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9/22/23 Friday

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‘Lipstick on a Pig’: Zelensky’s US Trip Revealed Deepening Fractures in NATO Support

As Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky wrapped up his trip to the United States on Friday, where he spoke at the United Nations and visited the White House, he is preparing to return to Ukraine with far less than he expected. An expert noted the US and Ukraine are struggling to make a bad situation look better than it is.

Retired CIA intelligence officer and former US State Department official Larry Johnson told Sputnik that “nothing of substance” had come from Zelensky’s trip to Washington, DC, but that careful study of the demeanor of Zelensky and several American officials revealed “they've had some very uncomfortable conversations behind the scenes.”

“He’s not going to get the ATACMS that he claimed he wanted,” Johnson said, referring to the ground strike missile that is launched from a HIMARS rocket system. He noted “they are sending some M1 Abrams tanks next week - that was already on the table.”

“What was clear is that you've got a disconnect between the rhetorical position, what the Biden administration is saying publicly to support Zelensky, and what it's actually doing,” he pointed out.

“On the one hand, they are stridently insisting that they're going to support Ukraine to the end, that Zelensky is on their team, etc. But when it comes to the actual assistance, they didn't increase - they're going to continue to provide aid, but they're not providing any kind of advanced weapons system. I don't think they do have a weapon system that would make a difference. But, you know, for example, they talked about: ‘Oh, we have to provide Ukraine with their defense.’ I thought that was what the Patriot batteries were for. Clearly, the Patriots have failed in their mission. And it's not like the United States has a better air defense system than the Patriot batteries - that's the best we have to offer. That didn't work. But they're talking about providing some more air defense capabilities. I think it's a meaningless gesture,” he said.

“The problem is, it doesn’t matter what equipment or money the United States supplies. The problem Ukraine faces is the lack of manpower, that they've suffered such enormous casualties during this failed counteroffensive that their ability to replace those is a challenge.”

Johnson noted that during Zelensky’s visit, there were “subtle gestures” but nothing like the hero’s welcome he was given before.

“During his previous trip, he was celebrated with a joint session of Congress and got to kiss [then-House Speaker] Nancy Pelosi, and yet this time he didn't get that. He did meet with some members of Congress and he heard some challenges to his position. I think there's still a majority in the Congress, in both the House and Senate, that are saying that they really strongly support Ukraine, but there's a growing number of voices that are saying: ‘no, we need to spend that money that's been going to Kiev here in the United States, in Maui, Philadelphia, New York, San Francisco.’ There's growing pressure to spend those funds in the states as opposed to selling it overseas.”

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“He didn't get a joint press conference. They did put out some sort of controlled video of both Biden and Zelensky reading prepared remarks and setting it in a controlled environment, where the press were spectators but not able to ask questions. But they didn't have a side-by-side press-conference. So, it was a much more tepid response this time compared to previous ones. And he didn't go back with a greater economic package than he anticipated prior to arriving. Plus, on top of it, he did have Poland and the relationship to Poland and Ukraine was sort of a backdrop to all of this,” he said.

“I paid a lot of attention to the facial expression on Zelensky and his entourage at the United Nations the other day, sitting side by side with [US Secretary of State] Tony Blinken and [US climate envoy] John Kerry. And they all looked very, very unhappy. And this was while Biden was saying positive things about: ‘We're going to do this for Ukraine’ and ‘the world needs to come together.’ That lack of looking happy tells me they've had some very uncomfortable conversations behind the scenes. I know that within the intelligence community, at least according to [US investigative journalist] Seymour Hersh, the CIA believes that the war is lost, Ukraine has no viable way forward. Perhaps some of that information has percolated through.”

Johnson said the latest weapons page was “more of a gesture of support” than it was anything capable of pushing the conflict in Ukraine’s favor.

“They're going to provide more HIMARS missiles, supposedly, or rockets. But those systems have been hit and destroyed with some regularity. We saw - this goes back to the Sevastopol missile strike today - there's probably a Storm Shadow [cruise missile that was fired], it looks like some were shot down, it's not clear to me whether any actually got through or that what hit the headquarters was debris. But it just goes to highlight that Ukraine does not have an unlimited supply of these. And whatever the United States is able to supply is not - it's temporary. It's not like they're committing to supply: ‘Oh, yeah, we're going to give you 10,000 HIMARS rockets a month.’ Something like that would be significant because the United States doesn't have the ability to produce and supply such an amount.”

He noted the $325 million in weapons was "not going to change the ability of the Ukrainian Army because it’s [not] going to increase its ability to carry out military operations against Russia. I think that's the critical concern. Is it going to allow the Ukrainian Army to continue to function for the foreseeable future? Yes.”

“From that standpoint, the US aid is critical to keeping the Ukrainian Army in the field and able to engage Russia. But it does not provide enough aid to be able to shift the balance in a way that Russia would be at a disadvantage militarily,” he explained.

Johnson said the US was sending a tiny fraction of what had recently been promised by the White House because “the political environment is starting to change in Washington. It's no longer massive public support for the policy. In fact, there's a majority of Americans who are actually opposed to sending more aid to Ukraine, but that message has yet to get through to all members of Congress.”

“They call it ‘putting lipstick on a pig,’” he explained, referencing an American expression. “You take a pig and you put lipstick on it to try to make it look pretty. This trip was: he had to put some ‘lipstick on a pig.’ The situation is not good. Despite all of the claims that Ukraine's achieving progress and showing Ukraine on the road to victory. The reality is just the opposite. And instead of finding greater support within Europe, with NATO becoming more unified, it's just the opposite. NATO's becoming more fractured, so there's not any good news really for

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Zelensky, and yet he has to pretend that things are looking up and things are good. But even in some of his recent interviews, he's been less ebullient, less confident. We're going to see him showing signs of growing frustration and concern over the coming weeks."
Asked about a supposed joint weapons production effort between Kiev and Washington that Zelensky claimed was in the works, Johnson laughed, telling Sputnik to remember that Zelensky is "a comedian."
"That's got to be a joke. They don't have - they've got no wherewithal to do that. Not even in the United States, as [US national security adviser] Jake Sullivan admitted yesterday, that they were trying to get the US defense industry to produce more 155-millimeter artillery shells. They can't do it - they don't have the ability. They don't have the factories, they don't have the workers, they don't have the materials. Where are they going to build these sites that Zelensky is talking about? Any location in western Ukraine will be struck by Russia. Russia has the missiles to hit those locations. So I think it's just laughable."

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Experts: Ukraine-Poland Spat Signals Resurgence of 'National Interests' Over NATO's Pro-Kiev Agenda

More than a year and a half into its proxy war with Russia, NATO is facing a resurgence of national interests on the part of its member states, especially those along the "eastern flank" who have been asked to bear the brunt of the conflict in Ukraine, experts said. However, that doesn't always mean they're backing down from a hawkish position.
Formerly one of Ukraine's largest arms suppliers, Poland has said it will cease sending weapons to Kiev following Ukraine's filing of a lawsuit against Poland with the World Trade Organization (WTO). While on its face, the dispute seems to be over a grain shipment deal, experts told Sputnik that much deeper political currents are sending the governments of Ukraine, Poland, and the United States in different directions.
Political scientist Dr. David Oualaalou told Radio Sputnik's The Critical Hour that politicians in Ukraine, Poland, and the US were all facing pressure in upcoming elections due to domestic effects of the conflict in Ukraine.
"The bottom line is: this [Black Sea] grain deal used to work for everybody, now the EU is saying, 'wait a minute, Poland will have to allow the grain from Ukraine to go through.' And they're saying, 'no, we won't have it because our farmers are paying the price for it and we are not going to allow it', to the point that they decide now we're going to cut off the military support altogether."
"Here is what's at the heart of it: it's because 90% of the grain transfer used to go through Poland, which means also that the Polish farmers were being hit. Now you've got other neighboring countries, including Bulgaria, including Slovakia - all of them are saying 'enough is enough', because the domestic farmers are paying the price to support Ukraine and to them it doesn't make any sense."

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“On three fronts, the outcome is going to be different if things are not changed - the policy, that is,” he said, noting that not just [President Andrzej] Duda in Poland, but also [President Volodymyr] Zelensky in Ukraine and [President Joe] Biden in the US are all going into elections sometime soon facing strong headwinds on the popularity front."

“So for us here in the US, the speaker of the House, McCarthy, already made it clear that they're not going to support any of whatever the Biden administration intends to do. They are asking for another $24 billion. What happened to the American families? What happened to the American infrastructure? What happens right here at home? Why are we just giving money right and left when we don't even have it? That’s one.”

“Second, for Poland: when I was there about three or four months ago, and I was talking to locals there when they started to be unhappy with Duda's administration. As a matter of fact, I had a conversation with someone who understands the political structure inside the Polish government and told me that this is just a matter of time. Maybe this is Duda’s last time in office to begin with. So now Duda’s thinking about his political career by reversing course.”

“And for the elections in Ukraine, where the comedian Zelensky is already threatening [that] there will be no elections if we don't give him $5 billion. Well, who the heck is going to be thinking in terms of us giving money to do elections and so forth? What about the will of the people? And you can just see it: on three fronts, the outcome is not going to be bode well for anybody if things are not returned [to normal] - mainly for the United States and Poland. And this is why I believe Poland made the decision.”

Dr. George Szamuely, senior researcher at the Institute for Global Policy on disagreements within the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, told Sputnik that the dispute really started more than a year ago.

“In April of 2022, the European Union broke its own rules and essentially lifted tariffs on Ukrainian agricultural produce. So all of this entered the European Union market. The idea was always that it would simply transit through Europe and [go] on to the rest of the world. But that isn't really what happened. So actually, all this agricultural produce stayed in Eastern and Central Europe,”

“And it wasn't just the Poles. I mean, the Hungarians, the Slovakians, and Bulgarians, and Romanian farmers were all up in arms because this Ukrainian grain was seriously undercutting their produce, and the governments had to react. And the European Union knew that it had a big problem on its hands. So it said, ‘okay, fine. These five countries don't have to import Ukrainian grain other than, you know, we can guarantee that it will transit through the country.’"

“So it went on until last week, when the European Union announced that, ‘well, basically we're going back to the way it was before this deal with these five countries, and Ukrainian grain can just simply enter the EU market.’ Upon which Poland, Hungary and Slovakia have said, ‘well, we don't care what the European Commission says, we're still not going to allow Ukrainian agricultural produce in our markets.’ And what then happened, which was the straw that broke the camel's back, is that Ukraine said, ‘well, fine, we're going to sue you in the World Trade Organization. Well, this, of course, infuriated the Poles.”

“But, the most egregious thing that Zelensky did was to go before the UN General Assembly and accuse Poland of doing Moscow's bidding. Well, there's no greater insult to a Pole, especially a Polish president, than to say you're doing Moscow's bidding. And this is what infuriated President Duda, and [why] he told reporters that Ukraine is behaving like a drowning

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man who was trying to take down the person who was trying to rescue him. And then [Polish Prime Minister Mateusz] Morawiecki made his statement about, 'well, we're not going to let us send any more weapons into Ukraine because we need the weapons ourselves.'"

