question more complicated."

The deposition took place on April 13 in Manhattan. The former president sat face-to-face with the attorney general, who is seeking to permanently bar him and other Trump family members, from conducting business in New York. The suit is also seeking $250 million in penalties.

In a legal filing on Wednesday, the James urged Judge Arthur Engoron to grant summary judgment on one of her seven claims, alleging Trump and his company defrauded lenders, insurers and others by lying about his wealth and the value of his assets.

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America the Gerontocracy - Cartoon

According to one poll, at least 73% of Americans agree that there should be a maximum age limit for their political leaders.
US Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) froze on Wednesday while answering questions posed by reporters at a press event in Covington, Kentucky, pausing for more than half of a minute before aides came to his side calling for a momentary break with the journalists.
Wednesday's incident is the second time McConnell has had an issue while answering questions from the media, with the first occurring on July 26 during opening remarks at a weekly news conference at the US Capitol. Prior to July's "freeze," McConnell also appeared in 2020 at the Capitol with bruised hands and a swollen lip. And in March, he suffered a fall outside a Washington, DC, area hotel, during which he fractured a rib and was concussed.
While the senator has remained tight-lipped on his health and continued to brush off the incidents, he has not been the only politician who has suffered health issues and raised the matter of age limits in Congress.
Earlier this month, Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), who is 90 years-old, was hospitalized for about two hours after she fell at her home, according to her spokesperson. This year, Feinstein has already missed three months of work in the Senate after earlier being hospitalized with shingles. And yet, despite her health struggles, she has vowed to remain in her position until her term ends in January 2025.
With the oldest president in history currently sitting in the Oval Office, Americans appear to be unanimously fed-up with what is becoming a gerontocracy.
According to one report, the average age of a US senator at the start of 2021 was about 65-years-old - the oldest age recorded in American history. A poll from 2022 determined that at least three in four Americans (73%) believe there should be a maximum age limit placed on elected officials.

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UNSC Program of Work Shows Ukraine Meeting on Sept 20 - Draft

UNITED NATIONS, September 1 (Sputnik) - The tentative United Nations Security Council Program of Work showed on Friday that there will be a meeting on Ukraine on September 20.
The program of work is to be finalized on Friday at 11:30 AM EST by the Council members in person at the UN.
Albania will be presiding during September, taking over after the United States.
September is the busiest month for the United Nations because of the high-level week and especially the General Assembly debate, starting on September 19, when all world leaders

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gather in New York.

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White House Prepares Team Ahead of Expected Biden Impeachment Inquiry – Reports

WASHINGTON, September 1 (Sputnik) - The White House has prepared a team of two dozen lawyers, legislative aides, and communications staff in anticipation of a Republican impeachment inquiry into US President Biden, NBC reported on Friday, citing a White House aide.

The White House's efforts already began on the first day of the new Republican-majority House this year. As Speaker Kevin McCarthy has been warning that a formal inquiry could be launched after the August recess, White House aides have spent the past month researching Republican statements and fine-tuning their preparations.

A source said that they have referenced the 1998 impeachment of then-President Bill Clinton as a model for preparing their defense. A White House official said that the team plans to frame the Republican Party as out of touch and Biden as focused on economic issues.

The team includes defense attorney Richard Sauber, former staff director of the House Oversight Committee Russ Anello, communications operative Ian Sams, and former communications director of Building Back Together's Sharon Yang, among other people. White House counsel Ed Siskel will also soon join the team, which is structured to wall off Republican investigations so that other White House officials can focus on governing.

House Republicans have said they would pursue allegations that Biden abused his power while vice president in order to facilitate his son Hunter's foreign business dealings.

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Canada's GDP Contracts in Second Quarter, Remained 'Nearly Unchanged' – StatCan

WASHINGTON, September 1, (Sputnik) – Canada's economy slowed in the second quarter with real gross domestic product (GDP) contracting by 0.2% on an annualized basis, Statistics Canada said on Friday.

"The slowdown was attributable to continued declines in housing investment, smaller inventory accumulation, as well as slower international exports and household spending," the statistics agency's statement said.

Housing investments fell by 2.1% in the second quarter, marking the fifth consecutive quarterly decrease, it said, adding that a significant 8.1% drop in new construction in every province but Nova Scotia was the leading cause.

Moreover, renovation activities fell by 4.3% and were accompanied by increased borrowing costs and lower mortgage funds demand, the statement said, further noting that a slower

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inventory accumulation and imports having surpassed exports also contributed to the economy's slowdown.

Increased business investment in engineering structures and a higher government spending were some of the few elements that generated growth the statement said.

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US Lumber Duties on Canadian Wood to be Challenged by Ottawa – Global Affairs Canada

WASHINGTON, September 1 (Sputnik) – Ottawa has decided to go forth and challenge the decision by the US to maintain duties on Canadian softwood lumber products, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) said on Friday.

On August 22, the Canadian government announced it was initiating a review of what they characterized as an "unwarranted" decision by Washington to maintain duties on lumber coming from Canada.

"Canada is launching challenges to the latest U.S. countervailing duty determination under (CUSMA) Chapter 10 and to the latest U.S. anti-dumping duty determination before the U.S. Court of International Trade," Canadian Minister of International Trade Mary Ng said as quoted by GAC.

In the statement, Minister Ng maintained that the United States have been imposing an "unfair, unjust and illegal" 7,99% duty on softwood lumber products imported from Canada, a policy that has hurt the Canadian wood industry and played a role in the rising housing costs in both countries.

GAC noted that Canada is always open to resolving the dispute through negotiations and provide a stable and predictable environment to the wood industry.

The dispute over Canadian softwood lumber dates back to the early 1980s and has been a drag on the two countries' bilateral trading relationship for decades, including mutual complaints through the World Trade Organization.

In 2006, the two sides reached a settlement under which the United States agreed to suspend lumber duties. The deal expired in 2015 and the administration of former US President Donald Trump subsequently imposed new tariffs on Canadian lumber.

