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9/15/23 Friday

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US Space Force Prepares to Establish Command Post in Japan

The US Space Force (USSF) is moving toward establishing a new command post in Japan as the Pentagon's newest service branch establishes a firmer footing in the US military's global apparatus.

In July, Japan hosted its first-ever Space Engagement Talks with the United States at Yokota Air Base, which paralleled the arrival of two Space Domain Awareness (SDA) sensors that will be incorporated into Japanese satellites as part of a joint effort called the Quasi-Zenith Satellite System Hosted Payload (QZSS-HP).

USSF Brig. Gen. Anthony Mastalir, the commander of USSF forces under US Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM), said in a news release at the time that the QZSS-HP would help "extend our alliance into space."

"We are dedicated to enabling a cadre of space experts who can work with Allies and partners to integrate space activities into shared operations, activities, and investments. By bringing in the right Guardians [USSF service members] at the right time with our Allies, we can maximize opportunities to exercise and train together as well as cooperatively field capabilities such as QZSS-HP." Mastalir said, adding: "this milestone is significant for both nations."

The USSF has also had Space Engagement Talks with Israel, Brazil, and Australia.

The first steps toward a USSF presence in the Pacific were taken last November, when US Indo-Pacific Command established an Indo-Pacific Space Force component at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, followed by another in South Korea a month later.

In January, Tokyo appealed to Washington for their bilateral security treaty to be extended to include its space-based assets, which include several dozen communications and Earth-monitoring satellites in a variety of orbits, including geostationary.

The US has rationalized this expansion - and indeed, the existence of the USSF - by citing expanding Chinese and Russian space capabilities, including the testing of anti-satellite missiles previously only possessed by the US military. In April, Adm. John Aquilino, the commander of INDOPACOM, told federal lawmakers that by launching dozens of new satellites into space last year, China was "delivering capabilities that seek to deny use of our own space architecture."

Beijing has denied any intent to threaten US space assets, instead pointing to the threat posed by US satellites to Chinese space assets. In 2021, China said its Tiangong space station was forced to alter course twice in order to avoid Starlink internet satellites operated by SpaceX, a US defense contractor owned by Elon Musk. An article published by Chinese academics in a peer-reviewed journal in November 2022 found that SpaceX's vast network of Starlink satellites "routinely" violate the informal set of rules nations have used to govern safety in Earth orbit.

However, China isn't the only concern cited in expanding USSF operations in the Pacific: missile tests by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) have also come up. When US President Joe Biden hosted the Japanese and South Korean leaders in Camp David last month,

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the trio discussed extending their cooperation on ballistic missile tracking and defense, pledging to have a joint system in place by the end of the year.

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'Matter of Honor': N Korea Will Never Bow to US Pressure Despite Huge Weapons Sales to the South

Washington's goal on the Korean Peninsula has always been to destabilize and destroy the socialist Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), which has blocked its goal of unifying Korea under a pro-US banner for 73 years. Fortunately, Pyongyang has friends, most especially in Moscow, and is a faithful partner, an expert told Sputnik.

The US State Department on Wednesday approved the sale of 25 more F-35A Joint Strike Fighters to South Korea for $5.06 billion. The package includes a spare jet engine and a variety of weapons and equipment for the stealthy aircraft.

Seoul is slated to receive a total of 60 F-35As, which operate from conventional airstrips, and at least 20 F-35Bs, the short and vertical-takeoff and landing variant of the jet suitable for flying from the amphibious assault ship the South Korean navy plans to build in the coming years.

The F-35s will operate closely with the KF-21 Boramae, a joint project between South Korea and Indonesia to produce a similar aircraft to the F-35 with less stealth and a much cheaper cost.

Scott Bennett, a former US Army psychological warfare officer and State Department counter-terrorism analyst, told Sputnik on Friday that the latest F-35 sale to Seoul was a "gross hypocrisy," but ultimately not of major concern, due to the aircraft's many failings.

"The recent sale of US F-35s to South Korea while at the same time, protesting furiously and trying to command North Korea to cut off all relations from Russia is comical. It's not just a sign of gross hypocrisy and childish tantrums, but it's the indication of a psychotic State Department, resembling the psychosis of an Alzheimer's afflicted and dementia-riddled old man in the White House," he said of 80-year-old US President Joe Biden.

"It's also not too concerning, because the F-35s essentially are one of the worst air platforms ever designed and no nation can fly them for more than a couple days without grounding them for repairs," he continued. "So they're not a serious piece of military technology and certainly South Koreans are not capable of even understanding them, never mind operating them, especially given the superior technology of North Korea."

Bennett said the US had made the decision to approve the massive weapons sale during DPRK leader Kim Jong Un's visit to Russia, which Washington is striving to isolate geopolitically, because its only goal in Korea has been to destabilize the DPRK and cause it to implode, ultimately with the goal of depriving China of a powerful ally.

"The US also has tens of thousands of troops stationed on South Korea and has equipped South Korea with all kinds weapons, technology, missiles, planes, and other things, including the biological weapon technology that the US developed in Ukraine," he added.

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“What is most interesting is that the US strategy has failed, and is indeed beginning to backfire, as we see most recently with the assembly of the multipolar world and BRICS organizational success. Indeed, this was capped off this past week, when the president of North Korea, Kim Jong Un, jumped on a train and visited President Putin, and together they toasted their long friendship and enduring commitment to each other, militarily, economically, socially and politically. It was clear to all who could see, and had honest hearts to understand, that there was deep honest affection between them, and an enduring commitment between North Korea, and Russia now exists because of the pressure and hostility imposed against them by the United States in NATO,” he said, adding: “This will only increase and become more dynamic in the future months and years.”

Bennett noted that despite US protests, Pyongyang has “promised to always stand by Russia,” refusing to be turned into a weapon for destabilizing its northern neighbor.

“It is now a matter of principle and honor - which ranks very high in Korean psychology,” he noted.

“Indeed, it seems that many nations and tribes of the world are now finally recognizing that if they do not support each other against the global domination ambitions of the West, then they will hang independently and individually in the future as the West methodically targets one nation after another.”

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‘Pro-Labor’ Biden Must ‘Walk Fine Line’ Between Union, Bosses in Posturing on UAW Strike

Which side the Democratic US president will take on the United Auto Workers strike remains to be seen, as the White House struggles to maintain an increasingly impossible position as both pro-labor and pro-business.

The strike by American auto workers has the potential to deal a severe blow to the US economy, but the workers’ cause is “just,” a labor lawyer told Sputnik.

Following a breakdown in contract negotiations, 13,000 automotive factory workers represented by the United Auto Workers (UAW) labor union walked out on strike on Friday, just the latest in large strike actions to rock the US economy in 2023. The strikes affected factories owned by Ford, Stellantis and General Motors in Missouri, Ohio, and Michigan.

"For the past 24 hours, we've been actively bargaining with Ford, General Motors and Stellantis. For the first time in our union's history, we had all three companies bargaining right here at the 'Solidarity House,' leading into the final hours of our strike deadline. We've been working hard trying to reach a deal for economic and social justice for our members," UAW President Shawn Fain said on Thursday night, hours before the strikes began.

US President Joe Biden made a last-minute appeal to the automakers and the UAW to reach an agreement and avert the strike to no avail. The Democratic leader has promoted himself as “the most pro-union president ever,” but largely failed to show support for the myriad unions that have gone on strike during his tenure, including signing a bill to block railway workers from striking last December.

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By contrast, business leaders and the right wing have tried to cast the strike wave as a consequence of Biden's policies. US Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Suzanne Clark said on Friday that "the UAW strike and indeed the 'summer of strikes' is the natural result of the Biden administration's 'whole of government' approach to promoting unionization at all costs." Supporters of the strike actions and threatened strikes over the last few months have hailed the uptick in organized labor activity as "hot labor summer." Other unions also on strike include the Screen Actors Guild and American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA) and the Writers Guild of America (WGA), and several other unions have authorized strikes that have not yet begun, such as employees of American Airlines.

The United Parcel Service (UPS) narrowly avoided what would have been the nation's largest-ever, single-employer strike in August by returning to the negotiating table days before the strike by the International Brotherhood of Teamsters was set to begin.

Human rights lawyer, labor lawyer, and peace activist Dan Kovalik toldRadio Sputnik's Political Misfits on Friday that Biden will need to walk a narrow line between maintaining his image as a pro-union president and his image as a leader responsible for a strong economy, due to the potential for the UAW strike to be "the straw that breaks the camel's back" and trigger an economic downturn.

"It appears not all of the union workers are on strike. What I saw was that they did not want to, at least at this point, bring the industry down," he told hosts Michelle Witte and John Kiriakou. "And yes, usually it is targeted. Usually they pick one company to target and then try to get the other companies to fall in line. I don't think that's what's happening here: they haven't targeted one company, but they've targeted a few different plants. So they've not shut the entire industry down," he explained.

Kovalik said there were a few core issues in dispute, which the union and the company didn't seem close to resolving any time soon.