"So as things stand, I mean, this is going before the World Trade Organization, Poland is saying 'no more weapons' - it's a serious problem. It could boil over, or they could come to some kind of an agreement, but it is definitely embarrassing, particularly as Zelensky is in Washington meeting, essentially, his benefactors, because whatever Poland does, it pales in comparison with what the United States has done for Ukraine."

"So, you know, you know, Poland talks long and loud, but what it's provided [to] Ukraine is really just a small portion of what the United States is providing."

Asked about whether US President Joe Biden might use his private audience with Zelensky in Washington, DC, on Wednesday to smooth things over with Warsaw, Samueli told Sputnik that "Biden may well say to Zelensky: 'you need to patch things up with Poland. Don't go out of your way to insult the Poles, certainly not before the UN General Assembly.' But the problem is that the Biden administration is absolutely on the hook for Ukraine. I mean, it can't just simply back away now without seriously losing face."

Former UN weapons inspector & WMD whistleblower Scott Ritter told Radio Sputnik's The Backstory that an even more intransigent nationalist current was beginning to prevail in Poland, one that is preparing for a direct war with Russia.

"It was just a month ago that I was engaged in discussions with people about the concept of an economic union between Poland and Ukraine, a customs union. The idea was to reduce as much as possible the border between Poland and western Ukraine. People were speculating about Poland making a move on western Ukraine. It appears that Poland has done a complete 180-degree turnaround and Poland is looking out for Poland's interests. Poland has announced that they plan on expanding their military to 300,000: this requires not only the creation and training of new units, but that these units be equipped. And what Poland is saying is that they are no longer going to be sending [to Ukraine] the modern equipment that they are using for themselves."

"And reading between the lines, this means that Poland is waking up to the reality that Ukraine has lost this conflict, that Poland's going to have to start preparing for a post-conflict reality that has Ukraine existing as a defeated state - meaning that Russia will be, if not right up on the border, at least have a presence closer to the Polish border. So it's the beginning of the end for Poland. You're starting to see Zelensky's stature internationally collapse, and as it collapses, as he is no longer the magnet for international military assistance, I think you'll see his political position collapse as well."

However, Ritter cautioned that while Warsaw might be ending its support for Ukraine, that in no way equates to a softening of their stance toward Russia.

"There is an element of, you know, national interest in this as well. It isn't just about politics. It's about what's best for Poland. And Poland is waking up to the fact that sometime in the near future Ukraine will have lost this war and there will have been a negotiated end that will not be beneficial to either the Zelensky led Ukraine or NATO."

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All Parts Distribution Centers for GM, Stellantis Join US Auto Workers' Strike

The strike by the United Automobile Workers (UAW) labor union took a dramatic turn on Friday as workers at a handful of car factories were suddenly joined by the workers at more than three dozen parts distribution facilities spread across 20 US states.

"At noon Eastern today, all parts distribution centers at General Motors and Stellantis will be on strike," UAW President Shawn Fain said on Friday. "We will shut down parts distribution until those two companies come to their senses and come to the table with a serious offer."

Fain explained that no facilities owned by Ford, the third company whose factory workers were on strike, were joining the strike at this time because the company had yielded considerably in its negotiations with the labor union.

"We do want to recognize that Ford is serious about reaching a deal," he said. "Stellantis and GM in particular are going to need some serious pushing."

When contract negotiations collapsed and the auto workers went on strike a week ago, just three facilities were shut down by the walkout: a GM facility in Wentzville, Missouri; a Stellantis facility in Toledo, Ohio; and a Ford plant in Wayne, Michigan. It involved about 12,700 of the UAW's 145,000 members.

Now, the strike has spread to 38 more facilities across 20 states and their ranks have swelled to over 18,300 striking workers.

The union is demanding the rescinding of many concessions made to the automakers during the 2007-2008 financial crash, when they received bailouts from the federal government. They are seeking a 36% wage increase over four years and the elimination of a tiered wage system, along with more paid time off and other benefits.

The struck companies have fired back, calling the strike "unnecessary" and accusing the UAW of "pursuing their own political agendas" by expanding the strike. Some commentators have accused the union of striking to sabotage the reputation of US President Joe Biden.

The union has signaled Biden is welcome to visit the picket line and show his support for the workers, but were reportedly dismayed when the president attempted to send two aides to serve as negotiators instead. The aides were rebuffed, and the White House was told to send Biden or nobody.

Twice on Friday, Biden answered reporters at the White House asking him if he would meet with the strikers by asking them "will you come with me?" Afterward, his official social media account said that on Tuesday of next week he would "go to Michigan to join the picket line and stand in solidarity with the men and women of UAW."

The UAW strike has come amid ongoing monthslong strikes by SAG-AFTRA and the WGA, representing Hollywood actors and writers, respectively. The United Parcel Service (UPS) narrowly avoided the nation's largest-ever, single-employer strike in August when it reached a last-minute deal with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

The delivery workers similarly demanded an end to a tiered wage system they said was unfair. Labor activists and their supporters have dubbed the strike wave "Hot Labor Summer."

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Indian Space Rover, Lander Have Yet to Awaken After Enduring Cold Lunar Night

The Chandrayaan-3 mission was India's first successful moon landing and the world's first near the lunar south pole. India was the fourth nation to soft-land on (that is, not crash into) the moon, following the Soviet Union, United States and China.

The Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) has not received any communications from the Vikram lander or Pragyan rover it landed on the moon as part of its Chandrayaan-3 mission, after the two robotic space explorers turned off for the two-week-long lunar night.

The lunar night is over for the part of the moon where Vikram and Pragyan were last seen, and as such is expected to have turned back on and send a message to the ISRO; however, that has not yet happened.

The main mission of the Chandrayaan-3 explorers was to operate during the lunar day and then enter "sleep mode" in preparation for the lunar night. While they were both designed to turn back on once the sun hit their solar panels again, that was never guaranteed and would be considered a bonus for the ISRO. Still, officials expected the two devices would turn on at least one more time after their initial lunar night.

On Friday, the ISRO tweeted "no signals have been received from [the Vikram or Pragyan]" but noted that "efforts to establish contact will continue."

That tweet, posted 13 hours ago at the time of this writing, has not been followed by an update.

Lunar nights feature extremely harsh conditions, especially at the poles, with temperatures dropping as low as negative 283 degrees Celsius (negative 396 degrees Fahrenheit). While low temperatures are generally good for electronics, extreme cold temperatures as those found on the moon or outer space, can actually damage electronic components as they expand and contract during temperature changes.

While electronics meant for space exploration are much hardier than consumer electronics on Earth, the extreme temperatures still present a challenge for engineers and scientists.

The ISRO launched the Chandrayaan-3 in July and landed the Vikram on August 23, which then sent out the Pragyan rover. Two weeks later, they shut off to prepare for the night and hoped they would turn back on around this time.

The ISRO said they hoped they would turn back on, but cautioned the harsh environment would make that difficult.

While there has been no word from Vikram or Pragyan yet, it is still possible they may wake up as the sun's rays warm the devices up. "This sustained period of cold may have caused issues with the equipment, and it may take longer to warm up than was previously planned, especially if the rover is in the shadow of a boulder," Sarah Casewell of the University of Leicester, UK, told a science-focused outlet.

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'Get Rescue Rolling': Audio of 911 Call From F-35 Crash Captures Stunned Dispatcher

The F-35 fighter jet program is the most expensive in Pentagon history, estimated to cost over $1.7 trillion by the time it is completed. Despite its hefty price tag, the next-generation plane has been plagued by issues, and a recent report revealed nearly half of them are not ready to fly at any given time.

Newly released audio from the 911 phone call made by the resident whose backyard recently served as the landing site for the pilot of a crashed F-35 jet reveals just how bizarre the situation was for all parties involved.

In the Thursday-released recording, the resident can be heard calmly trying to explain the situation to a 911 dispatcher, who seems to have trouble wrapping her head around the series of unfortunate events.

“We got a pilot at our house and he says he’s been ejected – he ejected from a plane, so we wanted to see if we could get an ambulance please,” the resident can be heard saying.

“I’m sorry, what happened?” the dispatcher can be heard responding.

After the caller explains the situation again, the dispatcher, clearly still confused, can be heard asking for the caller’s phone number before saying that help is on the way and then asking him to hold.

Later, the pilot can be heard trying to explain the situation once again to the dispatcher.

“Ma’am, a military jet crashed. I’m the pilot. We need to get rescue rolling. I’m not sure where the airplane is. It would have crash landed somewhere. I ejected.”

Later, he can be heard asking for an ambulance, explaining he was in good shape but that he had some back pain.

The pilot was described by the Marine Corps as having decades of experience behind the cockpit.

The F-35 fighter jet crashed on Sunday after a malfunction caused the pilot to eject mid-flight over a residential area in Charleston near the city’s airport.

The plane’s crash site was not found for more than 24 hours, eventually being discovered in a rural area of South Carolina, about two hours north of Charleston.

In a different set of audio released earlier this week, an unnamed Marine Corp official and air traffic control could be heard trying to contact the then pilot-less plane, showing just how chaotic the situation was.

The Marines said in a statement that the plane likely continued flying because of an on-board system designed to protect pilots who become incapacitated during flight.

“If the jet is stable in level flight, the jet will attempt to stay there. If it was in an established climb or descent, the jet will maintain a 1G state in that climb or descent until commanded to do something else,” the Marine Corps said in a statement. “This is designed to save our pilots if they are incapacitated or lose situational awareness.”

The statement also noted the plane is designed to erase any secure communications if a pilot ejects, which combined with the plane’s stealth capabilities, made it more difficult to track the

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plane. While the plane does continue to broadcast on open channels in the event of a pilot ejection, the statement noted air traffic control may have not received those broadcasts because of the weather conditions at the time.
A full investigation of the incident has been opened, but it could be months before it is completed.