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UPDATE - US Adds Forecast-Beating 187,000 Jobs in August But Unemployment Also Up to 18-Month High

(Changes headline and lead; adds details, comments and context, paragraphs 3-7)

WASHINGTON, September 1 (Sputnik) - The US economy beat forecasts by adding 187,000 jobs in August but the unemployment rate also rose to 18-month highs, according to Labor

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Department data on Friday that showed mixed results to the Federal Reserve's aim of bringing inflation back to pre-pandemic levels.

Economists polled by US media had expected a jobs growth of 170,000 for last month, from a previously published 187,000 for July which the Labor Department now revised down to 157,000. The unemployment rate, instead of staying at last month's 3.5% as forecast, grew to 3.8%.

The changes suggest the Fed would have to ponder more deeply on how to proceed with interest rates as it targets for inflation to return to the annual 2% or less level seen before the COVID-19 outbreak in March 2020.

Inflation rose as much as 9.1% year-on-year in June 2022, hitting four-decade highs as the government spent trillions of dollars fighting the pandemic. As of last month, inflation had moderated to an annual growth of 3% after the Fed raised interest rates to 5.5% from a base rate of just 0.25% in March 2022. While pandemic-related spending is now over, robust jobs growth and wage growth are keeping the Fed from achieving its 2% target for inflation, the central bank said.

The Fed has three more opportunities to raise rates this year, with its policy-making Federal Open Market Committee having rate decisions scheduled on September 20, November 1 and December 13.

With jobs still growing more than expected each month, the central bank could opt for one or two more hikes this year. Yet, any growth in unemployment as well, as evidenced in August, will complicate the Fed's decision-making process on this. Aside from keeping inflation at or below 2%, the central bank is mandated by the US Congress to provide maximum employment to Americans — a target identified by a jobless rate of 4% or below. Last month's unemployment rate of 3.8% was the highest since February 2021.

The Fed has vowed not to cut rates so long as inflation stays above 2%, setting the central bank up for what could possibly be a protracted battle in achieving its target.

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US Adds 187,000 Jobs in August, Unemployment Rate Rises to 3.8% - Labor Department

WASHINGTON, September 1 (Sputnik) - The US economy beat forecasts by adding 187,000 jobs in August but the unemployment rate also rose more than expected, according to Labor Department data on Friday that showed mixed results to the Federal Reserve's aim of bringing inflation back to pre-pandemic levels.

Economists polled by US media had expected a jobs growth of 170,000 for last month, from a previously published 187,000 for July which the Labor Department now revised down to 157,000. The unemployment rate, instead of staying at last month's 3.5% as forecast, grew to 3.8%.

The changes suggest the Fed would have to ponder more deeply how to proceed with interest rates as it aims to bring inflation back to an annual 2% or less.

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Trade Restrictions Increased by Three Times Since 2019 - IMF Deputy Managing Director

WASHINGTON, September 1 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) warns that the volume of global trade restrictions has nearly tripled in the last four years, IMF First Deputy Managing Director Gita Gopinath said on Friday.

"Almost 3,000 restrictions were imposed just last year - nearly 3 times the number imposed in 2019," Gopinath said at the South African Reserve Bank conference.

Gopinath said foreign direct investment is now increasingly driven by geopolitical preference rather than geographic distance, adding that such a situation signals an "increasingly fragmented world."

Different countries would face various effects of fragmentation, she said.

"Our simulations of the impact of trade fragmentation find that while a few EMs could benefit, most will lose - including South Africa, with a hit of 5% of GDP," Gopinath said.

However, other emerging markets could face output losses of over 10% of GDP, she said.

Gopinath also warned that foreign direct investment fragmentation would worsen the situation, and developing countries would face the most serious consequences of that situation.

Gopinath called on states to enhance resilience to geo-economic fragmentation through diversification and reforms. She urged firms to upgrade and modernize critical infrastructure and conduct stress tests that would help to prepare for future shocks.

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IMF Expects Global Interest Rates to Remain High - First Deputy Managing Director

WASHINGTON, September 1 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) expects global interest rates to remain high in the foreseeable future, IMF First Deputy Managing Director Gita Gopinath said on Friday.

“As the fight to bring inflation back to target continues, we expect global interest rates to remain high for quite some time,” Gopinath said at the South African Reserve Bank conference.

Gopinath cautioned that there are reasons to think interest rates may never return to the era of “low for long.”

“This possibility is reflected in US ten-year treasury bond yields, which have surged to over four percent in nominal terms, the highest level since the global financial crisis,” she said.

Gopinath pointed out that the financing conditions for emerging markets would remain challenging in the current environment.

Portfolio flows to a majority of those markets have decreased sharply since the United States started its aggressive tightening cycle and average long-term yields for emerging countries' dollar bonds have increased by about 200 basis points while sovereign and corporate bond

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issuance has dropped by half and two-thirds, respectively, she said.

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BRICS Can Create Viable Currency Options as Dollar Dethroned - US Economist Sachs

WASHINGTON, September 1 (Sputnik) - The US dollar will eventually be dethroned as the dominant global currency and the BRICS can create viable alternatives, Jeffrey Sachs, a world-renowned economist and President of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, told Sputnik.

"The BRICS can create viable alternatives to the dollar. In this sense, yes, the dollar will be dethroned as the overwhelmingly dominant global currency," Sachs said. "That is inevitable in the long run in any event, given the declining share of US GDP and global trade."

The BRICS will hasten the transition to a multi-currency system, and the US dollar will still have its role, but a much smaller one among many currencies, Sachs added.

Former chief economist of Goldman Sachs Jim O'Neill told Sputnik the US dollar can be dethroned only when China wants "much wider use" of the .

Last week, the BRICS group of major emerging economies - Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa - announced that its membership is more than doubling. Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Saudi Arabia were invited to join the group. Their membership will take effect on January 1, 2024.

