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9/11/23 Monday

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'Situation Was Horrible': Chilean Activist Says Pinochet's Economic Miracle 'Totally False'

Monday marks 50 years since the Chilean military, led by Augusto Pinochet, overthrew democratically-elected President Salvador Allende, destroying the democratic socialist experiment and ushering in a dictatorship that killed thousands and disappeared thousands more.

Allende had been elected three years earlier in a stunning victory, but even before the votes were cast, the US was already trying to sabotage Allende's rise. A week after the victory, then-US President Richard Nixon ordered CIA Director Richard Helms to "make the economy scream" in Chile to "prevent Allende from coming to power or to unseat him," and a campaign of sabotage and assassinations was unleashed, aided by powerful US companies with assets in Chile who opposed the socialist government in Santiago.

A march to commemorate Allende, who was killed by soldiers storming the presidential palace during the coup, and other victims of Pinochet, was greeted with police violence in Santiago on Sunday. Video posted on social media even showed tear gas being deployed at the Santiago General Cemetery to disperse the marchers, who could be seen darting between graves to escape. The cemetery is the final resting place for more than two million individuals, including Allende.

Patricio Zamorano, director of the Council on Hemispheric Affairs, told Radio Sputnik on Monday that 50 years later, "the police in Chile still have a very strongly conservative vibe."

"They have very low support by the population. There is a huge movement to eliminate the police, very similar to what you see in the US, because the police in Chile were responsible for many abuses of human rights, and they continued that repression in the 1990s, 2000s," Zamorano said. "Torture, rape, corruption. So it's not a surprise they overreacted and started gassing protesters trying to honor Salvador Allende."

Zamorano noted that official investigations in recent decades have revealed what both Santiago and Washington had long denied: that the US government played a pivotal role in supporting Pinochet's preparations for the coup and weakening Allende's government.

"The participation of the government of the US in the Chilean coup d'etat is absolutely documented, and the fact that the CIA was working very avidly before Salvador Allende was elected. There are a bunch of declassified documents that prove with absolutely no doubt the illegal and clandestine involvement of … the CIA, President Nixon, with the help and advice of Henry Kissinger, and the whole apparatus of the CIA structure … not to let Chileans elect democratically the socialist Salvador Allende."

"So we know that Salvador Allende was condemned even before he was elected, the US government of Richard Nixon was not going to allow that government to survive, and that's exactly what happened. They did everything they could to stop the election first, and later on they financed, they helped the military personnel to organize a coup d'etat."

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Still, polls show wide support for Pinochet today. One by Al Jazeera found that 36% of Chileans see the September 11, 1973, coup as "justifiable," while another poll found that 40% see it as incorrect to call Pinochet a "dictator."

A narrative popular in the West at the time and even today is that despite his murderous repression of the left and of critics, Pinochet's free market reforms, implemented at the behest of a group of right-wing US economists called the "Chicago Boys" because they followed University of Chicago economist Milton Friedman, had nonetheless yielded huge economic benefits.

Zamorano noted it is always important to ask which people benefited and which did not.

"The narrative of the 'Chilean Miracle' is false. It is true that in very specific microeconomic parameters, Chile did relatively well in comparison to the rest of the continent, especially under the crisis of the 1980s - we have to remember there was a huge recession during those years that started in the US and the whole oil industry. But the situation in the country in terms of unemployment was critical, the poverty levels increased."

"And the other side of that narrative is the fact that Chile is one of the most unequal countries in the world - in the top three - which means the rich people got so much richer and the poor people got so much poorer under the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet."

Zamorano added that he lived in Chile as a child in the 1980s and that "the situation was horrible. We had hunger, chronic lack of employment, the situation was extremely bad."

"We have to remember also that the Chicago Boys' neoliberal policies were implemented without control in Chile, because the dictatorship controlled everything. We didn't have an independent supreme court system, we didn't have Congress, so the Pinochet regime implemented all these aggressive neoliberal policies without any restrictions of a real democracy. So, Pinochet privatized the health system, the education system, the pension system. It meant that a huge percentage of the population that didn't have enough income had a horrible life in Chile."

"We are still victims of that situation," he added. "That is why we had this whole constitutional movement to create a new constitution to replace the constitution approved by the dictatorship."

Zamorano noted that today, Chile remains "a center-right country. We still have people who support Pinochet." He noted that across Latin America, between 20% and 30% of the population in polls say they are willing to tolerate a right-wing government if it leads to improvements in their quality of life, according to polls.

He added it was "exactly the same" as how so many Americans support former US President Donald Trump.

Indeed, Zamorano noted that while there was an immense "historic" struggle to win the right to write a new constitution and that leftists make up nearly 80% of the deputies sent to the constituent assembly to draft it, the population nonetheless rejected the proposed constitution in a referendum.

"The fact that it was rejected meant that the right-wing sectors of Chile have more leverage," Zamorano said. In new elections this past May, the far-right Republican Party of José Antonio Kast, the son of a Nazi German military officer who has cast himself as Pinochet's successor, won the largest political bloc in the constituent assembly.

"The left had to learn a lot of lessons from that process," Zamorano noted.

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Zamorano said it was “absolutely not true” that the US’ days of orchestrating coups in Latin America have long since passed, pointing to the ongoing blockade of Cuba.
“At the United Nations every single year, the majority of the planet - except a couple of countries, mostly the US and Israel - always condemns the embargo against Cuba. They are absolutely doing something against international law, these unilateral sanctions that don’t make any sense.” He also recalled the ongoing US sanctions against Venezuela and Nicaragua as well.
“So yeah, times have changed, but the illegal practices of the US government are still exactly the same,” Zamorano said. “So I would say that the Chilean coup d’etat was just an example of a whole historic set of policies that are attacking any government that the United States perceives as too progressive in a way that is going to create a situation where the US has less influence in those countries.”

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Marching One By One: First Red Fire Ant Nests in Europe Found in Sicily

A highly invasive ant species notorious in the Americas for their persistent swarms and stinging bites, red fire ants have finally been detected in Europe. Scientists say they knew that in our increasingly globalized world, it would happen sooner or later, but they’re fighting back tooth and nail anyway.
Several red fire ant colonies have been found recently in northern Sicily, and a study published Monday in in Current Biology explains the extent of their spread and how they likely established themselves on a new continent.
“S. invicta is one of the worst invasive species. It can spread alarmingly quickly,” lead study author Mattia Menchetti, a researcher at the Institute of Evolutionary Biology in Spain, told US media.
"Finding this species in Italy was a big surprise, but we knew this day would come," he added.
According to their report, 88 nests have already been found spread across 5 hectares (12.4 acres) in the Syracuse suburbs, on Sicily's southeastern corner. DNA analysis revealed the ants had come from either the United States or from China, where they have already established themselves as an invasive species. The ants are originally from South America.
The researchers believe that queen red fire ants must have arrived in the port of Syracuse with other cargo and flown north to establish the nests. While individual red fire ants have been found on cargo at several European ports, they were never queens who established nests.
Ant stings in the Syracuse area have increased since 2019, meaning the ants might have arrived as much as four years earlier, the researchers noted.
Unlike many poisonous ants, which bite with their mandibles before spraying a stinging acid, red fire ants are actually venomous: they bite to get a grip on their prey, then inject it with venom using a stinger on their abdomen. This venom causes extreme pain that victims say is comparable to being burned by fire - hence the name - and can be deadly if the victim is allergic or if they receive many bites.

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While Sicily is an island, the researchers warn that the fire ants have the potential to one day establish themselves across much of southern Europe. An estimated 7% of the continent has a climate amenable to their subtropical tastes, including cities like Barcelona, Rome, London, and Paris.

Roger Vila, the study's lead and the principal investigator at the Institute of Evolutionary Biology's Butterfly Diversity and Evolution Lab, said that "Coordinated efforts for early detection and rapid response in the region are essential to successfully manage this new threat, before it spreads uncontrollably."

Menchetti added that "The public could play a key role in the detection of S invicta, considering that it is frequently found in urban and adjacent areas. It is possible to detect this ant due to its painful stings and the characteristic mounds of their nests, although confirmation of an expert is required."

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Chinese Carrier Shandong Drills South of Taiwan After Slew of US-Led War Games

US and Canadian warships transited the Taiwan Strait on Saturday, part of an ongoing Western effort to flout China's territorial claims to Taiwan and over the waterway separating it from the mainland.

Authorities on Taiwan said on Monday they had dispatched aircraft in response to detecting numerous Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy ships and aircraft off the island's southern coast, including the aircraft carrier Shandong.

The autonomous island's Ministry of Defense said "a naval formation led by the Shandong was spotted passing 60 nautical miles off the southeast tip of Eluanbi and sailing eastward towards the western Pacific for training," according to Taiwanese media. Cape Eluanbi is Taiwan's southernmost tip. It is the closest either Chinese aircraft carrier has come to the island.