"Wages are big, because again, they haven't had a wage increase in a long time and of course the cost of living has gone up," he noted, adding there was also a "two-tier wage structure and part-time employees - they have way too many part-time employees who don't have a very good path to becoming full-time employees. And that is something that they want to deal with, that's probably one of the bigger issues."

Indeed, the strike that the Teamsters threatened against UPS last month also focused in large part on ending a much-hated two-tier wage system.

Kovalik said he didn't believe it was "out of bounds" for the UAW to demand a 36% wage increase over the next five years, given that inflation is already high and the previous deal didn't include a built-in cost-of-living increase in wages.

"The CEOs of these companies are making millions of dollars, of course. These are profitable companies, there's no reason they can't share some of those profits with these workers. So to me it just seems to come down to greed. I don't know how else to characterize it. That's why the union's cause here is just," he said.

Kovalik said the strike has the "potential ability" to have even wider economic ramifications than the New York Times, which said it could cost the economy some $5.4 billion, is willing to admit. Indeed, even the NYT's estimate assumes the strike will only last eight days.

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“If it lasts weeks or months, you’re talking about billions and billions of dollars,” he said, noting that “upstream” industries, such as steel and rubber manufacturers, would be just as affected as “downstream” industries, such as vehicle sales and maintenance.

“So this could impact many industries and many workers and have a huge impact on the economy,” Kovalik said, adding “the economy seems teetering on a recession in any case, so this could be the straw that breaks the camel’s back.”

Turning to Biden’s anticipated national speech in response to the strike, Kovalik said the president would need to “walk a fine line … between appearing to be pro-union, but also he’s afraid that this strike could destroy any economic gains he’s had during his term, and therefore jeopardize his reelection.”

“He’s going to be very careful in how he words this. He has not said that he supports the strike, all he’s said is he supports the parties reaching an agreement,” Kovalik said, noting “it doesn’t appear he’s done much to help them reach an agreement.”

“And again, where is Pete Buttigieg, the transportation secretary, he seems MIA in all this. I think we’re going to hear a lot of tap-dancing and not hear much concrete of anything, because he doesn’t know which direction to go on this one,” Kovalik said of Biden’s speech.

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US Army Admits Hypersonic Weapon Deployment Plan Behind Schedule

After delaying its latest test of the Long-Range Hypersonic Weapon (LRHW), the US Army has admitted that its plan to deploy the ground-launched missile by the end of September is off schedule. The Pentagon has struggled to catch up with rivals like Russia and China in developing the advanced weapons.

Earlier this month, the Army canceled its planned test of the weapon ahead of its planned entry into active service in late September, based on unstated problems encountered during “pre-flight checks.”

“It is not uncommon for fielding dates to adjust based on real-time developments,” a US Army spokesperson told US media on Friday. “We continue to aggressively pursue the testing and fielding of long-range hypersonic weapons. Our goal is to field the system as soon as possible following a successful test. It is a top modernization priority for the Army and for the Department of Defense.”

The Army has been developing the LRHW with Lockheed Martin since 2019 as one of several hypersonic weapons programs after Russia and China debuted their own hypersonic weapons. The LRHW is fired from a mobile Transporter-Erector-Launcher (TEL) like a ground-launched ballistic missile, but contains an unpowered glide vehicle that takes the warhead to its final destination at speeds in excess of Mach 5, all while making random maneuvers. The result is a weapon that’s incredibly difficult to track and even harder to shoot down. It has a reported range of 1,725 miles (2,780 kilometers).

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In addition to its ground-launched variant, the LRHW is also planned to be adapted to firing from the US Navy's Zumwalt-class cruisers, which have already begun refitting to carry the extra-large missile tubes.

Another hypersonic weapon in development by the Pentagon, the Air-Launched Rapid Response Weapon (ARRW), is also behind schedule after repeated test failures. The weapon is fired from beneath the wing of a B-52 Stratofortress bomber and also contains a glide vehicle. Other types of hypersonic weapons might use ramjet technology to operate more like super-fast cruise missiles.

Russia led the way in developing hypersonic weapons in the early 21st century after the United States unilaterally shredded the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, a 1972 agreement designed to lower the risk of nuclear war. The treaty limited the US and Soviet Union (later Russia) to two sets of anti-ballistic missile interceptor complexes in an attempt to avoid either nation from believing it was so secure from enemy counterattack that it could survive launching a nuclear first strike.

After the US began developing a slew of new anti-ballistic missile interceptors following the end of the ABM in 2002, Russia dusted off 1980s-era plans for hypersonic weapons, which are designed to beat traditional ballistic missile defense systems. Avangard, the world's first hypersonic weapon, was announced to the world in 2018, and Russia has introduced two more since: the Kinzhal hypersonic cruise missile and the Zircon surface-launched and submarine-launched missile.

China has also pioneered the development of several types of hypersonic weapon in line with its heavy focus on long-range missiles as an asymmetric counter to the superior technology of the US military. Iran and North Korea have also announced tests of hypersonic weapons.

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Former US President Jimmy Carter and Wife Near Their 'End', Says Grandson

The former commander-in-chief is already the longest-living US president in history. His 99th birthday is coming up on October 1.

Former US President Jimmy Carter and his wife Rosalynn are coming to the end of their lives, the ex-leader's grandson Jason Carter said on Thursday.

In February, the Carter Center announced the former president had decided to forgo treatment and enter into hospice care. By May, the Carter family announced the former first lady had been diagnosed with dementia.

Thursday, Jason Carter told US media that the former president is in a good place, watching baseball and spending time with his family.

"They're coming to the end, as we know," Carter said. "They are together. They are at home. They're in love, and I don't think anyone gets more than that. I mean, it's a perfect situation for this time in their lives."

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The younger Carter, who is also the chairman of the Carter Center's Board of Trustees, added that his grandfather does face "really significant physical challenges" but both he and the former first lady are "doing as well as can be expected."

Current US President Joe Biden is known to have a close relationship with the Carter family, and Jason Carter said that the president still communicates with the elder Carter on a "relatively regular basis." He noted that Biden had recently sent a letter to the former president.

Born in 1924, Carter served in the US Navy from 1946 to 1953. He entered politics in the 1960s and was elected to serve as state senator in Georgia. He was later elected governor of Georgia in 1971 and served one term before starting his presidential campaign. Carter was elected president in 1977 and served one term before losing to Ronald Reagan.

After leaving the White House, Carter set up the Carter Center to promote human rights around the globe, with the actions of that group earning Carter the Nobel Peace Prize. While three other US presidents have achieved that feat, Carter remains the only one to receive the honor after leaving office. Carter was also a key figure and the most visible proponent of Habitat for Humanity.

Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter remain at their modest home in Plains, Georgia, where they have lived since 1961. Their 77 years of marriage is the longest presidential union in US history.

The Carter Center is asking the public to send well wishes that it will feature in a digital mosaic for the president and his family to enjoy.

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Pentagon to Interview Kabul Airport Attack Witnesses Amid Calls for Transparency

The United States launched Operation Enduring Freedom on October 7, 2001, spending nearly 20 years and more than $2.3 trillion removing the Taliban* from power and occupying Afghanistan. On August 15, 2021, two weeks before the total US withdrawal from the country, the Taliban returned to power, and sacked the capital city of Kabul.

Nearly 20 US military personnel who were injured in a suicide bombing during the United States' chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan will be interviewed about the incident after their public comments about the attack increased public and congressional scrutiny.

The firsthand witnesses were not among the more than 130 people who were interviewed during the military's investigation of the attack. The interviews were ordered by General Michael E. Kurilla, who oversees US Central Command "to ensure we do our due diligence," a spokesperson for the Army said in a statement.

The soldiers were not interviewed previously because they were being medically evacuated after the attack, US Army Central said last month.

The order to conduct the interviews does not reopen the investigation, but Kurilla could decide to do so if new information warrants it. One of the soldiers set to be interviewed is Marine Sergeant Tyler Vargas-Andrews, who lost multiple organs and two limbs in the attack.

Vargas-Andrews testified to the House Foreign Affairs Committee in March that the "withdrawal

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was a catastrophe," and that there has been "an inexcusable lack of accountability and negligence," in the follow-up to the attack.

In an interview with US media, Vargas-Andrews, a sniper, said he believes he had the suicide bomber in his sights before the attack, but was told to stand down by his superiors.

"Unfortunately, a lot of people died," because of the decision to stand down, he told US media. "That's a hard thing to deal with. You know, that's something that, honestly, eats at me every single day."

A 2022 CENTCOM investigation determined the attack "was not preventable at the tactical level without degrading the mission to maximize the number of evacuees" and "was not the result of any act of omission or commission by forces on the ground."

The attack occurred on August 26, 2021, as US allies and Afghan refugees desperately tried to reach the Kabul airport for evacuation. Some 170 Afghan civilians died in the attack, along with 13 US military personnel. Three days later, the US conducted a drone strike that killed seven Afghan children and three adults. The Pentagon originally called the bombing a "righteous" attack on another suicide bomber, but later admitted it was a "tragic mistake."