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McCarthy May Find Unlikely Allies in Democrats to Save His Speakership

If a vote to vacate the House speakership is held, as Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-FL) has recently threatened, a simple majority will be required to certify the motion. A new vote for speaker will then be held, with a simple majority also being needed to appoint a new lawmaker to the post.
Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, facing a possible vote to vacate from the hardline House Freedom Caucus wing of his party, may get some help from an unexpected source: members of the Democratic Party.
However, any help from the Democrats would come with significant conditions to receive their support. During a podcast with a US outlet, Rep. Katherine Clark (D-MA) listed disaster relief, further funding for Ukraine and ending "this sham of an impeachment inquiry [against US President Joe Biden]."
McCarthy is not expected to fulfill those demands, especially the demand to end the impeachment inquiry. Ending that would not only infuriate larger parts of his caucus, it would also anger Republican voters who overwhelmingly support the inquiry and former President and current frontrunner for the 2024 Republican nomination, Donald Trump.
Meanwhile, several Democrats have stated they would be happy to see McCarthy go.
"I mean, if that vote comes up, I'll vote to vacate," Rep. Maxwell Frost (D-FL) said last week.
But others see it as an opportunity to limit the influence of the House Freedom Caucus. "A small number of Freedom Caucus members have been able to do a ton of damage," Rep. Greg Casar (D-TX) said. "I think that a significant number of progressive members hopefully can stop a bunch of that damage."
It was also reported in US media earlier this week that "small groups" of centrist Democrats were meeting with McCarthy's allies in the GOP to pass the spending bill that has dominated US politics for months. McCarthy's position as speaker was reportedly brought up during those talks, though they were not the focus.
The last time a vote to vacate the speaker position was raised - for then-House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) in 2015, Democrats hinted they would not support his removal despite his unpopularity with Democrats because they feared a more conservative figure taking the role.
The US government faces a shutdown on September 30 if a compromise spending bill cannot be passed by then. The House Freedom Caucus, a group of Republicans whose total membership is unknown, along with a selection of libertarian-minded Republicans, have been holding up the bill over spending issues, particularly more funding for Ukraine.

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Report: More Than Half of Leopard Tanks Donated to Ukraine by Denmark Are Faulty

The 42-ton diesel tank was retired by the German military in 2000. First deployed in 1965, the specific version being sent to Ukraine -- the Leopard 1A5 -- was updated in the 1980s.
Over half of the German-made Leopard 1 tanks donated by Denmark and Germany to Ukraine reportedly have significant technical faults.
In February, the German Defense Minister announced that his country, along with Denmark and the Netherlands, planned to send Ukraine at least 100 Leopard 1 tanks. At the time, they were described as a “robust and assertive” addition to Ukraine’s forces.
State media in Denmark reported that 12 of the 20 Leopard 1 tanks donated by the country have technical issues, with two sitting in Poland with “serious” issues, citing comments from Danish Defense Minister Troels Lund Poulsen.
Earlier this week, a German newspaper reported that another 10 Leopard tanks donated to Ukraine had significant enough issues that Ukraine refused their delivery.
The issues with the tank deliveries raise the possibility that the German-Denmark-Netherlands group may be unable to meet its proposed timeline of delivery.
Even if the Leopard 1 tanks arrived in Ukraine on time and in acceptable shape, it is questionable how much support they could give the Ukraine Armed Forces. During the early stages of Ukraine’s failed counteroffensive, it heavily utilized the Leopard 1 and its more advanced successor, the Leopard 2.
The Leopard 2 has more armor, a larger cannon with more range, a more powerful engine, and more advanced control systems than any of the Leopard 1 variants, including the 1A5. Despite extensive use of both Leopard 1 and 2s, the counteroffensive failed to make any significant gains and open-sourced observers confirmed the destruction of dozens of Leopard tanks, most recently in the Kupyansk direction.

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Global Manipulation for Dummies - Cartoon
Media mogul Rupert Murdoch announced on Thursday that he will step down as head of Fox and News Corp this November, handing the companies to his son Lachlan.
“For my entire professional life, I have been engaged daily with news and ideas, and that will not change,” Murdoch, 92, wrote in a memo to employees. “But the time is right for me to take on different roles, knowing that we have truly talented teams.”
News Corp. publishes some of the most influential newspapers in the United States, including the Wall Street Journal and New York Post, as well as The Sun and The Times in the United Kingdom. Fox News has long been the highest rated US 24-hour news network.

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Lachlan has been groomed for the role for years. He co-chaired both Fox and News Corp with his father and was appointed the CEO of Fox in 2019. His father seemed to imply that Lachlan will continue the conservative slant of the outlets, taking the time to attack the "elites" and the media that works with them.

"Elites have open contempt for those who are not members of their rarefied class. Most of the media is in cahoots with those elites, peddling political narratives rather than pursuing the truth," Rupert Murdoch said in the memo.

Rupert Murdoch has a reported net worth of $17.4 billion and was listed as the 96th richest person in the world earlier this month.

The elder Murdoch will continue serving as chairman emeritus, which grants him the ability to sit in on board meetings and receive the same information as other board members but will not be allowed to vote.

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US Adds 28 Entities Including From China, Russia to Economic Blacklist - Commerce Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 25 (Sputnik) - The United States imposed export restrictions on 28 entities including 11 in China and five in Russia, the Commerce Department's Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) said on Monday in a notice in the Federal Register.

BIS "amends the Export Administration Regulations (EAR) by adding twenty-eight entities to the Entity List under the destinations of the People's Republic of China (China), Finland, Germany, Oman, Pakistan, Russia and the United Arab Emirates. These entities have been determined by the US Government to be acting contrary to the national security or foreign policy interests of the United State," the notice stated.

The targeted entities in Russia were Dvice Consulting, Grant Instrument, SMT-iLogic, Streloy and VSMPO-AVISMA Corporation PJSC.

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US Condemns Attacks on Kosovo Police, Urges Both Sides to Show Restraint - Blinken

WASHINGTON, September 25 (Sputnik) - The United States condemns recent attacks on police officers in Kosovo and urges the governments in Pristina and Belgrade to refrain from dangerous rhetoric, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday.

"The United States strongly condemns the coordinated violent attacks on the Kosovo Police near the Banjska Monastery on September 24, and expresses deep condolences to the family of the Kosovo Police sergeant killed in the line of duty," Blinken said in a statement.

He called for justice for the perpetrators of the attacks and urged the governments of Kosovo and Serbia to avoid any actions or rhetoric that could further inflame tensions.

Blinken also urged the two governments to work in coordination with international partners to deescalate the situation, ensure security and rule of law, and return to the EU-facilitated

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dialogue.
Blinken said that the Kosovo police have full responsibility for enforcing the rule of law in the region.
"The United States recognizes and respects the Kosovo Police's role as first responder in emergency and crisis situations," he said.
Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti said on Sunday that unidentified people had opened fire on Kosovo police officers in the northern municipality of Zvecan, killing one and wounding another. The shooting occurred around 03:00 a.m. local time (01:00 GMT) near the village of Banjska, some 30 miles from Pristina. Later, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said that three Serbs were killed and two others injured in the clashes with police in northern Kosovo and Metohija.
Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Monday that the situation in Kosovo is extremely difficult, tense and potentially dangerous. He pointed out that Moscow notices a biased attitude toward the Serbs and is closely monitoring the developments.

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Northern Cyprus in Talks With Other Countries to Open Trade Representations - Leader

UNITED NATIONS, September 23 (Sputnik) - Northern Cyprus is in discussions with other countries on opening trade representation offices, Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar told Sputnik on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly.
"We have a number of countries we are talking with, supported by Turkey, to open new offices," Tatar said.
In August, Northern Cyprus received permission to open a trade office in Malaysia.
"We have representations in 27 countries and, moreover, we have an agreement with Turkey that wherever there is a Turkish embassy we can use their offices to basically promote Northern Cyprus," Tatar said.
Northern Cyprus is opening such offices wherever it can and obviously we need people to send there, Tatar said.
"We are recruiting new people to our foreign ministry who will be able to take on the responsibilities when they go to these countries. We are training diplomats because we want to be in as many countries as possible," Tatar added.
The island of Cyprus has been split since 1974 between Greek Cypriots, who represent the island nation in the European Union, and Turkish Cypriots, who are recognized by Turkey.

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Turkish Cypriot Leader Says Country Disturbed by illegal Migration

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UNITED NATIONS, September 23 (Sputnik) - Turkish Cypriot Leader Ersin Tatar told Sputnik on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly that his country is disturbed by illegal migration and the newly announced migration Center will help solve the problem.

"Some people choose to come to know Cyprus to go to the Greek side, because Greek side is European side, they cross the border, maybe illegally, they go to seek asylum in Europe. That creates problems because we don't want to get engaged in illegal matters," Tatar said.

"Therefore our police is very careful who to let in, scrutinizing migration systems at airports and ports to protect us because people who come just migrate down to the South for political reasons. This is something which is disturbing us. So we have to be careful."

In July, the minister of internal affairs or Northern Cyprus announced that there will be created a migration center in Northern Cyprus.

"If they are good People who come to the north, for as a student as a tourist, as somebody who will make an investment for the good of my country and for their own good, then we support it," Tatar said.

Tatar noted that the center will operate within the Ministry of Interior and police.

He also shared that the majority of the refugees come from Syria, Afghanistan, and some African countries.

The island of Cyprus has been split since 1974 between Greek Cypriots, who represent the island nation in the European Union, and Turkish Cypriots, who are recognized by Turkey.

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Turkish Cypriot Leader Says to Discuss Two State Solution With Guterres in New York

UNITED NATIONS, September 23 (Sputnik) - Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar told Sputnik on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly that he will discuss the two state solution to solve the Cyprus problem with UN Secretary General during the meeting in New York.

"I will be meeting Guterres on Saturday," Tatar said. "I want to tell him that to be able to resume formal negotiation for the resolution of the Cyprus problem, we want the acknowledgment of the sovereign equality. It should be two states. If they do not accept the Turkish Cypriot state, then there is no way we can find a solution for the Cyprus problem."

Tatar said his side wants a two-state solution while the other side, led by Cypriot leader Nikos Christodoulides, is still insisting on federalism.

Tatar went on to say that if Cyprus is prepared to discuss that two states policy formally, he is ready to start talking.

"I can propose to him other issues if we are going to successfully meet to discuss other aspects of the Cyprus issue, which is basically energy, natural resource issue, water issues, the energy issues, these migration issues where we have problems, then we can meet to discuss but only these issues, not to discuss federalism," he said. "I refuse to sit to discuss federalism."

Asked about the prospects for resumption of talks, Tatar stated, "At the moment, I have no prospects, nothing to say."

Tatar believes that a two-state solution is practical, fair and sustainable.

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"The only way forward is a two-state solution. Because we have had our own state for the last sixty years, they had their own state in the south of the island for 60 years," he said. "Let's resolve the issue. I'll be begging the Greek Cypriots to come talk to us on the basis of equality with regard to natural resources around the island, with regard to sharing water which we have been able to bring from Turkey."

Tatar continued to say that such a solution has tremendous potential.

"If we have an agreement, From this agreement Turkish Cypriots will benefit, Greek Cypriots will benefit because of the peace environment that will evolve , Turkey will benefit, Greece will benefit, the whole region will benefit," he said. "We want reciprocity, respect from the others who are the champions of humanity, the champions of peace and other global values. As far as Turkish Cypriots are concerned we never received our share of this global vision for values."

He went in to say that the embargoes concern not only trade and economics, but also, the youth who cannot participate in sports events anywhere.

"We have even people, youth who can be champions in Olympics, but we cannot participate anywhere because we are under embargoes," he said. "Republic of Cyprus says whenever we go that he or she is from the occupied regime in the north of the island, they cannot compete. And we are ruled out. Cultural events, music and all other activities, we are pushed out. Because we are not going there with the republic of Cyprus flag."

