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9/13/23 Wednesday

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Musk: Ukraine Demanded SpaceX Violate US Sanctions to Aid Crimea Drone Attack

The US has extensively sanctioned Russia since the special operation in Ukraine began in February 2022, blocking many US tech companies from doing business there. However, sanctions on Crimea go back to 2014, when the region declared independence from Ukraine and rejoined Russia in an overwhelming vote the West refuses to recognize.

During an appearance on the Silicon Valley podcast All-In earlier this week, SpaceX CEO Elon Musk gave greater context to a 2022 episode revealed in his recently-released biography.

Walter Isaacson's book "Elon Musk," which was released on Monday, describes an undated incident in which the Ukrainian Armed Forces launched an attack on the Russian naval base at Sevastopol in Crimea. US news agency CNN reported the incident as one in which Musk "turned off" Ukraine's access to the Starlink satellite internet constellation operated by his company, SpaceX, in order to sabotage the attack.

However, as Musk explained on the podcast, that wasn't actually how it happened at all.

"At the time this happened, the region around Crimea was actually turned off," he said, referring to the Starlink connection. "Now, the reason it was turned off was originally because the United States has sanctions against Russia - and that includes Crimea - and we are actually not allowed to turn on connectivity to a sanctioned country without explicit government approval, which we did not have from the US government."

"So basically, Ukraine - they didn't give us any advance warning or heads-up or anything, we just got the urgent calls from the Ukrainian government saying that we needed to 'turn on Crimea' - it was like in the middle of the night, basically. We were like: 'what are you talking about?' And then we figured out this was a kind of Pearl Harbor-type attack on the Russian fleet in Sevastopol. So they were really asking us to really actively take part in a major act of war," Musk said.

"We certainly have huge empathy and support for the Ukrainian government, the Ukrainian government is not in charge of US people or companies. That's not how it works."

The podcast hosts asked about an interview with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Monday in which CNN journalist Jake Tapper, asked if there should be "repercussions" because "Musk effectively sabotaged a military operation by Ukraine."

Musk noted that "to his credit, Secretary Blinken was actually quite supportive, despite the absurd accusations and questions," adding that the foreign minister didn't "take the bait at all."

Indeed, Blinken's answers to a series of questions about Musk and Starlink focused on how the satellite internet service "has been really important to the Ukrainians" and "an important part" of their military operations.

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SpaceX, a major US government defense contractor, has offered Kiev free use of the Starlink network since shortly after the conflict began in February 2022. Still, Musk has indicated there are limits to how far it will go to directly aid Kiev's side of the conflict.

"Starlink is the communication backbone of Ukraine, especially at the front lines, where almost all other internet connectivity has been destroyed," Musk said in February on the X social media site, which he also owns. "But we will not enable escalation of conflict that may lead to WW3."

SpaceX President Gwynne Shotwell later told reporters that Starlink "was never intended to be weaponized."

"Ukrainians have leveraged it in ways that were unintentional and not part of any agreement," Shotwell said. She later added that "there are things that we can do to limit their ability to do that. There are things that we can do, and have done."

Indeed, there have been certain examples of "weaponization," including a naval drone found near Sevastopol with a Starlink antenna lashed to its stern.

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US Deployments in Japan Could 'Chain-Gang' Tokyo Into Conflict With China

While Seoul and Tokyo have been willing to host US forces for decades because they have been seen as a stabilizing force in the region, it's unclear how far either government is willing to tolerate Washington potentially dragging them into a major war with China, especially if it's over Taiwan, an expert told Sputnik.

Washington and Tokyo are increasingly preparing for what they call a "Taiwan contingency" - that is, the possibility that a conflict between the autonomous government in Taiwan and those of mainland China could draw the US and Japan into conflict with Beijing.

According to reports in Japanese media on Wednesday, Tokyo has dispatched a Defense Ministry official to the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association, Tokyo's informal embassy in Taipei, to act as a de facto defense attaché. The official has been positioned there since the Spring, alongside another retired Japanese Self-Defense Forces officer.

The Japanese government does not formally recognize the Republic of China on Taiwan, having switched its recognition of the legitimate Chinese government to the People's Republic of China in Beijing in 1972.

Still, Japan has strong economic ties to Taiwan, which was once a colony of the Japanese Empire used for sugarcane and rice cultivation for the home islands. Today, much of the exchange is based on electronics, including the manufacturing of advanced microchips.

Japanese media has also reported on the formation of a new US Marine Corps (UMSC) littoral regiment that will be based in the southern Japanese island of Okinawa. The force of nearly 2,000 Marines, including long-range fires, anti-air systems, and amphibious vessels, is intended to protect Japan's Ryukyu Islands, which string along the eastern edge of the East China Sea between Taiwan and the Japanese home islands.

The new unit formation is a recent introduction by the USMC, which announced in 2020 it would restructure from being a primarily land combat-based force toward a maritime and amphibious

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basis, in line with the needs of the US' new strategic focus on "great power competition" with Russia and China.

Much of the Pentagon's energy since 2017 has gone toward strengthening its forces and its alliances in what it calls the Indo-Pacific region, shifting new forces into the area and seeking to bolster its military relationshipswith smaller nations in the region by casting China as a threat to their sovereignty. No entity has received more attention than Taiwan, a Chinese island that has maintained its autonomy from Beijing only with the informal but open support of the United States.

Dr. Victor Teo, a political scientist who specializes in the international relations of the Indo-Pacific region, told Sputnik on Wednesday that despite allowing such force expansions on their territories, Japan and other regional partners like South Korea are ambivalent about the potential of being drawn into a potentially catastrophic conflict with China, Russia, or the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

"Over the last decade, Japan has stepped up political and security preparations to prepare for a Taiwan contingency. Tokyo has increasingly identified Taiwan's security to be intricately linked to Japan's own security," Teo said, noting that from Tokyo's perspective, such moves "are just part of the contingency planning to ensure that Japan has adequate intelligence capabilities as well as preparation for political and consular representation in case China undertakes reunification by force."

"This is particularly important as Japan has extensive economic interests in Taiwan, and regards the freedom to navigate Taiwan Straits as vital to its own survival," Teo added.

"The US forces in Okinawa and other parts of Japan and South Korea have been part of the strategic landscape in Asia since the end of the Second World War. The Americans and their allies regard these deployments as being critical to the peace and stability of the region, but China as well as states in the opposing camp, like Russia and North Korea, disagree," he explained.

"Most analysts assume that US forces in Japan and Korea would be used against China in the event that hostilities break out. This is plausible, but I think there are still difficulties. It is unclear at what point or under what conditions the governments of Japan and [South] Korea would agree to have US forces operating out of these bases attack China as Tokyo and Seoul have their own security considerations to think about. After all, Japan and South Korea are sovereign entities with their own interests and security considerations, and would definitely voice their own resistance, especially if they feel they are being chain-ganged into a conflict they want no part of."

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Fuel Price Hikes Drive US Inflation Upward for Second Straight Month

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Recent numbers from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) show that the rate of inflation of the US dollar increased slightly in August, marking the second straight month of increase after more than a year of decline.

The latest consumer price index (CPI) report released on Wednesday showed that the average cost of basic commodities for Americans rose by 0.6% from July to August, and had increased by 3.7% since August of last year.

Driving the increase was a huge spike in energy costs, including a 10.6% increase in the cost of gasoline and a 9.1% increase in the cost of fuel oil from the preceding month. Experts said the price hikes were a result of production cuts by the OPEC nations, especially Saudi Arabia.

Other commodities tracked by the BLS saw their prices increase very modestly by comparison, with the largest being a 2% hike in transportation costs - likely following the trend in fuel prices.