As many as 78,000 Afghans who worked for the US government and, depending on the estimate, between several hundred and several thousand US citizens were left behind during the withdrawal.

In April, US officials announced the Taliban executed the man behind the suicide bombing, who was reportedly a member of Daesh**.

Last month, families of 11 of the 13 soldiers who died in the attack called for more transparency. Kurilla ordered Lt. General Patrick D. Frank to review public testimony about the attack in June. The interviews will start in the coming days and Frank has been asked to provide an update to Kurilla within 90 days. Kurilla also told Frank to take "whatever time is necessary" to make sure the witnesses have had a chance to speak and "share their experience and perspective."

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The First, First Criminal - Cartoon

The first son of the United States, Hunter Biden, was indicted on three felony gun charges on Thursday, making him the first son of a sitting president to be indicted on criminal charges.

The charges include two counts of making false statements in purchasing a firearm and one count of illegally obtaining a firearm while addicted to drugs. Combined, the first son faces a maximum penalty of 25 years in prison.

The charges came after a plea deal between prosecutors and Biden's defense attorneys fell apart in July after Judge Maryellen Noreika questioned aspects of the deal and the two parties couldn't agree to the breadth of immunity it offered.

That deal would have had Biden plea to two misdemeanor tax charges and complete a probationary period to avoid jail time and a felony charge.

Hunter Biden's exploits first became public after the contents of a laptop he reportedly abandoned at a repair shop were leaked to the media. Among the trove of files found on the

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laptop were multiple videos of Hunter in various states of undress, holding a firearm and smoking what appears to be crack cocaine.
US President Joe Biden has frequently taken credit for writing the 1994 Crime Bill which ushered in some of the most draconian federal drug laws in the United States history and encouraged states to do the same.
“Every time [former President] Richard Nixon [...] would say, ‘Law and order,’ the Democratic match or response was, ‘Law and order with justice’ — whatever that meant,” the elder Biden said on the Senate floor in 1994. “And I would say, ‘Lock the S.O.B.s up.’”
No date has been set for Hunter Biden's arraignment on the charges.

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US F-35 Goes Missing After Pilot Ejects Safely - Joint Base Charleston

WASHINGTON, September 18 (Sputnik) - The US military is seeking the public's help finding an F-35 that went missing during a "mishap" over South Carolina that forced the pilot to eject, Joint Base Charleston said in a series of social media posts.
"Personnel from Joint Base Charleston and Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort (MCAS Beaufort SC) are responding to a mishap involving an F-35B Lightning II jet from Marine Fighter Attack Training Squadron (VMFAT) 501 with the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing. The pilot ejected safely and was transferred to a local medical center in stable condition. Emergency response teams are still trying to locate the F-35," Joint Base Charleston said late Sunday in a post on Facebook (a social network owned by Meta, banned in Russia as an extremist organization).
Based on the last known position of the stealth fighter jet, the US military is focusing its search in the area around Lake Moultrie and Lake Marion, Joint Base Charleston said in a post on X, formerly known as Twitter.
The post implored the public to cooperate with military authorities as they continue their search and asked anyone with information that could assist the effort to call the Joint Base Charleston Base Defense Operations Center.
The jet was in autopilot mode when the pilot ejected, meaning that it could have remained airborne for some time, a spokesman at Joint Base Charleston told NBC News.

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Pentagon Says No Decision Has Been Made to Provide ATACMS to Ukraine

WASHINGTON, September 16 (Sputnik) - The US has not made a decision on whether to provide Ukraine with long-range Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS) but is in constant communication with Kiev on its security aid needs, Lt. Col. Garron Garn told Sputnik.
US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan earlier in the day said another announcement of

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additional military assistance for Ukraine can be expected sometime next week when President Joe Biden will host Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on September 21 at the White House.

"While we're in constant communication with Ukraine about their security assistance needs as they defend themselves from Russia's unprovoked attacks, there has been no decision to provide ATACMS at this point. We have no announcements to make today," Garn said on Friday.

Zelenskyy is expected to meet with both Democratic and Republican lawmakers on Capitol Hill during his visit to Washington, Sullivan said.

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US Justice Dept. Seeks to Limit Trump Statements on Election Case in Washington - Filing

WASHINGTON, September 16 (Sputnik) - US federal prosecutors asked a judge to impose an order to limit former President Donald Trump's statements regarding his election interference case in Washington, court documents revealed.

"Consistent with its obligations to guard the integrity of these proceedings and prevent prejudice to the jury pool, while respecting the defendant's First Amendment rights, the Court should enter the proposed order imposing certain narrow restrictions on the parties' public statements regarding this case and governing any jury studies the parties may undertake," Special Counsel Jack Smith's team stated in the court documents on Friday.

Prosecutors accuse Trump, through his statements, of threatening to undermine the integrity of the court proceedings in this case, according to court documents.

Trump faces four criminal charges over his alleged role in trying to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election. He pleaded not guilty to the charges.

Trump faces one count of conspiracy to defraud the United States, one count of conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding, one count of obstruction of and attempt to obstruct an official proceeding and one count of conspiracy against rights.

Judge Tanya Chutkan set a March 4 trial date for Trump's federal case in Washington.

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Six Religious Group Members Charged in Death of S. Korean Woman They Lured to US - Police

WASHINGTON, September 16 (Sputnik) - Six members of a self-described religious group called the "Soldiers of Christ" are currently under arrest following the discovery of a South Korean woman's body in a car trunk in Gwinnett County, Georgia, police said in a statement.

"On September 12, at approximately 10:50 p.m., officers assigned to Central Precinct

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responded to 3555 Gwinnett Place Dr in unincorporated Duluth in reference to a suspicious activity. A person called 911 dispatch and advised he believed a dead body was inside a vehicle at the location. Officers arrived on scene and were able to confirm a body was inside the trunk of a vehicle, " the Gwinnett Police Department said.

The victim, who had recently immigrated to the United States from South Korea in the summer, had intended to join a religious organization referred to as the "Soldiers of Christ," the statement said.

Allegations of prolonged abuse, including beatings and malnourishment, emerged, resulting in the victim's body weighing approximately 70 pounds at the time of its discovery, the statement said.

Detectives believe Eric Hyun, the alleged driver of the silver passenger car containing the victim's body, parked the vehicle at 3555 Gwinnett Place Dr on the early morning of September 12, the statement said.

Subsequently, he asked a family member to retrieve a personal item from the car, leading to the discovery of the deceased body. This development prompted the family member to call 911 on the evening of September 12, the statement said.

Detectives have filed charges against the following suspects: Eric Hyun (age 26, Suwanee), Gawom Lee (age 26, Lawrenceville), Joonho Lee (age 26, Lawrenceville), Juoonhyum Lee (age 22, Lawrenceville), Hyunji Lee (age 25, Lawrenceville), and Junyeoug Lee (age 15, Lawrenceville), the statement said.

As of now, death notifications have not been conveyed to the victim's family in South Korea, and the identity of the victim remains undisclosed, the statement said.

On Friday, the police said they added more charges including "criminal gang activity."

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UAW Chief as Strike Against Automakers Launched Says US Working Class 'Fed Up, Fired Up'

WASHINGTON, September 16 (Sputnik) - United Auto Workers (UAW) union President Shawn Fain said during a rally in Detroit that American working class citizens are fed up and fired up about standing up to companies over unfair wages and treatment.

About 13,000 workers went on strike after the UAW in the United States announced in the early hours of Friday that strikes at all three plants of the US "big three" automakers, namely Ford, Stellantis and General Motors, had begun after negotiations failed to increase workers' wages by a deadline set late Thursday night.

"We have to do whatever we have to do by any means necessary, we have nothing to fear... I see a working class that is fed up and fired up," Fain said on Friday.

Fain said a US auto worker would have to work for 100 years to make what a CEO in a major US auto firm makes in one year.

"So we're gonna wreck their economy because it only works for the billionaire," Fain said.

According to an analysis from Fortune magazine, last year Ford CEO Jim Farley made at least 281 times what the average company employee earns, which is less than $75,000.

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The report also highlighted that General Motos CEO Mary Barra earned $29 million last year, 361 times what the average company employees earned, which was an annual salary of about $80,000.

Negotiations between the UAW and major US auto firms will resume on Saturday, according to the White House.

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 have already presented their proposals in response to the UAW's demands. General Motors offered a 20% 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.

Earlier in the day, President Joe Biden said he is dispatching two members of his team - acting Labor Secretary Julie Su and White House Senior Advisor Gene Sperling - to offer their full support in reaching a contract agreement for all parties involved in the negotiations.

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US Intelligence Community Watchdog Unable to Provide Info on Alleged UAP Programs - Letter

WASHINGTON, September 16 (Sputnik) - US intelligence community watchdogs are unable to provide members of Congress with information on alleged US government programs to retrieve and reverse engineer unidentified anomalous phenomena (UAP, also known as UFO), US Inspector General of the Intelligence Community Thomas Monheim said in a letter to lawmakers.