Tatar stressed that they want to coexist in the island in peace and tranquility.

"They need to respect us. We need an agreement between the two states," he said. "Right now the Republic of Cyprus is using their power everywhere including the UN, saying basically give up your rights and join us and as the republic of Cyprus we will take care of you."

Tatar said they will will never accept the proposal because it would amount to "national suicide."

"So we have to battle on. It's not easy. We have to battle on until the world and the world powers recognize the fact and will be able to come up with the settlement in Cyprus. Turkish Cypriot sovereignty should be recognized," he said.

The island of Cyprus has been split since 1974 between Greek Cypriots, who represent the island nation in the European Union, and Turkish Cypriots, who are recognized by Turkey.

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N. Cyprus Has Seen Rise in Russian Tourists Amid Anti-Moscow Sanctions - Leader

UNITED NATIONS, September 23 (Sputnik) - Northern Cyprus has seen an increase in the number of Russian tourists over the past year amid the anti-Moscow sanctions, Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar told Sputnik on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly.

"It [the number of tourists] has increased. I don't have the [exact] number. Tens of thousands," Tatar said.

When asked about the impact of the anti-Moscow sanctions, Tatar noted, "We are a small country, and it's partly because of this Turkish leverage. Because Turkey I think conducted an excellent policy with regard to this issue of Ukraine and Russia."

"Because with all these embargoes and isolation on Russia, Russians... cannot easily go

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anywhere. Where do they go? they come to Turkey, they come to North Cyprus," he said.
Russian aviation has been facing massive sanctions since the beginning of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The EU sanctions included ban on the sale of aircraft and their parts to Russian airlines, obligating European leasing companies to recall all leased aircraft from Russia.

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Northern Cyprus Doing Its Best to Increase Trade With Russia - Leader

UNITED NATIONS, September 23 (Sputnik) - Northern Cyprus is doing its utmost to boost trade with Russia, Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar told Sputnik.
"We are doing our best to increase our connection with countries that are friendly to us, with trade potential, with trade prospects. Russia is one of them," Tatar said on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. "We very much value Russia connection and obviously, because of the Turkish- Russia connection."
Tatar stressed that there are a number of Russians living in North Cyprus and they have a lot of exchanges with these people.
"Through Turkey, we have connections, we have some trade, including our commercial products, agricultural products, trade via Turkish firms with Russia and I think it's only fair that we should do it," he added.
The island of Cyprus has been split since 1974 between Greek Cypriots, who represent the island nation in the European Union, and Turkish Cypriots, who are recognized by Turkey.

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Turkish Cypriot Leader Says Ready to Authorize Direct Flights With Russia

UNITED NATIONS, September 23 (Sputnik) - Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar told Sputnik on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly that he is ready to authorize direct flights with Russia once Russia green lights them and expressed hope that it will happen soon.
"I hope that Russians would sometime accept direct flights from Moscow to our airport because there is a lot of traffic," Tatar said.
The Northern Cyprus government has two pending requests from Russian companies who operate in Russia "in big volumes."
"They - or others - could be companies who want to have direct flights. I'm prepared to authorize this because it will be in the interest of everyone," Tatar said.
Discussions about launching direct flights between Russia and Northern Cyprus have been ongoing since last year, but no action has been authorized by the Russian government yet, Tatar said.

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"There are people coming along from Russia to Northern Cyprus to discuss these businesses but at the moment," Tatar said. "I hope they will authorize one day soon… I think it will be something that will help our relationship."

Travel capability is essential given that there are at least 50,000 Russians living in Northern Cyprus and a fair amount of Turks who want to visit Russia.

The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus was declared in 1983 with Turkey's backing, although the island had been divided since 1974 into a Greek and a Turkish part.

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Turkish Cypriot Leader Says He Hopes Russia Will Open Consular Office This Year

UNITED NATIONS, September 23 (Sputnik) - Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar told Sputnik on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly that he hopes Russia opens its consulate in Northern Cyprus this year.

"The Russians do not recognize us. But as you know, the Russian government is considering opening a consulate in Northern Cyprus because we have so many Russian people. I hope that we have it," Tatar said, adding that the opening of the consulate is expected to happen later this year.

Tatar said that Norther Cyprus officials have been speaking to the Russian ambassador in Cyprus on the issue of opening a consulate.

Tatar pointed out that the decision to open a consulate to assist Russians living in Northern Cyprus was announced several weeks ago after the meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

"Erdogan told us that he's discussed it with Putin and Putin gave him the authority that they open an office in Northern Cyprus," Tatar said. "That is a step forward."

The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus was established in 1983 with Turkey's backing although the island of Cyprus had been divided since 1974 into a Turkish and a Greek part.

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Pentagon Awards $1.3Bln Naval Nuclear Propulsion Contract

WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) - The US awarded a contract worth more than $1.3 billion for nuclear propulsion work at the Naval Nuclear Laboratory, the Defense Department said in a press release.

"Fluor Marine Propulsion LLC, Arlington, Virginia, is awarded a $1,362,922,002 cost-plus-fixed-fee modification to previously awarded contract... for Naval Nuclear Propulsion work at the Naval Nuclear Laboratory," the release said on Friday.

Work will be performed in the US and is expected to be completed by September 2024, the release added.

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Naval Sea Systems Command in Washington, DC is the contracting activity, according to the release.

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US, China Hold Meeting to Discuss 2023 Cyber Strategy - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) - US and Chinese defense officials met at the Pentagon to discuss the newly updated 2023 Cyber Strategy Summary, the Defense Department said in a press release.

"US defense officials held a hybrid in-person and virtual meeting today with People's Republic of China (PRC) defense officials at the invitation of the Department of Defense to discuss its recently released Cyber Strategy Summary, in accordance with the 2014 US-PRC Memorandum of Understanding on Notification of Major Military Activities Confidence Building Measure Mechanism," the release said on Friday.

In 2014 the US and China signed the mechanism to reaffirm the commitment of both nations to developing a new model of US-China military-to-military relations, an integral part of their bilateral relationship, the release added.

However, earlier this month, the Defense Department released an updated iteration of the 2023 Cyber Strategy Summary, which serves as an implementation framework for the priorities outlined in the 2022 National Security Strategy, 2022 National Defense Strategy, and the 2023 National Cybersecurity Strategy.

Furthermore, the strategy underscores the Pentagon's commitment to investing in and guaranteeing the safeguarding, accessibility, dependability, and robustness of its cyber networks and infrastructure.

The US delegation was composed of representatives from the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, while the Chinese delegation included officials from the Defense Attache Office of the Chinese Embassy in Washington and the Central Military Commission's Office for International Military Cooperation (OIMC), the statement said.

After the briefing, the two sides engaged in substantive discussion on a range of cyber-related issues, the statement added.

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UK Official on Storm Shadow Used on Sevastopol Strike: Ukraine Has Right, Stands With Kiev

UNITED NATIONS, September 23 (Sputnik) - Senior UK official Tariq Ahmad in response to a question from Sputnik about the use of Storm Shadows in a strike on Sevastopol said Ukraine has as right to self defense and the United Kingdom stands with Kiev.

"Like every sovereign nation, Ukraine has a right to self defense and the United Kingdom

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stands with the sovereign... nation of Ukraine," Ahmad said on Friday.
Ahmad is the the United Kingdom's Minister of State for the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia and United Nations.
According to media reports, Kiev used Storm Shadow missiles, supplied to Ukraine from the United Kingdom, to attack the headquarters of Russia's Black Sea fleet in Sevastopol on Friday.
The Russian Defense Ministry said that a missile strike on Sevastopol damaged the historical building of the Russian Black Sea Fleet headquarters and killed one serviceman.

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Timor-Leste Hopes For Cooperation with Russia in Different Spheres - Foreign Minister

UNITED NATIONS, September 23 (Sputnik) - Timor-Leste is hopeful for cooperation with Russia on areas of education, agriculture, security as well as IT technology, Bendito Dos Santos Freitas, Timor-Leste's Minister of Foreign Affairs, told Sputnik.
"I think maybe education, agriculture issues," Dos Santos Freitas said when asked about specific areas for expansion of cooperation with Russia. "Technology and science are very much important, also security and other issues that we need to consider but mostly education and technology."
Commenting on the current level of relations with Russia, the minister underscored that "we are living in one world with all issues and cooperation with all states is very important."
He also said Timor-Leste foreign policy is based on the motto "no allies, no enemies, all friends."
"So [we] make use of all these relationships to better develop our country and we really want to also establish cooperation with all states," he said.
Dos Santos Freitas spoke on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York.

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Timor-Leste Can Cooperate With Russia In Oil and Gas - Foreign Minister

UNITED NATIONS, September 23 (Sputnik) - Timor-Leste sees oil and gas as one of the areas for potential cooperation with Russia, Bendito Dos Santos Freitas, Timor-Leste's Minister of Foreign Affairs, told Sputnik.
"We have resources of oil and gas, Timor has potential, that's the area where we can cooperate," Dos Santos Freitas said.
Dos Santos Freitas spoke on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York.
He noted that he did not have any meeting planned with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov there but underscored the importance of maintaining such contacts.

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Biden Says Will Join UAW Union Members on Picket Line in Michigan on Tuesday

WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said he will travel to Michigan on Tuesday to join United Auto Workers (UAW) union members on a picket line amid the ongoing strike against major US auto manufacturers.

"Tuesday, I'll go to Michigan to join the picket line and stand in solidarity with the men and women of UAW as they fight for a fair share of the value they helped create," Biden said on Friday via X, formerly known as Twitter.

Biden said it's time major auto firms and auto workers reach a "win-win agreement."

Trump Campaign Advisor Jason Miller said Biden's planned trip to Michigan is a "cheap photo op" that came about after former President Donald Trump announced last week that he will meet with auto workers in Detroit next week.

"Biden is still hell-bent on destroying all of the auto jobs he's purporting to care about," Miller said in a press release. "His visit on Tuesday is completely meaningless unless he withdraws his Insane EV [electric vehicle] Mandate and rebukes his Green New Deal, which Biden will never do because he's beholden to the Radical Left Eco-Loons in California."

Earlier on Friday, UAW President Shawn Fain invited Biden to join the picket lines amid their growing strike against the three largest auto manufacturers in the United States.

The union expanded its strike on Friday to all parts distribution facilities at General Motors and Stellantis, affecting 38 locations across 20 states, due to lack of progress in negotiations.

Due to the expansion, approximately 5,600 workers on Friday will join the roughly 13,000 who went on strike earlier this month at three major plants owned by the Big Three automakers - Ford, GM, and Stellantis.

Fain in a statement earlier said Friday's expansion of the strike does not affect Ford because of some progress made in negotiations.

The actions of the UAW were prompted by failed negotiations to secure wage increases for workers. The UAW demands had included a 46% pay increase and a reduced work week to 32 hours, among other provisions.

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US Trade Representatives Says Expects Talks With EU on Steel Tariffs to Reach Fair Deal

WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) - US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said that she expects US-EU negotiations on steel tariffs to reach a fair deal soon.