Overall, pundits quoted in US media cast the inflation increase as a hiccup in a downward trend that was soon to resume.

“This should just be a temporary interruption of the downward trend,” Andrew Hunter, deputy chief US economist at Capital Economics, told one outlet.

“Broadly, we’re already seeing pretty clear signs the situation is approaching normal again,” he added.

“It’s a little hot, but I don’t think it’s an inflection point,” said Skanda Amarnath, executive director of the left-leaning think tank Employ America. “It’s information that tells you the process is going to take some time. Don’t expect inflation to fall overnight.”

With the Federal Reserve set to meet next week for its first time since July, there’s still the potential for the Open Market Committee to further increase interest rates in response to the trend. A standard tool in capitalist fiscal policy, raising interest rates is intended to slow down investment and decrease inflation, but carries with it the risk of increasing unemployment or

However, alongside the slight inflation increases have been persistent job growth and a modest increase in unemployment over the last two months as well, despite federal interest rates being at their highest in decades.

US markets effectively flatlined on Wednesday on the heels of the CPI report, with the Dow Jones at a 118-point loss when this story went to press on Wednesday afternoon.

Inflation was noted as a major cause behind the trend revealed in a US Census Bureau poverty report released earlier this week.

In 2022, child poverty in the US more than doubled and overall poverty increased nearly as much. While the worst of the current inflation trend occurred that year before being brought under control by the Fed, 2022 was also the first year after the Biden administration allowed nearly all of the numerous pandemic-era economic benefit programs to expire.

Those programs were aimed at helping tens of millions of Americans cast out of work by the pandemic and its associated lockdowns and economic disruptions, and were credited with dramatically decreasing child poverty and hunger rates in the US.

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Ufologist Presents Claimed 1,000-Year-Old ‘Alien Corpses’ to Mexican Congress

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A self-proclaimed UFO expert made an unforgettable presentation in Mexico's national legislature on Tuesday when he revealed what he claimed were mummified "alien corpses," one of which he said was "pregnant" with eggs.

Television cameras were rolling on Tuesday when Jaime Maussan, a self-described ufologist, cracked open two small caskets in the halls of the Mexican Congress, revealing two small figures he told lawmakers were "alien corpses."

The boxes were about two feet square and the figures inside them only about one foot tall. They resembled stereotypical portrayals of extraterrestrials, with long, large heads, large eyes, small bodies, and three fingers on elongated hands.

"These specimens are not part of our terrestrial evolution," Maussan asserted, testifying under oath. "These aren't beings that were found after a UFO wreckage. They were found in diatom (algae) mines, and were later fossilized."

The bodies were allegedly found in a mine in Cuzco, Peru, in 2017 and are believed to be 1,000 years old, according to media reports.

Pre-Columbian indigenous societies in the Andean highlands and Pacific coast have long practiced mummification rituals on dead humans, with numerous examples known to science. Last week, a 1,000-year-old human mummy was found in a residential suburb of the Peruvian capital of Lima, who was estimated to have lived during the early Ychsma culture.

"These are not mummies," Maussan asserted on Tuesday. "These are complete bodies that have not been manipulated."

Maussan also presented what he said were X-rays of the alien bodies, showing one of them had eggs inside.

José de Jesús Zalce Benítez, a forensic expert and a military doctor, testified that the so-called 'aliens' had big brains and little eyes, "which allowed for a wide stereoscopic vision," and that they likely only drank liquids because they did not have teeth.

According to media reports, Maussan previously made similar claims about alien corpses that were debunked. In 2017, a small, shriveled body he claimed was a mummified alien was instead revealed to have been a Native American child discovered in Arizona in 1896.

Extraterrestrials supposedly visiting Earth have always captivated the interest of a certain sector of the population that believes "the truth is out there," as one popular science fiction show put it, but in recent years unidentified aerial phenomena (UAPs - the modern term for UFOs) have been given more attention by the halls of power as well.

To date, the US Congress has held several hearings on a dramatic spike in UFO sightings, which lawmakers are concerned are signs of experimental aircraft being tested by adversary nations.

In one July hearing, David Grusch, an Air Force veteran and former member of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency who served as the national reconnaissance officer representative for the Pentagon's Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena Task Force - a body tasked with researching UAP reports, claimed the US was concealing its possession of alien bodies and spacecraft. He claimed his evidence was classified and could not be revealed.

Asked earlier this month about the possibility the US government was concealing alien activities from the public, astrophysicist and science educator Neil DeGrasse Tyson said Washington wasn't "competent" enough to keep such a secret.

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"Oh, my gosh, when did you get that much confidence in the US government?" Tyson ribbed the reporter who asked him, laughing. “If we had an alien invasion, more than the US government would know about it. We would know about it.”

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Congress of Russian Americans Seeking to Counter Russophobia in US - President

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The Congress of Russian Americans (CRA) has fought Russophobia throughout its 50-year existence by opposing closures of parks and demolition of monuments linked to Russian heritage, CRA President Natalie Sabelnik told Sputnik.

The CRA will celebrate its 50th anniversary on September 22. The organization will mark it with a gala in San Francisco, where it is headquartered.

"Most recently, Aleuts in Sitka, Alaska, wanted to completely remove the Baranov statue - representing Alexander Baranov, who governed the territories of Russian America from 1799-1819. We wrote letters and obtained signatures on petitions distributed worldwide and were able to find a compromise with the statue being moved to the local museum in Sitka rather than being destroyed," Sabelnik said.

The CRA president expressed concern with that demand to destroy the statue, which she called a Russophobic act, and said Aleut activists claimed Russians had invaded their lands and sought to remove everything related to the country.

"I think we found a good compromise. A compromise is always a good solution," Sabelnik said.

Several years ago, then-California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger wanted to close Fort Ross, a major Russian settlement owned by the Russian American Company in the 19th century. Back then, it was not perceived as a move motivated by Russophobia, but the organization nevertheless "bombarded" the governor with letters and petitions, Sabelnik said.

"We were saying that Fort Ross is not just a park, it is actually a historical monument of friendship between Russians, the Russian American Company, the indigenous people and the Spaniards who were there at the time. It worked! They did not close Fort Ross," Sabelnik said.

The CRA also helped defend Russian programs in several universities in the United States when the schools wanted to close them.

Sabelnik expressed disappointment that some residents of California suggested renaming the Russian River to the Ukrainian River after Moscow began its special military operation in Ukraine in February 2022.

"Some started to cover up the name 'Russian River’ and [call it] 'Ukrainian River' instead and wrote messages in the neighborhood blog claiming the Russians are 'always invading,' including Hawaii, Alaska and Fort Ross in California. Obviously, those individuals do not know history at all," she said.

Sabelnik noted that Russians developed that part of California in the early 19th century and called the river Slavyanka.

"Because few could pronounce Slavyanka when the maps were being made, somebody said

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'Russian River' when asked what was the river called," she said, adding that nobody actually wants to rename the river now.

The CRA president emphasized that Russophobia remains a part of life in the United States just as intolerance against other minorities - African, Asian or Jewish Americans - also exists. "Yes, a lot of progress has been made, but it still prevails in the United States. It is still something that I am not sure will ever go away," she said.

Sabelnik, a daughter of White Russian emigres who was born in China, shared a story from the time when she arrived in the United States in 1950 and experienced other children in kindergarten calling her a “communist” just because she was Russian.

"Obviously, these children probably did not know what they were saying. It was probably they came home, went to their parents and said there was a girl in the class and she only speaks Russian, to which the parents probably answered - she is a communist, she is red," Sabelnik said.

However, most Americans are very kind people and interested in learning about foreign cultures, so explaining Russian traditions would help build bridges, she said.