According to the group, this year, the BRICS overtook the global GDP contribution of the G7 countries and accounts for nearly one-third of world economic activity.

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BRICS Expansion Will Strengthen OPEC+, Provide More Leverage - US Economist Jeffrey Sachs

WASHINGTON, September 1 (Sputnik) - The recently-announced BRICS expansion will strengthen the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries Plus (OPEC+) and give BRICS nations more leverage in negotiations on the global stage, Jeffrey Sachs, renowned US economist and President of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, told Sputnik.

"The BRICS expansion will strengthen the BRICS members and give these members more leverage in negotiations in international forums. It will also strengthen OPEC+," Sachs said.

Sachs further noted that the BRICS nations will play a leading role as the world goes through a deep energy transition to zero-carbon energy, including renewables, green hydrogen, and nuclear, among others.

"Mineral investments will be of great significance in the upcoming industrial and energy transformations," Sachs said. "The BRICS nations will play a leading role in the global

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production and trade in strategic minerals."

At its recent summit in Johannesburg, the BRICS group of major emerging economies - Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa - announced that its membership is more than doubling. Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Saudi Arabia were invited to join BRICS with membership effective January 1, 2024.

According to the group, this year, the BRICS overtook the global GDP contribution of the G7 countries and accounts for nearly one-third of world economic activity.

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BRICS Expansion to Make 'Huge Difference' in Weakening Western Sanctions - Economist Sachs

WASHINGTON, September 1 (Sputnik) - The BRICS expansion will have a major impact on the effectiveness of Western sanctions given the bloc's long-term resistance against the measures, prominent US economist and President of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, Jeffrey Sachs, told Sputnik.

"Yes, the Western sanctions are not very powerful when much or most of the world is against them," Sachs said when asked if the BRICS expansion will affect Western sanctions. "The BRICS nations resist the Western sanctions, and that makes a huge difference."

Sachs said he believes the Western sanctions are generally in violation of international law and imposing them should be according to the approval of the United Nations.

Last week, the BRICS group of major emerging economies - Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa - announced that its membership is more than doubling. Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Saudi Arabia were invited to join the group. Their membership will take effect on January 1, 2024.

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Raytheon Secures US Contract for Work on Rolling Airframe Missile for Germany - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 1 (Sputnik) - Raytheon won a contract to provide design and engineering support for the Rolling Airframe Missile for Germany, the US Defense Department said in a press release.

"Raytheon Co., Tucson, Arizona, is awarded a $10,029,711 cost-plus-fixed-fee modification... for design agent and engineering support services for the Rolling Airframe Missile," the release said on Thursday.

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Work is expected to be completed by March 2028, according to the Pentagon.

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US Awards $156Mln for Apache Attack Helicopter Fire Control Radar for Australia - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 1 (Sputnik) - A US contractor won more than $156 million to deliver attack helicopter fire control radar to support a foreign military sale to Australia, the Defense Department said in a press release.

"Longbow LLC, Orlando, Florida, was awarded a $156,372,092 modification... for procurement of Apache Attack Helicopter Fire Control Radar and other support hardware and auxiliary services," the release said on Thursday.

Fiscal 2023 Foreign Military Sales Australia funds were obligated at the time of the award, the release added.

Work on the contract is targeted to be done by April 30, 2027, according to the statement.

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US Defense Contractor Wins $40Mln Saudi F-15 Support Contract - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 1 (Sputnik) - The US awarded nearly $40 million for service support training for Saudi Arabia's F-15 jet program, the Pentagon said in a press release.

"PKL Services Inc., Poway, California, has been awarded a $39,566,733... modification to previously awarded contract for the Royal Saudi Air Force F-15SA Upgrade Maintenance Training Program," the release said on Thursday.

Work will be performed at King Khalid Air Base, Khamis Mushayt, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the release added.

The Pentagon also said the contract is expected to be completed by August 31, 2025.

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US Army Orders More Armor Vehicles Costing $706Mln From BAE Systems - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 1 (Sputnik) - The US Army has given BAE Land Systems & Armaments two contracts totaling more than $706 million to make new Armored Multi-Purpose Vehicles and produce additional ones from earlier models, the Department of Defense announced in two press releases.

"BAE Systems Land & Armaments [in] York, Pennsylvania, was awarded a $432,590,330

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modification ...contract to procure Armored Multi-Purpose Vehicles," the first of the two releases stated on Thursday.

BAE Systems Land & Armaments in York was also awarded a second US Army totaling $274,100,716 to produce M2A4 and M7A4 vehicles from various legacy source variants, the Defense Department said.

Work on the first contract will be performed in York over the next three and a half years with an estimated completion date of February 28, 2027. Work on the second contract is due to be completed 29 months from now on January 31, 2026, the releases said.

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US Awards Contract to Enhance Development of Israel's F-35 Program - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) - US defense contractor Lockheed Martin won a contract worth more than $10.8 million to boost capability integration for the development of F-35 fighter aircraft for Israel, the Defense Department said in a press release.

"Lockheed Martin Corp., Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Co., Fort Worth, Texas, is awarded a $10,812,945... modification to a previously awarded contract. This modification adds scope to provide continued capability integration requirements in support of F-35 Joint Strike Fighter aircraft systems development and demonstration for the government of Israel," the release said on Thursday.

Work is expected to be completed in March 2024, the released added.

Naval Air Systems Command is the contracting activity, according to the Pentagon.

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US Awards Lockheed $18Mln Contract to Support Taiwan's F-16 Fighter Jet Program - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 1 (Sputnik) - The US government awarded Lockheed Martin $18 million to provide support services to Taiwan's F-16 fighter jet program, the Defense Department said in a press release.

"Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Co., Fort Worth, Texas, was awarded a not-to-exceed price of $18,170,000 undefinitized contract action for F-16 Systems Program Office Foreign Military Sales (FMS) support," the release said on Thursday. "This contract involves FMS support to the Taiwan Air Force, and the requirement is for the Taiwan F-16 Block 20 Service Life Extension Program."