Last month, a group of lawmakers, including Congressman Tim Burchett, sent a letter to the Office of the Inspector General of the Intelligence Community (IC IG) to request information on alleged US government UAP programs.

"As a matter of discretion, IC IG notes that it has not conducted any audit, inspection, evaluation, or review of alleged UAP programs within the responsibility and authority of the Director of National Intelligence that would enable this office to provide a fulsome response to your questions," the letter said on Friday.

The lawmaker specifically requested information based on testimony provided to Congress by former US intelligence official David Grusch. Earlier this year, Grusch testified that the United States is engaged in efforts to retrieve and reverse engineer UAP.

The lawmakers asked about which intelligence community members, military bases and other actors are involved in the alleged programs. Grusch has claimed that he provided information pertaining to his claims to the IC IG, prompting the lawmakers' request.

"The IC IG office did nothing to look into the information they received from David Grusch on UAP crash retrieval programs? They have no information they can give to Congress? Cover-up," Burchett said in a statement on the letter.

The Pentagon studies the issue of UAP through the All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO). NASA also commissioned an independent study team to approach the matter from a

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scientific perspective and created a director of UAP research position.
The office has not found any credible evidence to support Grusch's claims, AARO Director Sean Kirpatrick said. The NASA independent study group has also said that there is no evidence linking UAP to extraterrestrial life.
House lawmakers have requested a select committee on UAP, although the request has been denied, US Congresswoman Anna Paulina Luna said on Thursday. However, lawmakers are working on getting access to a sensitive compartmented information facility in which Grusch could provide further information, Luna added.

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Trump Says Welcomes Putin's Praise of Plan to Negotiate Resolution to Conflict in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, September 16 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said that he welcomes Russian President Vladimir Putin's praise of his intentions to try and negotiate a resolution to the conflict in Ukraine.
Last week, Putin said that he is glad to see Trump's proposal to try and quickly negotiate an end to the conflict if reelected as US president in 2024.
"I like that he said that," Trump said in a preview of an NBC News interview set to premier Sunday. "Because that means what I'm saying is right."
Trump said that he would bring Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy together to negotiate an end to the conflict.
The negotiations would result in a "fair deal" for all parties, Trump added.

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REVIEW - Major US Auto Firms, UAW Union Set to Resume Talks Saturday

WASHINGTON, September 16 (Sputnik) - The United Auto Workers (UAW) union and the so-called big three US automobile manufacturers Ford, General Motors (GM) and Stellantis are set to resume negotiations on Saturday after the parties failed to reach a deal to raise workers' wages by a deadline set on Thursday night.
About 13,000 workers went on strike in the early hours of Friday at three plants, including the General Motors Wentzville Assembly, the Stellantis Toledo Assembly Complex and the Ford Michigan Assembly Plant.
The UAW is demanding equitable contract offers from Ford, Chrysler and General Motors, including a substantial 46% wage increase and a reduced work week to 32 hours, among other demands.
The automakers have already presented their proposals in response to the UAW's demands. General Motors offered a 20% wage increase, Stellantis - which owns Chrysler - offered 14.5%

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and Ford proposed a 9% wage increase and a 6% lump sum to be added later.

RESUMING NEGOTIATIONS

Generals Motors will continue to negotiate in good faith with the UAW, but there is disappointment that the union decided to initiate several strikes on Friday, a company spokesperson told Sputnik.

"The UAW has informed GM that they are on strike at Wentzville Assembly in Missouri as of 11:59 p.m.," the spokesperson said on Friday. "We are disappointed by the UAW leadership's actions, despite the unprecedented economic package GM put on the table, including historic wage increases and manufacturing commitments. We will continue to bargain in good faith with the union to reach an agreement as quickly as possible for the benefit of our team members, customers, suppliers and communities across the United States."

The UAW strike at GM's Wentzville assembly plant has prompted concerns about a potential parts shortage at the company's Fairfax, Kansas, assembly plant, possibly resulting in its closure in the coming week, according to media reports.

Ford CEO Jim Farley said the company had yet to receive any counteroffer from the UAW less than eight hours before the potential strike.

Later in the day on Friday, Ford reportedly notified 600 employees at its assembly plant in Michigan that they were laid off as a consequence of the UAW strike. The Michigan assembly employees some 4,900 workers, according to the company.

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION'S RESPONSE

White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing on Friday that the UAW union will resume negotiations with the major US auto manufacturers on Saturday morning.

"The UAW has made clear their desire to continue those negotiations with the companies and we're going to see that set tomorrow morning," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing.

Earlier on Friday, President Joe Biden said he is dispatching two members of his team - acting Labor Secretary Julie Su and White House Senior Advisor Gene Sperling - to offer their full support in reaching a contract agreement for all parties involved in the negotiations.

Biden expressed respect for the union's efforts to improve their situation through collective action, but also acknowledged that no one wants to see the UAW strike happen.

On Thursday, the White House said Biden had spoken with the leaders of the major automobile manufacturers and with the UAW chief to discuss the status of the negotiations.

ASSIGNING BLAME AND GIVING WARNING

US Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Suzanne Clark said in a statement that the Biden administration's pro-union policies are to blame for the nationwide UAW strike that now threatens the US economy.

"The UAW strike and indeed the 'summer of strikes' is the natural result of the Biden administration's 'whole of government' approach to promoting unionization at all costs," Clark said. "The decision by the… UAW to initiate a strike will have far reaching negative consequences for our economy, for the American workers directly employed by the Detroit Three, their suppliers and dealers, as well as the thousands of small businesses and families whose livelihoods will also be put at risk."

Clark added in the report that the US Chamber of Commerce urges the UAW to halt their strike and return to the negotiating table.

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Moreover, the bank BMO Harris said on Friday that it made a strategic decision to exit the retail auto finance business, effective immediately.

Former President Donald Trump said in an interview that UAW President Shawn Fain was not doing a good job in representing his union.

Although the UAW leadership has refrained from endorsing Biden, Fain has said a second Trump presidency would be a "disaster."

Trump also expressed concern that UAW members striking against General Motors, Ford and Stellantis may lose their jobs because all electric cars will be made in China.

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Pentagon Says Abrams Tanks Remain on Schedule for Delivery to Ukraine This Fall

WASHINGTON, September 16 (Sputnik) - Abrams main battle tanks remain on schedule for delivery this fall to Ukraine, a US Defense Department spokesman told Sputnik in a statement.

“The tanks remain on schedule for delivery this fall,” the statement said on Friday.

Ukraine is awaiting the delivery of 31 Abrams M1 main battle tanks, which President Joe Biden promised to supply in January.

In August, US media reported that the first ten of the 31 promised Abrams tanks would arrive in Ukraine as early as mid-September just as the first groups of Ukrainians completed their training in Germany on how to operate the tank.

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UAW Strike at GM's Wentzville Plant Threatens Shutdown of Fairfax Assembly - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 16 (Sputnik) - The United Auto Workers' (UAW) strike at General Motors Co.'s (GM) Wentzville assembly plant has prompted worries about a potential parts shortage at the company’s Fairfax, Kansas, assembly plant, possibly resulting in its closure in the coming week, the Detroit News reported.

Due to the strike’s impact on the Wentzville operations, General Motors anticipates running out of parts for the Fairfax facility as soon as early next week, the report said on Friday, citing an employee notice.

UAW President Shawn Fain called for strikes at the plants of the so-called "Big Three" automakers in Detroit on Thursday, to bring attention to the need to increase wages, the issue of temporary employees, and other labor-related demands.

The strikes, involving some 13,000 employees, represent a historic moment in UAW’s 80-year history and mark the first instance of simultaneous work stoppages at all three major Detroit automakers, the report said.

The Wentzville plant supplies parts to the Fairfax plant, where the Chevrolet Malibu sedan and

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the Cadillac XT4 SUV are assembled, the report added.
Due to the expired agreement between GM and the UAW, there are no provisions for the company to provide supplemental pay to workers at the Fairfax plant, according to the report.

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UPDATE- USAID Boss Says Trying to Prevent Russia From Becoming Grain Supplier of First Choice

(Updates the quote)
WASHINGTON, September 16 (Sputnik) - USAID Administrator Samantha Power said during a discussion hosted by the Foreign Policy magazine that the United States is trying to prevent Russia from taking the place of Ukraine in grain markets after Moscow decided to pull out from the Black Sea grain deal in July.
"[Russia] is actually trying to come in and fill the breach and benefit on the pulling out of the Black Sea grain deal, so, prevent Ukraine from putting its grains out in the market and try to be a grain supplier of first choice. So, I try to prevent some of that," Power said on Friday.
Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Friday that while the United Nations is taking steps to resume the grain deal, Kiev sabotages every attempt to negotiate Russia's participation in it, urging the organization to develop more expensive paths of grain supply.
On July 18, Russia pulled out of the UN- and Turkey-brokered grain export deal with Ukraine, saying that its demands were repeatedly ignored. Russia said it was promised at the signing of the pact in June 2022 that its food and fertilizer exports would be exempted from Western sanctions but no curbs were lifted.
On Tuesday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said there has not been any progress toward a resumption of the deal.

