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'Not Legally Possible' for US to Transfer Seized Russian Assets to Ukraine - Int'l Lawyer

While the United States might be aiming to undermine Russian prestige by seizing its assets abroad and transferring them to Ukraine, it is in fact harming its own reputation by engaging in lawless behavior that violates the sanctity of private property underpinning the capitalist system, an international legal expert told Sputnik.

The US said it would transfer the seized assets of Russian businessmen to veterans of the Ukrainian Armed Forces on Thursday. The announcement was made by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken during a press conference with his Ukrainian counterpart, Dmytro Kuleba, in Kiev, who indicated the amount transferred would be $5.4 million. Blinken, however, did not elaborate on the precise sum, from which accounts the money would be taken or when exactly the transfer would occur.

Since the launch of Russia's special operation in Ukraine in February 2022, Western powers have initiated several rounds of seizures of property and freezing of assets belonging to both Russian nationals and state institutions located in the West. The US has long asserted it would seek to transfer these assets to Ukrainian control, but has so far not attempted to do so.

Christopher C. Black, an international criminal lawyer with 20 years of experience in war crimes and international relations told Sputnik it was "not legally possible" to do what Blinken declared the US was doing.

"It seems to me that the statements declaring their intentions to use seized assets to fund the Ukraine regime are more for propaganda purposes than for real economic effect. They make these announcements from time to time to try to humiliate Russia and show Russia who's boss, or so they think," Black told Sputnik, adding that such moves were aimed at harming Russian prestige.

"But the opposite occurs. It is their [US] reputation and prestige that is undermined, their claimed adherence to the rule of law, to the right to property, to justice. They reveal themselves for what they are and the consequence is that citizens and national governments will be reluctant to have any type of assets placed in those nations if they can be seized on any pretext. So it ends up harming their own economies and the world economic system."

"The issue of the use of illegally seized assets, whether cash or property or financial securities such as stocks, bonds is important to expose the nature of the governments involved," Black said. "They continually talk about their 'values' and we see with this that one of their values is to raise theft and piracy to a standard practice."

"It is not legally possible to use such assets to provide Ukraine with funds to carry on the war against Russia," Black asserted.

"The Canadian government has stated that they will sell the Russian aircraft that they illegally seized to give the money from the sale to Ukraine. The US and EU countries have promised to use other seized assets for the same purpose. But again, all of this is illegal, since the assets

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were simply ordered to be seized by government fiat, by-passing proper legal procedures and without any means for the owners to object," the legal expert explained.

"Assets can only be seized normally if a debt is owed and the creditor goes to court to get compensation and a court orders certain assets to be handed over to satisfy the debt, but no debts were involved. The NATO governments have just stolen these assets ignoring all legalities," he said.

"Once they have taken that step they have crossed the line of legality and morality and will use the assets as they see fit."

Black explained that they would first have to sell the assets to someone else willing to pay for them - a considerable problem, since "potential buyers will be reluctant to acquire those assets when the title to them is doubtful, or there remains a question as to who the real owner is." Doing so could make them parties to the theft as well.

"[T]hey cannot be sure that they will really own anything at the end of the process," he explained. "Others may have claims to the assets as well. For example monies seized from Russian oligarchs or businessmen from banks located in NATO countries may be involved in other disputes with others, or the banks themselves may be reluctant to hand over the funds when they make interest on them so long as they remain in their accounts."

"The EU statement that they cannot seize Russian assets is nothing more than a recognition of the law and the right to property that is sacrosanct to the capitalist system. They recognize, however, reluctantly, that to engage in the seizure of property of citizens of another country for political reasons destroys or undermines the entire basis of the economic system which depends on the right to property, the expectation that nations and courts will abide by the laws governing property and legal contract and procedures," Black asserted.

"Lastly, even if those assets can be liquified into cash, there remains the problem of transferring those funds to Ukraine. If the USA, for example, uses the normal banking system the banks involved can be accused of money laundering which is both illegal and if known to the public will harm their reputation and business."

He noted that the US' actions leave open the possibility for Moscow to retaliate in kind, and seize and sell US assets.

Black further pointed out that the owners of the seized assets might be able to file lawsuits attempting to stop the illegal use of their property and to have it returned, but noted this was "unrealistic" since the governments engaged in seizure will use legal fictions to declare their actions as allowable.

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Researchers Accidentally Make First-Ever Measurement of Black Hole's Swirling Accretion Disk

An accretion disk is comprised of the swirling funnel of gas and dust that orbits a black hole as it slowly spirals down into oblivion. Previously, scientists had been able to tell where this disk begins but not where it ends, thanks to the unusual laws of physics surrounding a black hole that bend and distort light from its far side.

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A group of astronomers studying a supermassive black hole had to double-check their work after making an astounding discovery: they found a way to measure the diameter of a black hole's accretion disk.

A black hole has gravity so strong that even light, the fastest thing in the universe, cannot escape from it. However, outside the point of no return - called an event horizon - objects remain quite visible. Surrounding many black holes is a vast swirl of dust and gas called an accretion disk, which shines brightly as it is pulled in toward the black hole.

These disks are easy to spot, since they emit a wide range of radiation, including in the spectrum of visible light, which we can detect on Earth.

In a paper recently published in the Astrophysical Journal Letters, a group of astronomers explain how they accidentally stumbled upon a way to find the edge of the other side, and tell for the first time how far across an accretion disk is.

Essentially, the astronomers were monitoring light from the black hole designated III Zw 002, a supermassive black hole anchoring the center of a galaxy 22 million light-years away.

The team was using the Gemini Near-Infrared Spectrograph (GNIRS) from the Gemini North telescope in Hawaii, and measured a slightly wider range of light wavelengths than is typical. Because GNIRS can detect emissions of different wavelengths of light simultaneously, it captured the elusive signal for the far side of the accretion disk without the astronomers realizing they were even collecting the extra data.

Expecting to see a single double-peak formation in the data, the scientists were stunned to find a second set of double-peaks.

"We didn't know previously that III Zw 002 had this double peaked profile, but when we reduced the data we saw the double peak very clearly," Alberto Rodríguez-Ardila, an astronomer at the Canary Islands Astrophysics Institute and co-author of the study, said in a news release.

"In fact, we reduced the data many times thinking it could be a mistake, but every time we saw the same exciting result."

"The detection of such double-peaked profiles puts firm constraints on the geometry of a region that is otherwise not possible to resolve," Rodríguez-Ardila said, adding it would enable researchers to observe the "feeding process and the inner structure of an active galaxy" for the first time.

Once the data was modeled, they had their answer: the accretion disk is 52.4 light-days across, or more than 9,000 times the distance from Earth to the sun. They also found the disk sits at an angle of about 18 degrees with respect to observers on Earth, and that the black hole has a mass of between 400 and 900 million times the mass of our sun.

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Snacktime: Astronomers Spot Black Hole That Takes Bite Out of Star Every Month

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Astronomers have long tracked stars being steadily eaten away by black holes after becoming trapped in their orbit, and they've even seen entire stars getting torn apart by them. However, now astronomers have found something new: a star that's getting eaten by a black hole very slowly, for about one week every month.

This bizarre event is unfolding about 500 million light-years away, where a white dwarf named Swift J0230 has been observed for more than a year suddenly growing extremely bright, then become extremely dim.

A team based at the University of Leicester in the UK first spotted the star in June 2022 using the Neil Gehrels Swift Observatory, a space telescope that monitors ultra-high-wavelength radiation, such as gamma rays, x-rays, and ultraviolet light.

Their results are discussed in a paper published in Nature Astronomyon Thursday.

Researchers noticed that after being bright for between seven and 10 Earth days, Swift J0230's brightness would fall by a factor of 20 in a little under 16 hours, becoming almost impossible to spot. Then, about a month later, it would light back up again for another seven-to-10 days.

What they found was that this dramatic brightening happened when Swift J0230 swung close to a black hole designated 2MASX J02301709+2836050, which sits near the center of their host galaxy. When a star does this, it's called a tidal disruption event. It's not unknown to science, but they typically happen daily or annually, not on monthlong cycles like in this case.

Rob Eyles-Ferris, a research associate at the University of Leicester, said in a news release that the discovery was "an exciting addition to the class of partially-disrupted stars as it shows us that the two classes of these objects already found are really connected, with our new system giving us the missing link."

Black holes are among the most powerful and mysterious objects in the universe. They form from the core of massive collapsed stars where the gravity behind the implosion became so strong that not even light could escape from it. However, black holes are nonetheless visible when their gravity begins tearing stars apart or drawing in interstellar gas, which becomes hot and shines as it crunches toward the point-of-no-return.

The largest black holes anchor the centers of galaxies and can emit such powerful radiation they are visible billions of light-years-away. Earth scientists call such black holes "blazars."

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'Huge Barriers': Pentagon's Hypersonic Woes Due to 'Very Delicate' Physics Problems Behind Tech

Hypersonic technology is highly specialized, and military engineers have to overcome serious challenges posed by physics that disrupt the typical way missiles are used. This is why the US military has struggled to catch up to Russia, China, and other nations that have already developed the technology, experts told Sputnik.

US media reported on Thursday that the Pentagon had postponed testing of its Long-Range Hypersonic Weapon (LRHW) a day prior, based on "pre-flight checks." The test was to take place in Florida, with the weapon fired eastward into the Atlantic Ocean.

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The LRHW is a surface-launched weapon initially intended to be deployed with the US Army later this year and fired from a Transporter-Erector-Launcher (TEL) like a ballistic missile. Another version is later planned for deployment on naval warships like the Zumwalt-class cruiser, which have already begun the refitting process for carrying the weapons.

The scrubbed test comes after repeated failures to fire the Air-Launched Rapid Response Weapon (ARRW), an air-launched ballistic missile with a hypersonic glide vehicle that has only had one successful test - late last month. Another weapon, the scramjet-powered Hypersonic Attack Cruise Missile (HACM), is also in development but with no predicted time to enter service.

Hypersonic speed is that beyond Mach 5, or roughly 3,800 miles per hour. It is much faster than any existing aircraft or missile, except for space-bound rockets seeking to break from Earth's gravitational pull.

The US has lagged behind countries like Russia, which was the first to introduce hypersonic weapons as a response to US air defense systemsthat greatly exceeded the parameters of the defunct Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, and China, both of which have several types of hypersonic weapons in service.

Sputnik spoke with two military technology experts to find out why the US is behind.

Konstantin Sivkov, corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Rocket and Artillery Sciences, Doctor of Military Sciences, pointed out that the technology behind hypersonics is both old and new.

"What is a hypersonic weapon? It allows you to hit targets using homing in the final stage and at the same time fly at hypersonic speed," he summarized to Sputnik.

"Many ballistic missiles that appeared in the world as intercontinental ones back in the 1950s also have hypersonic speed, but they do not maneuver on their flight path - but this is not the case for hypersonic weapons."