The work will be performed in Fort Worth, Texas, and in Taiwan, the release said.

The contract is expected to be completed by August 30, 2030, the release added.

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Fulton County Jail Inmate Killed, Others Injured in Mass Stabbing - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 1 (Sputnik) - One inmate was killed and at least two others were injured during a mass stabbing at the Fulton County Jail in the US state of Georgia, CNN reported, citing the local Sheriff's office.

The death marks the fifth time an inmate at the Fulton County jail has been killed in under a month's time, the report said on Thursday.

The US Justice Department launched a civil rights investigation in July into the conditions under which the jail operates amid the facility's record of violence against detainees, the report said.

Though the investigation is ongoing, the Sheriff's office has reported that the situation in the jail is under control.

The Fulton County jail has been in the spotlight in recent days as former President Donald Trump was booked there along with 18 other co-defendants on charges related to the 2020 US presidential election.

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Russian-German National Arrested for Allegedly Exporting Sensitive US Tech to Russia - DOJ

(Updates with more details in paras 4-7)

WASHINGTON, September 1 (Sputnik) - A Russian-German national was arrested in Cyprus for allegedly exporting to Russia sensitive US-made microelectronics with military applications, the US Justice Department said in a press release.

"Arthur Petrov allegedly participated in a Russia-Based illicit procurement network that, subsequent to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, illegally procured large quantities of sensitive microelectronics for a Russian company that supplies manufacturers for the Russian military," the release said on Thursday.

The release said Petrov, a dual Russian-German national, was arrested on Saturday in Cyprus at the request of the United States.

According to the release, Petrov works for the Russia-based LLC Electrocom VPK, a supplier of critical electronics components for manufacturers supplying weaponry and other equipment to the Russian military. Petrov and two co-conspirators, who also worked for Electrocom, allegedly operated an illegal procurement network in Russia and abroad.

Petrov and the two co-conspirators used shell companies and other deceptive means to evade US export controls and to conceal that the US-sourced electronic components were destined for Russia, the release said.

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The electronic components were to be used for Russian guided missiles, drones and electronic warfare devices the release added.
Petrov faces 11 federal criminal charges in connection to this alleged role in the illicit procurement scheme and faces up to 100 years in prison if convicted on all charges, according to the release.

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US Awards Raytheon $192Mln for AMRAAMs for Ukraine - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) - US defense giant Raytheon won a contract worth $192 million for advanced medium range air-to-air missiles for Ukraine, the Defense Department said in a press release.
"Raytheon Missiles and Defense, Tucson, Arizona, was awarded a $192,000,000 indefinite-delivery/indefinite-quantity contract for purchase of Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missiles (AMRAAM)," the release said on Friday.
The Pentagon said the funding is coming from the fiscal 2023 Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, September 1 (Sputnik) -

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE
* Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Thursday that he explained to his Turkish counterpart Hakan Fidanthe that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's peace plan is unacceptable for Moscow.
* The US-led Ukraine Defense Contact Group to hold a new meeting at the Ramstein air base in Germany on September 19, the DPA news agency reported.
* The Ukrainian military has lost more than 400 soldiers in the Kupyansk and Donetsk areas in the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

GABON DEVELOPMENTS
* The African Union's Political Affairs Peace and Security Council announced on Thursday that it is suspending the participation of Gabon in all activities of the organization until the constitutional order in the country is restored.
* Gabon's rebel-appointed leader Gen. Brice Oligie Nguema vowed that the country will honor all domestic and international commitments.

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* Nguema will be sworn in as an interim president before the constitutional court on Monday, a spokesman of the rebels said.

BLACK SEA GRAIN INITIATIVE

* UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Thursday that he has sent concrete solutions to Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov about more effective access of Russian products to global markets, as part of his efforts to renew the grain exports agreement, formally known as the Black Sea Initiative.
* Lavrov said the situation after the termination of the grain exports agreement is blown out of proportion by foreign media and there is no rise in food prices.
* The proposals made by the United Nations regarding the resumption of the Black Sea Grain Initiative lack guarantees regarding Russia's concerns, Lavrov said.
* Lavrov said that he discussed with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan the initiative of Russian President Vladimir Putin to supply Turkey with one million tonnes of Russian grain at a discounted price for further processing and this issue is also being discussed with Qatar.
* Discussions about the Black Sea Grain Initiative did not bring any specific results yet, but Russia is ready to return to it immediately if its concerns are fully addressed, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

GLOBAL ENERGY MARKETS

* Russia and OPEC+ have reached an agreement on reducing Russian oil supplies to foreign markets, and the new parameters will be announced next week, Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said at a meeting with President Vladimir Putin on the development of the Krasnoyarsk Region on Thursday.
* Gas futures in Europe have decreased by almost 10%, falling below $400 per 1,000 cubic meters, according to data from the London-based ICE exchange.
* Russia's Gazprom has been responsible for over half of the increase in Chinese gas imports in eight months, CEO Alexey Miller said.

TRUMP COURT CASE

* Former President Donald Trump has pleaded not guilty in his Georgia criminal case and will not appear in court at his arraignment scheduled for September 6, a court filing revealed on Thursday.
* Trump's lawyers filed a motion on his behalf requesting to separate his Georgia election meddling case from co-defendants who are seeking a speedy trial, a court filing revealed.

PUTIN-ERDOGAN MEETING

* Ankara has not confirmed yet September 4 as the date for the visit of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Russia, the Turkish leader's administration told Sputnik on Thursday.
* Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said that he discussed with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov the preparations for the meeting of Putin and Erdogan in Sochi.

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

Russian-German National Arrested for Allegedly Exporting Sensitive US Tech to Russia - DOJ

WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) - A Russian-German national was arrested in Cyprus for allegedly exporting sensitive US-made microelectronics with military applications to Russia, the US Justice Department said on Thursday.