The United States and the European Union are in the middle of two-year-long negotiations to reduce carbon emissions from steel factories and also curb excess production capacity.

"We do intend to land this negotiation on a Washington-Brussels basis and soon," Tai said during a conference hosted by the Atlantic Council on Friday.

Both parties must reach a deal by October 31 or else risk the revival of tariffs on billions of

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dollars worth of transatlantic trade.
Media reported earlier this month that talks between the two parties hit a wall over disagreements on their proposals.

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Trudeau Commits C$650Mln in Military Assistance to Ukraine, to Send F-16 Pilot Trainers

(Updates with more details in paras 5, 6)
WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) - Canada will be providing Ukraine with C$650 million (US$482 million) in military assistance over the next three years and will be sending F-16 trainers for Ukrainian pilots, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said.
Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy arrived in Canada on Thursday for a two-day visit. In Ottawa, Zelenskyy delivered a speech at the House of Commons and participated in the signing of a bilateral agreement with the Canadian government.
"Today, we are making a longer term, a multi-year commitment that provides predictable steady support to Ukraine. It will include $650 million over three years for 50 armored vehicles, including medical evacuation vehicles, that will be built by Canadian workers in London, Ontario," Trudeau said during his address at the House of Commons on Friday.
Canada will also be sending F-16 instructors to train Ukrainian pilots and to maintain the donated fighter jets, Trudeau said.
Later in the day, Trudeau's office provided allocation details of the $500 million security package for Ukraine that was announced during his visit to Kiev in June, including $76 million for 35 high-resolution drone cameras and support, $30 million for the Leopard 2 Maintenance and Service Center in Poland and $33 million for air defense missiles.
Trudeau also announced that Canada will continue providing substantial macro-economic support for Ukraine in 2024 and an additional $8.3 million to support peace, security and stabilization in Ukraine, including $4.3 million for security measures at the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, the Office of the Prime Minister said in a press release.

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New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy Calls on US Senator Menendez to Resign Amid Bribery Probe

WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) - US Senator Robert Menendez ought to resign from his seat in Congress after the Justice Department announced bribery charges against the lawmaker and his wife, Democratic New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy said in a statement.
"Senator Menendez and the other defendants have not been found guilty… However, the alleged facts are so serious that they compromise the ability of Senator Menendez to effectively

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represent the people of our state. Therefore, I am calling for his immediate resignation," the statement said on Friday.

Earlier on Friday, the Justice Department unsealed an indictment charging Menendez, his wife and three other individuals with crimes including conspiracy to commit bribery, conspiracy to commit honest services fraud and conspiracy to commit extortion under color of official right.

The investigation into Menendez is ongoing, US Attorney Damian Williams said in a press conference on the charges.

Menendez allegedly exchanged his influence as a lawmaker to enrich himself and other co-defendants, as well as to benefit the Egyptian government, according to the indictment. The bribes allegedly included cash, gold bars and a luxury vehicle.

Menendez released a statement in response to the allegations, characterizing the case as an "active smear campaign" based on anonymous sources and innuendos. However, the lawmaker agreed to temporarily step down as Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chair until the case resolves.

The allegations against Menendez implicate national security and the integrity of the US justice system, Murphy's statement said.

Democratic US Congresswoman Mikie Sherrill, who also represents New Jersey, likewise called on Menendez to resign. Menendez's resignation would be in the "best interest" of New Jersey, Sherrill said.

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Inflation Still Too High for Average American to Bear – Federal Reserve Officials

WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) - Federal Reserve officials reinforced Chairman Jerome Powell's verdict from earlier in the week that inflation was still too much for the average American to bear and that interest rate hikes were probably needed well into next year to keep a lid on prices.

"Inflation is still too high, and I expect it will likely be appropriate for the (Federal Open Market) Committee to raise rates further and hold them at a restrictive level for some time to return inflation to our 2% goal in a timely way," Fed Governor Michelle Bowman told a banking event in the state of Colorado on Friday.

The Fed left US interest rates unchanged at a peak of 5.5% at the conclusion of its September policy meeting on Wednesday.

"The fact that we decided to maintain the policy rate at this meeting doesn't mean we have decided that we have or have not at this time reached that stance of monetary policy that we are seeking," Fed Chair Powell had told reporters. "We are prepared to raise rates further, if appropriate."

The Fed raised interest rates 11 times between February 2022 and July 2023, adding a total of 5.25 percentage points to a prior base rate of just 0.25%. The central bank has forecast that US rates will trend around 5.1% through 2024.

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The Fed's Summary of Economic Projections projects another quarter-point rate increase by the end of 2023. The Fed has two more policy meetings left for this year - in November and December. Markets are trying to guess which month the central bank would pick for that.

Adding to the debate on rates, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston President Susan Collins said a further tightening of monetary policy "is certainly not off the table," though she also counseled "patience."

"It is too soon to be confident that inflation is on a sustainable trajectory back to the 2% target," Collins said, adding that job growth was still "above trend" and elevated inflation in aspects of the service sector remained a concern.

"I expect rates may have to stay higher, and for longer, than previous projections had suggested," Collins said.

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Blinken Discusses With Turkish Counterpart Sweden NATO Accession, Grain Deal - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken discussed with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan a number of pressing issues, including the grain exports agreement, formally known as the Black Sea Initiative, and Sweden's accession to NATO, the State Department said in a statement.

Blinken expressed gratitude to Turkey for its continuous efforts to revive the Black Sea Initiative and emphasized the urgency of expeditiously ratifying Sweden's accession to NATO given that it reflects broader geopolitical concerns in the region, the statement said on Friday.

Blinken also urged Turkey to support initiatives aimed at ending hostilities and preventing a deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, the statement added.

Blinken also highlighted the vital importance of the US-Turkey relationship and voiced strong support for bolstering bilateral economic cooperation, according to the statement.

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Blinken Says Use of Force in Nagorno-Karabakh is Unacceptable

UNITED NATIONS, September 22 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Friday expressed strong disapproval of the use of force in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, emphasizing that recent actions in the territory undermine peace efforts.

"We want to make clear that the use of force is unacceptable, and it runs counter to the efforts that we've been engaged in," Blinken said during a press conference at the United Nations.

He also expressed deep concern over the humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh and underscored the need for humanitarian organizations to have unimpeded access to assist the affected populations.

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Blinken's remarks come after fresh clashes erupted in the Nagorno-Karabakh region on Tuesday. On Wednesday, the Russian Defense Ministry said that Azerbaijan and representatives of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh had agreed on a complete cessation of hostilities through the mediation of Russian peacekeepers.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) -

WESTERN AID TO UKRAINE
* The Biden administration is nearing a decision to provide Ukraine with a variant of the long-range Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS) that is armed with cluster bomblets, the Washington Post reported on Friday.
* US President Joe Biden informed Volodymyr Zelenskyy that Washington will send a small number of ATACMS long-range missiles to Ukraine for the first time, NBC reported citing US officials.
* The Canadian government will pledge US$482 million in additional assistance to Ukraine which will include the supply of more Leopard 2 tanks and will also impose new sanctions on Russia, CTV News reported.

NAGORNO-KARABAKH
* The armed formations of Nagorno-Karabakh have handed Over six armored vehicles, more than 800 units of small arms and about 5,000 ammunition rounds, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Friday.
* Two ceasefire violations have been detected by Russian peacekeepers in the Askeran area of Nagorno-Karabak since the end of hostilities, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
* Soldiers of Armenian origin in Nagorno-Karabakh who voluntarily laid down their arms are free, Hikmet Hajiyev, assistant to the president of Azerbaijan, said.

CHINA-SYRIA RELATIONS
* China and Syria have established a strategic partnership, the Chinese news agency Xinhua reported on Friday following a meeting of the countries' leaders.
* China supports Syria in countering foreign interference, protecting its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, Chinese President Xi Jinping said.
* Syria opposes any interference in China's internal affairs and is ready to be Beijing's long-term friend and partner, Syrian President Bashar Assad said.

CANADA-UKRAINE AGREEMENTS
* Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Friday signed a free trade agreement (FTA) between Canada and Ukraine.

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* Ukraine's Ukrhydroenergo and Canada's AECON Group signed an agreement on the collaboration on the construction of an Hydroelectrical Power Plant in the Ukraine.

US SENATOR MENENDEZ INDICTED

* US Senator Robert Menendez and his wife have been indicted for bribery and a conspiracy to commit fraud and extortion, according to the indictment unsealed by the US Justice Department on Friday.
* Menendez allegedly provided sensitive government information and took other actions to aid the Egyptian government, the indictment said.
* US Attorney Damian Williams said that the federal bribery investigation of Menendez is ongoing.

GRAIN EXPORTS DISPUTE

* Ukraine complains about being unable to send grain to Africa, but at the same time is seeking access to central European markets, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto said on Friday.
* Hungary is ready to stand up for its interests if Kiev sues Budapest over its decision to bar Ukrainian grain imports, Szijjarto told Sputnik.
* The next meeting of the Ukrainian grain coordination platform is scheduled for September 28 and all participants are expected to be present, European Commission Spokesperson for Trade and Agriculture Miriam Garcia Ferrer said.

ENERGY MARKETS

* The Russian Economic Development Ministry said on Friday that it expects oil exports to decease by 0.5% in 2023 and pipeline gas exports to decrease by 26.1%.
* The export price for Russian oil will amount to about $70 per barrel in 2024-2026, Economic Development Minister Maxim Reshetnikov said.

UKRAINIAN ATTACKS ON RUSSIA

* Russia's air defense systems have downed Ukrainian drones over Kursk and Belgorod regions on Friday, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Friday.
* A missile strike on Sevastopol damaged the historical building of the Russian Black Sea Fleet headquarters and killed one military, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
* Russian air defense destroyed a drone over the Belgorod Region, and there are currently no reports of casualties and destruction, Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said.
* Russian air defense took down cruise missiles over Crimea, region's head, Sergey Aksyonov, said.

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Canada, Ukraine to Work With G7 to Seize, Forfeit Russian Central Bank Assets - Trudeau

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WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - Canada and Ukraine agreed to engage with Group of Seven (G7) partner states to create a working group that would provide advice on how to seize and forfeit Russian assets, including those of the Russian Central Bank, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Friday.

"Canada and Ukraine have agreed to engage with G7 partners to establish a working group of eminent persons who will provide advice on the seizure and forfeiture of Russian assets, including of the Russian Central Bank," Trudeau said during a joint press conference with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

The step is part of Canada's efforts to find ways to directly help Ukrainians with Russian money amid the ongoing conflict between the countries, Trudeau added.

Earlier on Friday, Trudeau's cabinet announced a new package of Russia-related sanctions, including on 42 Russian individuals and 21 entities.

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US Hopes to Wrap Up Review of China Tariffs By End of Year - Trade Representative

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - The United States hopes to wrap up its review of US tariffs on Chinese goods by the end of the year as it mulls if to keep them in place, US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said on Friday.