"The Americans cannot solve two problems: providing control over the flight of missiles at hypersonic speeds - that is, maneuvering - and the issue of ensuring the operation of targeting systems at hypersonic speeds."

Dmitry Drozdenko, a military analyst and chief editor of the "Fatherland Arsenal" internet portal, told Sputnik that the LRHW was similar to Russia's Avangard hypersonic weapon, which was the first to be announced in 2019.

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"That is, there is a standard container in which the rocket engine accelerates the warhead-laden glider up to a certain height and to hypersonic speed. At that point, it begins to maneuver in the atmosphere without an engine. The only difference is that our Avangard has a global strike capability: it can strike at the South or North Pole, even in Washington, even in Canberra - anywhere on the planet, with both nuclear and non-nuclear payloads."

Drozdenko explained the US has struggled to develop a usable hypersonic weapon because hypersonic technology is "subtle in the field of fundamental science."

"It is a very delicate topic," he told Sputnik.

"Once upon a time there were problems with supersonic, if you remember the old stories, when the first jet aircraft had straight wings and propellers, and then they began to be made with wings angled back. It's all related to the fact that when approaching the speed of sound, a

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shockwave occurs, which does not allow an effective increase in speed. Therefore, the wings were deflected back and this shockwave flowed back at supersonic speed."
"So at hypersonic speeds, physical phenomena also arise. That is, there are several barriers such as high temperatures - very high. The vehicle heats up a great deal. If we are talking about [Russia's] Avangard, it heats up to the state of plasma" similar to a spacecraft's reentry into Earth's atmosphere, which also travels at hypersonic speed, he explained.
"The protective layer burns away as a result. The astronaut is not damaged, but at that moment the communication connection is lost. That is, it is a known fact that when they enter the atmosphere, radio communication is lost, because radio waves do not pass through the plasma."
"And here questions of control arise: a hypersonic weapon that flies for a long time at such speeds must, firstly, be refractory. That is, it should not burn out, otherwise it will not fly," he said, adding that "This is a matter of materials science - maintaining high temperatures."
This, Drozdenko noted, was a key difference between reentry vehicles and hypersonic weapons: they have to be controlled and maneuvered, not just allowed to "ram the atmosphere with their belly" until they slow down.
"The task of hypersonic weapons like Avangard is to maneuver. This is the most important thing, so that air defense systems can neither detect it nor shoot it down. It needs a control system that can somehow analyze the external environment despite being in this plasma cloud. There is a whole complex of fundamental theoretical sciences - materials science, aerodynamics of high speeds - which current control systems and radio electronics do not have. This is a huge barrier."
That is why, Drozdenko noted, such technology has been highly classified - and why it's been a major target for American spycraft in recent years.
"It's called industrial espionage. That is, they simply have not grown to this level yet."
"And now we actually have just three types of weapons: the glider, Avangard, which has already been repeatedly tested; we have the Kinzhal missile with a rocket engine; and Zircon, a sea-based rocket that works with a ramjet engine that is a further development of the Onyx missile."
"Part of these technologies was received by India in the process of joint development of the Brahmos missile. That is why the Americans fail: because a good part of humanity does not want to share technology with [them]. They didn't manage to steal from them themselves, until they fully developed it."

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'That 70s Show' Actor Danny Masterson Sentenced to 30 Years for Rape

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The ‘That 70s Show’ actor was first found guilty of two counts of rape in early June of this summer. He was charged with forcibly raping three women in his Hollywood Hills home between 2001 and 2003; however, the presiding jury was deadlocked on the third rape count.

US actor Danny Masterson was sentenced on Thursday to 30 years in prison for raping two women in the early 2000s.

Masterson, who did not testify in either trial, did not to speak during the hearing. He has denied assaulting the three women, who are all former members of the Church of Scientology. Masterson remains a member of the church.

The actor's first trial in November of 2022 ended with a mistrial as the jurors leaned towards an acquittal. However, his second trial in early June ended with two convictions of rape by a jury of seven women and five men, who deliberated for seven days.

Although Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Charlaine Olmedo allowed the women to testify that church officials pressured them to not speak to the police after they were raped, Olmedo stressed the church was not a defendant in the case.

"Mr. Masterson, you are not the victim here. Your actions 20 years ago took away another person's choice and voice. Your actions 20 years ago today were criminal, and that's why you are here," Olmedo said in court.

"You were not convicted on the testimony of one person," the judge continued."You were not convicted based on rumors, innuendo, gossip and speculation."

"You were convicted based on evidence that 12 people in the community found to be credible. …You were convicted because each of the victims reported the rapes to someone shortly after the rapes occurred," the judge added.

The judge denied the defense’s request that the 47-year-old's sentence be served concurrently rather than consecutively, so he’d only spend 15 years behind bars.

Before Olmedo handed down the sentence, two of the victims read emotional impact statements before the court.

"You relish in hurting women. It is your addiction. It is without question your favorite thing to do," said one of the women. "Life is precious and fragile. Find your heart."

"Listen to the brightness of nothing and get well. I forgive you," she continued.

Masterson was sentenced to the maximum amount allowed by law, meaning he will be eligible for parole after serving 25 and a half years, but could still be held in prison for life. The actor’s wife, Bijou Phillips, reportedly cried in court at the beginning of the hearing. The couple share one child.

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Some 150 Japanese Residents File Lawsuit to Halt Fukushima Water Release - Reports

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MOSCOW (Sputnik) - About 150 residents of several Japanese prefectures, including Fukushima and Miyagi, filed a first-of-its-kind lawsuit on Friday to stop the release of treated water from the Fukushima nuclear power plant (NPP), Japanese media reported.

The lawsuit, filed with the Fukushima District Court against the Japanese government and the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings (TEPCO), claims that the release of treated water undermines citizens' right to live safely and threatens the operation of local fisheries, a Japanese news agency reported. According to the document, the release is the "fresh misconduct" by the government and TEPCO after the 2011 Fukushima disaster.

The plaintiffs also cited documents from 2015 in which the governmentand the operator promised not to start releasing water from the plant without the approval of all parties involved. The actual release of water broke that promise, as the Japan Fisheries Association officially protested the discharge the day before it was to begin.

The suit claims that the provisions of the 2015 document have been violated, and that the government and TEPCO are obligated to solve the problem of radioactive water accumulation at the plant in another way that does not have a significant negative impact on the environment.

The plaintiffs also seek to revoke the approval granted by Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority in May and July of this year to proceed with the water discharge plan.

On August 24, Japan began dumping treated wastewater from the Fukushima NPP into the Pacific Ocean after diluting it with seawater. Tokyo claimed to have cleaned the water of all radionuclides except tritium, which was still within acceptable limits.

The water release has drawn strong opposition from China and other countries in the region. Beijing has described the discharged water as "contaminated" and responded by suspending seafood imports from Japan. Tokyo, for its part, has vowed to use tools under World Trade Organization rules to respond to the ban. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has said that the treated wastewater would have a negligible radiological impact on people and the environment.

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‘Climate Breakdown Has Begun’: Summer 2023 Deemed Hottest on Record

The data puts numbers to a sweltering summer that has been experienced by billions of people across the Northern Hemisphere, including parts of the United States, Europe and Japan.

The European Union Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) on Wednesday released data revealing that summer of 2023 marked the hottest-ever season on record.

This year's three-month period of June, July, and August surpassed previous heat records by a large margin since recording first began in 1940. The global average temperature this summer was 16.8 degrees Celsius (62.2 F), which is 0.66 degrees above the averages recorded between 1990 and 2020.

The new average is about 0.3 degrees celsius hotter than the previous record set in August 2019. The increase has proven significant as such heat records are typically broken by just hundredths of degrees; however, this summer, which is the hottest on record, is a major outlier.

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Global average summer temperatures have been getting hotter since the early 1940s: the summer of 1952 recorded a global average temperature of 15.5 C. Then in the summer of 1983, the temperature was recorded at 15.8 C.

By the summer of 1998, another outlier appeared, with a red hot summer of 16.3 C. In the summer of 2022, the global average was 16.4 C, and just a year later, that temperature has skyrocketed to 16.4 C.

"The dog days of summer are not just barking, they are biting," warned UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in a statement coinciding with the release of the data. "Our planet has just endured a season of simmering — the hottest summer on record. Climate breakdown has begun."

“The northern hemisphere just had a summer of extremes — with repeated heat waves fueling devastating wildfires, harming health, disrupting daily lives and wreaking a lasting toll on the environment,” added Petteri Taalas, the Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

Taalas says the Southern Hemisphere, where the shrinkage of Antarctic Sea ice is rampant, was “literally off the charts” this summer while the global sea was “once again at a new record.”

The same data center predicted 2023 will also be the hottest year on record overall. As of now, it is right behind 2016 for temperature records. August of this year, meanwhile, was estimated to be around 1.5 C warmer than pre-industrial levels.

The sizzling weather is undoubtedly a result of human-caused climate change, which has been pushing global temperatures, and weather patterns, to new extremes; however, the arrival of the natural climate phenomenon known as El Niño has exacerbated the temperatures this year.

The heat waves in 2016, for example, can be partially tied to a strong El Niño event as well. But this year’s is expected to be even stronger, and may endure into the first months of 2024.

“The La Niña was suppressing the warming we’d otherwise experience in greenhouse gasses globally, and now this is enhancing it,” said climate scientist Zeke Hausfather. “Flipping from one to the other, it leads to these fairly large jumps in temperature.”

“There’s a lot of reason to suspect that the El Niño conditions that are currently growing are more likely to impact 2024 temperatures overall than this year.”

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Norwegian Man Makes ‘Gold Find of the Century’ Using Metal Detector

Archaeologists have indicated that the new discovery is Norway’s “gold find of the century.”

A Norwegian man who was out walking on doctors’ advice stumbled upon a rare discovery: a cache consisting of nine gold medallions and gold pearls that once made up a costly necklace, as well as three gold rings.

The medallions—or bracteates—date back to about 500 AD (during a time known as Norway’s Migration Period), and weigh a little more than 100 grams. The item also features a type of horse from Norse mythology, a rare design according to archaeologists.

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"At first I thought it was chocolate coins or Captain Sabertooth coins," said 51-year-old Erlend Bore, who made the discovery. "It was totally unreal."
Bore, who said he had longed to be an archaeologist as a child, unearthed the treasure on the southern island of Rennesøy, near Stavanger, in August after he first bought the metal detector. In fact, he was about to head home for the day after searching when his metal detector alerted him to the discovery.
According to professor Sigmund Oehrl, from the Archaeological Museum at the University of Stavanger, the symbols on the bracteates feature the Norse god Odin healing his son's sick horse. On the recently discovered coins, the horse's tongue hangs limply out of its mouth while "its slumped posture and twisted legs show that it is injured."
Oehrl adds that just 1,000 golden bracteates have so far been found across the three Scandinavian countries of Norway, Sweden and Denmark.
"The horse symbol represented illness and distress, but at the same time hope for healing and new life," he added.
To find this much gold at the same time is highly unusual, said Ole Madsen, director at the same museum where the items will be preserved and displayed. Madsen has emphasized that Bore's discovery is the "gold find of the century in Norway."
Norwegian law dictates that objects from before 1537 and coins older than 1650 are considered state property, and that those items must be handed over. However, both Bore and the landowner will receive a reward, of which the amount has yet to be determined.