The ministry said it "sent warplanes and warships to shadow the PLA movements and deployed missile systems as appropriate responses."

They said they detected a total of 26 PLA aircraft, including the Shandong's J-16 fighters as well as Su-30 fighters and KJ-500 airborne early warning and control aircraft, both of which were launched from shore facilities.

Some of the aircraft were reported to have crossed the median line, which serves as a de facto dividing line and some were said to have ventured into Taiwan's air defense identification zone (ADIZ). Neither concept has legal bearing, and Taiwan's self-imposed ADIZ extends well into Chinese airspace; nonetheless, Chinese military forces crossing either of them is reported in Western press as aggressive acts against Taiwan.

The PLA exercises came after a trio of events in recent days, which Beijing has perceived as aimed at emboldening political factions in Taiwan that support independence and oppose reconciliation with the mainland.

On August 31, the Super Garuda Shield drills began in Indonesia, involving military forces from seven nations that included the United States and Australia. In addition, US and Canadian

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warships joined the Japanese aircraft carrier JS Izumo for the Noble Stingray exercises in the East China Sea.

Afterwards, the Arleigh Burke-class destroyer USS Ralph Johnson and Halifax-class frigate HMCS Ottawa, two ships involved in the Noble Stingray drills, sailed through the Taiwan Strait in what US Indo-Pacific Command called a transit "through a corridor in the strait that is beyond the territorial sea of any coastal state" - a direct challenge to China's claims that the strait is an internal waterway. The PLAN Type 052D destroyer Hohhot trailed the two ships through the strait by about half a mile, warning them about their violation of Chinese waters.

Those, in turn, followed multi-nation war games in the South China Sea and in South Korea last month.

Since shifting its primary strategic focus toward "great power competition" with Russia and China, the US has pushed to unite East Asian nations into anti-China blocs, claiming Beijing poses a threat to their sovereignty that only the US military can oppose. That has included funneling new weapons to the government in Taiwan, which Washington officially doesn't recognize as a country but which nonetheless enjoys de facto US support.

Answering a question last week about speculation about responses by other countries to a "potential war in Taiwan," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told reporters that "Taiwan is part of China" and issues regarding Taiwan are "China's internal affair" in which no other nation has a right to interfere.

"By hyping up the Taiwan question on various occasions, the US has been creating tensions, provoking confrontation, and seeking to turn the Taiwan question into an international issue," Mao said. "This is highly dangerous. The most effective way to safeguard peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait is to adhere to the one-China principle and unequivocally oppose 'Taiwan independence.'"

The government on Taiwan is the last surviving remnant of the Republic of China, which governed all of China from the abdication of the last Chinese emperor in 1912 until the communist victory in 1949, which led to the foundation of the People's Republic of China on the mainland.

Both governments claim to be the legitimate Chinese government, but only a handful of small US-aligned states recognize Taiwan's claims today. The US switched its recognition to Beijing in 1979 and acknowledged Beijing's position under "One-China policy", which stipulates that the PRC is the only legitimate government of China.

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Earthquake Death Toll in Morocco Hits Nearly 3,000 as Rescuers Scramble for Survivors

Morocco has not experienced an earthquake this deadly in more than six decades. In fact, the 1960 Agadir quake that struck at a magnitude of 5.8 claimed upwards of 12,000 lives in the North African nation.

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As an international team of rescuers race to find earthquake survivors in Morocco, the death toll has continued to climb and has since reached 2,862, according to latest figures released by the Moroccan Ministry of the Interior.

At least another 2,562 people have been injured by the deadly earthquake. Insiders have noted that the traditional mud brick homes, which are common in the area, have made it more difficult to find survivors. Search teams from Spain, Britain and Qatar have been aiding Moroccan rescuers.

Many Moroccans spent the second night following the earthquake on the streets, terrified of added damages that could be brought on by aftershocks.

Morocco has been selective about how much help they are to receive in addressing the natural disaster. According to reports, officials indicated they would prefer to maintain control and do not want to run the risk of the search-and-rescue efforts becoming uncoordinated and overwhelmed. "A lack of coordination in such cases would be counterproductive," authorities have said.

A Pentagon spokesperson said that the government of Morocco had not requested assistance from the US Defense Department.

“We do have approximately 100 US forces that are in the country that are there for exercise planning, not related to the current situation. They’re all accounted for,” said Air Force Brig. Gen. Patrick Ryder. “We’ll continue to monitor the situation, but we’ve not been asked to provide any support.”

The first 72 hours following a natural disaster are the most important for rescuing survivors, after which time the chance of saving victims begins to diminish. Authorities have warned the death toll will continue to rise.

Friday’s earthquake had the destructive force of 25 nuclear bombs, according to Dr. Iyd al-Tarazi, a professor at the Department of Seismology and Natural Hazards at the Hashemite University in Jordan, who spoke to Sputnik Arabic.

The 6.9-magnitude earthquake first hit Morocco 77 kilometers (48 miles) southwest of the city of Marrakesh. The earthquake also struck with a depth of about 11 miles, making it a “shallow earthquake,” which tends to be more destructive. According to one Moroccan geological researcher, an earthquake of similar magnitude has not struck the African country since 1755.

Those who have been affected by the earthquake are among Morocco’s poorest, and many of the homes that have been destroyed by the quake lacked electricity or running water, reports detailed. About 25 miles south of Marrakesh, a military field hospital and displacement camp have been set up for civilians in need. Morocco’s civil protection service was also able to erect 30 tents for families at the camp.

“The situation is currently stable,” Yaqoubi Abdelhadi, a doctor at a medical center near the epicenter, said Sunday afternoon, as aid workers from the Red Cross and Red Crescent helped victims into nearby ambulances. “But since people haven’t yet come from remote areas, we are on high alert to brace for what may come.”

According to one report, a man, Afouzar, was at his sister’s home when the earthquake hit. As soon as the ground started to shake he ran home in an attempt to get to his wife and two children. But the moment he reached the door, the home collapsed and from within he could hear his family screaming for help.

With help, Afouzar was able to dig through the rubble and reach his wife; however, his 18-year-old son and 13-year-old daughter died in the collapse. His son’s arms were found

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wrapped around his daughter, as if he was trying to protect her amidst the disaster, a relative said.
“I feel that the world is done for me,” Afouzar said. “I lost my house, I lost my family.”
Marrakesh’s Medina and city walls, historical treasures adored by tourists, were damaged by the earthquake, while the Tinmal Mosque in the High Atlas mountains, were also damaged.
On Sunday, Morocco’s King Mohammed VI declared three days of mourning and ordered mosques nationwide to hold funeral prayers on Sunday following the natural disaster.
He also thanked Spain, Qatar, the United Kingdom and the United Arab Emirates for sending aid to assist with the effects of the earthquake.
"On these basis, the Moroccan authorities responded, at this particular stage, to the offers of support made by friendly countries Spain, Qatar, the United Kingdom and the United Arab Emirates, which suggested mobilizing a group of search and rescue teams," the king said, according to an Interior Ministry statement.
"Moreover, with the progress of interventions, the assessment of potential needs may develop, which may lead to going back to offers of support from other friendly countries, according to the needs of each stage separately."

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US Explorer Rescued After Being Trapped Deep Inside Turkish Cave for Days

The American explorer became stuck in an area in the cave system known as "Camp Hope," after he underwent gastric pain that was followed by vomiting and bleeding. Some 200 individuals took part in the rescue effort.
Mark Dickey, a 40-year-old cave explorer and rescuer, was successfully rescued from a cave in southern Turkiye overnight Tuesday, after spending days trapped more than 3,400 feet (1,036 meters) below ground.
Dickey first became trapped underground in the Morca cave system in Turkiye after he fell ill on September 2, according to the New Jersey Initial Response Team, a group which he leads.
At the time, Dickey was on an international exploration expedition in the Morca cave in Mersin province’s Taurus mountains - Turkiye’s third-deepest cave, hoping to help map a new pathway in the cave system. However, Dickey eventually fell ill from gastrointestinal bleeding, a condition that further worsened and left the explorer unable to move. A doctor later had to administer vials of blood to keep him stabilized.
Dickey was finally rescued from one of the world’s deepest caves after a three-day rescue operation by six teams from the European Cave Rescue Association (ECRA). The operation first came underway on Saturday, and by Tuesday at 12:37 a.m. local time, they were able to bring him to safety by using a stretcher.
During the operation, some parts of Turkiye’s cave had to be blasted away with explosives prior to Dickey's removal in order to ensure a safer passage. He was first moved upward to a 3,400-foot level where he remained for a week, awaiting rescue at the Turkish Caving Federation’s campsite.