"Our goal is to wrap this up hopefully by the end of this year," Tai said during a conference hosted by the Atlantic Council.

The Trump administration in 2018 and 2019 imposed tariffs on thousands of Chinese goods valued at $370 billion at the time.

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US Senator Menendez Resigns as Foreign Relations Panel Chair Amid Bribery Probe - Schumer

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - US Senator Bob Menendez is temporarily resigning as chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee following an indictment for crimes including bribery and conspiracy to commit extortion, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said on Friday.

"Senator Menendez has rightfully decided to step down temporarily from his position as Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee until this matter has been resolved," Schumer said in a statement.

Earlier on Friday, the US Justice Department unsealed an indictment charging Menendez and his wife with bribery, conspiracy to commit honest services fraud and conspiracy to commit extortion under color of official right for allegedly exchanging his influence as a Senator to enrich

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himself and co-defendants and benefit the Egyptian government.
Menendez is a "dedicated public servant" and has a right to due process and a fair trial, the statement said.

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Trudeau, Zelenskyy Sign Canada-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Friday signed a free trade agreement (FTA) between Canada and Ukraine.
"Please welcome the Prime Minister of Canada, the Right Honorable Justin Trudeau, and the President of Ukraine, his Excellency Volodymyr Zelenskyy ... The signing is the Canada-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement," the signing ceremony speaker said.
Zelenskyy arrived in Canada on Thursday for a two-day visit. While in Ottawa, Zelenskyy addressed the House of Commons and participated in the signature of bilateral agreements.

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Ottawa, Kiev Sign Deal to Collaborate on Hydro Power Plant Construction in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - Ukraine's Ukrhydroenergo and Canada's AECON Group signed on Friday an agreement on the collaboration on the construction of an Hydroelectrical Power Plant in the Ukraine.
The signing ceremony was also attended by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.
"Mr. Ihor Syrota and Mr. John M. Beck will now sign the memorandum of collaboration between private joint stock company Ukrhydroenergo and AECON Construction Global Services Incorporated on the collaboration in the construction of a hydro power plant in Ukraine," the signing ceremony speaker said.
Zelenskyy arrived in Canada on Thursday for a two-day visit. While in Ottawa, the President is set to deliver an address to the Canadian House of Commons and to participate in the signature of bilateral agreement with the Canadian government.

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White House Declines to Comment on Sen. Menendez's Bribery Indictment

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WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre refused to provide any comments with regard to the indictment of Senator and Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Menendez on bribery charges earlier in the day.

"I have to be really careful because it is indeed an ongoing matter, and so I cannot comment on this. But as far as his leadership role in the Senate, that is something for Senate leadership to speak to," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing.

Earlier on Friday, Sen. Menendez, his wife, and three other co-defendants were indicted for bribery and conspiracy to commit fraud and extortion under color of official right.

Following the unsealing of the indictment, the senator said he was the victim of an "active smear campaign."

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Canada Imposes Sanctions on 42 Russian Persons, 21 Entities - Global Affairs

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government has imposed a new round of sanctions on 42 Russian individuals and 21 entities, Global Affairs Canada said on Friday.

The sanctions target Labor Minister Anton Kotyakov; Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO); HSE University; the Russian Geographical Society; the Valdai discussion club; the newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda; and the Patriotic Youth Movement, among others.

The announcement comes amid the visit of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to Ottawa and the pledge by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to impose a new row of sanctions on Russia.

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Pentagon Aware of Reports Biden Approved ATACMS for Ukraine But Has Nothing to Announce

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department is aware about the reports that President Joe Biden approved supplying long-range Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS) to Ukraine, but there is nothing to announce on this matter at present, a Pentagon spokesperson told Sputnik on Friday.

"We're aware of the press report on this, but in regards to ATACMS, we have nothing to announce," the spokesperson said.

Earlier on Friday, US media reported that Biden informed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy the previous day that the United States will send for the first time a small number of ATACMS to Ukraine, but no details were provided about a delivery timeline.

A White House National Security Council spokesperson declined to confirm and comment on

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the reports.

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UPDATE - UAW Expands Strike to GM, Stellantis Parts Facilities Nationwide - President
(Adds details on status of negotiations in paras 5-14)

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - United Auto Workers union (UAW) President Shawn Fain announced on Friday that all parts distribution facilities at General Motors and Stellantis would go on strike at noon, affecting 38 locations across 20 states, due to lack of progress in negotiations.

"So today at noon, Eastern time, all of the parts distribution facilities at General Motors and Salinas are being called to stand up and strike. We will be striking 38 locations across 20 states, across all nine regions of the UAW," Fain said in a statement.

Approximately 5,600 workers will join the roughly 13,000 who went on strike earlier this month at three major plants owned by the Big Three automakers - Ford, GM, and Stellantis.

The expansion of the strike does not affect Ford, Fain said, because of some progress made in negotiations.

The strike began after a breakdown in negotiations over UAW demands, including a 46% wage increase and a reduced work week to 32 hours, among other provisions.

Fain, providing details on talks with Ford, said the carmaker had agreed to reinstate a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) that was suspended in 2009.

The union also won, for the first time, the right to strike over plant closures during the life of the agreement, he added, along with benefits for those on layoff.

"At Ford we've also won additional job security for our members in the event of indefinite layoff. If that happens, our members, including temporary workers, will now receive income security for up to two years, with healthcare," the UAW chief said.

The union leader said the automaker agreed to the "immediate conversion" of all current temporary workers to full time employees.

In addition, Ford agreed to enhance the profit-sharing formula that would have resulted in a 13% boost in payouts on average last year. All temps will have profit-sharing after 90 days service "and there are no concessions on the table," Fain added.

"To be clear: we are NOT done at Ford," Fain said. "We still have serious issues to work through. But we do want to recognize that Ford is serious about reaching a deal."

Fain had sharp words, however, for the status of negotiations with the other two members of the Big Three - GM and Stellantis. Unlike Ford, the two carmakers have refused virtually all of the union's proposals.

"Both companies are still offering a deficient COLA that is projected to provide ZERO increases over the next four years. Both companies have rejected all of our job security proposals. Both companies have rejected our profit-sharing proposals. Both companies have rejected our proposals to convert temps," Fain said.

The union reportedly has put the demand for a 32-hour work week on the backburner as it

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focuses more on pay and other benefits, The New York Times said on Thursday.

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Biden Would Veto US House Republican State, Homeland Security Funding Bills - White House

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden would veto appropriations bills for the State Department and Department of Homeland Security proposed by House Republicans, the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) said on Friday.

OMB released statements of administration policy opposing House Republican bills to fund the State Department and the Department of Homeland Security for fiscal year 2024.

"House Republicans had an opportunity to engage in a productive, bipartisan appropriations process, but instead, with less than two weeks before the end of the fiscal year, are wasting time with partisan bills that cut discretionary spending to levels well below the Fiscal Responsibility Act agreement and endanger critical services for the American people," the statement said.

The draft bills include provisions that harm access to abortions, hinder climate change initiatives and prevent programs that promote diversity, the statement said.

Biden would veto either bill if presented to him, the statements said.

Congress is attempting to pass government funding legislation before the end of the month, which could take form as individual appropriations bills, a continuing resolution or an omnibus spending bill. House Republicans have proposed passing appropriations bills, including the possibility of a short-term funding bill to give lawmakers more time.

However, the Democrat-majority Senate must also agree to the government funding measures, setting up a showdown over House Republican policy provisions. Some House Republicans have also expressed opposition to plans to include Ukraine aid in US government funding legislation.

The US government risks a shutdown in the event lawmakers fail to reach a government funding agreement before the end of the month.

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Trudeau Commits C$650Mln in Military Assistance to Ukraine, to Send F-16 Pilot Trainers

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) – Canada will be providing Ukraine with C$650 million ($482 million) in military assistance over the next three years and will be sending F-16 trainers for Ukrainian pilots, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Friday.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy arrived in Canada on Thursday for a two-day visit. While in Ottawa, the President is set to deliver an address to the Canadian House of Commons and to participate in the signature of bilateral agreement with the Canadian government.

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"Today, we were making a longer term, multi year commitment that provides predictable steady support to Ukraine. It will include $650 million over three years for 50 armored vehicles, including medical evacuation vehicles, that will be built by Canadian workers in London, Ontario," Trudeau said during his address at the House of Commons

Canada will also be sending F-16 instructors to train Ukrainian pilots, and to maintaining the donated fighter jets, Trudeau said.

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UAW President Urges Biden to Join Picket Lines as Nationwide Strike Expands

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - United Auto Workers union (UAW) President Shawn Fain on Friday called on President Joe Biden to join the picket lines in the ever expanding strike against the three largest carmakers in the United States.

Earlier in the day, Fain expanded the strike to all parts distribution facilities at General Motors and Stellantis, affecting 38 locations across 20 states, due to lack of progress in negotiations.

"We invite and encourage everyone who supports our cause, to join us on the picket line from our friends and families, all the way up to the President of the United States. We invite you to join us in our fight," Fain said.

Due to the expansion, approximately 5,600 workers on Friday will join the roughly 13,000 who went on strike earlier this month at three major plants owned by the Big Three automakers - Ford, GM, and Stellantis.

Fain in a statement earlier said Friday's expansion of the strike does not affect Ford because of some progress made in negotiations.

The actions of the UAW were prompted by failed negotiations to secure wage increases for workers. The UAW demands had included a 46% pay increase and 32-hour work week.

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UAW Expands Strike to GM, Stellantis Parts Facilities Nationwide - President

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The strike began after a breakdown in negotiations over UAW demands, including a 46% wage increase and a reduced work week to 32 hours, among other provisions.

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White House Won't Confirm, Declines Comment on Reports Biden Approved ATACMS for Ukraine

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - A White House National Security Council spokesperson declined to confirm and comment in response to an inquiry from Sputnik on reports that President Joe Biden approved supplying long-range Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS) to Ukraine.

Earlier on Friday, media reported that Biden informed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Thursday that the United States will send a small number of ATACMS long-range missiles to Ukraine for the first time, but no details were provided about a delivery timeline.

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UNSC Must Decide on Any UN Peacekeeping Mission in Nagorno-Karabakh - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, September 22 (Sputnik) - Any United Nations peacekeeping mission in Nagorno-Karabakh must be decided on by the UN Security Council, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric told reports on Friday.

"Any peacekeeping mission would have to be decided on by the Security Council," Dujarric said when asked to comment on Armenia's proposal to deploy UN peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh.

On Thursday, Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan called on the UN Security Council to immediately deploy an interagency mission to Nagorno-Karabakh after Azerbaijan undertook military activities in the region.

Azerbaijan announced on Tuesday the launch of local anti-terrorist activities in Nagorno-Karabakh aimed at restoring the constitutional order. Baku said its forces targeted only military facilities in Nagorno-Karabakh, while Armenian state media reported multiple casualties among civilians. Armenia characterized Azerbaijan's operation as aggression.