"We are proud that we are Russians. We are proud of our culture, heritage and traditions," Sabelnik said.

The Congress of Russian Americans is a non-governmental organization in the United States created in 1973 by Russian immigrants, mostly White Russian emigres from the Russian Empire. The organization is committed to preserving Russian culture in the United States, protecting the rights of Russian Americans, fighting Russophobia and improving relations between Russians and Americans.

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Congress of Russian Americans to Mark 50 Years With Gala in San Francisco - President

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The Congress of Russian Americans (CRA), one of the oldest existing Russian organizations in the United States, will celebrate its 50th anniversary on September 22 with a gala, exhibits and project presentations in San Francisco, CRA President Natalie Sabelnik told Sputnik.

"We will start the day by offering people to look at some of our exhibits and works that we have done throughout the years. We will also have a silent auction and any money we raise will go to our humanitarian aid programs," Sabelnik said.

The gala will take place in San Francisco, where the organization is headquartered.

The CRA also plans to present a two-volume book about its history and initiate discussions on two historical Russian forts in the United States — Fort Ross in California and Fort Elizabeth in Hawaii, she said.

Speaking of humanitarian activities, Sabelnik said the CRA used to support numerous programs financially assisting Russian orphans and orphanages, blind and handicapped children; provide aid to those in need; assemble and send hundreds of containers of clothing, food, medicine to help underprivileged and needy children and families after the collapse of the

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Soviet Union.

Currently, the CRA is partnering with other organizations engaged in humanitarian projects, including the Russian Children's Welfare Society, Russian Children's Benevolent Society in Los Angeles, Russian American Community Services, churches and other community organizations.

"So, we do go through our partner organizations to help humanitarian aid programs," she said.

Sabelnik also said that the CRA during the celebration will induct composer Sergei Rachmaninoff and Russian-American singer Nikolai Massenkoff into its Hall of Fame. Until recent years, the congress' bylaws said Hall of Fame members had to be living, so Rachmaninoff was not inducted earlier.

The CRA president pointed out that Rachmaninoff's contribution to the Russian and American cultures is significant and characterized him as being one of the most modern Russian Americans.

"I think Rachmaninoff is very famous here in the United States as a Russian composer, and in Russia, of course. But he spent many years in the United States, so he is a Russian American," Sabelnik added.

The Congress of Russian Americans is a non-governmental and non-profit organization in the United States created by Russian immigrants, mostly White Russian emigres from the Russian Empire. The organization is committed to preserving Russian culture in the United States, protecting the rights of Russian Americans, fighting Russophobia through cultural diplomacy, and developing a positive image of Russian Americans and their contributions in the US.

The CRA Hall of Fame was established in 1978 as a reminder of Russian creative input into American life. A dozen well-known Russian Americans have been inducted into the Hall of Fame, including aviation pioneer Igor Sikorsky, musician Mstislav Rostropovich, portrait painter Michael Werboff, ballet dancer Alexandra Danilova, Nobel Prize laureate Wassily Leontief, writer Alexandra Tolstoy and the "father of television" Vladimir Zworykin.

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US Auto Workers Preparing to Strike Against 'Big Three' - President

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The United Auto Workers (UAW) union is poised to strike against the US' three largest automakers due to an impasse in reaching an agreement, President Shawn Fain said in a Facebook Live address.

"We do not yet have offers on the table that reflect the sacrifice and contributions our members have made to these companies to win; we're likely going to have to take action," Fain said on Wednesday.

The UAW demands equitable contract offers from Ford, Chrysler, and General Motors, often referred to as the Big Three, including a substantial 46% wage increase and a reduced work week to 32 hours, among other provisions.

The automakers presented their proposals in response to the UAW's demands. General Motors offered a 10% wage increase, Stellantis - which owns Chrysler - offered 14.5%, and Ford proposed a 9% wage increase and a 6% lump sum to be added later.

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Fain has called the offers "shameful and insulting."

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US Redirects $55Mln of Military Aid for Egypt to Taiwan Over Human Rights Issue - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is redirecting $55 million in military aid initially meant for Egypt to Taiwan because of US concerns over Cairo's human rights record, the Wall Street Journal reported, citing US officials.

The report said on Wednesday that the United States decided to withhold a portion of US military aid for Egypt after it determined Cairo failed to make progress on human rights and other issues.

Overall, the United States is withholding $85 million in assistance to Cairo unless the Egyptian government releases political prisoners.

The withheld funds are only a small portion of the $1.3 billion in military aid the United States provides Egypt annually.

Several US lawmakers are urging Biden to withhold an additional $235 million as a means to further penalize Egypt, according to the report.

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US Judge Again Declares DACA Unlawful, Blocks Biden Effort to Codify the Policy - Filing

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - A US judge again declared the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program unlawful, blocking President Joe Biden's effort to make the Obama-era policy a federal regulation, court documents revealed.

The DACA program provides deportation protections to migrants who were brought to the United States illegally as children.

"That... order is hereby reaffirmed and the original injunction and order of vacatur is hereby expanded to cover Final Rule DACA," Judge Andrew Hanen wrote in the court filing on Wednesday. "That program is vacated, and the Department of Homeland Security is enjoined from implementing Final Rule DACA until a further order of this Court, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, or the Supreme Court of the United States."

However, Hanen said that DACA will remain in place for current beneficiaries of the program, allowing the government to process renewal requests.

Moreover, Hanen pointed out that a final judgement has not been issued in the case.

The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals previously declared the DACA program illegal in October 2022, but left the policy in place for some 600,000 immigrants in the United States who depend on the program.

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Republican Presidential Hopeful Ramaswamy to Close 5 US Agencies if Elected - Interview

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - Vivek Ramaswamy, a contender for the Republican Party's presidential nomination, said that he would seek to reduce the size of the US federal government by closing down five agencies if elected president in 2024.

The plan is to "reduce the size of the federal employees down by 75% by the end of the first term," Ramaswamy told Semafor on Wednesday.

The agencies that would be closed include the FBI; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF); the Department of Education; the Nuclear Regulatory Commission; and the Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Services, he said.

Ramaswamy pointed out that he would use executive action and bypass Congress to close the agencies.

In addition, Ramaswamy said he would also execute "a revision of at least 50% of federal regulations that failed the Supreme Court's test."

The plan does not entail replacing the agencies, however, it does envision relocating some employees to other government units, Ramasvamy said.

For example, 15,000 of the 35,000 FBI employees would be reassigned to roles within the US Marshals Service, the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network and the Drug Enforcement Administration, Ramaswamy added.

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DHS Says Reunited 900 Migrant Families Affected by Trump-Era Zero-Tolerance Policy

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said in a statement that it has reunited 900 migrant families affected by the Trump-era zero-tolerance policy that separated family members after illegally entering the United States.

"To date, the Task Force has confirmed over 900 children as reunified, and we will not stop our work to meet this mandate until all the separated families are afforded the opportunity for reunification," the DHS said on Wednesday.

The DHS said that under President Joe Biden, it launched the family reunification task force two years ago.

According to the Biden administration, more than 3,900 migrant children were separated from their families at the US southern border under the Trump-era policy from July 2017 through January 2021.

The Justice Department rescinded the zero-tolerance policy in late January 2021, shortly after Biden became US president.

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Schumer Says Lawmakers Discussed AI Technology Impacts on US Elections in Senate Forum

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - US lawmakers discussed the potential impacts of artificial intelligence (AI) technology on elections in the United States during a Senate forum on AI, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said.

"We talked about election law and the need to do something fairly immediate before the election," Schumer said during a press conference on Wednesday. "There's the issue of actually having deepfakes, where people really believe that a candidate is saying something when they're a total creation of AI."