"Arthur Petrov allegedly participated in a Russia-Based illicit procurement network that, subsequent to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, illegally procured large quantities of sensitive microelectronics for a Russian company that supplies manufacturers for the Russian military," the Justice Department said in a press release.

The release said Petrov, a dual Russian-German national, was arrested on Saturday in Cyprus at the request of the United States.

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US Court Sentences Proud Boys Defendant to 15 Years for January 6 Crimes - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) - A US court sentenced Proud Boys organization member Zach Rehl to 15 years in prison for crimes linked to the January 6, 2021 US Capitol riot and efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election, CBS News reported on Thursday.

US district judge Tim Kelly sentenced Rehl to 15 years in prison after considering his crimes, personal references and the need for deterrence, the report said. Prosecutors sought a sentence of 30 years in prison.

Rehl addressed the court during the sentencing hearing, acknowledging fault and disavowing politics, the report said.

Earlier on Thursday, a US court also sentenced Proud Boys member Joseph Biggs to 17 years in prison for crimes related to the January 6 US Capitol riot. Several members of the Proud Boys were found guilty in May on charges including seditious conspiracy.

The sentences come as US courts attempt to resolve charges against former US President Donald Trump for alleged crimes linked to January 6.

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Flooding Remains Major Concern After Hurricane Idalia in Florida – White House

WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) – Flooding remains a major concern in Florida after hurricane Idalia hit the state, US Homeland Security Advisor Dr. Liz Sherwood-Randall said on Thursday.

“The greatest concern right now is flooding and the impact on people’s homes and businesses

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from that flooding," Sherwood-Randall told reporters, adding that the authorities are just getting initial assessments.

Aerial surveillance allows to hope that the hurricane did not cause widespread damages, while some homes and businesses have been harmed, particularly in low-lying areas, Sherwood-Randall noted. She promised that the government would focus primarily on recovering these most affected territories.

Sherwood-Randall also noted that US President Joe Biden had spoken several times with Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and governors of other impacted states.

Hurricane Idalia hit Florida Wednesday morning and caused widespread power outages. DeSantis said later in the day the authorities have no information about possible casualties.

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UPDATE - US Imposes New North Korea-Related Sanctions on 2 People, 1 Entity - Treasury Department

(Updates with details in paras 1-8)

WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) - The United States along with South Korea and Japan imposed new North Korea-related sanctions on a company in Moscow and two individuals including one Russian national, the Treasury Department said on Thursday.

"In coordination with the Republic of Korea and Japan, the United States sanctioned two individuals and one entity — Jon Jin Yong, Sergey Mikhaylovich Kozlov, and Intellekt LLC — involved in generating revenue for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) unlawful development of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and ballistic missiles," the Treasury Department said in a press release.

The United States took the action in response to North Korea's attempt on August 23 to launch a reconnaissance satellite into orbit, the Treasury Department said,

The State Department in a separate statement said both men engaged in "revenue generation activities" that aided North Korea's weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs.

The Treasury said it designated Jon Jin Yong because he is an official of the Workers' Party of Korea and targeted Kozlov for providing him with material assistance.

According to the Treasury, Kozlov and Jon Jin Yong worked together in Moscow to procure items used in the ship-building industry.

Kozlov also allegedly helped Jon Jin Yong obtain identification documents for his North Korean IT team in Russia. Some of the identity documents belonged to family members of Kozlov's employees, the Treasury said.

The two are also accused of coordinating a Moscow-based construction project between Kozlov's company Intellekt LLC and a Second Academy of Natural Sciences (SANS) cover company. The State Department sanctioned SANS in 2010 over its alleged proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

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Pentagon Says Launching UFO Office Website to Provide Information to US Public

*WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department's All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO) launched a website to provide information to the public on its efforts to better understand unidentified anomalous phenomena (UAP, also known as UFOs), Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said on Thursday.

"The department is launching a website on the All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office to provide the public with information concerning AARO and its efforts to understand and resolve unidentified anomalous phenomena," Ryder said during a press briefing.

The website will provide information, including photos and videos, on resolved UAP cases as they are declassified and approved for public release, Ryder said.

The website will also include a reporting feature in the future for current and former US government employees and contractors to provide AARO with information, Ryder said.

Ryder also confirmed that Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks will now oversee AARO. Hicks' oversight highlights the importance of AARO to the Pentagon and will not change the program operationally, Ryder said.

The Pentagon expects the next AARO report to Congress to be delivered "relatively soon," Ryder added.

The website's launch comes amid an increasing interest by US lawmakers in the subject of UAP, including calls for a special committee to investigate the phenomena. The US government maintains both AARO and a NASA independent study on UAP as part of its public efforts to analyze the subject.

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Pentagon Says Russia's Wagner Group Essentially Over, Reduced Operations in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) - Russian private military company Wagner Group is essentially defunct and no longer a substantial force on the battlefield in Ukraine, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said on Thursday.

"Wagner Group is essentially over… ," Ryder said during a press briefing, when asked about Wagner Group. "At one point in time, Wagner Group were the most effective combat forces Russia had on the ground in Ukraine, and they've essentially been removed from the battlefield as anything even remotely being significant in terms of combat capability."

The statement comes following the death of Wagner Group founder Yevgeny Prigozhin in a plane crash in Russia earlier this month. Prigozhin died several months after an attempted mutiny over disputes with the Russian Ministry of Defense.

The Russian Investigative Committee tasked with analyzing the crash is considering different causes, including a deliberate crime, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Wednesday.

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US Will Continue to Seek Military-to-Military Communication With China - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) - The United States will continue to seek military-to-military communication with China in order to reduce the potential for miscalculation, Pentagon Press Secretary Brig. Gen. Patrick Ryder said on Thursday.

"We will continue to seek open lines of communication [with China]," Ryder said during a press briefing.

The Pentagon is going to continue to do everything it can do on its part to maintain open lines of communication to reduce the potential for miscalculation, Ryder added.