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Democracy for Me But Not for Thee - Cartoon

At least 13 presidential libraries, going as far back as former US President Herbert Hoover, issued a joint statement on Thursday warning about the state of US democracy, marking a first-ever.
Officials from the libraries said the joint statement was a "reminder" that called for a recommitment to the country's founding principles, including the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, as well as a call to respecting a diversity of beliefs and backgrounds.
"Americans have a strong interest in supporting democratic movements and respect for human rights around the world because free societies elsewhere contribute to our own security and prosperity here at home," the statement says in part.
The statement has been co-signed by several libraries for past presidents including: Barack Obama, George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George & Barbara Bush, Ronald Reagan, Jimmy Carter, Gerald Ford, Richard Nixon, Lyndon B. Johnson, John F. Kennedy, Harry Truman, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Herbert Hoover. The library for Donald J. Trump was not included in the signatures as his library does yet formally exist.
While the statement did not explicitly name Trump as a culprit for the dire situation of American democracy, a recent poll revealed 48% of Republicans lack confidence in the Justice

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Department. The poll was conducted at the beginning of August, before Trump and 18 of his allies were indicted in Georgia over attempts to overturn the 2020 election results.
“I think there’s great concern about the state of our democracy at this time,” said Mark Updegrove, CEO of the LBJ Foundation, which supports the Johnson Presidential Library in Austin, Texas. “We don’t have to go much farther than January 6 to realize that we are in a perilous state.”

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Canada, Singapore to Renew Cybersecurity MoU - Trudeau's Office

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - Canada and Singapore agreed to renew the bilateral cybersecurity memorandum of understanding, the Canadian prime minister's office (PMO) said on Friday.
Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is on an Indo-Pacific tour, which kicked off with an ASEAN summit in Jakarta. From September 7-8, Trudeau is visiting Singapore to meet with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and business stakeholders. He will then participate in the G20 summit in New Delhi.
"In Singapore, the Prime Minister announced the upcoming renewal of the Canada-Singapore Cybersecurity Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that commits both nations to increasing our co-operation on information sharing, skills development, and innovation and capacity building in our cybersecurity systems. This agreement will help us coordinate internationally to combat ongoing threats to security, including in the Indo-Pacific region," the PMO said in a statement.
In addition, Trudeau and Lee agreed to launch negotiations on a General Security of Information Agreement that would deepen defense cooperation and allow Canadian industries to participate in classified contracts with Singapore.
The two countries will also establish a Canada-Singapore Youth Mobility Arrangement to simplify work and travel for young professionals from both countries.
Trudeau and Lee welcomed discussions on advancing cooperation partnerships in science, technology, and innovation partnership.
"As we expand our partnership, Canada will continue to work with Singapore to innovate, to add value to the global economy, to protect and uphold international peace and security, and to create opportunities for all our peoples," the statement added.
Trudeau will depart for New Delhi, India to participate in the G20 summit from September 9-10.

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Guterres 'Not Very Hopeful' of Peace Solution Soon in Russia-Ukraine Conflict

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UNITED NATIONS, September 8 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Friday he is "not very hopeful" that the Russia-Ukraine conflict will reach a peace solution soon.
"I am not very hopeful that we will have a peace solution in the immediate future," Guterres said in New Delhi ahead of the G20 summit. "I believe the two parties are still decided to move on with a conflict."

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Over 20 Churches, 200 Homes Vandalized in Anti-Christian Violence in Pakistan - Priest

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - More than 20 Christian churches and over 200 homes belonging to members of the Christian community were vandalized in Pakistan during a recent wave of violence, Joseph Farooq, the sole priest of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) in Pakistan, told Sputnik.
"Twenty-one churches and 200 homes of Christians were vandalized," Farooq said, adding that several hundred copies of the Bible were also destroyed.
The violence erupted in mid-August in the city of Jaranwala. The priest pointed out that some people falsely accused local Christians of tearing pages from the Quran and writing derogatory words about the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad.
"They made such announcements in the mosque, and the mob gathered against Christians, they destroyed their houses, churches, and copies of the Holy Bible," the priest said.
The ROCOR mission in Pakistan is located 16 kilometers away from Jaranwala and was not directly affected by the violence. However, many parishioners have relatives and friends from other Christian denominations whose homes were demolished and sheltered them.
"People told me that they [the mob] stole valuable things from their houses. They damaged properties, all property, everything was damaged, everything. People are crying, people are weeping," Father Joseph, who visited the victims just after the tragedy, said.
Farooq noted that it is a big blow to the Christian community because most of them are poor and have to work for their Muslim landlords. "Their bread is very hard, they are working very hard for their daily bread," he said.
The priest emphasized that the initial investigation revealed that the violence was well coordinated. Extremists started by making announcements in mosques, gathering a crowd and inciting the mob to violence against the Christians, he explained.
However, there was a reason for hope even amid the nightmare the community found itself in, as many Muslims moved to protect innocent Christians and provide them with shelter, Farooq said.
"In Pakistan, the majority of Muslims – they are good, they are kind, and they are friendly with Christians. Only a small minority follow radical Islam," he said.
When asked about the reasons for such violence, the priest mentioned a lack of education and aggressiveness caused by the ongoing economic crisis in Pakistan.
"People are not educated. They listen to their clerics in the mosques. They misuse their minds," the priest said, adding that it is important to teach children about tolerance, patience, and the

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true teachings of Islam, which is that all humans are equal and remain people of God regardless of faith.

Father Joseph said that police have already arrested about 100 people responsible for the violence. The Christian community has requested that the Pakistani authorities ensure the protection of religious minorities, he added.

"Those responsible for the violence must be arrested and punished according to the law. Otherwise, these incidents will happen again," the priest warned.

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Russia Can Help Orthodox Mission in Pakistan by Sending Missionaries - Priest

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - Russia can help the Christian Orthodox mission in Pakistan by sending missionaries and asking the country's government to protect Christians from extremist attacks, Joseph Farooq, the sole priest of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) in Pakistan, told Sputnik.

"The Russians can help us by sending missionaries to Pakistan and supporting us financially. At the government level, they can speak to the Pakistani authorities and ask them to protect and help Christians in Pakistan," Farooq said. "Our government has land, so they can provide it to the Orthodox community to build an Orthodox church there."

ROCOR started a mission in Pakistan in 2011, and Farooq is its only priest, serving the entire country in addition to the Moscow Patriarchate clergy being present there separately as well. The mission consists of four stations in different regions of Pakistan, necessitating Farooq to travel frequently to serve the believers there.

Farooq explained that the mission needs support to build an administrative office and a bigger church, which would enable it to attract more people to worship.

The priest said in addition to his church services duties, the faithful ask him at times to help obtain birth certificates or to accompany those who are ill in hospitals or even those facing legal problems in civil court.

"I am also trying to help them if they want to find a job or get admission to the school or college," Farooq said.

Religious services, however, remain the central element of the mission's work and the clergy serve Vespers every Saturday evening and the Divine Liturgy on Sunday mornings as well as the holy fests, he said.

Farooq pointed out that the mission has also established a Sunday school for children and an adult center for women.

"Every evening, they learn how to write, read, they learn Orthodox prayers. They also receive some skills in embroidery and stitching," he said, adding that the center is open to all women regardless of whether they are of other Christian denominations.

Farooq emphasized that an increasing number of people in Pakistan are deciding to become Orthodox Christians because they find true spirituality in ROCOR.

"They feel how we love the Most Holy Theotokos, how we celebrate fests, how we venerate

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icons. They found true worship, no mixture," he said.

Farooq noted that Pakistan is a predominantly Islamic country, but Christianity has deep roots there and many trace its history to the preaching of the Holy Apostles.

However, Farooq acknowledged that becoming a Christian is difficult in Pakistan because people do not know the church traditions and history, and sometimes approach the church based on stereotypes.

"In general, people in Pakistan respect the Holy Orthodoxy, they love our traditions and appreciate our veneration of the holy icons and how we serve the Divine Liturgy. All these things touch their hearts," he said.

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Biden Extends National Emergencies Over 9/11 Terror Attacks

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden extended multiple national emergencies with respect to the terrorist attacks on September 11 for another year.

"I am continuing for 1 year the national emergency previously declared on September 14, 2001, in Proclamation 7463, with respect to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the continuing and immediate threat of further attacks on the United States," Biden said in one of the notices on Thursday.

He also extended the national emergency with respect to persons who commit, threaten to commit, or support terrorism for another year.

The president said the crisis constituted by the terror attacks that led to the declaration of a national emergency on September 23, 2001, has not been resolved, and continues to pose an "unusual and extraordinary threat" to US national security.

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Yale Agrees to Change Race-Based Admissions Policies in Settlement With Activists - Filing

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA) has withdrawn its legal action against Yale University after the school agreed to implement reforms including no longer using race as a factor in financial aid decisions.

According to the Joint Stipulation of Voluntary Dismissal filed on Thursday, Yale has committed to implementing a series of adjustments to its admissions procedures.

Initially filed in February 2021, the lawsuit by SFFA was temporarily halted while the Supreme Court considered similar challenges against Harvard University and the University of North Carolina.

The Supreme Court, in June 2023, determined that these institutions had engaged in discriminatory practices. These practices favored applicants from underrepresented

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backgrounds but harmed white and Asian American applicants. The basis for these discriminatory practices was the utilization of race-conscious admissions policies.

The Joint Stipulation, filed in the United States District Court of Connecticut, outlines the modifications Yale has agreed to implement.

Yale University has undertaken significant steps, including revising its training materials to prohibit the consideration of race in admissions decisions explicitly, as said in the statement.

Additionally, they have introduced technological safeguards to ensure that access to race-related data is restricted during the admissions review process, according to the statement.

The university has also committed to abstaining from generating reports on the racial composition of admitted students during admissions reviews.

Furthermore, as mentioned in the statement, it has been affirmed that race will no longer be a determining factor in financial aid calculations.

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RPT - Biden's Anti-Mining Policies Leave US Critical Mineral Supply Chains at Risk - Congressman

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - US supply chains for minerals critical to national security remain vulnerable, and reliant on China and other foreign sources, due to the Biden administration's lack of support for domestic mining initiatives, Congressman Paul Gosar told Sputnik.