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“Mark Dickey was removed from the last exit of the cave at 00:37 and taken to the UMKE tent. Thus, the cave rescue part of the operation has ended successfully. We congratulate all those who have contributed!” Turkish rescuers stated on X, formerly known as Twitter.
The teams had to break up the rescue into different stages along the cave’s depths, with a rescue team from Bulgaria initially helping to bring Dickey from a depth of 3,412 feet to 2,953 feet (1,039 meters to 900 meters).
A Croatian rescue team subsequently brought him to 2,345 feet (714 meters) as an Italian rescue team took over and brought him up to a depth of 1,540 feet (469 meters). Three additional pushes saw a Polish team bring the injured American to a depth of 1,181 feet (359 meters), and a Hungarian team to 590 feet (179 meters), with the final push being made by a Turkish team.
His parents said they were filled with “incredible joy” and were thankful for the support he received in his rescue. "It is, we know, an event that all involved in the extensive rescue effort worked so significantly hard for," they said.
"Mark is strong and we believe in his strength, but fully knew that he was in dire need of tremendous and immediate support. We are so very thankful and grateful that the support he needed was given to him and that the first medical rescue team to arrive reached him when they did."
The cause of Dickey's illness remains unclear, however, he remains in stable condition.

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DraftKings Issues Apology for 9/11-Themed 'Never Forget' Bet Offering

DraftKings Sportsbook is an American fantasy sports contest and sports betting company.
The fantasy sports betting app DraftKings issued an apology on Monday after offering a bet themed after the tragic events on September 11, 2001.
The wager bore the title “Never Forget” and was a parlay bet that the New York Mets, New York Yankees and New York Jets would win their respective games on Monday, which marked the 22nd anniversary of the terrorist attack against the US on September 11, 2001.
A “parlay” bet involves betting on multiple outcomes in one bet. The odds that all three teams would win was set at +651, so a $100 wager would have netted $651 for participants.
After receiving widespread criticism for the 9/11-themed parlay bet, DraftKings issued an apology via X, formerly known as Twitter.
“We sincerely apologize for the featured parlay that was shared briefly in commemoration of 9/11. We respect the significance of this day for our country and especially for the families of those who were directly affected,” the company wrote.
September 11, 2001 is a solemn day for Americans, as it marks the day that 3,000 people died when 19 al-Qaida members hijacked four commercial airline planes, sending two into the Twin Towers and one into the Pentagon. The fourth plane crashed into Somerset County, Pennsylvania after the terrorists failed their initial mission.

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This isn't the first time a company has received backlash for using 9/11 to market their products. In 2016, Walmart apologized for a display of Coca-Cola boxes stacked to resemble the World Trade Center, with a "We Will Never Forget!" banner, in one of their Florida stores.

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Secret Service Agent Raises Questions About JFK 'Magic Bullet' Assassination Theory

Sixty years ago, the one US Secret Service agent was just feet away when he experienced a moment that would forever change history. In the years since, the assassination of US President John F. Kennedy has raised a series of questions and sparked various conspiracies.

A former US Secret Service agent who was present when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas, is now challenging a crucial theory put forward by the Warren Commission, which investigated the 1963 killing of the then-commander-in-chief.

The new revelations are being made on the heels of the agent's upcoming book, "The Final Witness: A Kennedy Secret Service Agent Breaks His Silence After Sixty Years."

Paul Landis, who is 88, was given the task of protecting first lady Jackie Kennedy during the two-day, five-city tour of Texas when he was a young agent; however, he was just feet away when the sound of three gun fires rang out on November 22, 1963.

The first struck Kennedy in his throat, which would have been a serious but non-fatal strike. It was the second, or third shot that struck Kennedy's skull, and resulted in his untimely death. Landis not only remembers hearing these shots, but he also recalled having to duck down so as to avoid being covered in the president's brain tissue.

The "magic bullet" theory was put forward by the Warren Commission a year after the president's death. It is believed that one of the bullets struck and exited the president before injuring then-Texas Governor John Connally Jr. in his back, chest, wrist and thigh. This theory was believed in part because the bullet was found on a stretcher thought to have been used in Connally's aid.

In the chaotic moments following the assassination, Landis says he recalls picking up a near-pristine bullet from the back seat of the presidential limousine, behind where Kennedy had been sitting. He then took the bullet so as to avoid it becoming lost to theft, and took it to the Parkland Memorial Hospital where Kennedy died, and placed it on his stretcher so it could be examined.

"There was nobody there to secure the scene, and that was a big, big bother to me," Landis said. "All the agents that were there were focused on the president."

"This was all going on so quickly. And I was just afraid that — it was a piece of evidence, that I realized right away. Very important. And I didn't want it to disappear or get lost. So it was, 'Paul, you've got to make a decision,' and I grabbed it.'"

At some point, he believes the stretchers were pushed together, and the bullet was somehow shaken onto the stretcher.

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Landis has theorized the bullet struck Kennedy in the back, but that it may have been undercharged and therefore popped back out of his body when he was removed from the limousine.

People have also questioned whether or not Lee Harvey Oswald—who was believed to be a lone actor in the president's assassination—really acted alone. Landis has believed it too, but now he's not so sure.

"At this point, I'm beginning to doubt myself," he said. "Now I begin to wonder."

The former agent has shared his personal accounts with key figures associated with the assassination, including Lewis C. Merletti, a former director of the Secret Service, and James Robenalt, a Cleveland lawyer and author of several books of history.

"If what he says is true, which I tend to believe, it is likely to reopen the question of a second shooter, if not even more," Robenalt said, according to the New York paper that interviewed Landis. "If the bullet we know as the magic or pristine bullet stopped in President Kennedy's back, it means that the central thesis of the Warren Report, the single-bullet theory, is wrong."

Robenalt adds that if Connally was indeed hit by a second bullet, and there is no "magic bullet," then it would not have been possible for Oswald to reload his gun quickly enough to cause those separate injuries.

Merletti, however, is unsure Landis' account. "I don't know if that story's true or not, but I do know that the agents that were there that day, they were tormented for years by what happened," he said.

The report that Landis had filed following the assassination included mistakes, he said. He had been in shock and had not been able to sleep following the incident, and therefore did not think to mention his account of finding the bullet.

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Biden to Address UN General Assembly in New York on September 19 - White House

WASHINGTON, September 12 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will deliver a speech at the UN General Assembly in New York on September 19, Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Tuesday.

Biden will travel to New York City to participate in the 78th session of the UN General Assembly from September 19-20.

"In addition to addressing the General Assembly on September 19, President Biden will meet with world leaders to discuss cooperation in tackling threats to international peace and security, advancing global prosperity, and protecting human rights," Jean-Pierre said in a statement.

The UN General Assembly is one of the most important diplomatic events of the year, giving a venue for leaders from around the world to meet and address global issues. The high-level General Debate will run from September 19-26.

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Biden Admin. Says 8 More Companies Joined Commitments on AI-Related Risks

WASHINGTON, September 12 (Sputnik) - The White House announced on Tuesday that eight additional tech companies have signed up for its principles of responsible AI development.

In July, seven US companies, namely Amazon, Anthropic, Google, Inflection, Microsoft, OpenAI, and Meta (banned in Russia as an extremist organization), voluntarily committed to responsibly manage risks posed by AI.

"The Administration has secured a second round of voluntary commitments from eight companies — Adobe, Cohere, IBM, Nvidia, Palantir, Salesforce, Scale AI, and Stability — that will help drive safe, secure, and trustworthy development of AI technology," the White House said in a new fact sheet.

The Biden administration is also working on an executive order and will further pursue bipartisan legislation to ensure the country leads the way in responsible AI development, the fact sheet added.

The commitments undertaken by the companies include ensuring products are safe before introducing them to the public, prioritizing security and earning the public's trust.

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Liberal Lawmakers Feel Trudeau Neither Listens to Them, Nor Solicits Advice - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 12 (Sputnik) - Several lawmakers from the Liberal Party of Canada headed by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau feel he does not listen to their views, nor requests advice from them, CBC News reported on Tuesday, citing over a dozen members of parliament.

Trudeau and his cabinet will begin a three-day series of meetings starting today in the city of London, Ontario. The talks will mainly focus on affordable housing, improving healthcare and efforts to counter climate change.

Ahead of the Liberals' national caucus, several party lawmakers are hoping that Trudeau and his inner circle will begin paying attention to their concerns before it is too late, the report said.

The lawmakers intend to use the next three days to exhort Trudeau, his office and his ministers to think of and present a new plan with solutions to address top concerns for Canadians, the report said, as many allegedly believe the current communications strategy is ineffective.

In addition to the new plan, other lawmakers say Trudeau must draft an action plan to respond to the opposition Conservative party and its leader Pierre Poilievre, who recently held their policy convention in the city of Quebec.

The lawmakers' remarks come as a recent survey by Abacus Data showed that Liberals are 14 points behind the Conservatives.

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UN Says US Drone Strike in Syria Killed 60-Year-Old Civilian Instead of Al-Qaeda Leader

WASHINGTON, September 12 (Sputnik) – The US military killed an elderly civilian during a drone strike in Syria aimed at eliminating a senior operative of the Al-Qaeda terrorist group (banned in Russia), the United Nations Human Rights Council said on Tuesday.