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USAID Boss Says Trying to Prevent Russia From Becoming Grain Supplier of First Choice

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"[Russia] is actually trying to come in and fill the breach and benefit on the pulling out of the Black Sea grain deal, so, prevent Ukraine from putting its grains out in the market and try to be a grain supplier of first choice," Power said on Friday.
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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, September 16 (Sputnik) -

RUSSIA-NORTH KOREA RELATIONS
* Russia never violates its obligations and does not intend to do so, but will develop relations with North Korea within the framework of international law, President Vladimir Putin said on Friday.
* Russia and North Korea did not sign any agreements, including related to military cooperation, during the visit of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

BANS ON UKRAINIAN GOODS
* Poland introduced an indefinite ban on the import of Ukrainian grain starting on midnight, Minister of Economic Development and Technology Waldemar Buda said on Friday.
* Slovakia will unilaterally extend the ban on Ukrainian grain imports, Slovak broadcaster Markiza reported, citing the Slovak Agriculture Ministry.
* Hungary has imposed a ban on 24 Ukrainian imports in connection with the European Commission decision not to extend the restrictions on grain exports from Kiev, Hungarian Agriculture Minister Istvan Nagy said.

BIDEN MEETINGS AT UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY
* US President Joe Biden will meet on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly next week his counterparts from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Friday.
* Biden's meeting with the five nations next week is not intended to be directed at any other country, but deliverables are expected, Sullivan said.
* Biden will meet with Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on the margins of the UN General Assembly next week, Sullivan said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE
* Moscow will seek an adequate reaction of the relevant international organizations to Kiev's

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threats against Russian journalists, the Russian Foreign Ministry said on Friday.
* Belgium will send two F-16 fighter jets and technical personnel to Denmark next year to train Ukrainian pilots, Defense Minister Ludivine Dedonder said.
* The Biden administration is looking to supply Ukraine with long-range ATACMS missiles this fall, the Wall Street Journal reported, citing US officials.
* Russian forces have destroyed two unmanned boats of the Ukrainian armed forces in the southwestern part of the Black Sea over the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

INTERNATIONAL SPACE STATION
* The Soyuz-2.1a rocket put the Soyuz MS-24 spacecraft into low-Earth orbit, carrying two Russian cosmonauts and a US astronaut to the International Space Station, a Sputnik correspondent reported on Friday.
* The Soyuz MS-24 spacecraft docked to the ISS, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

PUTIN-LUKASHENKO MEETING
* The development of relations between Russia and Belarus is stable and reliable, contacts on cooperation continue, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Friday during a meeting with Belarusian counterpart, Alexander Lukashenko, in Sochi.
* Putin told Lukashenko that he will inform about his meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un earlier this week.
* Lukashenko congratulated Putin on holding regional elections in the country, and called them a “big success.”

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Global Oil Prices Rally 3rd Week in Row; US Crude at 10-Month Highs Above $90

NEW YORK, September 15 (Sputnik) - Global oil prices rose for a third week in a row, with U.S. crude settling on Friday at above the $90-per-barrel mark the first time in 10 months, helped by better-than-expected consumption by top importer China.
London-traded Brent, the global benchmark for oil, settled at $93.93, up 23 cents, or 0.3%. Brent hit a 10-month high of $94.62 earlier. For the week, it was up 3.6%, adding to prior back-to-back weekly gains of 2.4% and 4.8%.
New York-traded West Texas Intermediate, or WTI, crude settled at $90.77, up 61 cents, or 0.7%, on the day. The US crude benchmark rose to $91.15 earlier in the session, its highest since November. For the week, WTI finished up 3.7%, adding to prior back-to-back weekly gains of 2.3% and 7.2%.
Crude prices have been on a tear since early June, with the rally accelerating in the past three weeks after major oil exporters Saudi Arabia and Russia said they would collaborate to remove a combined 1.3 million barrels from the market each day until the end of the year.
This week’s rally in oil was helped by better-than-expected data out of China.
Chinese industrial output grew 4.5% in August from a year earlier, versus a forecast 3.9%, and

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retail sales expanded by 4.6%, beating an expected 3% increase. Also, Chinese crude imports rose nearly 31% last month while refinery throughput hit a record 64.69 million metric tons as a function of summer travels.

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Ford to Cut 600 Jobs at Michigan Plant as Result of UAW Strike - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - Ford will cut 600 jobs at an assembly plant in Michigan as a result of the strike by the Union Auto Workers (UAW) union, CNBC reported on Friday.

The report said, according to Ford, that 600 employees at its Michigan assembly plant were notified they were laid off as a consequence of the UAW's strike.

About 13,000 workers went on strike after the UAW in the United States announced in the early hours of Friday that strikes at all three plants of the US "big three" automakers, namely Ford, Stellantis and General Motors, had begun after negotiations failed to increase workers' wages by a deadline set late Thursday night.

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NASA Says Refining Responsibilities of New UFO Research Director Role

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - NASA is refining the responsibilities of its newly announced Director of Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena (UAP, also known as UFOs) Research position as it processes the recommendations of an independent study team, NASA Science Mission Directorate Press Secretary Katherine Rohloff said on Friday.

On Thursday, the independent study team on UAP released recommendations to NASA, urging further research and interagency cooperation on the matter. NASA also announced the creation of a new Director of UAP Research position, which will be held by former NASA-Pentagon liaison Mark McInerney.

“We are continuing to refine Mark’s role as the director of UAP research, as well as digesting the study team’s report and findings,” Rohloff said in a statement to Sputnik, when asked whether McInerney will be responsible for cooperating with international partners to analyze UAP.

McInerney will centralize communications, resources and analytical capabilities to create a database for the future evaluation of UAP, NASA said in a statement. The role will leverage NASA’s expertise in artificial intelligence, machine learning and space-based observation to support the broader US government effort to study UAP, the statement said.

The Pentagon also operates the All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO) to study UAP and their potential threat to US airspace. The independent study team commissioned by NASA

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approached the study of UAP from a scientific perspective.

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Three Acquitted in Alleged Plot to Kidnap Michigan Governor - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - The last three defendants in the trial involving the alleged conspiracy to abduct Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer have been acquitted of all charges, NBC News reported on Friday.

The trial took place in northern Michigan, focusing on the months leading up to the 2020 presidential election, during which the COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges, the report said.

According to state prosecutors, a group of individuals characterized by anti-government sentiments, connections to militia groups, and discontent with pandemic-related measures came together to formulate a plot aimed at kidnapping Whitmer at her rural residence, the report said.

Among the group of fourteen individuals facing charges in both state and federal courts were Eric Molitor and identical twins William Null and Michael Null, according to the report.

The defendants had pleaded not guilty to various state charges, including providing material support for terrorist activities and unlawful possession of firearms, according to the report

Furthermore, Null and Molitor testified in their own defense, underscoring their lack of awareness regarding the true nature of the conspiracy until the final stages of the alleged plot, the report said.

The verdict was delivered by an Antrim County jury on Friday, following approximately one day of deliberation, the report said.

Nine militia members involved have been convicted in state or federal court over the alleged plot, with two others acquitted.

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DeSantis Says Would Not Meet With Kim, Putin Without Preconditions

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - Florida Governor and contender for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination Ron DeSantis said on Friday that he would not meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un or Russian President Vladimir Putin without preconditions.

"I would not meet with him without conditions," DeSantis said in an interview with CBS News, when asked if he would meet with Kim. "I'd say the same thing [about Putin]. I think that it would have to be set up for there to be something productive to happen."

DeSantis said he would not want to legitimize Kim or Putin by meeting with the leaders without producing guaranteeing results.

The United States should put Kim "in a box" to prevent North Korea from further bolstering ties

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with other adversaries, DeSantis said when asked about recent meetings between top Russian and North Korean officials.

Kim is an irrational actor, DeSantis said, adding that as president he would authorize a preemptive strike against North Korea if it was certain they were about to launch a missile at the United States.

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DeSantis Says Chance of Trump Winning Reelection if Convicted of Felony 'Close to Zero'

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - The chances of former President Donald Trump winning reelection if convicted on any felony charges is close to zero, Florida Governor and contender for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination Ron DeSantis said on Friday.

"I think the chance of getting elected president after being convicted of a felony is as close to zero as you can get," DeSantis said in an interview with CBS News.

DeSantis said that he believed Trump should not have run for reelection even before being indicted given that he is a "deal-breaker" for many voters.

However, more than half of Republican voters say that the criminal charges against Trump are not a serious cause for concern, according to a CNN poll released on Wednesday.

Trump remains the frontrunner to win the 2024 Republican presidential nomination with 52% support, a 34-point advantage over DeSantis, the poll said.