The senators also discussed the issue of so-called watermarking of AI-generated content, Schumer said.

The senators heard from tech executives, including X chief Elon Musk, Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates and others.

The lawmakers discussed the possibility of either creating a new agency to regulate AI or using existing agencies to do so, Schumer said.

Every person attending the forum said they believed that government regulation of AI is necessary, Schumer added.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) -

PUTIN-KIM MEETING

* Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un exchanged views on the situation in the world and the region and characterized it as being very difficult, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Wednesday.
* Putin and Kim discussed the possibility of sending a North Korean cosmonaut in space, Peskov said.
* Putin said he held an open exchange of views with Kim on the situation in the Far East region.
* Kim plans to go to the Russian city of Komsomolsk-on-Amur and visit factories where civilian and military equipment is made, Putin said.
* Russia complies with its international obligations, but within the rules there are opportunities for military-technical cooperation with North Korea, Putin said.

UKRAINIAN ATTACKS ON RUSSIA

* UK Storm Shadow missiles were used by Ukraine to attack the headquarters of Russia's

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Black Sea fleet in Crimea, Sky News reported, citing a Ukrainian and a Western source.
* The two ships damaged in the Ukrainian missile attack on Sevastopol will be fully repaired, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
* The Russian air defense destroyed two Ukrainian aircraft-type drones over the Bryansk region around 10:00 p.m. Moscow time (19:00 GMT), the Russian Defense Ministry said.
* The Russian air defense destroyed a Ukrainian aircraft-type drone over the Belgorod region, the Defense Ministry said.
* The naval aviation of the Russian fleet destroyed three Ukrainian unmanned boats in the Black Sea, the Defense Ministry said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE
* Ukraine has lost up to 235 soldiers in the South Donetsk direction over the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
* Germany has delivered 20 more Marder combat vehicles to Ukraine for a total of 60, according to the German government list of military aid to Ukraine.

BLACK SEA INITIATIVE
* UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday he will meet with the presidents of Ukraine and Turkey as well as with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov during the high-level week for talks on the Black Sea grain deal.
* UN General Assembly President Dennis Francis told RIA Novosti that he welcomes Russia's willingness to reconsider a deal to facilitate the export of grain from the Black Sea, adding that he is ready to get involved but will not impose on negotiations.

EXPULSION OF SPUTNIK CHIEF IN MOLDOVA
* The Russian Foreign Ministry on Wednesday summoned Moldova's Charge d'Affaires over the expulsion of the head of Sputnik Moldova, Vitaly Denisov, spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told Sputnik.
* Russia demands from relevant international bodies to assess Moldova's decision to expel Denisov, Zakharova said.
* Denisov told Sputnik that the Moldovan authorities did not explain the charges levied against him.

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Biden Says Extending US Trade Restrictions on Cuba for 1 Year

WASHINGTON, September 13 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Wednesday that he is extending trade restrictions on Cuba for another year, utilizing authorities under the Trading With the Enemy Act.
"I hereby determine that the continuation of the exercise of those authorities with respect to Cuba for 1 year is in the national interest of the United States," Biden said in a memorandum to

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the US Secretaries of State and Treasury.
The United States will continue to exercise the authorities with respect to Cuba as implemented by the Cuban Assets Control Regulations.
Cuba is the only state currently under US trade restrictions through the Trading With the Enemy Act.

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Belarussian National Pleads Guilty to Violation of Sanctions on Russia – Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 13 (Sputnik) – A Belarusian citizen and resident of the US city of Miami pleaded guilty to a role in an alleged conspiracy to violate sanctions on Russia and agreed to forfeit nearly $5 million in criminal proceeds, the Justice Department said on Wednesday.
"Sergey Karpushkin, 46, of Miami, a resident of the United States and a citizen of Belarus, pleaded guilty today to engaging in a scheme to violate US sanctions and commit money laundering by conducting transactions for the purchase and acquisition of metal products valued at over $139 million from companies owned by Sergey Kurchenko, a sanctioned oligarch," the department said in a press release. "Karpushkin also agreed to forfeit $4,723,625 in proceeds that he obtained as a result of the conspiracy."
In April, the United States charged Karpushkin with one count of conspiring to violate and evade US sanctions and money laundering. It is alleged that the defendant as part of a conspiracy group between 2017 and 2020 knowingly purchased metal products from two companies owned by Kurchenko, according to the press release.
Karpushkin faces a maximum penalty of five years in prison, but the specific sentence will be determined by a judge, the press release said.

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US Approves $389 Million Foreign Military Sale to Poland - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 13 (Sputnik) - The US State Department announced on Wednesday that it has approved a potential $389 million foreign military sale (FMS) to Poland, encompassing F-16 fighter jet sustainment and related equipment.
"The proposed sale will improve Poland's capability to meet current and future threats by increasing the reliability of their F-16 fleet. Poland has purchased sustainment support for the F-16s in its inventory for many years, and will have no difficulty absorbing these articles and services into its armed forces," the State Department said in a statement.
Poland has expressed interest in purchasing so-called supplementary non-major defense equipment items and services to complement a prior FMS case with a value below the

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congressional notification threshold, the statement said.

The original $82 million FMS case included various items and services to bolster the F-16 aircraft's sustainment, the statement said.

"This proposed sale will support the foreign policy goals and national security objectives of the United States by improving the security of a North Atlantic Treaty Organization Ally that is a force for political stability and economic progress in Europe," the statement said.

The sale is not anticipated to disrupt the existing military balance in the region, the statement also said.

Lockheed Martin will serve as the principal contractor with no offset agreements currently proposed in conjunction with the potential sale, the statement added.

Implementing this sale will not require additional US government or contractor representatives to Poland and it is not expected to impact US defense readiness adversely, according to the statement.

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Sister of Paul Whelan to Meet With White House Officials During DC Visit - Kirby

WASHINGTON, September 13 (Sputnik) - The sister of Paul Whelan, a US citizen and Marine who is serving a prison sentence in Russia for espionage, is to meet with White House officials during her visit to DC and discuss US efforts to bring Whelan home, White House Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Wednesday.

"[Liz Whelan] is in town and she's gonna be meeting with White House officials. It will be a good opportunity for us to update her on our efforts to get Paul back-and those efforts are very active and ongoing," said Kirby.

Kirby's comment came after he was asked by a member of the press if Liz Whelan would be meeting with President Joe Biden as part of her visit to DC for a series of meetings with administration and congressional officials. President Biden initially met with Liz Whelan in September 2022.

The Biden administration has repeatedly maintained that it is making efforts to bring home Whelan and other detainees such as Evan Gershkovich, a Wall Street Journal reporter, as soon as possible.

On Wednesday, US Ambassador to Russia Lynne Tracy was granted a consular visit with Whelan and reiterated to him the United States' commitment to bringing him home.

Paul Whelan, a former US Marine, was arrested in Moscow in December 2018 and subsequently sentenced to 16 years in prison on espionage charges. Whelan, who is also a citizen of Canada, Ireland and the United Kingdom, has maintained his innocence, insisting that he came to Russia to attend a friend's wedding.

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State Dept. OKs $5.1Bln Sale of F-35s, Equipment to South Korea - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 13 (Sputnik) - The US State Department has approved a potential $5.06 billion sale of F-35 aircraft and related equipment to South Korea, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency said Wednesday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Republic of Korea of F-35 Aircraft and related equipment for an estimated cost of $5.06 billion. The Defense Security Cooperation Agency delivered the required certification notifying Congress of this possible sale today," DSCA said in a press release.