"On 3 May, a United States Central Command [CENTCOM] drone strike in Qurqaniyah, north of Idlib, killed a 60-year-old civilian. The United States forces initially claimed that they had targeted a senior Al-Qaida member," the council said in a report.

CENTCOM later stated that it had launched a formal investigation after completing a civilian casualty credibility assessment process, the UN report added.

The International Independent Commission found that the casualty was a civilian with no ties to any terrorist group. The commission is awaiting the results of CENTCOM's investigation, according to the report.

"The United States airstrike may constitute a violation of the principle of precautions in attack, either through inadequate planning of the attack or insufficient verification of the intended target during the attack," the report said.

The UN mentioned that "grave violations of human rights and humanitarian law" continued across Syria, regardless of whether the government or non-state actors control the territory.

The humanitarian and economic situation in the country also continued to deteriorate, with over 15 million Syrians in need of humanitarian assistance, the report added.

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US House Speaker McCarthy Set to Launch Impeachment Inquiry on Thursday - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 12 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker McCarthy plans to tell House Republicans on Thursday that an impeachment inquiry is the "next logical step" in their investigation into potential wrongdoing by President Joe Biden and his son Hunter Biden, Punchbowl News reported on Tuesday.

McCarthy will make the announcement during a closed-door meeting of House Republicans on Thursday morning during which key committee chairs will lay out the evidence that they have so far uncovered during their investigations, the report said.

The House Oversight and Judiciary Committees have been leading a probe into potential criminal activity by the Biden family, but until now, they have not uncovered evidence of Joe Biden's direct involvement in any wrongdoing, according to the report.

However, an impeachment inquiry, the first step in an impeachment process, would allow lawmakers to gather more evidence of potential crimes by giving them stronger standing to demand documentation from the Biden family.

McCarthy has previously said that an impeachment inquiry would give Congress heightened power to subpoena Biden for documents like bank and credit card statements that would

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indicate whether he was taking money from foreign sources.
It remains unclear whether House Republicans have the 218 votes needed to authorize an impeachment inquiry, as several moderate Republicans including Reps. Ken Buck and Don Bacon have voiced skepticism about such an effort.

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Journalist Says Court Ordered Canadian Minister to Lift Ban on X Account, Pay $20,000

WASHINGTON, September 12 (Sputnik) - A Canadian federal court ordered Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault to unblock the X (formerly Twitter) account of Rebel News publisher Ezra Levant, the journalist said in a post.
"We just crushed Trudeau's minister Steven Guilbeault in court. He illegally blocked us on Twitter. Today he was ordered to unblock us & pay $20,000 to Rebel News. His lawyers tried to get me to keep the details secret," Levant said on Monday and posted an image of a court order signed by Judge Russel Zinn.
Levant said Guilbeault ordered the government to "block" Ezra on X, so the news outlet could not receive any government news updates from his department's Twitter account.
Levant also said Liberals and Guilbeault do not care about freedom of the press.

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State Dept. Confirms Advanced Prisoner Swap Deal With Iran, $6Bln in Frozen Funds Released

WASHINGTON, September 12 (Sputnik) - A State Department spokesperson confirmed to Sputnik that Secretary of State Antony Blinken last week signed a waiver advancing a prisoner exchange deal with Iran that lifts a hold on $6 billion of Iranian funds.
"As we have said previously, the US has agreed to allow the transfer of funds from South Korea to restricted accounts held in financial institutions in Qatar and the release of five Iranian nationals currently detained in the United States to facilitate the release of five US citizens detained in Iran," the spokesperson said on Monday. "Secretary Blinken signed a waiver last week enabling the effectuation of this transfer. It was a critical step in securing the release of these five US citizens."
The spokesperson emphasized that the $6 billion of Iranian funds can only be used to fund Iran's purchases of humanitarian goods, the deal does not lift any US sanctions on Iran.
According to the State Department, the released funds belong to Iran and do not consist of US taxpayer money.
Iran's funds will be moved to restricted accounts in Qatar and the United States will have oversight as to how and when these funds are used, the spokesperson said.
Regardless of the current prisoner exchange deal, the spokesperson said, the United States

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will continue to work to secure the release of other Americans it considers "unjustly" held by Iran.

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US Sets Annual Record for Billion-Dollar Disasters With Four Months to Go - Climate Agency

WASHINGTON, September 12 (Sputnik) - The United States has experienced a record 23 confirmed weather and climate disaster events that resulted in losses exceeding $1 billion so far in 2023, the National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI) said in a statement.

"In 2023 (as of September 11), there have been 23 confirmed weather/climate disaster events with losses exceeding $1 billion each to affect United States. These events included 2 flooding events, 18 severe storm events, 1 tropical cyclone event, 1 wildfire event, and 1 winter storm event, " the NCEI said on Monday.

The 23 billion-dollar disasters tops the previous high of 22 that was set in 2020, according to NCEI data. However, there are still four months remaining in 2023, and more events that may surpass the $1 billion threshold in damage costs, the NCEI said.

Specifically, in August 2023, Tropical Storm Hilary made history by triggering the issuance of southern California's first-ever tropical storm watch. It unleashed record-breaking rainfall and extensive flooding across portions of the Southwest, said the statement.

Furthermore, throughout the spring to fall of 2023, drought conditions gripped multiple Midwestern states, including Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Wisconsin, Louisiana, and Texas, said the statement.

These conditions significantly impacted the agricultural sector in these states, leading to crop damage due to insufficient rainfall, NCEI said.

However, it is essential to note that these figures are preliminary, as calculations have yet to be finalized, and total costs remain undetermined as of September 11, 2023, according to the statement.

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Webb Telescope Finds Carbon Dioxide, Methane on Planet 120 Light Years Away - NASA

WASHINGTON, September 12 (Sputnik) - The James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) has discovered methane and carbon dioxide molecules on a a world eight times heavier than Earth, and orbiting a star 120 light years away, the US space agency announced in a press release.

"A new investigation with NASA's James Webb Space Telescope into K2-18 b, an exo-planet 8.6 times as massive as Earth, has revealed the presence of carbon-bearing molecules including methane and carbon dioxide," the release said on Monday.

Webb's discovery adds to recent studies suggesting that K2-18 b could be a Hycean exoplanet,

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one which has the potential to possess a hydrogen-rich atmosphere and a water ocean-covered surface, the release said.

K2-18 b orbits the cool dwarf star K2-18 in the habitable zone and lies 120 light-years from Earth in the constellation Leo, the release said.

"Exoplanets such as K2-18 b ... are poorly understood, and the nature of their atmospheres is a matter of active debate among astronomers," the release added.

The suggestion that the sub-Neptune K2-18 b could be a Hycean exoplanet is intriguing, as some astronomers believe that these worlds are promising environments to search for evidence for life on exoplanets, according to the release.

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Vinnik's Trial Date in US Court Preliminary, Can Be Postponed - Lawyer

WASHINGTON, September 12 (Sputnik) - The US court's decision to postpone the trial date for Russian national Alexander Vinnik to September 30, 2024 is preliminary and may be changed, his lawyer Arkady Bukh told Sputnik.

"Actually, the trial date itself often can be adjourned, so it is more of a control date. It can be potentially later if discovery happens to be so substantial that we will not be able to prepare for the appropriate time for the trial," Bukh said on Monday.

US District Judge Susan Illston from the US District Court for the Northern District of California decided on Monday to reschedule the trial date from early 2024 to September 30 of that year.

The lawyer welcomed the judge's decision, explaining that it would give the defense team, which just recently entered the case, additional time to learn all the details.

"Judge also gave an estimated trial length of 14 days, but this is a preliminary estimation, which may be changed," he said.

Bukh noted that the next "control date" in the case would be November 17, 2023, when the next status conference is scheduled.

"Judge will make sure that the discovery being produced in a timely and appropriate manner," he added.

The US government accuses Vinnik of enabling criminal activity through the cryptocurrency exchange BTC-e by obscuring and anonymizing transactions and sources of funds. Vinnik denies the charges against him.

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Biden's Americas Envoy to Travel to Peru to Boost Economic Ties - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 12 (Sputnik) - US Special Presidential Advisor for the Americas, Christopher Dodd, will visit Lima this week to strengthen economic cooperation between the

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United States and Peru, the State Department said in a press release.

"Christopher J. Dodd will travel to Peru from September 12 – 14. His visit will focus on encouraging Peru's full participation in the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity," the release said on Monday.

During his stay in Lima, Dodd is scheduled to engage in discussions with various stakeholders, including officials from the Peruvian government, influential members of Congress, and representatives from the business community, the release said.

These dialogues will focus on reinforcing the existing trade ties that benefit both nations and facilitate economic growth, the release added.