The United States is over 50% import reliant on 43 of 50 minerals deemed critical to security, eleven of which China is the primary import source, according to the US Geological Survey (USGS). Chinese export controls on gallium and germanium, metals the US needs to make semiconductors and renewable energy technologies, went into effect on August 1. The measures, showcasing China's critical mineral dominance, were imposed in retaliation to Biden administration restrictions on Chinese technology.

"Today, the United States relies on China to meet most of our demand for minerals. That's because China controls nearly two-thirds of the world's critical mineral supply," Gosar said. "Despite growing demand for minerals and America's dangerous reliance on China for minerals, the anti-mining actions by the Biden administration hurt America's economy, threaten our national security, and push mineral production abroad."

Gosar said President Joe Biden is "hellbent" on stopping mining in the United States. Several of the Biden administration's policies hinder domestic critical mineral production, limiting progress towards independence and risking supply chain disruptions, he added.

The United States needs to focus on bolstering domestic production of critical minerals given the global challenges US supply chains face, including scarcity, sourcing and the threat posed by international monopolies, Gosar said.

Gosar explained that Projects like Twin Metals in Minnesota and Resolution Copper in Arizona can provide desperately needed minerals for the United States, including copper, nickel, cobalt and tellurium, which are essential for electric vehicles, solar panels and many defense-related

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technologies.

The Biden administration canceled federal mineral leases for Twin Metals in Minnesota, which is a subsidiary of Chilean mining company Antofagasta. The Biden administration also halted the finalization of the environmental impact statement for Arizona's Resolution Copper project, which is stuck in court challenges launched by tribal groups.

"For too long, American mining has been lapped by foreign countries," Gosar said. "If these critical minerals are not produced domestically, they will be mined in other nations, some openly hostile to the United States and others that have notoriously poor human rights and environmental standards."

Several solutions exist to end US dependence on foreign supply of critical minerals including improving the mine permitting process, he added.

China recognizes the importance of critical minerals and is acting to protect its economy and military while the United States, under Biden, is not doing enough, Gosar said.

Gosar said China's restrictions on US access to germanium and gallium only worsen the national security threat created by Biden's push to eliminate domestic mineral production.

The Biden administration said it has attempted to secure US supply chains of key green metals, including by investing nearly $3 billion to boost production of materials required to meet the growing demand for electric vehicles and energy storage.

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Sullivan Says Doesn't Plan to Talk With Chinese Officials About Plans to Ban iPhones

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said he does not intend to consult with Chinese officials about reports China plans to ban the use of iPhones among government officials.

"I don't have plans to have a near term conversation with the PRC [People's Republic of China] on this, and we've only seen the report, so we'll see how things play out in China," Sullivan said on Thursday.

The Wall Street Journal reported earlier in the day that China plans to broaden a ban on the use of iPhones to government-backed agencies and state companies.

The order also prohibits officials from bringing these devices to the office. Staff were informed of the new policy in workplace chat groups or meetings in recent weeks. Similar instructions were given to employees at some central government regulators, the report said.

The campaign aims to cut the country's reliance on overseas technology and boost cybersecurity. The move also mirrors similar bans taken in the United States against China's telecom giant Huawei Technologies and video-sharing app TikTok, according to the report.

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Biden-Modi Meeting to Make Progress on GE Jet Engine Issue, MQ-9 Drone Sale - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a bilateral meeting on Friday in New Delhi will make progress on issues related to the joint production of General Electric (GE) jet engines, India's procurement of MQ-9 Reaper drones, among other matters, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said during a press gaggle aboard Air Force One.

"We will see meaningful progress on a number of issues including the GE jet engine issue, the MQ-9 Reapers... on a collaboration on critical and emerging technologies and progress also in the civil nuclear area as well," Sullivan said on Thursday.

Sullivan added that Biden during his meeting with Modi will also speak on critical fundamental values that the United States represents.

Earlier this week, the White House said Biden would have a bilateral meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday prior to the two-day G20 summit to mostly discuss matters on economic cooperation and multilateral investment opportunities among G20 countries.

Biden will have additional bilateral meetings on the margins of the G20 summit in New Delhi, Sullivan said, adding that he cannot confirm any details at the moment.

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Sullivan Says US Senate Showed Strong Bipartisan Support on More Ukraine Aid

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, after meeting with senate leadership, said they showed strong bipartisan support for providing additional assistance to Ukraine.

"I think I'm on solid ground saying that there was strong bipartisan commitment on the Senate side to support Ukraine and with respect to the House [of Representatives], I'll have a chance to go see both Republicans and Democrats in the House next week," Sullivan said at a gaggle on Thursday.

Earlier on Thursday, Sullivan met with senate leadership to discuss President Joe Biden's request of some $24 billion in additional assistance for Ukraine for next year.

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Musk Says Declined to Activate Starlink to Enable Ukrainian Attack on Russian Naval Fleet

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - Billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk, who runs SpaceX and its Starlink satellite internet service, said in a statement that he declined to activate the network over Crimea to enable a Ukrainian strike on the Russian naval fleet.

"The Starlink regions in question were not activated. SpaceX did not deactivate anything," Musk

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said on Thursday, via social media platform X (formerly known as Twitter).
Earlier on Thursday, US media reported that Musk turned off Starlink services near Crimea to disrupt a Ukrainian drone attack on the Russian naval fleet.
There was an "emergency request" from government authorities to activate Starlink all the way to Sevastopol, Musk said. SpaceX would have been complicit in a major act of war and conflict escalation had it complied with the request, Musk added.

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NASA Admits Costs for Space Launch System for Artemis Missions 'Unaffordable' - GAO

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - NASA admits that the Space Launch System (SLS), which is designed to serve as the rocket for the Artemis missions to the moon, is unaffordable at current cost levels, the US Government Accountability Office (GAO) said in a report.
"Senior NASA officials told GAO that at current cost levels, the SLS program is unaffordable," the report said on Thursday.
The SLS is the world's most powerful rocket created to enable NASA to return humans to the moon.
NASA should act on prior GAO recommendations to improve transparency and monitoring of the SLS program, including its long-term costs and affordability, the report said.
The report further said the original SLS cost baselines applied to the launch of the Artemis I test flight, but lacks baseline costs for future Artemis missions, which makes tracking future production costs for upcoming missions harder for NASA and Congress to monitor.
NASA plans to spend tens of billions of dollars to produce more SLS rockets, especially stronger versions, for use on Artemis missions into the 2030s, the report added.
NASA requested $11.2 billion in the fiscal year 2024 president's budget request to fund the program through fiscal year 2028, in addition to the $11.8 billion spent developing the initial capability.

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Lee Becomes Major Category 4 Hurricane, May Intensify Further - NHC

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - Lee has intensified into a major Category 4 hurricane and may potentially become a dangerous Category 5 one by Friday, the National Hurricane Center (NHC) said.
"Lee has become a major hurricane and further strengthening is expected, with its core moving north of the northern Leeward Islands, the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico this weekend and early next week," the NHC said in a statement on Thursday.
Residents of the northern Leeward Islands should prepare for hazardous surf and

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life-threatening rip currents beginning on Friday, the statement said.
The adverse conditions are expected to extend westward, affecting Puerto Rico, Hispaniola, Turks and Caicos and the Bahamas throughout the weekend, the statement added.

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Accusations China Using AI to Interfere in US Politics 'Malicious Speculation' - Embassy

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - Western claims that China is using artificial intelligence to create fake social media accounts to interfere in American politics are full of prejudice and malicious speculation, Chinese Embassy spokesperson Liu Pengyu said in a statement to Sputnik.
According to media reports, citing Microsoft, China is alleged to have established a network of fake social media accounts with the aim to influence US voters by using artificial intelligence.
"In recent years, some western media and think tanks have accused China of using artificial intelligence to create fake social media accounts to interfere the US' politics," Liu said on Thursday. "Such remarks are full of prejudice and malicious speculation against China, which China firmly opposes."
Liu added that China actively advocates for using artificial intelligence in a safe, reliable and controlled manner.
The social media platforms apparently affected by the Chinese operation appear to be Facebook and X, formerly known as Twitter, media reported.

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US Extends National Emergency With Respect to Foreign Meddling in Elections - Biden

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden sent a letter to Congress notifying it that he has extended the national emergency on the threat of foreign interference in the US elections.
"National emergency with respect to the threat of foreign interference in or undermining public confidence in United States elections declared in Executive Order 13848 of September 12, 2018, is to continue in effect beyond September 12, 2023," Biden said in the letter on Thursday.
Biden pointed out in the letter that there has been no evidence of a foreign power altering the outcomes or vote counts in any US election.
However, digital devices and internet-based communications have significant vulnerabilities and have magnified the scope and intensity of the threat of foreign interference, which is the reason to continue extending the national emergency, Biden said.

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US Awards $474.5Mln Contract to Boeing for F-15 Japan Super Interceptor Program - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - The US government has awarded Boeing a $474.5 million contract to add survivability systems for the F-15 Japan Super Interceptor Program, the Defense Department said.

"The Boeing Co., St. Louis, Missouri, was awarded an undefinitized contract action with a total not-to-exceed value of $474,500,000 for the F-15 Japan Super Interceptor Program. This contract provides for the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) requirement to add the Eagle Passive Warning Survivability System for the Japan Air Self Defense Force," the Defense Department said in a statement on Thursday.

Work for the contract will take place in St. Louis and will be completed by December 31, 2028, the statement added.

The US Air Force Life Cycle Management Center will serve as the contracting activity, according to the statement.

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Blinken, Romanian Foreign Minister Discuss Ukraine, Rotation of US F-16 Jets - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke by telephone with Romanian Foreign Minister Luminita Odobescu and discussed the conflict in Ukraine and the rotation of US F-16 fighter jets in the country, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said.

"Secretary Blinken and Foreign Minister Odobescu discussed Romania's investigation of the drone debris found in Romania, close to the border with Ukraine," Miller said in a statement on Thursday.

Blinken and Odobescu also discussed increasing cooperation to preserve airspace security, the statement said.

In addition, the two diplomats discussed the upcoming rotation of additional US F-16 fighter jets to bolster NATO's air policing mission in Romania, the statement added.

Earlier on Thursday, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said Romania has informed the alliance about its investigation into debris from a possible drone found on its soil, but NATO has no information indicating any intentional attack by Russia.

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US, Allies Map Out $280Bln in Frozen Russian Assets, Most of Them Held in EU - Treasury

(Adds details, background in paras 4-8)

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - The United States and their allies have mapped out approximately $280 billion worth of frozen Russian assets held in their jurisdictions, most of which are in the European Union, the US Department of Treasury said in a statement.

"The total value of assets in this [REPO] mapping exercise is estimated at around $280 billion, the majority of which is held in the European Union," the Treasury said on Thursday.