South Korea requested to buy up to 25 F-35 aircraft and up to 26 Pratt & Whitney F135-PW-100 engines, according to the release.

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State Dept. Claims US Always Fulfills Its Obligation as UN Host-Country

WASHINGTON, September 13 (Sputnik) - State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said on Wednesday that the United States fulfills its obligations as a United Nations host country and does so regardless of its attitude to the policies of a particular state.

“We have an obligation as the host country to admit representatives of other countries, no matter what we think of those country's policies,” Miller said during a press briefing.

The United States has a long history of not issuing visas to foreign diplomats, including from Russia, Iran, Libya, Venezuela, and Cuba.

In 2023 alone, the United States refused to issue visas or issued them too late to a host of Russian diplomats who were not able to travel to New York to take part in the work of the mission.

In June, Russia initiated an arbitration against the United States as a host country amid repeated violation of its obligations, including non-issuance of visas to Russian diplomats.

According to Russian Deputy Permanent Representative Maria Zabolotskaya, nearly 50 new employees appointed to work at the Permanent Mission have already been waiting for US entry visas for longer than three months.

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White House Says Biden Toured Ground Zero Week After 9/11 Attack, Fixing President’s Claim

WASHINGTON, September 13 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden visited Ground Zero approximately a week after the September 11 terror attacks, although he claims to have visited it

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a day after, National Security Council Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Wednesday.

During a speech commemorating the anniversary of the attacks on Monday, Biden claims to have visited Ground Zero the day after the terror attacks brought down the Twin Towers. However, fact-checkers have since disputed the president's claims.

"[Biden] spoke about a visit to Ground Zero, which he did participate in about a week or so after the event, and what that looked and what that smelled and what that felt like, and it had a visceral impact on him as it did so many other Americans on that terrible day," Kirby said, confirming the error in Biden's claim.

Biden toured Ground Zero on September 20, 2001, while serving as a US Senator.

Biden is focused on making sure an attack like 9/11 never happens again by improving over-the-horizon counterterrorism capabilities, Kirby added.

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Utah Senator Mitt Romney Announces He Won't Seek Re-election - Statement

WASHINGTON, September 13 (Sputnik) - Utah Senator Mitt Romney, on Wednesday, in a video shared on social media, declared that he would not pursue re-election next year, asserting that it's "time for a new generation of leaders to take the reins."

"At the end of another term, I'd be in my mid-80s. Frankly, it's time for a new generation of leaders. They're the ones that need to make the decisions that will shape the world they will be living in," said Sen. Mitt Romney.

Mitt Romney further elaborated on his decision, pointing out key challenges faced by the nation.

"We face critical challenges," remarked Mitt Romney, and assessed President Biden and former President Trump for failing to address issues related to deficits, debt, and entitlements.

"While I'm not running for re-election, I'm not retiring from the fight," said Mitt Romney.

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US Ambassador Visits Paul Whelan in Russian Prison – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 13 (Sputnik) - US Ambassador to Russia Lynne Tracy has visited convicted American citizen Paul Whelan and reiterated to him that President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken remain committed to bringing him home, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Wednesday.

"Ambassador Tracy did meet with Paul Whelan earlier today. It was a consular visit. We believe

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Paul continues to show tremendous courage in the face of his wrongful detention. Ambassador Tracy reiterated to him that President Biden and Secretary Blinken are committed to bring him home," Miller said during a press briefing.

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Trudeau Says Continuing to Do His Job Despite Polling Low

WASHINGTON, September 13 (Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Wednesday he has no intention to resign despite polling low in recent surveys.

His remarks come a day after media reported that over a dozen lawmakers from the ruling Liberal Party expressed concerns that Trudeau does not listen to their views, nor requests advice from them. In addition, a survey by Abacus Data published on September 7 revealed that the Liberals are polling 14 points behind the Conservatives of Pierre Poilievre.

"Well, we're two years out from the next election. I'm continuing to do my job. There's a lot of important work that needs to be done to deliver for Canadians during this tough time, and I remain enthusiastic to do that work," Trudeau said during a press conference from London, Ontario.

When addressing a question on a comment made by a member of the Liberals who said that although Trudeau had led them to victory in 2015, he had now become a liability for the party, the prime minister said that he would be having "frank conversations" with his fellow party members to find ways to address current challenges faced by Canadians.

"This is what Canadians expect of us," Trudeau said, adding that he has lots of ambition for Canada.

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

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US Has Obvious Concerns Over Any Burgeoning Defense Ties Between Russia, DPRK - Kirby

WASHINGTON, September 13 (Sputnik) - The United States has concerns about any defense relationship between Russia and North Korea, White House Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Wednesday.

"We obviously have concerns about any burgeoning defense relationship between North Korea and Russia," Kirby said during a press briefing.

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Biden Admin. Launches System to Track Civilian Deaths From US-Supplied Weapons - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 13 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has launched a new system to keep track of collateral civilian deaths and injuries as a result of the use of US-made weapons supplied to partner governments, the Washington Post reported on Wednesday.

The administration announced the launch of the new Civilian Harm Incident Response Guidance (CHIRG) in a diplomatic cable to all US embassies and consulates on August 23. Meanwhile, the State Department tasked its foreign missions to actively monitor and report all incidents of harm to civilians involving US-made arms, the report said.

US officials will be tasked with assessing whether the use of US weapons by a partner government that resulted in civilian collateral damage warrants suspension of arms sales, the report said.

The new system will be led by the State Department and will involve representatives from the Defense Department, the intelligence community and other government agencies that will probe all incidents involving US-origin weapons around the world, the report added.

In July, the Biden administration sent its first military assistance package to Ukraine that included cluster munitions. The move has been widely criticized by officials and human rights activists around the world and opposed by some US lawmakers.

It is not clear whether the new system will monitor the use of US-supplied cluster munitions by Ukraine.

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Blinken Says Agreement With Bahrain Will Strengthen Coordination Between Armed Forces

WASHINGTON, September 13 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday signed an agreement with Bahrain that will strengthen the coordination of their armed forces and intelligence units.

"This agreement will strengthen coordination between our armed forces and the integration of our intelligence capacity, so allowing us to even better deter and respond to threats as they arise," Blinken said alongside Bahraini Crown Prince and Prime Minister Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa at the State Department.

Blinken also said the agreement enhances the economic relationship between the United States and Bahrain by identifying new investment opportunities for private sector partners in the United States. The free trade agreement between the two countries has more than tripled trade and investment to about $3 billion a year, he noted.

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US Oil Output at New 3-Year High as Crude Stockpiles Rise First Time in 5 Weeks - EIA

WASHINGTON, September 13 (Sputnik) - US oil production hit new three-year highs last week and a weekly reading for crude stockpiles rose for the first time in five weeks as the peak summer driving season drew to a close, the Energy Information (EIA) said on Wednesday.

Average daily oil output for last week was estimated at 12.9 million barrels, the EIA said in its Weekly Petroleum Status Report. Until a couple of months ago, US crude output ranged between 12.1 million and 12.2 million barrels per day.

Last week's revision means US oil production is now just 400,000 short of the record high of 13.1 million barrels per day averaged in March 2020, just before the coronavirus outbreak and the implementation of the measures that temporarily decimated energy demand.

On the inventory side, US crude oil stockpiles jumped nearly 4 million barrels last week and fuel inventories rose by as much or more, indicating lower demand as the summer driving season officially drew to a close.

Specifically, the US crude inventory balance was higher by 3.955 million barrels during the week ended September 8. Industry analysts polled by US media had expected a crude drawdown of 2.481 million barrels instead for last week to add to the 6.307 million deficit in the prior week to September 1.