On Wednesday, the Russian Defense Ministry said Azerbaijan and the representatives of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh had agreed on a complete cessation of hostilities through the mediation of Russian peacekeepers.

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RPT - Resumption of Oil Exports From Iraqi Kurdistan Can Stabilize Oil Prices – KRG Top Diplomat

(RPT adds name to lede)
UNITED NATIONS, September 22 (Sputnik) - The Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) hopes to see the existing disagreements between Iraq and Turkey resolved and oil exports from the Kurdistan region resumed to stabilize market oil prices, Kurdistan Regional Government Foreign Relations Minister Safeen Dizayee told Sputnik.
"We hope that the issue between Ankara and Baghdad can be settled to resume export from Kurdistan which is 0.5% of the national needs, but it will help maybe stabilize the price," Dizayee told Sputnik.
In March, Turkey halted the flow of Kurdish oil through the Iraqi-Turkish pipeline. It came after the Paris-based International Chamber of Commerce ruled in favor of Iraq in a long-running legal battle. The arbitration court found that Turkey had violated a joint agreement by allowing the Kurdistan Regional Government to export oil to the port of Ceyhan without Baghdad's consent.
The government of Iraqi Kurdistan views the oil situation after the arbitration decision in Paris as a theft of its resources, Dizayee added.

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Turkey ‘Best Located’ Geographically to Become Gas Hub - Iraqi Kurdistan Minister

UNITED NATIONS, September 22 (Sputnik) - Turkey has an ideal geographical location to become a gas hub, Minister of Foreign Relations of Iraqi Kurdistan Region Safeen Dizayee told Sputnik.
"If you look at it geographically, probably Turkey is best located," Dizayee said.
He added there are talks underway about connecting southern Iraq with Kurdistan and then with Turkey via railroad links and possibly extending them as far as the Gulf states.
"So it's linking south with the north and Europe. Again, Turkey would be an ideal conduit for any such communication in the future," the minister said.
In October 2022, the presidents of Turkey and Russia instructed their relevant authorities to map out the possibility of creating a gas hub in Turkey where traffic could be diverted from the damaged Nord Stream pipelines.
According to Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak, the idea is not only to create a trading platform in Turkey but also to develop infrastructure and increase the volume of supplies to Europe. He said other countries, including Algeria, Qatar and Azerbaijan, could also join as suppliers.

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During a meeting with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Sochi in September this year, Russian President Vladimir Putin said he hopes negotiations on the creation of a gas hub in Turkey will soon be completed.

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Resumption of Oil Exports From Iraqi Kurdistan Can Stabilize Oil Prices – KRG Top Diplomat

UNITED NATIONS, September 22 (Sputnik) - The Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) hopes to see the existing disagreements between Iraq and Turkey resolved and oil exports from the Kurdistan region resumed to stabilize market oil prices, the region's x said on Friday.

"We hope that the issue between Ankara and Baghdad can be settled to resume export from Kurdistan which is 0.5% of the national needs, but it will help maybe stabilize the price," Dizayee told Sputnik.

In March, Turkey halted the flow of Kurdish oil through the Iraqi-Turkish pipeline. It came after the Paris-based International Chamber of Commerce ruled in favor of Iraq in a long-running legal battle. The arbitration court found that Turkey had violated a joint agreement by allowing the Kurdistan Regional Government to export oil to the port of Ceyhan without Baghdad's consent.

The government of Iraqi Kurdistan views the oil situation after the arbitration decision in Paris as a theft of its resources, Dizayee added.

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Western Sanctions Affect Kurdistan's Energy Cooperation With Russia - KRG Minister

UNITED NATIONS, September 22 (Sputnik) - Western sanctions have had an impact on cooperation between Iraqi Kurdistan and Russia in the energy sector, Kurdistan Regional Government Foreign Relations Minister Safeen Dizayee told Sputnik.

"In terms of the energy sector, yes, it has," Dizayee said in response to a question whether bilateral cooperation has been affected by sanctions.

Because of the Western-imposed restrictive measures and embargoes, some Russian companies are "somewhat restricted to operate," Dizayee added.

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Iraqi Kurdistan Ties With Russia Have Room for Expansion - KRG Foreign Minister

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UNITED NATIONS, September 22 (Sputnik) - The Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government is happy with the level of cooperation with Russia and hopes that ties will expand in the economic field, including investments in the energy sector, KRG Minister of Foreign Relations Safeen Dizayee told Sputnik on Friday.

"We currently enjoy good, stable political relations. We have a very active Consul General in Russia. We have had visits in the past by foreign ministers and senior officials from Russia. So, we are happy with the level of cooperation," Dizayee said.

However, the minister also said "there is always room for expansion," and pointed out to the economy as an area where he would like to see expansion of the cooperation with Russia, particularly in the energy sector.

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Zelenskyy Visit to US Flopped, Terror Threat if War Lost Backfired - Ex-CIA Analyst

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's latest visit to the United States backfired and was a striking contrast to the worshipful applause he once received from both chambers of Congress, former CIA analyst and station chief Phil Giraldi, co-founder, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) told Sputnik on Friday.

"It was a flop," Giraldi, also a former US Army intelligence officer and founder and chair of the Council for the National Interest, said. "Everyone is getting weary of the continuing war and Zelenskyy's increasing demands."

CNN noted that Zelenskyy's brief visit was in striking contrast to the worshipful reception he received nine months ago when he addressed both chambers of Congress to rapturous applause.

On Thursday, the House of Representatives refused to approve the latest $24 billion bill by the Biden administration to provide Zelenskyy's government and armed forces with additional weapons to fight Russia. Zelenskyy was held at arms length both by the administration and Congress, Giraldi pointed out. *His reception at Congress was not very warm, nor at the White House, apart from a promise of more money," he said.

Zelensky's heavy hinted threat of Ukrainian terrorism across Europe if his government should lose the war also backfired, Giraldi observed. "Zelensky's comment about possible unrest in Europe was a major faux pas - he did not help his cause when he said that while the Ukrainian refugees in Europe have 'behaved well... and are grateful' to those who have given them shelter, but it would not be a 'good story' for Europe if a Ukrainian defeat were to drive the people into a corner," he said.

These remarks did not go down well in Washington or European capitals, Giraldi recalled. “It was reasonably enough seen as nothing less than a threat of a surge in unrest producing domestic terrorism, as well as a possible internal insurrection uncontrollable by whatever Ukrainian government survives defeat," he said. Zelensky's threat could include violence and rioting initiated by people without houses and jobs, Giraldi warned.

This could "include the millions of Ukrainian refugees if the Ukrainian leader were not given all

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the support which he apparently believes is his due," he said.

Zelenskyy also faced a very disappointed reception when he addressed the United Nations General Assembly at its annual gathering, Giraldi noted.

Zelenskyy was also embarrassed by a story in the New York Times about the June 6 missile attack on Kostiantyniva which the Ukrainian leader had presented as a Russian 'terror' attack but which turns out to have been caused by a Ukrainian missile, Giraldi commented. “The story was clearly a leak shot across the bows from the White House to warn Zelenskyy that he was overreaching," he said.

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Canada to Pledge $482Mln in Support for Ukraine, Impose new Sanctions on Russia - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) – The Canadian government will pledge C$650 million ($482 million) in additional assistance to Ukraine which will include the supply of more Leopard 2 tanks, and will also impose new sanctions on Russia, CTV News reported on Friday.

On Friday, the Canadian government will announce C$650 million in additional assistance for Ukraine to be disbursed over the "next few years". Part of the funds will be used to provide Kiev with more Leopard 2 tanks, the report said.

Moreover, Ottawa will be imposing new Russia-related sanctions, the report added.

Zelenskyy arrived in Canada on Thursday for a two-day visit. While in Ottawa, the President is set to deliver an address to the Canadian House of Commons and to participate in the signature of bilateral agreement with the Canadian government.

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Canada Agency Warns of DDoS Attacks on Government Websites Amid Zelenskyy Visit

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - The Canadian Communications Security Establishment on Friday issued a statement warning of increased Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks on government and critical infrastructure websites during the visit of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Zelenskyy is visiting Canada following his participation in the UN General Assembly in New York and conducting meetings with US officials in Washington earlier in the week.

"The Communications Security Establishment (CSE) and its Canadian Center for Cyber Security (Cyber Center) are once again urging the Canadian cyber security community - especially the operators of government and critical infrastructure web sites - to adopt a heightened state of vigilance and to bolster their awareness of and protection against malicious cyber threats," the statement said.

It is not rare to observe increased DDoS attacks whenever Ukrainian officials visit NATO

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member state countries that militarily support Kiev amid Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, the statement said.

CSE said it would continue to work with government institutions and departments to ensure that the relevant systems in place are monitoring, detecting, investigating and neutralizing threats, the statement added.

Zelenskyy arrived in Canada on Thursday for a two-day visit. He is set to deliver an address to the Canadian House of Commons and participate in the signing of a bilateral agreement with the Canadian government.

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McCarthy Plans to Cut $300Mln in Ukraine Aid from Defense Bill, Hold Other Vote - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy reportedly said on Friday that he intends to remove $300 million in funding for Ukraine from a defense appropriations bill in an effort to pass the measure separate from defense spending.

Lawmakers will cut $300 million in Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI) funding and hold a vote on the matter separately from the defense spending bill, McCarthy said, according to a Punchbowl News report.

The move comes amid disagreement among House Republicans about whether to include Ukraine aid in US government spending bills. Congress is working to pass government funding measures before the end of the month to avoid a shutdown.

A group of House Republicans has blocked attempts to advance the defense spending bill. US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene said earlier this week that she will oppose the defense appropriations bill or a continuing resolution to fund the government so long as they include spending on the conflict in Ukraine.

USAI funds can be used for training, advising and equipping Ukrainian forces.

The USAI funds are likely to be approved in a separate vote in the House due to majority support for the measure. Senate leadership has expressed their intention to include Ukraine aid in any government funding legislation the upper chamber passes.

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US Senator Menendez Says He is Victim of "Active Smear Campaign"

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) – New Jersey Senator Bob Menendez said he is the victim of an "active smear campaign," following the unsealing of an indictment against him and his wife for bribery on Friday.

"For years, forces behind the scenes have repeatedly attempted to silence my voice and dig my political grave. Since this investigation was leaked nearly a year ago, there has been an active

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smear campaign of anonymous sources and innuendos to create an air of impropriety where none exists," he said in a statement.

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Mexico Believes Ukraine, Russia Should Both Be Parties to Peace Process - Foreign Minister

UNITED NATIONS, September 22 (Sputnik) - Mexico believes that a possible peace process on Ukraine should include both, Kiev and Moscow, Mexican Foreign Secretary Alicia Barcena said during a press conference on Friday.

"We believe that a peace process requires precisely to address the territorial integrity of Ukraine and yes, we are all for a peace agreement," Barcena said. "We would like to see - and this is the position of my president - we really want the two parties to be part of a peace process. You need two to tango, I mean, that's it."