Ryder highlighted that Admiral John Aquilino, the commander of Indo-Pacific Command, recently met with Chinese military officials at the 2023 Chiefs of Defense Conference held in mid-August in Fiji.

China has rejected requests from the United States for a meeting between the two countries' defense chiefs, mostly due to US sanctions placed on Chinese Defense Minister Li Shangfu.

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Biden Says He Hopes China's Xi Attends G20 Summit in India

WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Thursday said he still hopes to see his counterpart Xi Jinping at the G20 summit in India, despite media reports that the Chinese leader will skip the gathering.

"The answer is I hope he attends," Biden said when asked whether he hoped Xi would be at the gathering.

Media reports earlier on Thursday said Xi would most likely skip the upcoming summit in New Delhi from September 9-10.

Chinese Premier Li Qiang is instead expected to represent the country during the gathering, Reuters reported, citing sources in India and China familiar with the matter.

In July, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Biden and Xi will likely hold talks at some point in the months ahead.

Biden and Xi last met at the G20 summit in Bali, Indonesia, last November, when the two leaders agreed to keep open lines of communication in a bid to improve frayed ties.

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US Imposes New North Korea-Related Sanctions on 2 People, 1 Entity - Treasury Department

WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) - The United States imposed new North Korea-related sanctions on two individuals including one Russian and a company in Moscow, the Treasury Department said in a notice on its website on Thursday.

The sanctions target Russian national Sergey Kozlov and North Korean Jin Jon, along with the company Intellekt LLC in Moscow, the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) said in the notice.

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Biden Says He Will Visit Florida on Saturday

WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden said on Thursday that he will visit Florida after the Hurricane Idalia on September 2.

"I'm going to Florida Saturday morning," Biden said during a meeting at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Hurricane Idalia hit Florida Wednesday morning and caused widespread power outages. Governor Ron DeSantis said later in the day the authorities have no information about possible casualties.

Biden directed FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell to visit affected areas. She told reporters on Wednesday that Idalia became the strongest hurricane in this part of Florida in over 100 years.

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Attending Physician for US Congress Says McConnell Can Continue His Schedule

WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) - US Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell has been medically evaluated and given the go-ahead to continue with his schedule as normal, the attending physician for Congress said in a statement on Thursday after the senator a day earlier again froze due to lightheadedness.

"I have consulted with Leader McConnell and conferred with his neurology team. After evaluating yesterday's incident, I have informed Leader McConnell that he is medically clear to continue with his schedule as planned. Occassional lightheadedness is not uncommon in concussion recovery and can also be expected as a result of dehydration," the attending physician said in the statement.

On Wednesday, McConnell froze during remarks to reporters and appeared to lose his ability to speak in the second such incident this year. McConnell's spokesman said the pause was due to

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McConnell feeling lightheaded.

In July, McConnell similarly fell silent partway through a press conference in Washington. He briefly departed the presser before later returning, claiming he felt fine.

Earlier this year, McConnell sustained a concussion during a fall and stepped away after feeling lightheaded, one of McConnell's aides said at the time.

A McConnell spokesperson told Sputnik after the incident in July that the senator intends to serve in his party leadership role through the remainder of his term.

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BAE Systems Signs Deals to Supply More Arms to Ukraine, Boost Presence in Kiev - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) - BAE Systems has signed a series of deals with the government of Ukraine to supply more weapons to its armed forces and significantly expand its own business presence in Kiev, the company announced in a press release on Thursday.

"At a meeting in Kiev earlier this week, BAE Systems announced it has established a local legal entity and signed agreements with the Ukrainian government to ramp up the company's support to Ukraine's armed forces and to explore the supply of light guns to Ukraine," the release said.

The first agreement opens the way for BAE to work with the Ukrainian military to support its future force structure and also to revitalize the country's industrial base, the release said.

"The second agreement builds on that support and creates a framework for BAE Systems to work directly with Ukraine to explore potential partners and how it could ultimately facilitate the production of 105mm light guns in the country," the release added.

BAE has already set up a local entity to support the implementation of these goals, according to the release.

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Lockheed Says to Establish F-16 Training Center in Romania, Could Benefit Ukrainians

WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) - Lockheed Martin announced on Thursday that it plans to establish a European training center for F-16s in Romania that could eventually train Ukrainian forces.

"Lockheed Martin (NYSE: LMT) and the governments of Romania and the Netherlands have announced a Letter of Intent to establish the European F-16 Training Center in Romania," Lockheed said in a press release. "The center will focus on ensuring effectiveness and safety of Romanians flying and operating F-16 fighter jets and could eventually expand to include training for other nations."

According to the release, the training center will ultimately benefit Romania and other regional F-16 operators, including "potentially" Ukraine. The release did not provide a timeline of when

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the training center could be expected to be operational.

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Commerce Secretary Raimondo Says Message to China on Meeting US Interests 'Well Received'

WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) - The message to China that it needs to meet the interests of the United States and those of US companies was "well received," Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said on Thursday after a visit to Beijing aimed at growing bilateral diplomatic and business relations.

"We have no interest to hold China back or to hold its people down," Raimondo said during an appearance on CNBC. "We have an interest to protect our national security first and foremost. We find China's military fusion strategies very troubling. We have an interest to have a level-playing field, so that our companies and workers can compete. So that was my message and I think that message was well-received."

During her visit, Raimondo cautioned Chinese leaders that US businesses might stop investing in China without Beijing taking prompt action to address their complaints about worsening conditions due to raids on firms, unexplained fines and unpredictable official behavior.

Raimondo also cited China's about-turn on its commitments to buy US jets from manufacturer Boeing as one significant issue.

"Certainly we want the Chinese government at a bare minimum to, you know, take delivery of the planes that they've ordered. As you know, Boeing makes the best planes in the world. China has a huge and growing demand for our planes and we hope that they will continue to make those purchases," she said.