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US Should Banish Oil Firms' Subsidies as They Aren't Producing Enough Crude - Treasury

NEW YORK, September 12 (Sputnik) - The United States should eliminate corporate subsidies for the nation's oil sector as US energy companies had not boosted crude production during the supply crisis of the past year and focused instead on profits, Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo said to the New York Economic Club.

"None of us thinks it makes sense to subsidize energy companies in light of how they're doing in this country," Adeyemo said on Monday. "But there are probably other subsidies and other things we can do to make the budget more efficient."

Adeyemo's remarks came as President Joe Biden's budget called for boosting revenues by eliminating $31 billion in tax preferences and subsidies for oil and gas companies, whom he said had failed to invest in boosting energy production. In exchange, the Biden administration plans to continue offering targeted tax credits for clean-energy investments under the Inflation Reduction Act.

Aside from rewarding industries that help the nation, the administration says removing subsidies for the oil sector would provide its coffers with much-needed revenue.

"We want to be sure we have the money to pay for our priorities," Adeyemo added.

Biden's plans to punish the oil sector in the upcoming budget has, however, run into big challenges in a divided Congress, especially after the White House repeated its criticism of Big Oil for raking in record profits at a time of high consumer energy costs due to Saudi-Russian production cuts.

Oil prices edged lower in Monday's trading although global benchmark Brent remained steadily above the key bullish $90 per barrel mark.

Brent's hold at above $90 comes with less than two weeks left for summer, the season Americans like driving the most. With the fall season of lower oil usage set to begin imminently, crude prices would typically retreat a little, sometimes meaningfully, in the world's largest consuming country.

But that may not happen this time, not with the Saudi obsession of ultimately getting oil to $100 a barrel or beyond. Saudi Arabia, which controls much of the world's oil exports, has been fixated on triple digit pricing since losing that advantage in August 2022, when Brent crude

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hovered above $105.
Key to this is the 1.0-million-barrels-per day in additional cuts, on top of other existing production rationing, that the Saudis have been carrying out since July. By extending this till the year-end - and widening it with the help of Moscow which will cut 300,000 barrels per day of Russian production - the kingdom is hoping to create a different sort of market phenomenon for pricing.

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Trump Files Motion to Disqualify Judge in Capitol Riot Case - Court Document

WASHINGTON, September 12 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump has filed a motion in a Washington, DC court to recuse and disqualify Judge Tanya Chutkan in his January 6 criminal case, court documents showed.
"President Donald J. Trump, through undersigned counsel, respectfully moves to recuse and disqualify the Honorable Tanya S. Chutkan," Trump's attorneys said in the court document on Monday.
The motion cites what Trump alleges is Chutkan's compromised impartiality as cause for recusal.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, September 12 (Sputnik) -

RUSSIA-NORTH KOREA SUMMIT
* Negotiations between Russia and North Korea are planned during the upcoming visit of North Korean President Kim Jong Un to Moscow and the leaders of two countries may also hold a face-to-face meeting if necessary, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Monday.
* Russian President Vladimir Putin and Kim will discuss in Vladivostok issues concerning bilateral relations, Peskov said.
* The United States will closely watch the outcome of the meeting between Putin and Kim, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE
* There have not been any changes in the current US policy with respect to supplying long-range Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS) to Ukraine, but discussions on the issue are still ongoing, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.
* US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin spoke over the telephone with Ukraine’s new Defense

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Minister Rustem Umerov and discussed the agenda for next week's Ukraine Defense Contact Group meeting, the Defense Department said.
* International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Rafael Grossi said he supports contacts with Russia and Ukraine regarding the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant and plans to hold high-level talks in the near future.

BLACK SEA INITIATIVE
* Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Monday that he will continue talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin and will ask him to increase grain supplies to countries in need.
* The European Commission is still discussing whether to extend the ban on Ukrainian grain imports to five EU member states that expires on September 15, European Commission spokeswoman Miriam Garcia Ferrer said.

EU ECONOMIC FORECAST
* The European Commission on Monday lowered the European Union's 2023 economic growth forecast from 1% to 0.8%, while also lowering next year's forecast from 1.7% to 1.4%.

ENERGY MARKETS
* Russian President Vladimir Putin has extended restrictions for Gazprom on gas purchases from its joint venture with Austria's OMV company and Germany's Wintershall for one year, until October 1, 2024.

ELECTIONS IN RUSSIA
* Russia's Central Election Commission (CEC) has started preparations for next year's presidential election, CEC Chairwoman Ella Pamfilova said on Monday.
* The Russian Federation Council's commission on protecting state sovereignty said it had noted attempts by the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Poland and others to discredit the elections in the country.
* The results of gubernatorial and regional parliamentary elections in Russia that were held last week show citizens highly appreciating the work of the regional and local authorities, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.
* Russian President Vladimir Putin has not announced yet if he will run for reelection in 2024, Peskov said.

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Biden Says US Assesses Al-Qaeda Threat in Afghanistan, Pakistan Reached Historic Low

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The US intelligence community recently assessed that the threat from the the al-Qaeda terrorist group (banned in Russia) in Afghanistan and Pakistan reached a historic low, President Joe Biden said on Monday.

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"Today, our intelligence community has recently assessed in a declassified memo that al-Queda threat from Afghanistan and Pakistan has reached a historic low," Biden said during remarks at Anchorage, Alaska.

Biden, in light of the September 11 anniversary, said that although the United States' war in Afghanistan is over, its commitment to prevent another attack on the US mainland or its allies will never rest.

The United States will continue to track terrorist threats in all forms wherever it may be and will continue to disrupt terrorist activity wherever it is found, Biden said.

On August 15, 2021, the Taliban seized Kabul, two decades after being ousted by US-led forces in the wake of the September 11 attacks. The development accelerated the US troop withdrawal, which began in April 2021 and was completed in late August of the same year.

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Russia to Use Veto Power at UNSC to Ensure Adoption of Balanced Resolutions - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, September 12 (Sputnik) - Russia will continue to use its veto power at the UN Security Council (UNSC) to ensure the adoption of balanced and responsible resolutions, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Monday.

Nebenzia made the remarks while addressing the UN General Assembly 3rd plenary meeting, 78th session, convened over its use of veto power to end the extension of the sanctions regimes imposed on Mali.

"Russia will continue to adhere to its approach at the UN Security Council. We will use our veto so that this organization adopts equilibrated and responsible solutions and resolutions for the countries and people's figuring on the daily agenda's," Nebenzia said.

The Russian ambassador expressed hope that resolution authors will duly work on reaching compromises in the future, particularly when those are easily achievable, rather than provoking useless confrontations.

On September 1, the UNSC failed to extend for one year until August 31, 2024, the sanctions regime against Mali after Russia vetoed a Security Council draft resolution co-authored by France and the United Arab Emirates.

Russia prepared an alternative draft resolution but it did not receive the needed number of votes to be adopted.

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US State Dept. Approves $4Bln Sale of Air, Missile Defense Command System to Poland - DSCA

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WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The US State Department approved a potential $4 billion sale of an Integrated Air and Missile Defense Battle Command System to Poland, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Monday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Poland of an Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD) Battle Command System (IBCS) and related equipment for an estimated cost of $4 billion," the DSCA said in a statement.

The proposed sale will improve Poland's missile defense capability and support the foreign policy goals of the US by bolstering the security of the NATO alliance, the statement said.

Northrop Grumman will serve as the principal contractor for the multi-domain command and control system against air and missile threats, the statement added.

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US Issues Waiver to Release $6Bln Iranian Money, Clearing Way for Prisoner Swap - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) – The Biden administration issued a blanket waiver for international banks to transfer $6 billion in frozen Iranian assets from South Korea to Qatar as part of a prisoner swap deal to release five American citizens, The Associated Press reported on Monday.

The United States has also agreed to release five Iranian citizens as part of the deal, the report said.

According to the report, Secretary of State Antony Blinken green-lighted the deal last week but did not notify Congress until Monday.

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First Responders' Deaths From 9/11 Illnesses Now Equal Number of Those Killed in Attack

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - A total of 341 members of the New York City Fire Department have succumbed to rare cancers and diseases resulting from their exposure to toxic dust at Ground Zero in the two decades since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which is now nearly equal to the number of first responders who died on that day, the Uniformed Firefighters Association said on Monday.

"In the years that have followed, over 341 more FDNY members have died from rare cancers and diseases caused by the toxic dust at Ground Zero," the Uniformed Firefighters Association wrote on social media.

The FDNY continues to mourn not only the 343 heroic firefighters lost on September 11, 2001, but also the 341 members who have since passed away due to illnesses attributed to their selfless service and exposure to the toxic aftermath of the World Trade Center disaster, the

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statement said.

On September 11, 2001, members of the al-Qaeda terrorist group (banned in Russia) flew airplanes into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, as well as the Pentagon. A fourth plane believed to be targeting a federal building in Washington crashed in Pennsylvania, killing everyone on board. In total, almost 3,000 people were killed in the attacks.