On the fuels side, the EIA reported a gasoline inventory increase of 5.561 million. The forecast consensus was for a gasoline draw of 0.85 million barrels that would have added to the prior week's decline of 2.666 million.

With distillate stockpiles, there was a build of 3.931 million barrels versus the expected gain of 1.4 million and the prior week's rise of 0.679 million. Distillates are refined into heating oil, diesel for trucks, buses, trains and ships and fuel for jets.

The growth in both crude and fuel supplies coincided with the winding down of summer driving in the United States last week, marked by the September 4 Labor Day holiday. Prior to that, refiners had drawn nearly 20 million barrels of crude from inventory over a period of four weeks as they maxed out fuel processing to meet demand. Refiners had maintained an extraordinarily high run rate of more than 93% of their capacity during the period.

As of last week, the EIA said although US refineries were still operating at high run rates, the amount of crude that they turned into fuel was less than before.

"Refineries operated at 93.7% of their operable capacity last week," the EIA said in its report. "Gasoline production decreased last week, averaging 9.2 million barrels per day. Distillate fuel production decreased last week, averaging 5 million barrels per day."

Demand for fuels also fell as the peak summer driving bowed out, the EIA market summary showed. Total gasoline supplied to the marketplace - a key indicator of consumption - fell to a daily average of 8.307 million from the prior week's 9.321 million. Gasoline consumption below the daily mark of 9 million is often a red flag for demand, and such usage levels are typical in off-peak periods of demand like now.

Alongside domestic demand, exports of US crude - one of the bright spots of the weekly EIA report for months now - fell last week to 3.090 million barrels per day from the previous week's 4.932 million.

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But imports of crude grew as refiners appeared to pull more oil into the country in anticipation of demand. According to the EIA, US crude imports averaged 7.6 million barrels per day last week, up 0.812 million from the prior week. Imports grew despite aggressive supply cuts by Saudi Arabia, which has been trying to channel less crude towards the United States in its bid to create a more bullish picture for oil in the EIA's weekly reporting.

Joined by Russia, which has announced a 300,000 barrels per day cut in oil production from this month, the Saudis' voluntary reduction of 1 million barrels daily has driven global oil prices to 10-month highs of $90 per barrel or thereabouts.

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Republicans Say Will Block Federal Reserve Digital Coin, Liken It to Oppressive China Tool

WASHINGTON, September 13 (Sputnik) - Republicans in the US Congress are working to block the US central bank digital currency (CBDC) that the Federal Reserve has explored to innovate how Americans use and store money, congressional officials said on Wednesday.

On Tuesday, Republican Congressman Tom Emmer reintroduced the Central Bank Digital Currency Anti-Surveillance State Act, which aims to prevent the Fed and its member banks from issuing a CBDC that would practically serve as a digital version of the dollar and become a part of the US monetary system.

The congressional officials said Wednesday's debate on Emmer's bill, which originally surfaced earlier this year and has been updated since with more arguments against the CBDC, will likely shape the Fed's actions on how it pursues the proposed coin.

Republicans have likened the CBDC to the oppressive tools used by the Chinese Community Party (CCP) used to spy on and control citizens' private affairs, including their management of money.

"If not open, permissionless and private - like cash - a CBDC is nothing more than a CCP-style surveillance tool that can be weaponized to oppress the American way of life," Emmer said on Wednesday via X. "We're not going to let that happen - not on the House Republicans' watch."

The Fed has previously voiced concerns about the risks to Americans posed by cryptocurrencies and scams associated with digital money. However, the Fed has not clearly stated that it wants a CBDC, but has not rejected the idea based on the premise that Americans may one day benefit from government-endorsed digital money.

According to research by the Atlantic Council's GeoEconomics Center, as many as 130 countries that represent 98% of the global economy are exploring digital versions of their currencies. Eleven, including China, already have fully-implemented CBDCs.

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Musk After Senate AI Forum Says 'Strong Overwhelming Consensus' for Regulation

WASHINGTON, September 13 (Sputnik) - Tech entrepreneur Elon Musk said on Wednesday, following his participation in an artificial intelligence (AI) forum with other tech CEOs and US senators, that there was a strong overwhelming consensus among everyone on a need to regulate the technology.

"I think it's clear that there's a strong overwhelming consensus that there should be some AI regulation that would be in the best interest to do so and I think we'll probably see something happen, [but] I don't know on what time frame or how it will manifest itself," Musk told reporters after the meeting.

The AI forum was led by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and included other tech giants such as Meta(banned organization in Russia) CEO Mark Zuckerberg and Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates.

Some AI-related legislation could "probably" eventually come out as result of the meeting, according to Musk.

Musk said he believes something good will come of this meeting and described it as a civilized discussion among some of the smartest people in the world.

The meeting may go down in history as being very important for the future of civilization, Musk added.

According to media reports, Musk warned senators in the meeting that AI posed a civilizational risk to governments and societies.

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US Astronaut Says Will Forever Share Bond With Russian Crewmates After Mission

WASHINGTON, September 13 (Sputnik) - US astronaut Frank Rubio will share a bond with his Russian cosmonaut crewmates Sergey Prokopyev and Dmitri Petelin for the rest of his life after their record-breaking more than one year mission on the International Space Station (ISS), the NASA space veteran told a podcast on Wednesday.

"We will have that brotherhood and that bond for the rest of our lives," Rubio told NASA Administrator Bill Nelson and Deputy Administrator Pam Melroy.

Rubio, Prokopyev and Petelin are now scheduled to return to Earth on a Soyuz spacecraft on September 27 after spending 371 days in space, giving Rubio the longest single stretch of time of any US astronaut in space, beating Mark T. Vande Hei's previous record of 355 days. However, many Russian cosmonauts have served on missions of far longer duration.

Rubio will therefore become the first American to spend more than one calendar year in microgravity.

Rubio and his crewmates blasted off for the ISS on September 21, 2022 but in December their spacecraft developed a coolant leak. Then, Russian federal space agency Roscosmos and NASA worked together to extend their mission and plan to bring them home on a different

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spacecraft to ensure safety.

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Hunter Biden Sues Ex-Trump Aide Garrett Ziegler Over Infamous Laptop Ordeal - Filing

WASHINGTON, September 13 (Sputnik) - Hunter Biden filed a lawsuit on Wednesday against former Trump White House aide Garrett Ziegler for his alleged role in publishing online email and embarrassing images taken from his laptop, court documents revealed.

"Since approximately December 2020, Defendant Ziegler, Defendant ICU and their 'team' of volunteers and independent contractors have spent countless hours accessing, tampering with, manipulating, altering, copying and damaging computer data that they do not own and that they claim to have obtained from hacking into Plaintiff's iPhone data and from scouring a copy of the hard drive of what they claim to be Plaintiff's "laptop" computer," Biden's lawyers said in the complaint.

The lawsuit, which was filed in federal court in California, accuses Ziegler of violating the state's computer fraud laws.

While Biden sues Ziegler, he himself is under congressional investigation over alleged corrupt foreign business dealings.

Moreover, Biden faces tax evasion and firearms charges, which were set to be resolved by a plea deal and pre-trial diversion agreement. However, the arrangement collapsed and the parties have since reached an impasse in attempting to reach a new deal.

According to separate court documents, the Special Counsel involved in the Hunter Biden investigation plans to indict the President Joe Biden's son by September 29.

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Pentagon Orders Design for New Mobile Micro-Nuclear Reactor - Statement

WASHINGTON, September 13 (Sputnik) - The Department of Defense issued a release on Wednesday that it has ordered the design of a new mobile nuclear mini-reactor.