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Trump Says US Auto Worker Jobs Moving to China, Blasts Union Chief Amid Ongoing Strike

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump on Friday said he is worried US auto workers striking against General Motors, Ford, and Stellantis may lose their jobs because all electric cars will be made in China.

Earlier in the day, approximately 13,000 US auto workers halted production and initiated a strike in response to failed negotiations. This strike marks the first instance where the United Auto Workers (UAW) simultaneously targets the three automotive giants.

"The auto workers will not have any jobs... because all of these cars are going to be made in China," Trump told NBC News. "The electric cars, automatically, are going to be made in China."

Trump specifically targeted UAW president Shawn Fain for "not doing a good job in representing his union."

"The auto workers are being sold down the river by their leadership, and their leadership should endorse Trump," Trump added.

Although the UAW leadership has refrained from endorsing Biden, Fain has said a second

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Trump presidency would be a "disaster."

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US Approves Potential $313.4Mln Sale of Reaper Drone Munitions to Canada - DSCA

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - The US State Department has approved a potential $313.4 million sale of munitions and integrated systems for the MQ-9B Reaper drone to the Canadian military, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Friday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Canada of munitions and other systems to be integrated into MQ-9Bs for an estimated cost of $313.4 million. The Defense Security Cooperation Agency delivered the required certification notifying Congress of this possible sale today," the DSCA said in a statement.

The approved items include Lynx synthetic aperture radars, AGM-114R2 Hellfire II missiles, KMU-572 tail kits for the GBU-38 joint direct-attack munition and GBU-54 laser (JDAM), Mk82 500-pound general purpose bombs as well as Mk82 filled inert bombs, the statement said.

Other systems include due regard radars, AN/ARC-210 radios and compact multi-band data links, the statement said.

The sale would ensure Canada's ability to face future threats and fulfill its duties to the North American Aerospace Command (NORAD) as well as to the NATO alliance, the statement added.

The contract would mainly be fulfilled by General Atomics Aeronautical Systems and would not disturb the regional military balance, according to the statement.

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White House Says UAW Negotiations With Major US Auto Firms to Continue Saturday

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Friday that the United Auto Workers (UAW) union will resume negotiations with major US auto manufacturing firms on Saturday morning.

The UAW in the United States announced in the early hours of Friday that strikes at all three plants of the US "big three" automakers, namely Ford, Stellantis and General Motors, had begun after negotiations failed to increase workers' wages by a deadline set late Thursday night.

"The UAW has made clear their desire to continue those negotiations and with the companies and we're going to see that set tomorrow morning," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing.

Earlier in the day, President Joe Biden said no one wants the UAW strike against the three top US automakers but voiced respect for the union's efforts to improve their situation through

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Biden Meeting With C5 Not Against Any Country, Deliverables Expected - White House

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden's meeting with C5 nations next week is not intended to be directed at any other country, but deliverables are expected, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Friday.

On Tuesday, Biden will meet with his counterparts from the C5 nations - Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan - on the margins of the UN General Assembly to discuss a range of issues, including regional security, trade, climate change, among other matters.

"This summit is not against any country, it is for a positive agenda that we want to work through with these countries," Sullivan said when asked if the summit was directed at China. "On your question of deliverables, we do expect to have a joint statement at the end of it that will lay out in key areas concrete things that we intend to work on and do together and the United States will bring to the table some resources to be able to do that effectively."

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Biden to Host Zelenskyy at White House on Thursday - White House

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will host Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the White House on September 21, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Friday.

"President Biden will then return to Washington to host President Zelenskyy of Ukraine here at the White House on Thursday," Sullivan said during a press briefing.

Zelenskyy is expected to meet with both Democratic and Republican lawmakers on Capitol Hill during his visit to Washington, Sullivan said. Moreover, Sullivan said another announcement of additional military assistance for Ukraine can be expected sometime next week.

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Biden to Hold Bilateral Meetings With Lula, Netanyahu at UNGA - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will meet with Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on the margins of the UN General Assembly next week, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Friday.

"On Wednesday, the President will have the opportunity to hold a bilateral meeting with President Lula as well as to join him in an event with labor leaders from Brazil and the United States to highlight the central and critical role that workers play in building a sustainable, democratic, equitable and peaceful world," Sullivan said during a press briefing.

Also on Wednesday, President Biden will sit down with Prime Minister Netanyahu.

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Biden to Host C5+1 Summit on Margins of UNGA Next Week - White House

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly next week will meet with his counterparts from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Friday.

"The President will also meet with the presidents of five Central Asian nations Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan," Sullivan said during a press briefing. "This inaugural summit will allow for the leaders to discuss a range of issues from regional security to trade and connectivity to climate change, and ongoing reforms to improve governance and the rule of law."

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Normalizing Israel-Saudi Relations Possible, But Not Certainty - Blinken

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - The normalization of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia is possible but not a certainty, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Friday.

"It is very much possible; it is not at all a certainty," Blinken told reporters.

The United States expects progress to be made on a number of issues pertaining to improved Israel-Saudi relations, Blinken said.

However, Blinken acknowledged that ironing out the differences between the two countries remains a challenge.

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"Even as we are working on this, it remains a difficult proposition. The specifics of any agreement, in terms of what different parties are looking for, are challenging," he said.

Blinken emphasized that there is no guarantee of reaching an agreement and added that a potential deal cannot be and will not be a substitute for a two-state solution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In August, National Security Council Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby confirmed that talks on normalizing relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel are ongoing but they are not at the point of reaching an agreement.

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UPDATE - Alberta's E. Coli Outbreak Grows to 337 Lab-Confirmed Cases - Chief Medical Officer

(Adds details in paras 7-10) WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - The number of cases in the E. Coli outbreak in the Canadian province of Alberta has grown to 337 and authorities anticipate more will be announced as tests come back from laboratories, provincial Chief Medical Officer of Health Mark Joffe said on Friday.

On September 4, the Alberta Health Services declared an E. Coli outbreak in the area of Calgary after several children began to arrive at the city's hospital emergency departments with gastrointestinal complaints.

The outbreak has been linked to a kitchen shared by 11 daycares in the city which upon the latest inspection received three critical infractions related to food handling, sanitation, and pest infestation.

"As of today, a total of 337 lab confirmed cases have been reported in connection with this E. Coli outbreak. There are currently 12 patients receiving care in hospital. This is encouraging because it's a decrease of eight compared with two days ago. Lastly, 10 patients have hemolytic uremic syndrome, and 6 are receiving dialysis at Alberta Children's Hospital. We have also confirmed that there are 26 secondary transmission cases of this E. coli bacteria," Joffe said during a provincial update on the outbreak.

Joffe said that a case of E. Coli was detected in a child that did not attend the daycares, adding that an investigation had been launched to determine whether it was linked to the broader outbreak. The chief medical officer said that the area attended by the children at the daycare has been temporarily closed as a precaution.

Cases are expected to rise as new results come back from laboratories, Joffe said, adding that he remains optimistic that the number will not significantly increase.

Alberta Prime Minister Danielle Smith said she understood the kitchen's sanitary violations and its consequences have eroded public confidence in the system, noting that the province would be supporting the affected families with a one time "compassionate" payment of C$2,000 ($1,478) per child.

"Families will receive a one-time compassionate payment $2,000 per child. Our goal is to get the money to the parents as quickly as we can," Smith said.

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Upon concluding the update, Smith had to face several questions inquiring over the two-week lapse between the outbreak and her first appearance to the public to speak on the matter.
The prime minister said that politicians cannot get involved in health orders as it can render them illegal and added that she wanted to give Joffe the latitude he required to take the necessary steps.

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Blinken Says Did Not Discuss Krasikov-Gershkovich Prisoner Swap With German Counterpart

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Friday that he did not discuss with German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock any attempts to trade former Russian colonel Vadim Krasikov for detained US journalist Evan Gershkovich.
Krasikov is currently serving a life sentence in Germany for the murder of former Chechen fighter Zelimkhan Khangoshvili. Gershkovich is detained in Russia on espionage charges.
"That's not something that we discussed today," Blinken said during a press conference with Baerbock, when asked whether they discussed a potential swap.
Earlier on Friday, Deputy Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said that Russia granted the US embassy in Moscow permission to visit Gershkovich in jail.
Last year, the United States and Germany considered including Krasikov in a prisoner exchange for Paul Whelan, who was convicted in Russia on espionage charges, US media reported, citing a German government source.

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Auto Workers Strike 'Natural Result' of Biden Admin. Policies - US Chamber of Commerce

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration's pro-union policies are to blame for the nationwide United Auto Workers (UAW) strike that now threatens the US economy, US Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Suzanne Clark said on Friday.
"The UAW strike and indeed the 'summer of strikes' is the natural result of the Biden administration's 'whole of government' approach to promoting unionization at all costs," Clark said in a statement.
The UAW for the first time in its history initiated simultaneous strikes early on Friday against all three of America's unionized automakers, known as the "Big Three."
"The decision by the United Auto Workers (UAW) to initiate a strike will have far reaching negative consequences for our economy, for the American workers directly employed by the Detroit Three, their suppliers and dealers, as well as the thousands of small businesses and families whose livelihoods will also be put at risk," Clark said.
Clark added that the US Chamber of Commerce urges the UAW to halt their strike and return

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to the negotiating table.