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White House Says Biden Would Veto US House FY2024 Defense Spending Bill

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The White House said on Monday that President Joe Biden will veto the US House spending bill for the Department of Defense for fiscal year 2024 because it would significantly cut domestic spending and does not comply with the Fiscal Responsibility Act (FRA).

"The administration strongly opposes House passage of H.R. 4365, making appropriations for the Department of Defense (DOD) for the fiscal year (FY) ending September 30, 2024 and for other purposes," the White House Office of Management and Budget said in a statement. "If the President were presented with H.R. 4365, he would veto it."

The statement accuses Republicans in the House of Representatives of engaging in partisan politics by proposing bills that would include additional spending cuts that allegedly go against the debt ceiling agreement reached earlier this year between Biden and congressional leaders.

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white house says biden would veto defense department spending bill

State Dept. Says No Interaction Between Blinken, Lavrov at G20 Summit

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov did not interact during the G20 summit in India, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

"There was no interaction between Secretary Blinken and Foreign Minister Lavrov. I am not aware of any other interactions between the US and Russian delegations," Miller told reporters.

He did not rule out that delegates could have greeted each other in the hallway, but reaffirmed there were no substantive interactions.

New Delhi hosted a G20 leaders' summit from September 9-10. Russia was represented by Minister Lavrov, while the US delegation was led by President Joe Biden.

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New Mexico Governor Temporarily Suspends Right to Carry Firearms in Albuquerque - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham has invoked an emergency health order to suspend for 30 days the right to open and concealed carry of firearms across Albuquerque and Bernalillo County, Fox News reported on Monday.

Grisham's decision to enact the suspension comes in response to a recent surge in deadly shootings, including the incidents involving a 13-year-old girl in July, a five-year-old girl in August and an 11-year-old boy this month - all occurring in the Albuquerque area, the report said.

The emergency order will take effect on September 8, the report added.

This suspension applies to most public places, encompassing city sidewalks and urban recreational parks, in an area where the open carry of handguns has historically been permitted, according to the report.

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State Department Says US Military Exercises in Armenia Routine, Not Tied to Any Events

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The US-Armenia joint Military exercises in Transcaucasia are routine and not in response to any global events, State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said on Monday.

"We routinely train and operate alongside our partners to maintain readiness and we continuously improve on the interoperability between our armed forces. Armenia is a long-standing partner [of] the United States and has had an enduring relationship since 2003 with the Kansas National Guard as part of the Department of Defense's state partnership program," Miller said during a press briefing. "This is a routine exercise that is in no way tied to any other events."

The comment comes shortly after a reporter inquired about whether or not the exercises were in any way related to a potential military move by Azerbaijan.

The US Army announced earlier that some 85 US troops will train with 175 Armenian soldiers this week as part of the Eagle Partner joint military exercise that aims to prepare Armenian forces for a NATO Operational Capabilities Concept evaluation under the NATO Partnership for Peace program later this year.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Sunday condemned Armenia's decision to hold joint drills with the United States in Transcaucasia, which he characterized as a matter of regret for Russia, saying there was nothing good in NATO's attempts to penetrate the region.

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US Health Authorities Approve Updated COVID-19 Vaccine Formulas - Statement

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) said on Monday that it approved updated COVID-19 vaccine formulas for 2023-2024, amid an increase in cases heading into the autumn and winter.

"Today, the US Food and Drug Administration took action approving and authorizing for emergency use updated COVID-19 vaccines formulated to more closely target currently circulating variants and to provide better protection against serious consequences of COVID-19, including hospitalization and death," the FDA said in a statement.

The FDA approved COVID-19 vaccine formulas developed by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, the statement said.

Children between six-months and four-years old who have been previously vaccinated against COVID-19 are eligible for one or two doses of an updated vaccine, the statement said. Persons five years of age and older, regardless of previous vaccination, are eligible to receive a single dose of an updated vaccine, the statement said.

Unvaccinated kids between six-months and four-years old are eligible to receive three doses of an updated Pfizer vaccine or two doses of an updated Moderna vaccine, the statement added.

The updated vaccines are expected to provide "good protection" against currently circulating coronavirus variants, the statement said.

Vaccine manufacturers have said that updated doses would be ready this fall, and the FDA expects vaccines to be available in the near future, the statement said.

The United States experienced a rise in both hospital admissions and deaths from COVID-19 in recent weeks, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data. Nearly 6.3 million people in the US have been hospitalized with COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic, and more than 1.1 million have died in connection with the virus, the CDC said.

More than 152.5 million COVID-19 updated vaccine doses have been distributed in the US, the CDC also said.

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Poland Inks Deal With Lockheed to Purchase 486 Launchers Used for HIMARS - Statement

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - Lockheed Martin announced on Monday that Poland signed a deal to purchase 486 launcher-loader kits used for the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) as part of a new framework agreement between the two parties.

"Under the terms of the framework agreement, 486 Homar-A vehicles will be assembled in Poland, with first deliveries starting in 2026. In addition, tens of thousands of rocket ammunition missiles will be produced," Lockheed said in a press release.

The release said that under the agreement, Polish industry will work with Lockheed Martin to integrate key components of the HIMARS rocket launcher onto a Jelcz 6x6 truck, which is a

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heavy utility vehicle in service by the Polish military.
Key participants from the Polish industry include Polska Grupa Zbrojeniowa, Huta Stalowa Wola, WZU and MESKO, the release said.
Moreover, the agreement includes technology transfer and production orders for HIMARS ammunition, the release added.
Poland received its first shipment of HIMARS launchers in May, according to the release.

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State Dept. Says No Change in US Policy on ATACMS for Ukraine, Conversations Ongoing

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - There have not been any changes in the current US policy with respect to supplying long-range Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS) to Ukraine, but conversations on the matter are still ongoing both with Ukrainian counterparts and inside the US government, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.
"There has not been," Miller said during a press briefing when asked whether there has been a change in the US policy on ATACMS for Ukraine. "These are ongoing conversations that we have with our Ukrainian counterparts as well as conversations we have inside the United States government, but we don't have any new position to announce at this point."
Earlier in September, media reported, citing US officials, that the United States is likely to send Ukraine ATACMS, but it could be months before they are delivered.
Neither the Pentagon nor the White House Security Council confirmed to Sputnik a decision has been made to supply Ukraine with ATACMS amid the media reports.

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Boeing to Design, Build New Hypersonic Interceptor Prototype for Pentagon - Release

WASHINGTON, Sept. 11 (Sputnik) - Boeing is going to design, build and test a prototype new hypersonic interceptor vehicle for the Pentagon's Defense Advanced Research Project Agency (DARPA), the aerospace contractor announced in a press release on Monday.
"Boeing will develop and test technologies for a hypersonic interceptor prototype for DARPA's Glide Breaker program as part of a four-year effort," the release said.
Boeing will perform computational fluid dynamics analysis, wind tunnel testing and evaluation of aerodynamic jet interaction effects during flight tests, the release said.
"Glide Breaker is intended to inform the design and development of future hypersonic interceptors, which could destroy a threat traveling at least five times the speed of sound, or Mach 5 in the upper atmosphere during what's known as the 'glide phase' of flight," the release added.
Boeing will lead the development and testing program which will provide the foundation for

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future operational glide-phase interceptors capable of defending against these sophisticated and evolving hypersonic threats, according to the release.

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US to Watch Outcome of Putin-Kim Summit, Won't Hesitate to Sanction DPRK - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The United States will closely watch the outcome of a meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Vladivostok, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

"We're going to monitor very closely the outcome of this meeting. I will remind both countries that any transfer of arms from North Korea to Russia would be in violation of multiple United Nations Security Council resolutions. And we of course have aggressively enforced our sanctions against entities that fund Russia's war effort and we will continue to enforce those sanctions and will not hesitate to impose new sanctions when appropriate," Miller told a briefing.

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Biden Hopes to Meet with Xi Sometime This Fall - State Department

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden is hoping to have an opportunity to meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping this fall, State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said on Monday.

"As the President has said, he hopes to meet with President Xi sometime later this fall. We believe there is no substitute for one-on-one conversations at the leader level," Miller said during a press conference.

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Lockheed Martin Uses AI Jamming in Ground Support Mission Demonstration - Statement

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - Lockheed Martin and the University of Iowa's Operator Performance Laboratory (OPL) have completed an artificial intelligence (AI) demonstration using two piloted L-29 aircraft to carry out jamming operations in support of a simulated air-to-ground mission, the aerospace contractor announced in a press release on Monday.

"Lockheed Martin and the University of Iowa's OPL completed an AI demonstration using two piloted L-29 aircraft (acting as surrogates for uncrewed systems) performing jamming support in

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a simulated air-to-ground mission," the release said.