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Kiev Says Unable to Send Grain to Africa, But Seeks Access to Europe Markets - Szijjarto

UNITED NATIONS, September 22 (Sputnik) - Ukraine complains about being unable to send grain to Africa, but at the same time is seeking access to central European markets, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto said on Friday.

"What Ukraine is complaining about … [is] the non-operation of the Black Sea Grain Initiative, that they cannot deliver grain to Africa. We offer a chance for Ukraine to deliver its grain to Africa through ensuring the transit facilities, but the Ukrainians would like to spread their grain on the markets of the central European countries, and we have to protect our national interests," Szijjarto told Sputnik.

Szijjarto underscored that the original grain deal did not provide for flooding the Central European markets with Ukrainian grain but for ensuring its transit to Africa.

Hungary is ready to defend its national interests should Ukraine proceed with suing Budapest and other countries over their ban on importing Ukrainian grain, the diplomat added.

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US Attorney Williams Says Bribery Investigation of Senator Menendez 'Very Much Ongoing'

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - US Attorney Damian Williams said on Friday that the federal bribery investigation of Senator Robert Menendez is ongoing.

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"This investigation is very much ongoing, we are not done," Williams said during a press conference.

Earlier on Friday, the Justice Department unsealed a three-count indictment against Menendez and his wife on charges related to bribery and conspiracy to commit fraud and extortion under color of official right.

The bribes included cash, gold bars, home mortgage payments, compensation for a low-or-no-show job and a luxury vehicle, among other valuable items, the indictment said.

In addition, Menendez provided sensitive government information and took other actions, facilitated by his four co-defendants, to aid the Egyptian government, the indictment said.

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Hungary to Stand Up for Its Interests in Grain Ban Dispute With Kiev - Szijjarto

UNITED NATIONS, September 22 (Sputnik) - Hungary is ready to stand up for its interests if Kiev sues Budapest over its decision to bar Ukrainian grain imports, Hungarian Prime Minister Peter Szijjarto told Sputnik.

Ukraine filed a complaint with the World Trade Organization after several Eastern European states imposed import bans on Ukrainian food products.

"Look, the facts are on our side … The original agreement [with Kiev] did not say anything about bringing Ukrainian grain to the Central European markets to ruin the markets. The agreement was about ensuring transit, so we're ensuring transit. And if Ukraine decides to sue us, then we are ready to stand up for our own interests and we will enter into this legal dispute," Szijjarto said on the margins of the UN General Assembly.

When asked if Ukraine's retaliatory ban on imports from Hungary would have impact, the minister replied: "Yeah, of course, but we will help our farmers to find other markets.

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US, Mexico, Canada Launch Initiative Against 2026 FIFA World Cup Collusion

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) – The US, Mexico, and Canada jointly launched an initiative on Friday to tackle collusion related to the 2026 FIFA World Cup, according to a release from the US Justice Department.

“The Justice Department announced today, alongside its partners from Mexico’s Federal Economic Competition Commission and Canada’s Competition Bureau, the launch of a joint initiative to deter, detect and prosecute collusive schemes related to the provision of goods and services in connection with the 2026 FIFA World Cup,” the release stated.

Through this initiative, the enforcement agencies will collaborate on antitrust investigations and outreach efforts to the public and businesses about anti-competitive conduct.

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The 2026 FIFA World Cup will be jointly hosted by the three countries across eleven sites in the US, three cities in Mexico, and two cities in Canada. It is expected to bring in billions of dollars, including in the construction, entertainment, and tourism industries.

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Biden Informs Zelenskyy US Will Send Small Number of ATACMS to Kiev - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden informed Volodymyr Zelenskyy that Washington will send a small number of ATACMS long-range missiles to Ukraine for the first time, NBC reported on Friday citing US officials.

The delivery timeline remains unknown as is the time when an official announcement will be made, the officials said.

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Palestine Can Benefit From Israel's Peace With Arab States - Netanyahu

UNITED NATIONS, September 22 (Sputnik) - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Friday that Palestine should not seek to veto Israel's peace deals with Arab states and might rather benefit from them.

"I've long sought to make peace with the Palestinians, but I also believe that we must not give the Palestinians a veto over new peace treaties with Arab states. The Palestinians could greatly benefit from a broader peace. They should be part of that process, but they should not have a veto over the process," Netanyahu said during his UN General Assembly address.

Palestinians are wrong to think that unless they are first to achieve a peace agreement with Tel Aviv, no other Arab state should normalize relations with them, Netanyahu said. Peace between Israel and neighboring states could increase the prospects for an eventual peace with the Palestinians, he continued.

The prime minister said that although the Palestinians account for only 2% of the Arab World's population, they continue to believe the other 90% will remain in a warlike stance with Israel and eventually destroy it.

Netanyahu stated that when Palestine realizes that most Arab states seek to reconcile themselves with Israel, Palestinians will likely abandon their "fantasy of destroying" Israel.

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US Close to Giving Ukraine Long-Range Missiles Armed With Cluster Bomblets - Reports

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WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is nearing a decision to provide Ukraine with a variant of the long-range Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS) that is armed with cluster bomblets, the Washington Post reported on Friday.

Discussions on whether to send the cluster bomblets- armed ATACMS moved from the deputies committee to the principals committee, which includes the heads of US national security agencies, the report said, citing several people familiar with the talks.

The cluster bomblets-armed ATACMS are more numerous than single-warhead versions, and are no longer considered a frontline weapon for the United States, the report said. The missiles can strike between 45-190 miles away, potentially enabling strikes deep behind Russian defense lines.

The Biden administration has so far been reluctant to provide ATACMS to Ukraine, although White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said earlier this week that the weapons are not off the table.

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US Senator Robert Menendez, Wife Indicted for Bribery - Justice Dept.

(Updates with more details in paras 3-5)

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - US Senator Robert Menendez and his wife have been indicted for bribery and conspiracy to commit fraud and extortion under color of official right, according to an indictment unsealed by the US Justice Department on Friday.

"From at least 2018 up to and including in or about 2022, Menendez and his wife, Nadine Menendez, a.k.a. 'Nadine Arslanian,' the defendant, engaged in a corrupt relationship with three New Jersey associates and businessmen - Wael Hana a.k.a. 'Will Hana,' Jose Uribe and Fred Daibes, the defendants - in which Menendez and Nadine Menendez agreed to and did accept hundreds of thousands of dollars of bribes in exchange for using Menendez's power and influence as a Senator to seek to protect and enrich Hana, Uribe and Daibes and to benefit the Arab Republic of Egypt," the indictment said.

The bribes included cash, gold bars, home mortgage payments, compensation for a low-or-no-show job and a luxury vehicle, among other valuable items, the indictment said.

Menendez provided sensitive government information and took other actions, facilitated by his four co-defendants, to aid the Egyptian government, the indictment said.

The senator also pressured a US Department of Agriculture official to protect a business monopoly granted by Egypt to Hana, an Egyptian-American businessman and long-time friend of Nadine Menendez, the indictment said.

In addition, Menendez put forth a nominee for the position US Attorney for the District of New Jersey whom he believed he could influence in the federal criminal prosecution of real estate developer Fred Daibes, the indictment added.

All defendants each face counts of conspiracy to commit bribery and conspiracy to commit honest services fraud, while Menendez and his wife also face a count of conspiracy to commit

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extortion under color of official right, according to the indictment.

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US Provides $65Mln to Haitian Police, Imposes Visa Restrictions on Officials - Blinken

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed visa restrictions on Haitian officials responsible for the violence in the country and provided $65 million to support the national police to combat gangs, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Friday.

"Today, we are taking steps to impose additional visa restrictions on current and former Haitian officials for enabling the violence," Blinken said.

The secretary of state pointed out that the number of Haitians designated by the US government has reached 50.

The United States is also providing an additional $65 million in assistance for the Haitian national police to strengthen its capacity to dismantle gangs and safeguard communities, Blinken said.

However, additional efforts by the international community are needed to normalize the situation in Haiti, Blinken said, particularly praising the efforts by the Kenyan government.

"We support Kenya's vision for a three-part security mission providing operational support to the Haitian national police to combat the gangs," Blinken said.

The United States stands ready to support a multinational mission in Haiti by providing robust financial and logistical assistance and the UN Security Council should authorize such a mission, Blinken added.

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Netanyahu Says Israel Can be 'Bridge of Peace' Between Europe, Africa, Asia

UNITED NATIONS, September 22 (Sputnik) – Israel can become a "bridge of peace and prosperity" between Europe, Africa and Asia if Tel-Aviv and Riyadh achieve peace, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Friday.

"The land of Israel is situated in the crossroads between Africa, Asia and Europe for centuries, my country was repeatedly invaded by empires passing through it in their campaigns of plunder and conquest elsewhere. But today as we tear down the walls of enmity, Israel can become a bridge of peace and prosperity between these continents. Peace between Israel and Saudi Arabia will truly create a new Middle East," Netanyahu said during his address at the UN General Assembly.

However, the Prime Minister warned that peace could only happen when Palestinians stop "spewing Jew hatred" and reconcile themselves with Israel – "The people of Israel yearn for such a peace I yearn for such a peace'" he added.

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Netanyahu said that despite the many hurdles in the way for peace, he would continue to do everything he can to achieve it, further adding that he counts of the “indispensable” American participation in the process.

The Prime Minister said Israel also welcomed the announcement made at the G20 Summit in New Delhi, India to create a new economic corridor that will connect Asia to Europe by passing through several Middle Eastern countries, including Israel.

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US Sen. Menendez Allegedly Provided Government Information to Egypt - Indictment

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - New Jersey Sen. Robert Menendez allegedly provided sensitive government information and took other actions to aid the Egyptian government, according to the bribery indictment to be unsealed by the US Department of Justice on Friday.

"Among other actions, MENENDEZ provided sensitive U.S. Government information and took other steps that secretly aided the Government of Egypt," the indictment stated.

It also alleged that his wife Nadine and Egyptian American businessman Wael Hana also worked to introduce Egyptian intelligence and military officials to Menendez in order to establish and solidify a "corrupt agreement in which HANA, with assistance from FRED DAIBES and JOSE URIBE, the defendants, provided hundreds of thousands of dollars of bribes to MENENDEZ and NADINE MENENDEZ, in exchange for MENENDEZ’s acts and breaches of duty to benefit the Government of Egypt, HANA, and others, including with respect to foreign military sales and foreign military financing."

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US Puts Visa Curbs on Individuals in Bangladesh for 'Undermining Elections' - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed visa restrictions on individuals in Bangladesh who are allegedly responsible for undermining elections in the country, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Friday.

"Today, the Department of State is taking steps to impose visa restrictions on Bangladeshi individuals responsible for, or complicit in, undermining the democratic election process in Bangladesh," Miller said in a statement.

He did not provide specific names of the designated people but said that the list includes members of law enforcement, the ruling party, and the political opposition.

Designated persons and their immediate family members may be barred from entering the US, according to the statement.

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