The statement was made following a deputies meeting of the Russian Elites, Proxies, and Oligarchs (REPO) Task Force.

Accordingly, REPO member states which include the US and several of its allies discussed sanctions enforcement initiatives, stressing the necessity of countering alleged proxy networks.

Moreover, the Task Force is set to further refine their asset mapping process notably by capitalizing on new reporting requirements and by bolstering data sharing arrangements, the statement added.

Other items of discussion included efforts to hinder sanction evasion and the acquisition by Russian entities of critical dual use technologies which could be fueling the conflict in Ukraine.

Following the G7 Leaders commitment earlier in May, REPO carried out an initial mapping of Russian assets held in their respective jurisdictions, pledging to keep them frozen until Moscow disbursed financial reparations to Ukraine.

The Kremlin has repeatedly accused Western countries of trying to steal Russian gold and foreign exchange reserves for reparations and pledged to do everything possible to return the seized assets.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) -

RUSSIA'S KLYUSHIN SENTENED IN US

* A US court on Thursday sentenced Russian businessman Vladislav Klyushin to nine years in prison on hack-and-trade charges, a Sputnik correspondent reported.
* Klyushin's defense will appeal the sentence delivered, defense lawyer Maksim Nemtsev said.
* The defense is unaware if is being considered for a potential prisoner swap, Nemtsev said.

WESTERN SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

* The United States and their allies have mapped out approximately $280 billion worth of frozen Russian assets held in their jurisdictions, most of which are in the European Union, the US Treasury Department said on Thursday.
* The US Treasury Department said it is imposing sanctions on 11 Russian nationals in a cyber-related action.

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* The seizure of the property of Russian citizens by the United States is illegal, Moscow perceives it absolutely negatively, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.
* The United States warns that anybody who supports the elections organized by Russia in the former Ukrainian territories may be sanctioned, US Secretary of State said Anthony Blinken said.

UKRAINIAN ATTACKS ON RUSSIA
* Russian air defense systems intercepted two Ukrainian aircraft-type drones over Bryansk, one of them was destroyed in the air, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Thursday.
* The Ukrainian military attacked an industrial facility in Russia's Bryansk Region using drones and an administrative building caught fire, Governor Alexander Bogomaz said.
* The Ukrainian military shelled the village of Sluchovsk in Russia's Bryansk Region with over more 30 Grad rockets but there are no reports of casualties, Bogomaz said.
* A drone was intercepted and neutralized in Russia's Volgograd Region, there were no casualties after the incident, Governor Andrey Bocharov said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE
* The United States aims to have depleted uranium munitions arrive in Ukraine in time or when the Abrams tanks arrive there, Defense Department Deputy Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said on Thursday.
* The United States announced a new $600 million security package for Ukraine to include munitions in addition to equipment augmenting air defenses, Singh said.
* Ukraine has lost more than 320 military both killed and wounded in the Donetsk direction over the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
* The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) has uncovered a supply channel of spare parts of combat aircraft from Russia to Europe, including for the needs of Ukrainian military, the FSB press office said.

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Ex-Trump Adviser Peter Navarro Convicted of Contempt of Congress - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - Peter Navarro, one of ex-president Donald Trump's former advisers, has been convicted of contempt of Congress for refusing to comply with a subpoena regarding a probe into the events on the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, NBC reported on Thursday.
Navarro defied the subpoena, arguing that he was protected by executive privilege to keep communications with Trump confidential, the report said.
After a four-hour deliberation, a jury found Navarro guilty of two counts of contempt for refusing to testify before the US House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6 Attack and turn over subpoenaed documents, the report said.

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The sentencing is scheduled for January 12, the report added.

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US Warns Support for Russian Elections in Ex-Ukraine Territories May Result in Sanctions

WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - The United States warns that anybody who supports the elections organized by Russia in the former Ukrainian territories may be sanctioned, US Secretary of State said on Thursday.

"[W]e remind any individuals who may support Russia's sham elections in Ukraine, including by acting as so-called 'international observers,' that they may be subject to sanctions and visa restrictions," Blinken said in a statement.

The United States will never recognize Russia's claims to any of what it has called Ukraine's sovereign territory, the statement said.

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Biden Seeking Infrastructure Deal With India, Saudi Arabia, UAE at G20 Summit - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden is seeking to finalize an infrastructure deal with India, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as part of the upcoming Group of Twenty (G20) summit in New Delhi, Axios reported on Thursday.

The infrastructure deal between the four countries would connect Gulf and Arab nations via a network of railways, the report said, citing two sources with knowledge of the agreement. The deal would also connect India to the region through shipping lanes, the report said.

The tentative agreement is part of an effort by the United States to counter China's Belt and Road initiative as its influence expands in the Middle East, the report added.

Biden is set to travel to India for the G20 summit this weekend, as well as a bilateral meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday.

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Oil Prices Close Down 1st Time in 10 Days as Traders Ponder Rally's Direction

NEW YORK, September 7 (Sputnik) - Oil prices closed down for the first time in ten days as traders pondered the direction of the market after a 10% rally in that span.

Both the New York-traded crude and the global oil benchmark Brent lost close to 1% on Thursday despite the Energy Information Administration (EIA) reporting a fourth straight weekly

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decline in US crude stockpiles.

"Oil prices are finally in overbought territory," Phil Flynn, an analyst at Chicago's Price Futures Group, said. Flynn acknowledged the technical pressure brought on to the two crude benchmarks by a near 30% rally since mid-June.

New York-traded West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude settled Thursday's trade at $86.87 per barrel, down 67 cents, or 0.8%, on the day. It hit a 10-month peak of $88.09 on Wednesday. Despite the slide in the latest session, WTI was still up 1.5% on the week, extending last week's 7.2% gain.

The London-based Brent crude settled below the key $90 per barrel mark for the first time in three days as it finished Thursday's official trade at $89.22, down 68 cents, or 0.8%. Week to date, the global oil benchmark remained up 1.5%.

Flynn said Thursday's correction could help attract more buying at the lower end regardless of how modest it was.

But Sunil Kumar Dixit, a commodities chartist at SKCharting.com, said WTI might need to drop beneath $86 to spur demand at the lower end.

"The bullish rally appears to be in the process of momentum distribution following double top on day time frame, though it's initial extent may be limited to $84.90 & $84.40," Dixit said.

"Downward consolidation requires a clear break below the previous day's low of $85.90, followed by a day close below the zone," Dixit added.

The Washington-based EIA reported that US crude stockpiles dropped by 6.307 million barrels during the week ended September 1, extending the 10.584 million-barrel draw in the prior week to August 25.

Refiners had doubled down on fuel processing in the four weeks running up to the holiday, maintaining an extraordinarily high run rate of more than 93% of capacity. Fuel consumption is expected to moderate after the Labor Day holiday on September 4.

On the fuels side, the EIA reported a drawdown as well in gasoline inventories for last week and a build in distillates.

On the gasoline side, the EIA reported a decline of 2.666M barrels, after a slide of 0.214 million barrels last week. Analysts had forecast a decline of 0.950 million for last week. Automotive fuel gasoline is the No. 1 US fuel product.

With distillates, there was a build of 0.679 million that added to the prior week's gain of 1.235 million. Analysts had anticipated a build of 0.239 million for last week. Distillates are refined into heating oil, diesel for trucks, buses, trains and ships and fuel for jets.

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US Condemns Lukashenko's Passport Ban - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - The US State Department on Wednesday expressed concern over Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's decision to stop providing overseas passport services.

"The Lukashenko regime's decision... harms thousands of Belarusians living abroad and is the

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latest in a long line of cynical rejections by the regime of its basic obligations to its people," Spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a statement.

The decision not to renew passports for Belarusians overseas, Miller added, could have practical consequences for affected individuals and their families. It may affect their ability to obtain citizenship and travel documents for themselves and their children, he said.

Miller also said it may influence their capacity to manage property and assets in Belarus from abroad.

The US, European allies and Belarusian opposition continue to discuss ways to address concerns related to Belarus, the spokesperson said.

The executive order, issued by Lukashenko on September 4, came into force on Thursday. The new rule will not apply to passport requests already submitted, according to the decree.

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US Actor Danny Masterson Gets Prison Sentence of 30 Years to Life for Rape - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - Former "That '70s Show" actor Danny Masterson received a prison sentence of 30 years to life for raping two women more than two decades ago at his Hollywood Hills residence, NBC News reported on Thursday.

Masterson received the sentence after being convicted on two of the three rape charges against him during his retrial in Los Angeles, when he chose not to testify, the report said.

The actor maintained his denial of the allegations against him throughout the trial, the report said.

The charges against Masterson pertained to incidents dating back to the period between 2001 and 2003 and involved three women identified as Jane Doe #1, Jane Doe #2 and Jane Doe #3, the report said.

The three accusers were former members of the Church of Scientology with which Masterson is still affiliated, the report said.

During the retrial, Judge Charlaine Olmedo of the Los Angeles County Superior Court emphasized that Scientology was not on trial, the report added.

However, the judge allowed witnesses to testify about the alleged pressure by Church of Scientology officials to dissuade them from reporting the rape allegations to the police, according to the report.

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US, Allies Map Out $280Bln in Frozen Russian Assets, Most of Them Held in EU – Treasury

WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) – The United States and their allies have mapped out approximately $280 billion worth of frozen Russian assets held in their jurisdictions, most of

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which are in the European Union, the US Department of Treasury said on Thursday.
"The total value of assets in this [REPO] mapping exercise is estimated at around $280 billion, the majority of which is held in the European Union," the Treasury said in a statement.
The statement was made following a deputies meeting of the Russian Elites, Proxies, and Oligarchs (REPO) Task Force.

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US Repositioning Troops in Niger From One Airbase to Another - Pentagon

(Adds details in paras 4-6, background in para 7)
WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - The United States is repositioning troops and assets in Niger from one airbase to another, but its general force posture in the region has not changed, Pentagon Deputy Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said on Thursday.
"What we're doing right now is the department is repositioning some of our personnel and some of our assets from airbase in Niamey to airbase in Agadez," Singh said during a press briefing.
Singh said the move is simply precautionary.
According to Singh, "non-essential" personnel and contractors left US military bases in Niger in July. The US Defense Department has some 1,100 personnel in Niger at the moment, she added.
The United States hopes the situation on the ground gets resolved diplomatically, Singh said, emphasizing that there's no immediate threat to US personnel or violence on the ground.
Moreover, Singh said US forces are not conducting joint operations or training with Niger's military at this time.
The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has warned of the potential for military intervention in Niger if President Mohamed Bazoum is not released and returned to power. ECOWAS does not expect to reach an agreement with the Nigerien coup leaders in the coming days, according to French media reports.