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Canada Sanctions 6 Iranians on Anniversary of Mahsa Amini Death - Global Affairs

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - Ottawa has imposed sanctions on six Iranians allegedly involved in human rights violations, marking the first anniversary of the death of Mahsa Amini in police custody in Iran, Global Affairs Canada said on Friday.

"Today's sanctions list six individuals involved in activities that constitute gross and systemic violations of human rights, including the Secretary and three senior members of Iran's Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution, the chief architect of the regime's repressive compulsory hijab policy," Global Affairs Canada said in a statement.

The sanctions target the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' (IRGC) senior commander in Iran's Kurdish provinces and the parliament's most senior official for national security and foreign affairs, the statement said.

The sanctioned individuals also include the secretary of the Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution Abdol Hossein Khosrow Panah and its member Hasan Rahimpour Azghadi; Iranian Vice President for Women and Family Affairs Ensieh Khazali; and the country's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Mohammad Mehdi Esmaili.

Two other individuals related to the IRGC, Mohammad Masroor and Mojtaba Zonnouri, have also been sanctioned. Mansoor is commander of the IRGC Ground Forces Base and Zonnouri is heading the National Security and Foreign Affairs Committee of the Iranian parliament.

Canada has imposed Iran-related sanctions on 176 individuals and 192 entities, including members of the IRGC, and security, intelligence, and economic apparatuses.

On September 13, Amini was detained by Iran's morality police in Tehran for improperly wearing a hijab in violation of the law. The woman was sent to a detention center for an explanatory conversation but suffered a heart attack and died three days later.

Amini's death sparked protests, with some suggesting that law enforcement officers hit her on the head. An examination of the body, however, revealed no signs of violence, according to the authorities.

Tehran has said the protests were orchestrated by Western countries, including the United Kingdom, France and Norway, and has given a note of protest to the respective diplomats of these countries.

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Blinken Says US Determined to Prevent Iran From Acquiring Nukes 'One Way or Another'

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WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - The United States is determined to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon one way or another, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Friday.

"We are determined, President [Joe] Biden is determined, that Iran will not acquire a nuclear weapon, one way or another," Blinken said during a press conference.

The US continues to believe that diplomacy is the most effective means to achieve that result, Blinken said. However, there is no diplomatic engagement on the issue at this time, Blinken added.

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Alberta's E. Coli Outbreak Grows to 337 Lab-Confirmed Cases - Chief Medical Officer

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) – The number of cases in the E. Coli outbreak in the Canadian province of Alberta has grown to 337 and authorities anticipate more will be announced as tests come back from laboratories, the provincial Chief Medical Officer of Health Mark Joffe said on Friday.

On September 4, the Alberta Health Services declared an E. Coli outbreak in the area of Calgary after several children began to arrive at the city's hospital emergency departments with gastrointestinal complaints.

The outbreak has been linked to kitchen shared by eleven daycares in the city who upon the latest inspection received three critical infractions related to food handling, sanitation and pest infestation.

"As of today, I total of 337 lab confirmed cases have been reported in connection with this E. Coli outbreak. There are currently 12 patients receiving care in hospital. This is encouraging because it's a decrease of eight compared with two days ago. Lastly, 10 patients have hemolytic uremic syndrome and 6 are receiving dialysis at Alberta Children's Hospital. We have also confirmed that there are 26 secondary transmission cases of this E. coli bacteria," Joffe said during a provincial update on the outbreak.

Joffe said that a case of E. Coli was detected on a child that did not attend one of the daycares, adding that an investigation had been launched to determine whether it was linked to the broader outbreak. The Health Officer further noted that the area attended by the children at the daycare has been temporarily closed as a precaution.

Cases are expected to rise as new results come out of the laboratories, Joffe said, adding that he remains optimist that the number will not significantly increase.

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Biden Says No One Wants Auto Workers Strike But He Respects Union's Rights

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WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Friday that no one wants the United Auto Workers (UAW) strike against the three top automakers but voiced respect for the union's efforts to improve their situation through collective action.

"No one wants to strike. But I respect workers' right to use their options under the collective bargaining system," Biden said. "I'm deploying two members of my team in Detroit, Acting Labor Secretary Julie Su, and White House Senior Advisor Gene Sperling, to offer their full support in reaching a contract agreement for all parties involved," President Joe Biden added.

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US, Germany Will Make Case for Ukraine Peace Plan at UNGA - Baerbock

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - Both the United States and Germany are going to make the case for a Ukraine peace plan at the United Nations General Assembly, Germany's Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said on Friday.

"We will both make the case for the Ukraine peace plan at the United Nations General Assembly," Baerbock said during a joint press conference with Antony Blinken.

Baerbock added that she sensed "further support" for Ukraine during talks at Congress on Thursday.

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US, Allies Increased Flow of Food From Ukraine Through Alternative Routes by 800% - USAID

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) – The United States, along with Western allies and partners, managed to increase the flow of food through alternative routes following Russia's pull out from the Black Sea Grain Initiative in July by 800%, USAID Administrator Samantha Power said on Friday.

"Since July…we have been able to increase by 800% the flow of food through these alternative routes [via river, rail, and roads]," Power said during a discussion hosted by the Foreign Policy magazine.

On July 18, Russia pulled out of the UN- and Turkey-brokered grain export deal with Ukraine, saying that its demands were repeatedly ignored. Russia said it was promised at the signing of the pact in June 2022 that its food and fertilizer exports would be exempted from Western sanctions but no curbs were lifted.

On Tuesday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said there has been no progress toward a resumption of the deal.

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Biden Says Hopes UAW Union, Major Auto Firms Will Resume Productive Negotiations

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Friday that he hopes the United Auto Workers (UAW) union and major US auto companies will soon resume negotiations to end a nationwide strike.

The UAW in the United States announced in the early hours of Friday that strikes at all three plants of the US "big three" automakers, namely Ford, Stellantis and General Motors, had begun after negotiations failed to increase workers' wages.

"It's my hope that the parties can return to the negotiation table to forge a win-win agreement," Biden said during a press conference at the White House. "To continue our active engagement, I'm dispatching two members of my team to Detroit."

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US to Produce 100,000 155mm Artillery Shells Each Month by 2025 - Senior Pentagon Official

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - The United States is on track to produce 100,000 155mm artillery shells each month by 2025, Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment William LaPlante said on Friday.

"We're gonna be at 100,000 per month in 2025," LaPlante said during a discussion hosted by the think tank Center for a New American Security.

LaPlante noted that the United States was producing 14,000 shells each month six to eight months ago, but is now producing 28,000 shells per month.

Next year, the United States should be producing up to 65,000 155mm artillery shells per month, LaPlante said.

The United States ramped up production of 155mm artillery shells after stocks began to run low as they were sent to Ukraine from US stockpiles.

The United States has provided Ukraine with more than 2 million rounds of artillery munitions, according to the US Defense Department.

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UNSC Warns of Perpetual Conflict, Instability in South Sudan Unless Climate Action Taken

UNITED NATIONS, September 15 (Sputnik) - South Sudan risks falling into a cycle of perpetual violence and instability unless climate action is urgently taken, Albanian Deputy Permanent Representative Albana Dautllari said on behalf of 11 UN Security Council members.

The statement was made on Friday on behalf of Albania, France, Gabon, Ghana, Japan, Malta,

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Mozambique, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

"Failure to address the impact of climate change could not only perpetrate the cycles of conflict and instability, but also hinder the prospects of long-term peace and sustainable development. The international community should act swiftly and decisively to mitigate climate change and build climate resilience contributing to a more peaceful and secure South Sudan," Dautllari said during a media stakeout.

South Sudan, she said, is one of the five countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Its economy relies heavily on agriculture, fisheries, and livestock rearing, all of which are directly affected by rising temperatures, irregular rainfall and extreme weather events. Climate change effects, she warned, can create fertile ground for conflicts over scarce resources, including land and water, and exacerbate existing ethnic, political and social tensions.

The UN Security Council members call on Juba and its partners to act urgently and adopt mitigation measures as part of peacebuilding efforts by integrating them into national policies, enhancing the management of natural resources, and promoting sustainable agricultural practices, she said.

South Sudan should also invest in renewables and ensure it can support communities vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, Dautllari said.

Since climate change risks disproportionally affect women and girls, climate action needs to be gender-responsive, she added.

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IMF Mission Says Lebanon Failing to Take Urgent Economic Reforms

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) – An IMF mission to Lebanon has found that the country has failed to take action on urgently-needed reforms to rebuild its economy, according to a release on Friday.