"As part of the Strategic Capabilities Office (SCO) initiative Project Pele, the Department of Defense has awarded a contract option to X-energy of Rockville, Maryland in order to develop an enhanced engineering design for a transportable micro nuclear reactor," the release said.

The SCO selected in 2022 the company BWX Technologies of Lynchburg, Virginia, to build a prototype micro reactor.

Work on that project is now underway and long lead hardware fabrication has begun, the release said.

"By executing this contract option with X-energy, SCO seeks to develop a complementary micro

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reactor design that builds upon X-energy's developments completed under Project Pele in 2022," the release added.

The program now will continue funding for X-energy to develop its design to meet the technical requirements of Project Pele, targeting a reactor design which is ready for licensing by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for both commercial ventures and military resiliency, according to the release.

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US Congresswoman Greene Says Introduced Amendment to Cut Defense Secretary's Pay to $1

WASHINGTON, September 13 (Sputnik) - US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene said on Wednesday that she introduced an amendment to the Fiscal Year 2024 Defense Department appropriations bill to cut Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's pay to $1, citing a failure to uphold his responsibilities.

"Lloyd Austin has failed in his role as Secretary of Defense and has jeopardized the national security of the United States. I've introduced an amendment using the Holman rule to the Defense Appropriations Act to cut Secretary Austin's salary to no more than $1," Greene said in a statement via the social media platform X.

The Holman rule allows House of Representatives lawmakers to introduce amendments to appropriations bills to cut the pay of or fire a US government employee. The House Rules Committee declared Greene's amendment in order, slating it for a vote later on Wednesday, the statement said.

The amendment is the first of the 118th Congress to receive a vote using the Holman rule to slash the salary of a Biden administration official, the statement said.

Austin "botched" the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan, has failed to solve the military's recruitment crisis and purges members through vaccine mandates and other measures, the statement said.

US taxpayers should no longer have to reward Austin's failures by paying his salary, the statement added.

The House of Representatives was set to consider the defense appropriations bill on Wednesday, although floor action may be delayed due to a potential lack of necessary support in the Republican conference, according to media reports.

Congress must pass a continuing resolution, appropriations bills or an omnibus package before the end of the month in order to avoid a government shutdown.

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Guterres on Putin-Kim Talks: Any Cooperation Must Respect UN Sanctions Regime

UNITED NATIONS, September 13 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday regarding the talks held by the leaders of Russia and North Korea that any cooperation between them must respect the United Nations sanctions regime imposed on the latter.

"Any form of cooperation of any country with North Korea must respect the sanctions regime that was imposed by the Security Council," Guterres told reporters when asked about possible military cooperation between Moscow and Pyongyang.

Guterres emphasized that it is "absolutely essential" to abide by UN Security Council resolutions and accused North Korea of violating them as evidenced by Pyongyang's recent ballistic missile test launches.

Earlier on Wednesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un held talks at the Vostochny cosmodrome in Russia.

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UN Chief Says Ukraine Conflict Key Factor in Aggravating 'Geopolitical Dilutions'

UNITED NATIONS, September 13 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday that the conflict in Ukraine is the key factor in diluting the attention of the international community on other world conflicts.

"I think the war in Ukraine is indeed a key factor in the aggravation of geopolitical dilutions," Guterres said.

The UN chief pointed out that the solution to the Ukraine conflict is in line with the UN Charter and international law.

Ukraine is high on Guterres' agenda and he now focuses his efforts on reviving the exports grain agreement, formally known as the Black Sea Initiative.

The UN chief has said that the agreement also serves as a framework for dialogue between the parties to the conflict in Ukraine.

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UN Efforts to Revive Grain Initiative in Compliance with Sanctions Regime – Guterres

UNITED NATIONS, September 13 (Sputnik) – The efforts and proposals made by the UN for the establishment of the Black Sea Grain Initiative are not in violation of the current sanctions' regime imposed on Russia, but in compliance with it, Secretary General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday.

"I'd like to say because this has been in the in the press, that those efforts are being done not to

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violate the sanctions regime, but within the sanctions regime to make sure that there are not indirect impacts or chilling effects that were not wished when the sanctions regime was established," Guterres said during a press conference.

The SG's remarks came as he addressed media reports alleging that him and Turkish President Recep Erdogan were preparing new proposals for Russia in relation to the grain deal.

The initial Black Sea Grain Initiative – signed by Russia, Ukraine, Turkey and the UN – expired in July after the Kremlin declined to renew the deal, citing a lack of compliance with certain terms of the agreement.

On Tuesday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said there has not been any progress toward a resumption of the grain deal.

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UN Chief Says Would Love to Mediate Ukraine Peace Talks But Situation 'Far From That'

UNITED NATIONS, September 13 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday that he would love to mediate to get to peace talks in the Ukraine conflict, but the situation is far from such talks.

"I would love to have a chance to be able to mediate in order to have peace talks, but I think we are far from that," Guterres said.

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US Congressman Says Introduced Bill to Prevent Foreign Actors From Buying US Farmland

WASHINGTON, September 13 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Blaine Luetkemeyer said on Wednesday that he introduced a bill to prevent hostile foreign actors from buying farmland in the United States, due to the Chinese Communist Party allegedly purchasing land near US military bases.

"The legislation would empower the U.S. Department of Agriculture to assist in preventing potentially hostile foreign actors from purchasing agricultural land within the United States," Luetkemeyer said in a statement.

The bill, dubbed the Safeguarding American Farms from Foreign Influence Act, comes in response to an increase in purchases of farmland near US military bases by China, the statement said.

Foreign ownership of such land threatens national security and the US food supply, the statement added.

The bill would amend the Defense Production Act to require the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States to determine whether a national security review is necessary for any proposed agricultural land purchases, as referred by the US Secretary of Agriculture, the

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statement said.
US regulations require foreign persons who buy, sell or gain interest in US farmland to disclose their holdings and transactions to the US Department of Agriculture.

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Guterres Says Will Meet With Zelenskyy, Erdogan, Lavrov Next Week to Discuss Grain Deal

UNITED NATIONS, September 13 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday he will meet with the presidents of Ukraine and Turkey as well as with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov during the high-level week for talks on the Black Sea grain deal.
"Well, next week, I will be receiving President Zelenskyy. I will be receiving President Erdogan. I will be receiving Minister Lavrov and obviously, this question [grain deal] will be on the table," Guterres said during a press conference.
The UN chief declined to say whether he felt optimistic about what could be achieved during the talks, but said he remains determined to do everything he could to revive the Black Sea Grain Initiative.

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Support for Trump Remains Steady, Charges Against Him Not Serious Cause of Concern - Poll

WASHINGTON, September 13 (Sputnik) - Support for former President Donald Trump remains steady among Republican voters ahead of the primary elections and more than half of them say the criminal charges against Trump are not a serious cause of concern, a CNN poll revealed on Wednesday.
Trump remains the favorite contestant for the Republican Party presidential nomination with 52% of voters supporting him and providing an advantage of 34 points on his closest rival Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, a release on the poll said.
Forty percent of potential Republican voters have expressed intent to definitely supporting Trump and 20% pledged to vote for other candidates, the release said.
The criminal charges in four indictments against Trump have not significantly affected the Republican voting intentions and 56% of the voters say they are not seriously concerned by them, the release said.
In addition, the same block of voters say if the allegations prove to be true, Trump's ability to govern would not be affected, the release said.
"Most, 61%, say that Trump faces so many criminal charges largely because of political abuse of the justice system," the release added.

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UN Chief Calls on World Leaders Ahead of UNGA to Compromise for 'Better Tomorrow'

UNITED NATIONS, September 13 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres on Wednesday called on world leaders ahead of the UN General Assembly to come together and compromise in order to secure a better future.