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White House Says Biden Tested Negative for COVID Ahead of Departure to India for G20

WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden tested negative for COVID-19 ahead of his trip to India for a bilateral meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and a Group of Twenty (G20) summit, the White House said on Thursday.
Biden again tested negative for the virus, after testing negative on Wednesday and Tuesday as well, the White House said in a pool report.
Earlier this week, First Lady Jill Biden was infected with COVID-19, prompting the president to adhere to additional testing and masking protocols ahead of his international travel.

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Biden is set to meet with Modi on Friday for bilateral talks before attending the G20 summit over the weekend in New Delhi.

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US Defense Chief Discusses Security Cooperation With Japanese, ROK Counterparts - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin held a call with his Japanese and South Korean counterparts to discuss security cooperation and a recent space launch by North Korea, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said on Thursday.

"Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III held a trilateral phone call today with Japan Minister of Defense Hamada Yasukazu and Republic of Korea (ROK) Minister of National Defense Lee Jong-Sup. The Secretary affirmed the ironclad US extended deterrence commitment to Japan and the Republic of Korea," Ryder said in a statement.

The officials highlighted ongoing efforts by the US, ROK and Japan to operationalize early-warning missile data information sharing this year, the statement said. The officials also discussed the development of a multi-year exercise plan and enhancing coordination to address regional security challenges, the statement said.

In addition, the officials discussed and condemned an attempted space launch by North Korea using ballistic missile technology on August 24, the statement said. The test violated multiple UN Security Council resolutions, the statement said.

The three officials committed to meeting again to advance defense and security cooperation following a trilateral summit at Camp David last month, the statement said.

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Pentagon Confirms Scrapping Hypersonic Missile Test Launch After Pre-Flight Checks

WASHINTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - The US Army had planned to conduct what would have been the first hypersonic missile flight test, but the test launch was canceled after pre-flight checks were conducted, Pentagon spokesperson Sabrina Singh said on Thursday.

"The department planned to conduct a flight test in Florida to inform the department's hypersonic technology development but as a result of pre-flight checks, the test did not occur," Singh said during a press briefing.

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"What we're doing right now is the department is repositioning some of our personnel and some of our assets from airbase in Niamey to airbase in Agadez," Singh said during a press briefing.

Singh said the move is simply precautionary.

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US Aims to Have Depleted Uranium Rounds in Ukraine When Abrams Tanks Arrive - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - The United States aims to have depleted uranium munitions arrive in Ukraine in time or when the Abrams tanks arrive there, Defense Department Deputy Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said on Thursday.

"The goal is to have the rounds there, specifically in time or when the tanks are [there]," Singh said during a press briefing.

The United States expects the first Abrams tanks to arrive in Ukraine later in September.

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Pentagon Unveils New $600Mln Ukraine Package, Includes Equipment to Augment Air Defenses

WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - The United States announced a new $600 million security package for Ukraine to include munitions in addition to equipment augmenting air defenses, Pentagon spokesperson Sabrina Singh said on Thursday.

"Today, the Department announced a new security assistance package through the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative to support Ukraine's battlefield needs. This $600 million package includes equipment to augment Ukraine's air defenses, artillery munitions and other capabilities," Singh said during a press briefing.

The capabilities in the new announcement include equipment to sustain and integrate Ukraine's air defense systems, additional ammunition for HIMARS, 105mm artillery rounds, electronic warfare and counter-electronic warfare equipment, demolition munitions for obstacle clearing, mine clearing equipment, as well as support and equipment for training, maintenance, and sustainment activities, the Pentagon said in a press release.

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

Military Official Confirms US Repositioning Troops, Withdrawing Some Personnel in Niger

WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - A US military official on Thursday confirmed to Sputnik that the United States is repositioning its forces in Niger and withdrawing non-essential personnel from the country.

"I can confirm," the US military official said when asked to confirm reports that that the United States is repositioning its forces within Niger and withdrawing non-essential personnel.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has warned of the potential for military intervention in Niger if President Mohamed Bazoum is not released and returned to power by the country's coup leaders.

ECOWAS said it does not expect to reach an agreement with the Nigerien coup leaders in the coming days, according to French media reports.

The United States had 1,100 troops deployed to Niger prior to the recent departures.

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Trump May Attempt to Have Georgia Election Case Moved to Federal Court - Filing

WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump may attempt to have his Georgia election interference case moved to a federal court, a court document revealed on Thursday.

"President Trump hereby notifies the Court that he may seek removal of his prosecution to federal court," Trump's attorney Steven Sadow said in a court filing.

According to Sadow, Trump must file a "notice of removal" within 30 days of his arraignment on August 31.

Trump is facing criminal charges in Georgia for his alleged role in efforts to overturn the 2020 election results. Trump pleaded not guilty to his charges.

A date has not yet been set for Trump's trial, but prosecutors are hoping to have it begin on October 23. According to prosecutors, Trump's case could take up to four months and include some 150 witnesses.

Trump has several legal cases against him amid his re-election bid in the 2024 US presidential election.

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Severity, Unpredictability of Wildfires in Canada Call for Bolstered Capacities - Minister

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WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - The severity and unpredictability of the ongoing wildfires in Canada require bolstering firefighting readiness in the country, the Minister of Emergency Preparedness Harjit Sajjan said on Thursday.

"We have some of the best wildfire fighting capabilities in the world right here in Canada, but the increased severity and unpredictability of wildfires due to climate change requires us to bolster our preparedness even further," Sajjan said during a national wildfire update.

Sajjan pursued saying that even though there are positive signs of major wildfires being contained, hot and dry conditions will continue to pose significant risks in several parts of the country including in areas where fires are considered to be under control.

Canada's Minister of Natural Resources Jonathan Wilkinson further added that despite cooler temperatures and a decrease in lightning activity expected for Fall, current warm temperatures could contribute to the persistence of ongoing wildfires, and the ignition of new ones.

Wilkinson said that wildfire activity may continue through late Autumn and even Winter.

As of today, 1052 wildfires were burning across the country of whom 791 were deemed out of control, Sajjan said, further noting that over 16.5 million hectares were lost to the 6174 recorded fires.

Canada's 2023 wildfire season has been declared as the worst on record in the country's history.

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Harris Says Ready to Take Charge 'If Necessary' But Believes Biden 'Going to Be Fine'

WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Kamala Harris in an interview with CBS News expressed unwavering confidence in securing a second term for herself and President Joe Biden, but also affirmed her readiness to assume the role of commander-in-chief "if necessary."

"We will win re-election. There's too much at stake, and the American people know it," Harris said.

She also indicated her readiness to assume the role of commander-in-chief "if necessary."

Nonetheless, Harris believes that President Biden "is going to be fine." She emphasized their close collaboration, saying, "I work with Joe Biden every day," and praised the "transformative" accomplishments achieved under his leadership.

Harris shared her perspective with CBS News while in Jakarta, Indonesia, marking her third trip to Southeast Asia as vice president.

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Another Inmate Dies in Georgia's Fulton County Jail - Sheriff's Office

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WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - Another inmate at the Fulton County Jail in Georgia was found dead in his cell and authorities will launch an investigation into the incident, the Fulton County's Sheriff's Office said in a statement.

"Shawndre Delmore, age 24, was discovered unresponsive during a routine check by a detention officer at 8:19 p.m. on Thursday, August 31, 2023," the Sheriff's office said Wednesday. "Jail staff performed lifesaving measures in attempts to revive Delmore until advanced medical staff arrived. Delmore was taken to Grady Memorial Hospital where he remained unresponsive. Delmore died on Sunday, September 3, 2023."

The incident reportedly marks the 10th inmate death this year at the Fulton County Jail, where former President Donald Trump and 18 others surrendered last month in the Georgia election case.

“The Atlanta Police Department will conduct a death investigation, and the Fulton County Medical Examiner's Office will conduct an autopsy," the statement said.

The Atlanta Police Department arrested Delmore on April 1 for burglary in the second degree and willful obstruction of law enforcement officers, after which he was booked at the Fulton County jail, the statement said.

Delmore was held on a $2,500 bond for the burglary charge and a signature bond for the obstruction charge.

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US Repositioning Troops in Niger, Withdrawing Non-Essential Personnel - Reports

(Adds background in paras 6-8)

WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - The United States is repositioning its military forces in Niger and withdrawing some non-essential personnel following a coup in the African country in July, Reuters reported on Thursday.

The Defense Department is taking such actions out of an abundance of caution, the report said, citing US officials.

The officials declined to provide details on the troop movements and the evacuation effort, the report said.

The United States had 1,100 troops deployed to Niger prior to the recent departures.

Washington's actions represent the first major movement of US troops in Niger since the coup in which President Mohamed Bazoum was ousted and detained by Gen. Abdourahmane Tchiani.

Last month, acting US Deputy Secretary of State Victoria Nuland traveled to Niger for talks with the rebel-appointed chief of staff, Moussa Salaou Barmou. Nuland characterized the talks as "frank and difficult."

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has warned of the potential for military intervention in Niger if Bazoum is not released and returned to power. ECOWAS does not expect to reach an agreement with the Nigerien coup leaders in the coming days, according

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to French media reports.

Earlier on Thursday, the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service said the US is also considering physically eliminating Nigerien coup leaders in an effort to stop the rise of Africa as one of the centers of a multipolar world.

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Justice Hogue Appointed to Assess Depth of Russian, Chinese Meddling in Canada - Minister

WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - Quebec Court of Appeal Justice Marie-Josee Hogue has been appointed to lead the public inquiry on foreign interference in Canada and will be tasked with assessing the extent of alleged meddling by China, Russia and other states and non-state actors in Canada’s democratic institutions, Public Safety Minister Dominic Leblanc said on Thursday.

Earlier in the day, media reported that the Canadian government had designated Hogue to oversee the public inquiry on the matter. The decision comes after months of negotiations between the government and the opposition parties following the resignation of former Governor General David Johnston as Special Rapporteur on Foreign Interference.

"The government of Canada with the support of all recognized parties in the House of Commons will appoint the Honorable Marie-Josee Hogue, a judge of the Court of Appeal of Quebec to lead a public inquiry established under the Inquiries Act. Justice Hogue will be tasked with examining and assessing interference by China, Russia and other foreign states and non-state actors," Leblanc said.

Hogue is set to deliver a first interim report by February 29, 2024, and a definitive assessment

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by December 31 of the same year.

Leblanc said the inquiry will also look into the potential impacts the alleged interference may have caused to the integrity of Canada's federal and district level elections of 2019 and 2021.

The minister said Hogue will have full access to all cabinet documents and information relating to foreign interference relevant for the investigation and she will be tasked with assessing the sharing of data with senior decision makers, including elected officials.

Leblanc pointed out that Hogue had agreed to the terms of reference of the investigation, including with the deadlines set for her reports, and he is confident in her ability to deliver the reports on time.

"I assume that in the previous commission, if in her judgment she wants to ask for an extension of time that would be very much up to her," Leblanc said.