The project, named Enhanced Collaborative High-Frequency Orientation System, was sponsored by Lockheed Martin's 21st Century Security Demonstrations and Prototypes organization, the release said.

"The successful execution of the electronic attack task by AI agents shows how autonomous uncrewed aerial systems can operate in coordination with crewed tactical platforms in future combat operations, creating a powerful, unified team to address complex threats," the release said.

The L-29s were flown by experienced OPL pilots, following instructions from the AI agents in the form of heading, altitude and speed cues, the release added.

The pilots maintained the option to stop following AI cues if at any point they felt unsafe or if the agent tried to go outside acceptable operating conditions, according to the release.

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RECAST - US Air Force Chief Urges Congress to Avoid Short-Term Funding Bill, End Hold on Promotions

(Recasts para 5 to say that lawmakers need to pass budget by September 30, before fiscal year 2024 begins on October 1)

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - US Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall on Monday urged Congress to avoid adopting a short-term funding bill instead of a full budget, including for defense, and to end the hold on US military promotions.

"As we approach the end of the fiscal year in a few weeks, I do have some requests for the Congress," Kendall said during the Air, Space, Cyber Conference. "To not hold up the promotions of all of our general officers because of opposition to a policy that they did not create and cannot change ... Do not shut down the government in three weeks. Many of us have been through shutdowns; they are extremely damaging to our readiness, retention and morale."

Kendall was referring to Republican Sen. Tommy Tuberville's current hold on US military promotions stuck in the Senate because of his opposition to an abortion policy in the Pentagon.

Kendall said, regarding the issue related to the Continuing Resolution, that a short-term spending bill of any length is hugely inefficient and delays much needed modernization in the US military.

US lawmakers reconvened this month with the responsibility to pass a spending budget, including for defense, by September 30 in order to avert a government shutdown as fiscal year 2024 begins on October 1. There is concern lawmakers will resort to a short-term spending bill to buy additional time to iron details in the spending budget.

The Pentagon endured this kind of situation 10 years ago and is still recovering, Kendall added.

The Defense Department has already lost far too much time waiting for the Congress to act on US military modernization funding needs, Kendall said.

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New York Commemorates Victims of September 11, 2001 Terrorist Attacks

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - Hundreds of people have gathered in New York on the 22nd anniversary of the terrorist attacks in 2001 to commemorate the victims of the tragedy, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

In 2001, terrorists belonging to Al Qaeda (banned in Russia) crashed two hijacked commercial airplanes into the World Trade Center (WTC) in New York, while another airplane hit the Pentagon near Washington. A fourth hijacked plane fell down in the US state of Pennsylvania.

According to official data, 2,749 people were killed in the attacks in New York, 189 at the Pentagon and 44 in Pennsylvania.

A moment of silence was observed at 8:46 a.m. (12:26 GMT) - the exact time when the first American Airlines hijacked aircraft crashed into the Northern tower of the World Trade Center in New York. The ceremony then continued by ringing a bell reading the names of the victims killed in the attacks.

A second moment of silence was announced at 9:03 a.m. (13:03 GMT), the time when the second plane crashed in the Southern tower of the World Trade Center in 2001.

New Yorkers also kept minutes of silence at 9:37 a.m., when the third plane crashed in the Pentagon, and at 9:59 a.m. and 10.28 a.m., when the WTC towers collapsed, as well as at 10:03 a.m., when the airplane fell in Pennsylvania.

Katharina Kort, a journalist with the German Handelsblatt newspaper, said she was in New York on September 11, 2001, and exited the office near the collapsed towers.

"I came out there and I saw the first tower burning. I saw all those toilet papers and research papers falling down," she said.

Kort recalled that the police had already blocked the area and did not allow her to go through.

"I was also under shock because I was personally [there] at that moment," Kort said, adding that she was working in the subsequent days covering the attacks.

The public has only recently realized how much the attacks influenced US foreign policy that followed after, she said.

Kort noted she knew high school friends who were on the airplane that crashed in Pennsylvania and that contradicts various alleged conspiracy theories about the attacks that emerged later.

"These people are dead. So it's not something made up in Hollywood scenes," she said.

Former police officer Alex Palwer said he worked near the World Trade Center 22 years ago and recalled helping to evacuate people from the area. At a later time, he was diagnosed with cancer caused by toxic materials from the dust of collapsed buildings.

Palwers said he received compensation but now is trying to get more from the government because other types of cancers have developed since then.

"So, we'll see what happens down the road to get another compensation," he said.

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Biden Appoints New Special Envoy for Digital Freedom - Blinken

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden appointed Eileen Donahue as a new Special Envoy and Coordinator for Digital Freedom within the State Department, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday.

"The President's appointment of Dr. Donahoe reinforces the importance of digital freedom and values-based technology governance work as Administration and Department priorities," Blinken said.

Donahue will leverage her technical knowledge and foreign policy experience to advance US priorities around online freedoms, digital inclusion, and information integrity, he added.

Blinken pointed out that Donahue built a distinguished career promoting human rights and digital freedom within and outside of government. Before getting the new position in the State Department, she worked at Stanford University's Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies. She also served as the first US Ambassador to the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva and Director of Global Affairs at Human Rights Watch, Blinken added.

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Air Force Chief Says War With China Not Inevitable, But Lack of US Readiness Raises Risk

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - US Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall said on Monday that war with China is not inevitable, but a lack of US military readiness could increase the risk of a confrontation between the two countries.

"War is not inevitable ... [but] if our power projection capability and capacity are not adequate to deter Chinese aggression, against Taiwan or elsewhere, war could occur," Kendall said during the Air, Space, Cyber Conference in National Harbor, Maryland.

US military readiness is affected when Congress adopts short-term spending bills instead of full budgets, Kendall said.

US lawmakers must pass a spending budget, including for defense, by September 30 in order to avert a government shutdown as fiscal year 2024 begins on October 1.

There is concern lawmakers will resort to a short-term spending bill to buy additional time to iron out details in the 2024 spending budget.

Kendall said that if the United States cannot prevail in a war against China, the results could "cast a long shadow."

According to Kendall, China has been redesigning its military with the specific intent of preparing for war with the United States.

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ADM Reports Several Workers Injured in Explosion at Illinois Plant - Statement

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The foods processing company Archer Daniels Midland (ADM) said on Monday that an explosion occurred in its plant in Decatur, Illinois, the previous night and several employees have been injured.

"ADM immediately contacted the Decatur Fire Department, which remains on the scene. Several employees were injured and transported to the local hospital for treatment," the company said in a statement.

The incident occurred shortly after 7:00 p.m. on Sunday and produced a large plume of dark smoke, according to reports.

ADM said in the statement that it does not have a confirmed cause for the explosion at present.

The Decatur Fire Department Deputy Chief Dan Kline said that eight ADM workers were injured and taken to a nearby hospital.

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Mark Meadows Files Appeal to Move Georgia Election Case to Federal Court - Filing

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - Donald Trump's former aide Mark Meadows filed an appeal after a judge rejected his motion to move his Georgia election subversion case to a US federal court, according to a court filing.

The appeal was filed on Monday with the US court of appeals for the eleventh circuit in the city of Atlanta, Georgia.

On Friday, Judge Steve Jones ruled to reject Meadows' motion to change the jurisdiction of his election subversion case. Meadows argued his case should be moved to federal court because the allegations in the indictment against him were in connection to his duties as White House chief of staff.

Meadows is among the 18 co-defendants indicted alongside former President Trump in the criminal case related to their alleged efforts to overturn the 2020 US presidential election in the state of Georgia.

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US Air Force Secretary Says Reviewing Department to Reoptimize for Great Power Competition

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - Secretary of the US Air Force Frank Kendall said on Monday that the Department of the Air Force (DAF) is conducting a review to reoptimize the

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department for great power competition.

"Over the next few months, the Department of the Air Force senior leadership team will lead a broad review of all aspects of how the DAF performs its basic missions, to organize, train and equip the units and capabilities that we provide to the combatant commands and to the joint force," Kendall said during remarks at the Air, Space and Cyber Conference.

Initial meetings for the effort were held last week, Kendall said. The officials hope to identify and begin implementing a range of changes to reoptimize the DAF for great power competition by January 2024, Kendall said.

Officials will review DAF's organization, equipment, personnel, readiness and support for operational Air and Space Forces, Kendall said.

The efforts mirror actions by China to prepare its own forces for a conflict with the United States, Kendall added.

The US Air and Space Forces must change lest they fail to prevent or lose a war with a modern great power, which would have "enormous cost and consequences" for the US and the world, Kendall said.

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US Urges North Korea Not to Provide, Sell Arms to Russia - White House

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The United States is urging North Korea to abide by its public commitments and not to provide or sell arms to Russia, the White House said on Monday.

"As we have warned publicly, arms discussions between Russia and the DPRK [North Korea] are expected to continue during Kim Jong-Un's trip to Russia," National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watsons said, as quoted by CNN. "We urge the DPRK to abide by the public commitments that Pyongyang has made to not provide or sell arms to Russia."