"This is a time to come together for real, practical solutions. It is time for compromise for a better tomorrow," Guterres said.

The UN chief emphasized that politics is all about compromise and world leaders should practice it.

Ukraine is high on Guterres' agenda and will be discussed during the UN General Assembly debate that will start on September 19.

Guterres has focused his efforts mainly on reviving the grain exports agreement, formally known as the Black Sea Initiative, and maintains the deal serves as a framework for peace dialogue between the parties in the Ukraine conflict.

Moscow let the grain agreement lapse in July because the provisions of the agreement pertaining to Russia for its food and fertilizer exports had not been implemented.

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Blinken Says Post-Cold War Era Core Assumptions No Longer Hold

WASHINGTON, September 13 (Sputnik) - Some core assumptions about international relations that shaped the United States' approach to the post-Cold War era no longer hold and need to be reconsidered, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday.

"There's a growing recognition that several of the core assumptions that shaped our approach to the post-Cold War era, no longer hold," Blinken said in his speech at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS). "Decades of relative geopolitical stability have given way to an intensifying competition with authoritarian powers, revisionist powers."

Among the destabilizing factors, Blinken mentioned the conflict in Ukraine, as well as a growing challenge posed by China that allegedly aspires to reshape the international world order.

According to the top US diplomat, the world is currently facing the growing influence of non-state actors — from resourceful corporations to non-government organizations — while forging international cooperation has become more complex because of the immense scale of global problems.

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UN Chief Says to Find Multipolar Harmony, Institutions Need Reform

UNITED NATIONS, September 13 (Sputnik) - The United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday that in order to find harmony in today's multipolar world International institutions need reforms.

"To bring our multipolar world together, we need strong, reformed multilateral institutions, anchored in the United Nations Charter and international law.," Guterres told a briefing.

The international institutions were created after WWII and that is why they need a reform, he added.

Ukraine is now a big part of Guterres' agenda and it also will be discussed during the United Nations General Assembly debate which kicks off on September 19. The United Nations now focuses mainly on the resumption of the Black Sea Grain Initiative and says it also serves as a framework for peace dialogue between the parties.

Moscow let the UN-and-Turkey-brokered grain deal lapse in July because its condition of reciprocal market access for Russian food and fertilizer exports had been repeatedly ignored.

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UPDATE: Fugitive Killer Apprehended in Pennsylvania – State Police

(Updates para 1, replaces para 2, adds paras 4-6)

WASHINGTON, September 13 (Sputnik) – Fugitive convicted killer Danelo Cavalcante was apprehended by police on Wednesday after they were able to narrow down an area from a heat signal detected by aircraft, according to Pennsylvania State Police (PSP).

"Shortly after 8:00 a.m., tactical teams converged on the area where the heat source was. They were able to move in very quietly; they had the element of surprise. Cavalcante did not realize he was surrounded until that had occurred. That did not stop him from trying to escape. He began to crawl through thick underbrush taking his rifle with him as he went," Pennsylvania State Police Lieutenant Colonel George Bivens said at a press briefing.

Bivens said a Border Patrol Tactical Unit (BORTAC) released a dog who successfully subdued Cavalcante, allowing BORTAC and PSP officers to move in and take him into custody.

Cavalcante sustained a "minor bite wound," while law enforcement officials were not injured, he added.

Bivens rejected criticism of the nearly two-week manhunt that marshalled nearly 500 officers and left residents terrified as Cavalcante made his way through the western suburbs of Pennsylvania and even stole a rifle from a resident's garage. Bivens insisted that the operation was "absolutely a success" and law enforcement had "done an amazing job."

Bivens added that Cavalcante was transported to the Avondale station for further processing and would ultimately be transferred to a state correctional institute. He will discuss with the district attorney if Calvalcante will face charges resulting from the escape.

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The Brazilian national escaped from Chester County Prison on August 31, shortly after being sentenced to life in prison for killing his ex-girlfriend. His escape sparked a desperate manhunt, with Cavalcante considered by police to be “armed and extremely dangerous.”

He is also wanted in Brazil in connection with a murder dating from 2017.

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US House Oversight Panel Will Hold Hearing on Alleged Biden Crimes This Month - Comer

WASHINGTON, September 13 (Sputnik) - The US House Oversight Committee will hold a hearing later this month to review alleged crimes committed by President Joe Biden and his family, committee chairman James Comer said on Wednesday.

“We plan on having a hearing in September that will kind of evaluate some of the things that we believe have happened from the Biden family that are in violation of the law,” Comer said during a press conference.

On Tuesday, US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy announced that he directed House lawmakers to begin an impeachment inquiry into Biden to enable further investigation of alleged crimes.

The Oversight Committee has requested unredacted emails from the National Archives in which Biden allegedly used a pseudonym, Comer said. The panel also hopes to get bank account records from Biden’s son and brothers, Comer said.

Lawmakers are also seeking to interview people who may have knowledge of alleged illegal business deals involving the Biden family, Comer said.

The Oversight Committee has been investigating alleged foreign bribery and influence peddling involving the Biden family and entities in countries including Ukraine and China. Biden denies ever having discussed foreign business affairs with his son.

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US Working Round Clock to Have Gershkovich, Others Released - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, September 13 (Sputnik) - The United States is working "round the clock" to release Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich and others who have been "wrongfully detained," US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield said on Wednesday, commenting on a possible prisoner swap.

"I cannot get into details of what may be happening on that front, other than to say that we are working round the clock, we are working diligently to have Evan, as well as others who have been wrongfully detained released," Thomas-Greenfield told reporters.

When asked about potential interactions on the matter between US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov during the upcoming UN General

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Assembly's high-level week, Thomas-Greenfield declined to discuss Blinken's schedule. However, the US envoy pointed out that she uses every opportunity to raise the issue in engagements with her Russian counterpart.

On March 29, Gershkovich was arrested in the Russian city of Yekaterinburg on suspicion of trying to collect classified defense information for the United States. He has since been remanded in custody. If found guilty, the journalist could be facing up to 20 years of imprisonment.

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DIA Withheld Documents on Syria, Now Provides Overly Optimistic Reports on Ukraine - Hersh

SEPTEMBER 13 (Sputnik) - The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) withheld documents from the White House on anti-government extremist groups in Syria producing sarin gas and has been providing "insanely" optimistic assessments on the conflict in Ukraine, investigative journalist Seymour Hersh reported on his Substack blog on Wednesday.

"[Secretary of State Anthony] Blinken's wrong-headed confidence and his acceptance of a significant escalation in the Ukraine war defies belief given the reality on the ground today in the war. But it also could be based on insanely optimistic assessments supplied by the Defense Intelligence Agency. The DIA's assessments, as I have reported, are now the intelligence of choice inside the White House," Hersh said.

Hersh noted that amid calls for the United States to intervene in the Syrian conflict ten years ago, the White House was not provided with crucial intelligence because of their alleged "politically inconvenient" nature.

Such was the case of a detailed yet DIA-redacted five-page report from intercepts by the National Security Agency (NSA) that anti-government Islamist groups possessed the nerve agent sarin gas, Hersh said.

"It revealed the kind of truth that presidents then and now viewed as political poison," Hersh said.

DIA's intelligence on Russia does not get to relevant hands in the White House because it is being ignored for political expediency, just like CIA reports on the current failed Ukrainian counteroffensive are being ignored by Blinken, he said.

Hersh pointed out that he chose to publish a series of documents on his Substack because what the US Intelligence community did regarding Syria, it is doing once again regarding the Ukraine conflict.

If the same situation is allowed to persist regarding Ukraine, the war with Russia can expand and that is an outcome that nobody wants, Hersh added.

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