Hogue will have discretionary power as to what matters will be discussed on camera and what will be public hearings, and that she will be free to follow the evidence as she pleases, he added.

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IMF, World Bank Chiefs Call for Boosting Cooperation on Climate Change, Digital Transition

WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - The heads of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank on Thursday called to enhance cooperation on climate change, high debt vulnerabilities, and digital transition.

"Today, we need to enhance further our collaboration, in particular with regards to climate change, renewed high debt vulnerabilities, and digital transition," IMF Managing Director Krisatlina Georgieva and World Bank President Ajay Banga said in a joint statement.

They said the world confronts significant economic challenges, the existential threat of climate change as well as a digital transition. In these circumstances, well-designed and appropriately sequenced policies are critical to help accelerate growth, according to the statement.

Georgieva and Banga expressed confidence that the Bretton Woods institutions play a crucial role in helping countries tackle these challenges, which are "too great" to solve without support from other states and international organizations.

"The Bretton Woods institutions were established in 1944 to help rebuild a world economy devastated by global depression and war. As the world economy has changed over the past 80 years, the Bank and the Fund have continued to adapt and worked closely together to serve their members' needs," they said.

The two leaders expressed commitment to improve cooperation to deliver tangible benefits for member countries and their people.

Georgieva and Banga promised to work with shareholders and partners to mobilize the substantial resources needed to meet the complex challenges. They also urged the world to come together to address global challenges, adding that the IMF and World Bank are committed to helping advance this common effort.

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US Careful About Ukraine Aid, Aware of Responsibility for Any Escalation - UK Official

WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - The United States has been cautious about the military equipment it supplies to Ukraine because it is aware it will bear the greatest responsibility for any escalation in the conflict with Russia, UK Defense Staff Chief Adm. Tony Radakin said on Thursday.

"I think we all have that responsibility, but America bears that responsibility even more strongly than the rest of us because if it was to escalate, if it was to fracture some of the international unity, the country that then has to help pick up the pieces in a much stronger way than any other is the United States of America," Radakin said.

Radakin made the comment during a discussion with the Washington-based Hudson Institute think tank.

Radakin explained that the NATO allies have to balance providing support to Ukraine, imposing a cost on Russia, maintaining international unity and avoiding escalation.

The United States has been "magnificent" at managing those parameters, he said.

Ukraine has suffered very significant losses in the conflict with Russia, especially during its so-called counteroffensive in the past three months, which has resulted in tens of thousands of soldiers killed and wounded as well as hundreds of units of military equipment destroyed, according to reports.

US President Joe Biden is scheduled to depart for India on Thursday evening to attend the G20 Summit and participate in discussions on the conflict in Ukraine.

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Russia Requests Open UNSC Meeting on Anniversary of Nord Stream Attack - Polyanskiy

UNITED NATIONS, September 7 (Sputnik) - Russia has requested a United Nations Security Council meeting on the bombing of the Nord Stream pipelines on September 26 to mark the anniversary of the attack, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Thursday.

“We asked for an open meeting of the UN Security Council on September 26 - the anniversary of the Nord Stream bombing,” Polyanskiy said in a post on his Telegram page.

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Russia's Klyushin Sentenced to 9 Years in US Prison on Hack-and-Trade Charges

(Updates with more details in paras 7, 9-17)

BOSTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - A US court on Thursday sentenced Russian businessman Vladislav Klyushin to nine years in prison on hack-and-trade charges, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

The verdict was announced by US District Court Judge Patti Saris. Klyushin did not address the court.

The defense sought a three year sentence to include time served in Switzerland and in the United States. US prosecutors asked that Klyshin be sentenced to 14 years in prison.

Saris said a three-year sentence would minimize the seriousness of the crimes Klyushin committed.

However, Saris did mention various mitigating factors, including that Klyushin is a first time offender and that he has participated in charities and helped individual neighbors.

The court therefore sentenced Klyushin to nine years in prison with no supervised release. Klyushin will be deported once released from prison.

The judge also allowed for forfeiture totaling $34,600,000. Meanwhile, the decision on restitution will be deferred until December 5.

The defense and prosecution have until mid-October to file their positions.

Klyushin’s lawyer Maksim Nemtsev told reporters that the prosecution is seeking $8 million in restitution, while the defense insists on zero restitution.

Nemtsev expressed hope that an agreement will be reached "somewhere in the middle." Should an agreement not be reached, a hearing will be held on December 5, he said.

The lawyer also said that Klyushin will likely be held in a low security prison in New York.

During the hearing, Klyushin was dressed casually, wearing a white T-shirt, grey pants and sneakers. Prior to the hearing, the authorities removed his handcuffs. He seemed to be in a good mood, chatting and laughing with the translator.

Nemtsev said that Klyushin is positive, optimistic, remains in good spirits and also is in good health.

Klyushin was convicted by a federal jury in February on charges of conspiracy, wire fraud and securities fraud. He was found guilty by a jury in Boston, Massachusetts, on charges of conspiring to obtain unauthorized access to computers, wire fraud and securities fraud in connection to a $90 million scheme.

Klyushin was charged together with four other Russian nationals for crimes in connection with a global hacking and trading scheme that allegedly netted the defendant $82 million.

Federal prosecutors accused the defendants of hacking the computer networks of two US service providers used by publicly traded companies to make quarterly and annual filings during the period between January 2018 and September 2020.

Klyushin owns the media monitoring and cybersecurity services company M13. He was arrested in Switzerland in March of 2021 and extradited to the United States later that year.

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Geo-Fragmentation Threatens 'Very Bad' Outcome for Global Economy - US Treasury Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - Geopolitical fragmentation, which divides countries into different groups, could lead the global economy to a poor macroeconomic outcome, US Treasury Under Secretary for International Affairs Jay Shambaugh said on Thursday.

"Geo-fragmentation and dividing the world into two groups... I do not see as a direction that we in the US government are trying to drive," Shambaugh said at the Center for Global Development. "That would be a very bad outcome and one that would have macroeconomic outcomes."

However, Shambaugh called on to understand the difference between diversification and de-fragmentation. He noted that the US now sees "a lot more" diversification in global trade.

Shambaugh also said the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has warned about slowing down of economic activity due to fragmentation.

IMF First Deputy Managing Director Gita Gopinath warned in August that foreign direct investment fragmentation would worsen the situation, and developing countries would face the most serious consequences of that situation. She called on states to enhance resilience to geo-economic fragmentation through diversification and reforms.

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Declaration Submitted by Syria on Chemical at Barzeh 'Incomplete' - UN Official

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 7 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is of the opinion that the report submitted by Syria on an allegedly detected chemical at the Barzeh facilities cannot be considered "accurate and complete," UN Under-Secretary-General of Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakatmitsu said on Thursday.

"Considering the identified gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies that remain unresolved at this time, the OPCW [Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons] Technical Secretariat assesses that the declaration submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic still cannot be considered accurate and complete in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention," Nakamitsu said.

Nakamitsu made the comment during a UN Security Council meeting on the situation in the Middle East.

The United Nations and OPCW have requested that Syria provide information or an explanation to close the issue concerning the detected scheduled chemical at the Barzeh facilities in November 2020.

The OPCW Technical Secretariat works on verifying that Syria has fulfilled its declared obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Nakamitsu said the United Nations regrets that Syria has not yet provided the needed information.

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Defense Says Unaware If Klyushin Being Considered for US-Russia Prisoner Swap

WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - The defense is unaware if Russian businessman Vladislav Klyushin, who was sentenced to nine years in US prison, is being considered for a potential prisoner swap, lawyer Maksim Nemtsev said Thursday.

Earlier in the day, a US court sentenced Klyushin to nine years. Klyushin was also ordered to forfeit $34,065,419 and pay restitution in an amount to be determined at a later date. The defense intends to appeal the verdict.

"No," Nemtsev said, when asked if he has heard that his client might be on a list of prisoner swap candidates.

"What I know is just what I read in the media, and mostly it's The Wall Street Journal who's concerned obviously about their employee and who's publishing news articles that he's a potential candidate ... But I don't know anything more than that," the lawyer added.

When asked if Klyushin would be a good candidate, he replied: "Potentially, he would be."

Nemtsev, however, said he does not know "if everyone sees him as equal to anybody in Russia" for a prisoner swap.

The lawyer added he himself is unlikely to be involved in any potential swap deal.

He also said his client remains positive and optimistic and is in good spirits.

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US House Speaker McCarty Arrives in Japan for G7 Speakers' Summit - Statement

WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy arrived in Japan to participate in the Group of Seven (G7) Speakers' Meeting and is scheduled to deliver a keynote speech, McCarthy's office said on Thursday.

"Today, Speaker Kevin McCarthy arrived in Japan to represent the United States in the 21st annual G7 Speakers' Meeting. During the summit, Speaker McCarthy will deliver a keynote address to promote American energy as the practical solution to a stronger economy, cleaner environment, and safer world," the McCarthy's office said in a statement.

McCarthy's message will focus on promoting energy independence separate from Russia, China and other adversaries, the statement said.

US energy, particularly natural gas, remains the foundation for energy security in the "free world," the statement added.

McCarthy also held bilateral meetings with foreign parliamentary leaders including Canadian House of Commons Speaker Anthony Rota, Chairman of the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada Ruslan Stefanchuk and President of the German Bundestag Barbel Bas, according to the statement.

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Russia's Klyushin Sentenced to 9 Years in US Prison on Hack-and-Trade Charges

(Adds details in para 7)

BOSTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - A US court on Thursday sentenced Russian businessman Vladislav Klyushin to nine years in prison on hack-and-trade charges, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

The verdict was announced by US District Court Judge Patti B. Saris. Klyushin did not address the court.

The defense sought a 36-month sentence to include time served in Switzerland and the United States. US prosecutors asked for 14 years in prison.

The judge said that the 3-year sentence would minimize the seriousness of the crimes he committed, citing their sophisticated geography.

She did however also mention mitigating factors including that he is a first time offender and that he has participated in charities and helped individual neighbors.

The court thus sentenced Klyushin to nine years in prison with no supervised release. Klyushin will be deported once released from prison.

Klyushin was also ordered to forfeit $34,065,419.

Decision on restitution will be deferred until December 5, 2023.

The defense and prosecution should file their positions by mid-October.

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Biden Nominates Michael Whitaker to Head Federal Aviation Administration - White House

WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden has nominated Michael Whitaker to serve as administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the White House said on Thursday.

Whitaker served as FAA deputy administrator from 2013-2016 and currently works as COO of Supernal, a Hyundai Motor Group company designing an electric advanced air mobility vehicle, the White House said in a press release.

Prior to his roles at Supernal and the FAA, Whitaker was CEO at InterGlobe Enterprises, recognized as India's largest travel conglomerate and operator of the highly successful airline IndiGo, the release said.