Raimondo is the fourth high-level Biden administration official to recently visit China after Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen's trip there in July in an effort to restore relations that have reached a low due to disputes on technology, security and Taiwan, among other issues.

Raimondo told CNBC that the subject of Taiwan did not come up in her discussions with Chinese officials and characterized her meeting with Chinese Premier Li Qiang as well as with other officials as "very productive," while adding that she "didn't pull any punches" in her messaging.

"A few people commented that they had not heard that before from a US official recently on the ground in China," she added.

Raimondo said chief executives of major US companies had told her ahead of her trip that they faced increased pressure from Beijing's expansion of an anti-spying law this year, raids on some firms, tighter controls on data and lack of information about rule changes.

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Trump Files Motion to Sever Georgia Case From Co-Defendants Seeking Speedy Trial - Filing

WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump's lawyers filed a motion on his behalf requesting to separate his Georgia election meddling case from co-defendants who are seeking a speedy trial, a court filing revealed on Thursday.

"President Trump moves the Court to sever his case from those of his co-defendants who have demanded a speedy trial... and who have scheduled a trial date for October 23, 2023," the document stated.

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UN Chief to Attend Regional Forums of Africa, ASEAN, G20, G77 + China

UNITED NATIONS, August 31 (Sputnik) - The United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres announced on Thursday his upcoming travels to various summits: Africa Climate Summit, ASEAN UN Summit, G20 Summit and the G77 and China Summit.

“I will be traveling to the Africa climate summit in Kenya, to ASEAN UN summit in Indonesia, the G20 Summit in India and the summit of the G77 and China, in Cuba," Guterres told journalists.

The Africa Climate Summit will take place in Kenya from September 4-6, in parallel with the 2023 Africa Climate Week scheduled for September 4-8. The G20 Summit in New Delhi scheduled for September 9-10.

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US to Impose Visa Restrictions on Persons Undermining Democracy in Sierra Leone - Blinken

WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) - The United States will impose visa restrictions on individuals allegedly responsible for undermining the democratic process in Sierra Leone, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Thursday.

"The United States will pursue visa restrictions for those believed to be responsible for, or complicit in, undermining democracy in Sierra Leone, including through the manipulation or rigging of the electoral process; intimidation of voters, election observers, or civil society organizations through threats or acts of physical violence; or the abuse or violation of related human rights in Sierra Leone," Blinken said in a statement.

Family members of the designated persons may also face visa restrictions, the statement said.

Blinken emphasized in the statement that the restrictive measures affect particular individuals but are not directed against the people of Sierra Leone.

"This decision reflects the commitment of the United States to support Sierra Leoneans’ aspirations to have free and fair elections that demonstrate the will of the people and strengthen

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democracy and the rule of law," he said.
Blinken also emphasized the United States' commitment to supporting and advancing democracy in Sierra Leone.

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US Court Sentences Proud Boys Leader to 17 Years in Prison for January 6 Role - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) - A US court sentenced Proud Boys organization leader Joseph Biggs to 17 years in prison for his role in efforts to overturn the 2020 US presidential election in favor of Donald Trump during the US Capitol riot on January 6, 2021, HuffPost reported on Thursday.
Biggs and several other members of the Proud Boys were found guilty in May on charges including seditious conspiracy for their actions related to the Capitol riot. Prosecutors depicted Biggs as a tactician and planner for the Proud Boys leading up to January 6.
Prosecutors sought a 33-year prison sentence for Biggs – 15 years longer than any sentence for crimes related to January 6 so far.
Proud Boy co-defendant Zachary Rehl is set to be sentenced later on Thursday.
The sentences come as US courts attempt to resolve charges against Trump for his own alleged crimes related to the January 6 US Capitol riot.

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UN Chief Says He Sent Lavrov Proposal on Better Access of Russian Food to Global Markets

UNITED NATIONS, August 31 (Sputnik) - The United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres said on Thursday he has sent concrete solutions to Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov about more effective access of Russian products to global markets, as part of his efforts to renew the Black Sea Initiative.
"The proposal is relating to the need, as I said, to re-establish the Black Sea Initiative and at the same time, we have some concrete solutions for the concerns allowing for a more effective access of Russian food and fertilizers to global markets at adequate prices," Guterres told the journalists.

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US Concerned by Nagorno-Karabakh Situation, Urges Opening of Lachin Corridor - State Dept

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WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) - The United States is very concerned about the worsening humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and is calling for the reopening of the Lachin corridor to humanitarian and other traffic, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a statement on Thursday.

"We are deeply concerned about deteriorating humanitarian conditions in Nagorno-Karabakh resulting from the continued blockage of food, medicine and other goods essential to a dignified existence," Miller said. "We reiterate our call to immediately re-open the Lachin corridor to humanitarian, commercial, and passenger traffic."

Miller said that officials from Baku, Azerbaijan, and Stepanakert - the de facto capital of the breakaway Republic of Artsakh - should promptly agree on the means to transport critical provisions to the people in Nagorno-Karabakh.

"Basic humanitarian assistance should never be held hostage to political disagreements," Miller added.

Earlier in August, two United Nations special rapporteurs and an independent United Nations expert called on Azerbaijan to immediately lift the blockade of the Lachin corridor, saying it caused a "humanitarian emergency" in the disputed region.

The corridor, which serves as a lifeline for supplies and humanitarian aid to Nagorno-Karabakh from Armenia, was blocked in 2022 by people that Azerbaijan described as "climate activists" protesting alleged Armenian mining in the region.

On July 11, Azerbaijan suspended the Lachin checkpoint due to an investigation it undertook into alleged smuggling of goods disguised as humanitarian aid.

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Canada Assigns $16.6Mln in Development Assistance Funds to Colombia – Global Affairs

WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) – The Canadian Minister of International Development Ahmed Hussein announced C$22,5 million ($16.6 million) for development assistance projects in Colombia, Global Affairs Canada said on Thursday.