Earlier on Monday, Pyongyang and Moscow announced that North Korean President Kim Jong Un would visit Russia.

The White House said last week that the United States possess intelligence indicating that Russia and North Korea were "actively advancing" high-level talks on military cooperation.

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US Air Force Chief Urges Congress to Avoid Short-Term Funding Bill, End Hold on Promotions

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - US Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall on Monday urged Congress to avoid adopting a short-term funding bill instead of a full budget, including for defense, and to end the hold on US military promotions.

"As we approach the end of the fiscal year in a few weeks, I do have some requests for the

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Congress," Kendall said during the Air, Space, Cyber Conference. "To not hold up the promotions of all of our general officers because of opposition to a policy that they did not create and cannot change ... Do not shut down the government in three weeks. Many of us have been through shutdowns; they are extremely damaging to our readiness, retention and morale."

Kendall was referring to Republican Sen. Tommy Tuberville's current hold on US military promotions stuck in the Senate because of his opposition to an abortion policy in the Pentagon.

Kendall said, regarding the issue related to the Continuing Resolution, that a short-term spending bill of any length is hugely inefficient and delays much needed modernization in the US military.

US lawmakers reconvened this month with the responsibility to pass a spending budget, including for defense, in order to avert a government shutdown next year. There is concern lawmakers will resort to a short-term spending bill to buy additional time to iron details in the spending budget.

The Pentagon endured this kind of situation 10 years ago and is still recovering, Kendall added.

The Defense Department has already lost far too much time waiting for the Congress to act on US military modernization funding needs, Kendall said.

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Austin, New Ukraine Defense Minister Umerov Discuss Contact Group Agenda - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin spoke over the telephone with Ukraine's new Defense Minister Rustem Umerov and discussed the agenda for next week's Ukraine Defense Contact Group meeting, the Defense Department said on Monday.

"Secretary Austin provided an update on US security assistance efforts and exchanged views with Minister Umerov on priorities to support Ukraine's immediate battlefield needs and capability requirements over the long term," the Defense Department said in a press release. "Secretary Austin and Minister Umerov also discussed the agenda for the Ukraine Defense Contact Group meeting to be held next week at Ramstein Air Base, Germany."

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Russian Ushankas Sold Out at Kentucky Gun Show - Correspondent

LEXINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik), Lenka White - Russian winter hats, Ushankas, were sold out during a gun show in the US state of Kentucky, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

"Russian Ushankas got sold out yesterday … There were six of them," a gun shop owner at the show shared. "We have to order more."

People enjoy Russian products and there is no resentment, he added.

The owner, who preferred not to be named, also said that he believes "the US should have

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good relations with Russia, it would be much better."

On the shelves of the gun collector, one could also see other Russian military products: Soviet military pins and pins commemorating Vladimir Lenin, military belts and patches.

Kentucky has an open carry law, which enables anyone over 18 years old to carry a firearm in most places. The gun show was held in Kentucky's city of Lexington from September 9-10, drawing gun enthusiasts, ex-military personnel and random residents.

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Austin on 9/11 Anniversary Says Will Always Work to Keep America Safe

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said on Monday at a September 11 commemoration ceremony at the Pentagon that American troops will always work to keep their nation safe.

"We will always work to keep America safe, and we will always, always remember," Austin said at the Pentagon, where a plane hijacked by terrorists crashed on September 11, 2001, killing all 64 people onboard and 125 people in the building.

Austin pointed out that that day made the US "the nation at war." He also noted that many Americans have since served in Afghanistan and Iraq to fight terrorism.

Speaking before the families and friends of 9/11 victims, Austin said that it is the nation's obligation to carry out the missions those people supported.

"It is our duty to live up to the goodness that they embodied. And it is our duty to defend the democracy that they loved so much," he said.

He promised to always try to meet this challenge.

"We will always strive to live up to their example and their memory," Austin added.

US servicepeople commemorated all victims of the terrorist act that occurred 22 years ago. The ringing of a bell accompanied the pronouncement of each name while the priest read a special memorial prayer.

On September 11, 2001, Al Qaeda (banned in Russia) terrorists crashed two hijacked commercial planes into the World Trade Center in New York, while another one hit the Pentagon near Washington. A fourth hijacked plane fell down in the state of Pennsylvania.

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Top US House Oversight Panel Democrat Says Biden Probe Intended to Aid Trump Fruitless

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - US House Oversight Committee Ranking Member Jamie Raskin said on Monday that the Republicans' investigation into potential criminal activity by President Joe Biden and his family has been a fruitless effort designed to aid former President Donald Trump's 2024 re-election bid.

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"Republicans have obtained enormous amounts of evidence as part of their probe. None of it shows any wrongdoing by President Biden; in fact, the evidence proves the opposite," Raskin said in a statement.

The House Oversight Committee has been leading a probe into alleged criminal activity by the Biden family, including foreign bribery and influence peddling. Republican lawmakers have also suggested an impeachment inquiry into Biden to further investigate the matter.

The taxpayer-funded probe and impeachment effort amounts to nothing more than an attempt to help Trump retake the presidency in 2024, the statement said.

The panel has received more than 12,000 pages of subpoenaed bank records, reviewed more than 2,000 pages of suspicious activity reports and spent hours interviewing witnesses, but evidence fails to suggest any wrongdoing by Biden, the statement said.

Bank records do not show any direct payments to Biden, the statement said. Republicans have alleged that Biden and his family received payments through a network of business entities run by the president's son, Hunter.

Republicans have been misrepresenting Hunter Biden's businesses as shell companies despite making legitimate transactions and investments, the statement said.

Moreover, Republicans' claims that the Biden administration has obstructed their probe are meritless, the statement said.

The investigation into the Biden family is an attempt to distract the public from alleged corruption involving Trump and his administration, the statement added.

Lawmakers would be enabling Trump to subvert democracy by voting to open an impeachment inquiry into Biden, according to the statement.

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Biden Campaign Seeks to Boost Fundraising by Increasing Criticism of Trump - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden's re-election team plans to focus on criticizing former President and 2024 Republican presidential hopeful Donald Trump to boost campaign fundraising, NBC News said on Monday.

The Biden campaign will emphasize that Trump and his supporters threaten democracy in the United States in the hope that such messaging would energize potential donors and motivate them to spend more money, the report said.

The Biden team plans to start an "aggressive fundraising schedule" in September to recruit 1,000 new fundraisers by the end of the year, the report said.

The campaign has done very well in the last three years with big donations, but is now getting into crunch time and needs an army of fundraisers, the report quoted the Biden Victory Fund Chairman Chris Korge as saying.

However, the report pointed out that Biden faces a lack of enthusiasm among Democrats and has disclosed $19 million in donations in July, but $5.5 million came from donors who already paid the maximum allowed amount and can no longer provide more during the 2024 presidential

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race, the report said.

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Musk Dismisses 'Treason' Accusations for Declining to Activate Starlink Near Crimea

UNITED NATIONS, September 11 (Sputnik) - Tech entrepreneur Elon Musk on Monday dismissed accusations of "treason" in connection with his refusal to activate the Starlink satellite network over Crimea to aid Ukraine's attack on Russia's fleet.

"I am a citizen of the United States and have only that passport. No matter what happens, I will fight for and die in America. The United States Congress has not declared war on Russia. If anyone is treasonous, it is those who call me such," Musk said in a post on his social platform X.

The post was a reply to allegations, including those made by political commentators, that Musk "personally sabotaged a military operation of a US ally."

Last week, US media reported that Musk turned off Starlink services near Crimea in 2022 to disrupt a Ukrainian drone attack on the Russian naval fleet. In response, Musk said he declined to activate the network over Crimea to enable a Ukrainian strike on the Russian naval fleet.

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Over Half Americans Say Artificial Intelligence to Influence 2024 Elections Results – Poll

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) – Over 50% of American citizens believe that Artificial Intelligence (AI) related misinformation will have an influence on the outcome of the 2024 US elections, an Axios-Morning Consult AI poll revealed on Monday.

“By the numbers: 53% of survey respondents said misinformation spread by AI will impact who wins. That view was broadly shared across Fox, CNN, and MSNBC frequent watchers. 35% said AI will decrease their trust in election advertising,” the poll showed.

Among those who said public mistrust in electoral advertising would increase due to AI, 42% voted for former President Donald Trump, and 33% for President Joe Biden in the 2020 elections, the poll added.

Moreover, close to one in three American adults have expressed being ‘very concerned” by AI development, the poll said, adding that among those surveyed, nearly 60% believe humans will eventually lose control to it.

The survey also found that 30% of responses have no confidence in the ability to establish proper AI regulations.

The Axios poll surveyed a sample of 2,203 US adults from August 10-13, with a margin of error of +/- 2%.

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