Whitaker began his more than three-decade aviation career as a litigator, then as assistant general counsel of international and regulatory affairs at Trans World Airlines (TWA), the release added.

Whitaker also serves on the board of the Flight Safety Foundation, a nonprofit organization that

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promotes aviation safety globally, according to the release.

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(Adds details in paras 6-8)
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Defense Says Will Appeal Verdict After Klyushin Sentenced to 9 Years in US Prison

WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - Russian businessman Vladislav Klyushin's defense will appeal his nine-year sentence delivered by a US court, lawyer Maksim Nemtsev said Thursday.
"We will appeal," Nemtsev told reporters.
The lawyer said the defense will aim to reverse the sentence and conviction in their appeal.
They will also press a venue issue in the appeal, he added.

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US Says Ukraine Situation 'Not Getting Better,' Must Keep Pressure on Russia to Pull Out

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UNITED NATIONS, Sept 7 (Sputnik) - The situation in Ukraine is "not getting better" and the solution is to keep the pressure on Russia to withdraw its troops, US Ambassador and Alternative Representative for Special Political Affairs to the United Nations Robert Wood said on Thursday.

"The situation in Ukraine is bad. It is not getting better. So we just have to keep the pressure on the Russians to pull the troops out of Ukraine," Wood said.

Ukraine has suffered very significant losses, especially during its so-called counteroffensive in the past three months, which has resulted in tens of thousands of soldiers killed and wounded as well as hundreds of units of military equipment destroyed, according to reports.

Over the past 24 hours, the Ukrainian military lost more than 320 soldiers, both killed and wounded, in the Donetsk area, according to the Russian Defense Ministry.

US President Joe Biden is scheduled to depart for India on Thursday evening to attend the G20 Summit and participate in discussions on the conflict in Ukraine.

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Honda Says Will Start Using North American Charging Standard for Electric Vehicles in 2025

WASHINGTON September 7 (Sputnik) - Japanese automobile manufacturer Honda Motor Company said on Thursday that it will adopt the North American Charging Standard (NACS) in its North American electric vehicles (EV) starting in 2025, following adoption of the NACS by several other EV manufacturers.

“In 2025, Honda is planning to launch a new EV model in North America equipped with a NACS port. From that point forward, Honda will continue adopting NACS standards for its models,” Honda said in a statement.

EV models sold before 2025 will come with a Combined Charging System port that is compatible with NACS through an adaptor, the statement added.

Honda agreed to adopt the NACS to enable its customers to use Tesla Supercharger stations, which will “significantly enhance” charging convenience, the statement said.

In July, Honda and six other global automakers agreed to create a new North American EV charging network of at least 30,000 chargers. The first stations are set to open in the United States in summer 2024, and later in Canada.

Other automobile manufacturers including Nissan, General Motors and Ford have also announced plans to adopt the NACS for their EV models in the coming years.

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She still mentioned mitigating factor including that he is the first time offender and that he has participated in charities and helped individual neighbors.

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Klyushin's Lawyer Asks for 36-Month Sentence Including Time Served in Switzerland, US

BOSTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - Russian businessman Vladislav Klyushin's lawyer asked for a 36-month sentence for his client during a sentencing hearing on Thursday to include time served in Switzerland and the United States, a Sputnik correspondent reported from the courtroom.

The lawyer said his client did not deserve 14 years in prison, a "draconian" sentence being sought by US prosecutors.

Klyushin was arrested in Switzerland in March 2021 and extradited to the United States later that year.

In February this year, the Russian national was convicted by a federal jury on charges of conspiracy to obtain unauthorized access to computers, wire fraud and securities fraud. He pleaded not guilty.

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US Energy Department Says Applying AI Technology Now, Developing Further for Future

WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Energy (DOE) is currently applying artificial intelligence (AI) technology to its research and is developing it further for future use, Deputy Secretary of Energy David Turk said on Thursday.

"It is particularly important to underscore that DOE advances in AI are not just in the realm of the future; DOE is currently leveraging in real-time our core strengths in AI applications and leading high-performance computing systems to deliver across our energy, security, and science mission," Turk said in testimony to the US Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

Turk said the department is using AI to conduct complex analysis and forecasting to help plan energy investments.

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The department also developed AI-enabled microprocessor cards that can protect the electric grid by detecting gunshots near infrastructure, Turk said.

In addition, the department is also utilizing AI to bolster nuclear security and nonproliferation, including by using the technology to discover new materials and analyze adversaries' understanding of nuclear threat devices, he said.

Turk pointed out that the Biden administration is addressing the risks that AI presents to security, democracy, economy as well as civil and human rights.

The administration is partnering with allies and the private sector to ensure AI technology is underpinned by democratic principles and values, he added.

The Senate panel also heard from Rick Stevens, Associate Laboratory Director for Computing, Environment, and Life Sciences at Argonne National Laboratory, who said AI technology will "completely transform" science and society.

"AI is in the same class of transformative technologies as electricity and computers. Both were revolutionary, although they weren't necessarily recognized as such at the beginning. And the beginning is where we are with AI today," Stevens said.

AI coupled with robotics could improve throughput for experimental science by orders of magnitude, Stevens said.

The integration of the two technologies could be used to build so-called science factories to develop drugs and new types of semiconductors, Stevens also said.

Whichever country leads the world in AI will lead the world in innovation, clean energy and global security, Stevens added.

The hearing comes amid an increasing interest by lawmakers, policymakers and the public in AI technology, following its widespread popularization through programs such as OpenAI's ChatGPT.

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Musk Turned Off Starlink Network Near Crimea in 2022 to Thwart Ukraine Attack - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - US tech billionaire Elon Musk ordered his engineers to turn off his company's Starlink satellites near Crimea last year to disrupt a Ukrainian drone attack on the Russian naval fleet, CNN reported on Thursday, citing excerpts from Musk's new biography.

When Ukrainian submarine drones loaded with explosives approached Russian vessels, they "lost connectivity and washed ashore harmlessly," Walter Isaacson wrote in the book titled "Elon Musk."

The businessman feared that Moscow would respond to a "mini-Pearl Harbor" by deploying nuclear weapons, according to the book. His fear was driven by his conversations with senior Russian officials.

Musk also had calls with US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley, and Russian Ambassador to the US Anatoly Antonov to address anxieties from Washington to Moscow, the book said.

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Neither Musk nor SpaceX replied to requests for comment, CNN said.
"Starlink was not meant to be involved in wars. It was so people can watch Netflix and chill and get online for school and do good peaceful things, not drone strikes," the entrepreneur told Isaacson, who has also penned biographies of Steve Jobs and Albert Einstein.
Musk also told Isaacson that he would not turn the satellite network back on for Crimea because Ukraine "is now going too far and inviting strategic defeat," according to the book.

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US Federal Court Vacates Navy Officers' Felony Convictions in 'Fat Leonard' Case - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) – A US federal court has vacated the felony convictions of four Navy officers in the "Fat Leonard" maritime bribery case due to prosecutorial misconduct, The Washington Post reported.
At the officers' sentencing hearing in San Diego on Wednesday, the judge deemed the misconduct "outrageous" and permitted them to plead guilty to a misdemeanor and pay a $100 fine instead.
According to the Navy Times, Assistant US Attorney Peter Ko had asked the judge to vacate the convictions, admitting to "serious issues that affect our ability to go forward" with the previous ruling or a new trial, even though his office did not agree with all of the misconduct allegations.
The officers include former Captains David Newland, James Dolan, and David Lausman and former Commander Mario Herrera, all of whom were convicted of accepting bribes from Malaysian national Leonard Francis, a.k.a. Fat Leonard, and his company Glenn Defense Marine Asia.
Newland, Dolan, and Herrara each pleaded guilty on Wednesday to one count each of disclosing information, and Lausman pleaded guilty to a charge of destruction of government property. The four were each ordered to pay a $100 fine.

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US, UK Announce New Cyber-Related Sanctions Targeting 11 People in Russia – Treasury

(Modifies headline and lede, adds quote and details in para 3-5, background in para 6)
WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - The United States, in a joint action with the United Kingdom, on Thursday announced sanctions on 11 Russian individuals who it says are members of the Russia-based Trickbot cybercrime group.
The designated individuals are Mikhail Chernov, Maksim Galochkin, Maksim Khaliullin, Artem Kurov, Sergey Loguntsov, Alexander Mozhaev, Dmitry Putilin, Maksim Rudenskiy, Mikhail Tsarev, Vadym Valiakhmetov, and Andrey Zhuykov.

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"Today, the United States, in coordination with the United Kingdom, sanctioned eleven individuals who are part of the Russia-based Trickbot cybercrime group. Russia has long been a safe haven for cybercriminals, including the Trickbot group," the US Treasury said in a statement.

The US Department of Justice is concurrently unsealing indictments against nine individuals in connection with the Trickbot malware and Conti ransomware schemes, including seven of the individuals designated today, the statement noted.

The Treasury alleged that the Trickbot group has ties to Russian intelligence services and has targeted the US government and many critical infrastructure and health care providers in the US during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Trickbot, first identified in 2016 by security researchers, was a trojan virus that evolved from the Dyre trojan. It has infected millions of computers worldwide and has become a highly modular malware allowing it to conduct a wide range of malign activities, according to the Treasury.

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US House Speaker Weighs Leaving Ukraine Aid Out of Stopgap Spending Bill - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 7 (Sputnik) - US House leaders headed by Speaker Kevin McCarthy are considering leaving out Ukraine aid from a stopgap spending measure needed to fund the government and avert a government shutdown, Punchbowl News reported on Thursday.

In August, the White House Office sent a supplemental budget request to Congress for $40 billion, including $24 billion in additional assistance for Ukraine, as well as funds for border security, disaster relief and other government spending. Congress must pass a stopgap funding measure, or Continuing Resolution, by September 30 in order to avert a federal government shutdown.

House Republicans want to leave the Ukraine aid out of the supplemental package and instead pass a funding package that includes only disaster relief and enough money to keep the government open until some point in November, according to the report, which cited multiple sources familiar with the matter.

McCarthy wants the Ukraine aid considered separately so that Republicans can demand changes to border policy and an increase in border security funds in exchanged for more funds for Kiev, the report said. The White House's request currently includes only about $4 billion for border-related funding.

The report noted that these developments might lead to a “very big mess,” because the White House and Senate, controlled by the Democrats, are eager to continue supporting Kiev.

These disagreements over funding priorities could lead to significant delays in adopting a stopgap funding bill and eventually to a government shutdown, according to the report.

The report noted that Washington already has spent over $100 billion on the conflict in Ukraine, and a growing number of House Republicans are opposed to providing additional funding.

The US government has shut down 21 times since establishing the federal budget process in

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1976, although many shutdowns have been brief. The longest shutdown, 35 days, occurred under the Trump administration in late 2018 and into early 2019.

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