Canada has assigned C$64 million in financial development assistance to Colombia under the 2022-2023 fiscal year.

“The Honourable Ahmed Hussen announced nearly $22.5 million in funding for development programming while visiting Colombia, from August 28 to 31, 2023,” the ministry’s statement said.

Funds will be allocated both to gender equality projects to be jointly implemented with UN Women, and vaccine equity initiatives in collaboration with United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund and the Pan American Health Organizations, the statement added.

During his visit, Hussein also traveled to the Colombia-Venezuela border in the department of La Guajira, the statement said, where he sought first-hand insight on the challenges posed by regional migration dynamics.

Minister Hussein conducted a four-day trip to Colombia where he marked the seventieth anniversary of diplomatic relations with Bogota and reaffirmed Canada’s commitment to

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supporting the country's development, humanitarian, as well as peace and security goals.

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Sex Abuse Case Against Ex-Cardinal McCarrick Dismissed by Judge - Press Officer

WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) - Former Catholic Cardinal Theodore McCarrick will not be prosecuted on allegations of sex abuse after a judge dismissed the case on the grounds that he suffers from dementia, Office of Norfolk District Attorney Press Officer David Traub told Sputnik.

In February, McCarrick's legal team had requested the court to dismiss the case given that a Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine psychiatry professor concluded the former cardinal likely had Alzheimer's disease.

"After defense came forward with a report finding McCarrick incompetent several months ago, the Commonwealth hired an independent expert to fly to Missouri and conduct an independent evaluation. That evaluation confirmed a lack of competency to assist in his defense, which is required to go forward in Massachusetts courts. The case was thereupon dismissed by the court," Traub said.

McCarrick was dismissed from his position by Pope Francis in 2019 after a Vatican-commissioned internal investigation revealed that he had sexually molested children as well as adults.

The case had then created a crisis for the Catholic Church due to the evidence revealing the Vatican and Catholic leaders in the United States knew of McCarrick's wrongdoings yet chose to look the other way.

The former cardinal, who was accused of abusing a teenage boy at Wellesley College in 1974, has maintained his innocence, pleading not guilty to the charges laid upon him.

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Trump Pleads Not Guilty In Georgia Election Case, Waives Arraignment - Court Document

WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump has pleaded not guilty in his Georgia criminal case and will not appear in court at his arraignment scheduled for September 6, a court filing revealed on Thursday.

"I do hereby freely and voluntarily waive my right to be present at my arraignment on the Indictment and my right to have it read to me in open court. As evidenced by my signature below, I do hereby waive formal arraignment and enter my plea of NOT GUILTY to the Indictment in this case," Trump said in the document.

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UN Security Council Approved Extending Peacekeeping Mission in Lebanon - UN Meeting

UNITED NATIONS, August 31 (Sputnik) - The United Nations Security Council extended the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for another extra year, a Sputnik correspondent reported.
The final vote was 13 votes in favor and one abstention.
"We call on the uniform leadership to continue coordinating its activities in the area of operations with the Lebanese government, "Russian Permanent Representative Vassily Nebenzia told the Security Council members during a meeting on UNIFIL.
It seems that a big part of the negotiations and last minute changes were about the freedom of movement. The UNIFIL mission was established in 1978 to confirm Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon.

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UPDATE - Fed Inflation Tracker PCE Index up 3.3% in Year to July, Sliding Further From 2% Target

(Adds details, comments and context, paragraphs 4-8)
WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) - The Personal Consumption Expenditure (PCE) Index, a US inflation indicator closely followed by the Federal Reserve, rose by 3.3% in the year to July, slipping further from the central bank's annual 2% target for price growth, Commerce Department data showed on Thursday.
"From the same month one year ago, the PCE price index for July increased 3.3 percent," the department's Bureau of Economic Analysis said in a statement.
The growth in the PCE Index was precisely as forecast by economists polled by US media. It was also a touch higher than the July annual growth of 3.2% in the Consumer Price Index (CPI), which serves as a broader measure of inflation. In other comparison, the PCE Index grew by 3.0% in June
Energy prices, led by the retail price of gasoline at US pumps, averaged $3.825 per gallon this week versus $3.757 a month ago. But that was still way below the record high of $5 per gallon in June 2022.
Inflation has retreated significantly in the United States after the Fed resorted over the past 18 months to one of the most aggressive monetary tightening in its history to runaway inflation caused by the coronavirus pandemic and the trillions of dollars of relief spending related to that.
Since March 2020, the central bank has added a total of 5.25% to key lending rates which previously stood at just 0.25%. As a result, inflation measured by the CPI, has tumbled from an annualized four-decade high of 9.1% in June 2022.
Despite that, the Fed has not been able to easily move key inflation markers back to the 2% and below levels it had maintained before the pandemic. The reason, the central bank says, is stronger-than-expected growth in jobs and wages since the COVID-19 outbreak that have

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allowed Americans to continue spending robustly.

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World Bank Signs Deal With IDB to Increase Work in Latin America, Caribbean - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) - The World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) signed a memorandum of understanding to boost cooperation on work in Latin America and the Caribbean, the World Bank said in a statement on Thursday.

"At IDB headquarters in Washington, World Bank President Ajay Banga and IDB President Ilan Goldfajn signed a memorandum of understanding that will boost support for net-zero-deforestation efforts in the Amazon, strengthen the Caribbean's resilience to natural disasters, and bridge the digital-access gap, across Latin America and the Caribbean," the statement said.

The World Bank's political-risk insurance arm and the IDB's private-sector arm also agreed to collaborate to mitigate political risk in the region, the statement said.

The two agencies will work with the World Bank's International Finance Corporation to increase investment in the region by the private sector, the statement said.

The four-year partnership deal is a testament to the power of "collaborative innovation" for the region and the World Bank must play a central role in coordinating global action, the statement added.

The two executives visited the region together in June, where they emphasized the need for both institutions to increase cooperation to address poverty, create jobs and combat climate change, according to the statement.

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