“Lebanon has not undertaken the urgently needed reforms, and this will weigh on the economy for years to come. The lack of political will to make difficult, yet critical, decisions to launch reforms leaves Lebanon with an impaired banking sector, inadequate public services, deteriorating infrastructure, worsening poverty and unemployment conditions, and a further widening of the income gap,” the leader of the IMF mission, Ramirez Rigo, said in the release.

He added that inflation remained in the triple digits, further shrinking real incomes, and foreign exchange reserves continued to decline in the first half of the year. He warned that recent foreign exchange inflows from remittances and seasonal tourism gave the false impression that the economy had bottomed out, but these sources were unsustainable and fell very short of what was needed to offset a large trade deficit and lack of external financing.

Rigo called for aligning the central bank Banque du Liban’s governance, accounting, and foreign exchange operations with international best practices and unifying official exchange rates with market exchange rates to clamp down on arbitrage and rent-seeking.

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He also noted that Lebanon's government had yet to develop comprehensive reforms, including a plan to restructure the banking sector and major state-owned enterprises. Essential laws were either still being drafted or awaiting parliamentary approval. The government also had yet to implement a comprehensive policy to contain its massive external and fiscal deficits.

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Opposition to Further Ukraine Aid Growing Among US House Republicans - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - Opposition to providing more US aid to Ukraine is growing among Republican members of the House of Representatives, The Hill reported on Friday.

An increasing number of Republican lawmakers, including some so-called moderates, are opposing the inclusion of further aid to Ukraine as part of a government funding measure slated for a vote later this month, the report said, citing several Republican lawmakers.

Not just the Freedom Caucus of conservative Republicans, but there are many lawmakers who are concerned with potential additional funding, the report cited US Congresswoman Lisa McClain as saying.

Congress is set to vote on a continuing resolution before the end of September to temporarily fund the US government and avoid a shutdown. The Senate is seeking to include additional aid for Ukraine in the legislation.

More House Republicans have meanwhile come out against further transfers of taxpayer dollars and military equipment to Ukraine.

US Congressman Andy Biggs vowed not to support a new Ukraine aid package and expressed doubt that any such measure would reach the House floor soon, the report said. Biggs pointed out, however, that there still may be enough votes to advance additional aid to Ukraine given the presence of many "war hawks" in Congress, the report said.

US Congresswoman Nancy Mace emphasized that the US House has many other issues to address ahead of further Ukraine funding, the report said.

US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy has previously vowed to stop writing "blank checks" to Ukraine and is seeking to detach aid for Ukraine from the spending bill as well as hold a separate vote on it instead, media reported earlier.

In addition to working on passing a spending measure by the end of the month, McCarthy also recently announced an impeachment inquiry into President Joe Biden.

The Biden administration has repeatedly expressed confidence in lasting bipartisan support for Ukraine in Congress and in the lawmakers' ability to pass more aid packages.

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US Sanctions 18 Iranian Security Officials, State-Sponsored Media - Treasury

(Updates with more details in paras 2-10; modifies lede)

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - The United States has sanctioned 29 Iranian individuals and entities, including 18 security officials and three state-sponsored news outlets, for their alleged repression of protests throughout Iran following the death of Mahsa Amini in police custody a year ago, the US Department of the Treasury said in a release on Friday.

"Today, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) is designating 29 individuals and entities in connection with the Iranian regime's violent suppression of nationwide protests following the death of Mahsa 'Zhina' Amini in custody of its 'Morality Police,' and the regime's continued efforts to detain dissenting voices and restrict access to a free and open internet," the release said.

The sanctions were coordinated with the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and other partners, the release said.

The sanctions target key members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRCG) and Law Enforcement Forces (LEF); the head of the Prisons Organization; three individuals and one company allegedly involved in assisting with censorship and blocking of internet access; three IRGC and government-sponsored media outlets - Fars News, Tasnim News and Press TV - and three senior media officials, the release said.

The sanctions also target Tasnim's CEO Majid Gholizadeh, a former IRGC commander, Tasnim's head of the board of directors Hamidreza Moghadam Far, who is also an IRGC commander; and Fars CEO Payam Tirandaz, the release said.

The sanctioned LEF officials include Saeed Montazerolmehdi; Hossein Amjadian; Abbasali Mohammadian; Hassan Shahrestani; Ahmad Taheri; Ahmad Naderian; Seyyed Khalil Safavi; Delavar Alghasi-Mehr; Mohammad Mozzami Goudarzi; and Roham Bakhsh Habibi, the release said.

The sanctioned IRGC commanders include Khodarahm Sarani; Mazaher Majidi; Bahman Reyhani; Jamal Shakarami; Mohammad Abdollahpour; Gholamhossein Gheib-Parvar; Ali Akbar Pourjamshidian; and Abdolreza Abedzadeh, the release said.

In addition, the Treasury Department sanctioned Iran's Prisons Organization head Gholamali Mohammadi, the release said.

Also sanctioned are Alireza Abedinejad, CEO of Douran Software Technologies, a leading company allegedly assisting the Iranian government in censorship and filtering of the internet, and Amer Najafianpour and Soheila Kasaei, the chair and vice-chair of Douran's board of directors, the release added.

The company Yaftar Pazhohan Pishtaz Rayanesh is sanctioned for allegedly working with the Iranian government to block VPN addresses and design and implement tools to crawl through leading search engines to censor video and textual content, according to the release.

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Some Neighborhoods of Atlanta Resemble Trump's Description of 'Violent Crime War Zone'

ATLANTA, September 14 (Sputnik), Lenka White - When former US President Donald Trump announced that he would surrender in the Georgia election interference case, he fumed that District Attorney Fani Willis had "allowed Atlanta to become a record setting murder and violent crime war zone."

But longtime residents of the city say Atlanta is a city of two extremes that must be carefully navigated, with some neighborhoods resembling Trump's depiction of a dangerous territory.

"You can't go in that direction. It's dangerous," a taxi driver says while driving toward the Fulton County Jail, where Trump surrendered.

"This used to be the Heroin capital of the United States, but the drug addicts are still here," he says, while gesturing toward a street where people can be seen sleeping, some of them appearing to be unconscious as cars whiz by.

Even as Heroin abuse remains a problem in parts of Atlanta, with the Georgia Department of Health estimating that there are a minimum of 7,000 addicts in the city, officials are now struggling with a new wave of drug abuse as fentanyl and methamphetamine sweep through impoverished communities.

According to the Georgia Department of Health, the total number of opiod-related overdose deaths more than doubled from 853 in 2019 to 1,718 in 2021.

The Justice Department, meanwhile, regards Atlanta as a principal drug distribution hub, largely because of its location along a coastal interstate system and its Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, the largest in the world. Fentanyl and other drugs shipped by cartels such as Sinaloa and Cartel Jalisco New Generation arrive in Atlanta before being distributed to the Northeast, South Florida, and Midwest.

Walking in some neighborhoods of Atlanta such as Mechanicsville and Grove Park can feel unsafe, even in the afternoon.

"You should not walk here alone. Where are you going?" asks a security guard named Andre, as he rides by on an electric bike. "I will go with you and watch over you until you get there."

He insists on accompanying our Sputnik correspondent for her entire journey. Along the way, they encounter homeless people on the street and groups of young men who appear to be surveying passersby to identify their next target.

Andre walks with our Sputnik correspondent the whole way to a grocery store and then, for the sake of safety, she decides to take a taxi back to her hotel.

Andre's concerns are not completely unfounded, as Atlanta Police Department statistics paint a grim picture of crime in the city: In 2022, police investigated 170 homicides, 121 rapes and 3,192 aggravated assaults. The number of murders in the city rose by 7% when compared to 2021.

Andre and other local residents appear to know which neighborhoods to avoid when walking throughout town during the day, and are even more cautious during the night.

The situation appears vastly different across town, in the affluent neighborhood of Buckhead, where elaborate mansions line pristine streets bustling with young professionals.

But amid rising concerns about the surge in violent crime across Atlanta, Buckhead Republicans have recently attempted to advance legislation to separate their neighborhood from Democrat-run Atlanta.

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In March, the Buckhead cityhood bill failed 33-22 in Georgia's Senate, marking the second year in a row that the measure was defeated in the state legislature.

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Trump Says Ready to Testify Under Oath He Didn't Order Mar-a-Lago Security Tapes Deleted

WASHINGTON, September 15 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump has confirmed his readiness to testify under oath that he did not order Mar-a-Lago security video linked to the investigation into his documents handling be deleted.

"Sure, I'm going to — I'll testify," Trump told NBC News in an interview.

He further insisted that the tapes were not deleted, highlighting that he voluntarily shared them with investigators even though they are his property.

"In other words, there was nothing done to them. And they were my tapes. I could have fought them. I didn't even have to give them the tapes, I don't think," Trump stated.

The allegation that Trump ordered the video tapes be deleted was the basis of a superseding indictment filed in July against Trump, his aide, Walt Nauta, and Mar-a-Lago property manager Carlos De Oliveira.

The indictment added another three charges against Trump in the case related to obstruction and willful retention of national defense information, bringing the total number of counts against Trump in the case to 40.

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