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10/5/23 Thursday

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Pentagon: 'Regrettable' That US F-16 Fighter Shot Down Turkish Drone in Syria

In a rare moment of NATO-on-NATO violence on Thursday, a US fighter jet shot down a Turkish drone near a US military installation in Syria.

The incident happened near the town of al-Hasakah in northeastern Syria - a part of the country controlled by Turkish forces and US-backed Kurdish militant groups, which are themselves rival forces.

According to Pentagon spokesperson Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder, the Turkish drone was conducting airstrikes against Kurdish forces when it approached a US base that houses some 900 troops. After multiple warnings to turn away, an F-16 Falcon multirole fighter aircraft that had been scrambled shot down the drone.

Ryder told reporters it was "a regrettable incident, but we have no indication that Turkiye was intentionally targeting US forces," adding that Turkish drones were "conducting airstrikes inside a declared restricted operating zone."

He noted no US troops were injured in the incident.

So far, Turkish Defense Ministry figures have denied the US claim when asked by Turkish media, which some observers have noted may be an indication the drone was operated by the National Intelligence Organization (MIT), Turkiye's spy agency.

However, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told reporters he had a "fruitful" call with his Turkish counterpart, Yasar Guler on Thursday afternoon.

A spokesperson for the Kurdish militias, which call themselves the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), confirmed to US media the Turkish drone had been shot down, but added that "we currently do not possess sufficient information to provide further details."

Turkish forces have been occupying parts of northern Syria for more than half a decade, intervening in the Syrian Civil War in support of al-Qaeda-aligned* militias that sought the overthrow of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. However, Ankara also launched a major operation in 2019 to clear a border area in northeastern Syria of Kurds, claiming the SDF was aiding Kurdish communist groups inside of Turkiye that have been declared terrorist organizations. As the SDF was already aligned with Washington at the time, it created a potentially explosive situation.

Earlier this week, Ankara announced the conclusion of anothermilitary operation against Kurdish groups in northern Iraq's Kurdistan province, where it has repeatedly intervened for similar reasons, and also unveiled a new operation against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), one of the groups banned in Turkiye, in the southeastern region that borders Syria and Iraq.

Neither Turkish nor US troops have permission from the Syrian government in Damascus to be inside of Syria, and US forces have been observed for years to be transporting the region's petroleum out of the country and into Iraq by truck - a practice long denied by the US

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government and media until then-US President Donald Trump boasted about how the US "kept the oil" after intervening in Syria to fight Daesh** in 2017.

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'Completely Inadequate' Mainstream Media Talk on Poor US Health Outcomes Discounts Alternative

While corporate-owned US media outlets are beginning to discuss the serious problems with the US health care system, their investigations leave much to be desired as they turn the blame away from systemic issues caused by a profit-based system and instead focus on personal behavior to explain the disparities.

A recent investigation by the Washington Post found that life expectancy in the United States has steadily declined in recent decades, taking the US from the middle of the pack of industrialized nations to standing out for its poor outcomes, which are now below some far less developed countries.

The report documented how disparities in wealth in different regions of the country paralleled disparate health outcomes, with people in poorer and more commonly Republican-led parts of the country tending to die sooner than those in more affluent parts that tend to vote Democratic. As the wealth gap has accelerated its widening, so has the life expectancy gap.

Longtime nurses organizer Michael Lighty told Radio Sputnik's Political Misfits on Wednesday he felt "frustration and outrage" at how the issue was presented in the Washington, DC-based paper.

"On the one hand, it's good to make the clear connection between inequality and death, and between inequality and high rates of crime and disease, and to basically say the real measure of inequality is not difference in income but difference in life and death. Okay, that's a pretty strong point. There's a cynical way to look at that and that is, another in a series of avoidance strategies so that we don't have to take on the health care industry," he said.

"We can say to the Post here, it's really the social determinants of health, so-called, like you referenced the seatbelt law, the tobacco tax, that's really the problem. And they never come out and explicitly say: 'the health care industry makes money by denying people care and profits after charging a lot of money for insurance and procedures and other aspects of the health care system, and until we take the profit out of the health care system, we're going to have a country that looks like this,'" Lighty said.

He said the grim numbers were "a real indictment of the health care industry in the US," but noted "it's not news: folks who do health policy and look at these issues have known literally for years, if not decades, that Americans have high rates of chronic conditions. I mean, basically by the age of 65 most Americans have two or more chronic conditions. I noticed in the recent Medicare booklet that there are new provisions for accessing preventive care. By the time you're 65 it's a little late," Lighty said.

"This is a real indication that we don't have a health care system of early intervention, we don't have a health care system of prevention, we have huge disparities in the health care system not

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only based on income but by geography, race, gender - all sorts of barriers, primarily financial, to accessing care have caused this chronic disease epidemic," Lighty said. "And yeah, okay, you can say lifestyle, but frankly, if you're going to the doctor, have access to medical treatment, you're going to get messages and you're going to get interventions that do matter."

"And we do have to acknowledge that the Post points toward the fact that people can't afford good food, they eat badly, they make it seem like it's a notion of individual choice, and that's the other problem with the series is they're talking about essentially social determinants but they never say this is a social, structural problem in the American economy, in American society," he noted.

Lighty also stated the Post never mentions that 7 million people are being kicked off Medicaid as a consequence of the end of the COVID-19 pandemic-era emergency measures. "That's going to make a huge difference," he said, emphasizing the state-funded health insurance system for low-income Americans is extremely difficult to sign up for and retain.

"'Gee, why are they making such bad choices when we have such a great health care system? I don't understand it.' Then you don't live in the real world," Lighty quipped. "Particularly with the cost of groceries, access to good food is even worse. But I do think it comes back to … medical interventions matter, early treatment matters, and if all of sudden you start getting reports that your blood pressure is way-high and your blood sugar is out of control and your weight puts you at risk of these diseases, that gets through to people. I don't think you could ever address this issue simply by saying 'eat better.' You have to have a rigorous and ongoing relationship with medical providers."

Lighty said that when papers like the Post do cover proposed alternatives, such as Medicare for All, that would take the profit-making out of the health industry, they make a point to discuss only the downsides and never the benefits of such a model.

"It's just completely inadequate and it reflects entirely the conventional wisdom in Washington about the political viability of systemic change in health care. Basically, they start from the premise that 'we can't really change the system, so these wild-eyed idealists like [US Sen.] Bernie Sanders are really just tilting at windmills and everyone knows it's not going to happen, so let's talk about what could happen.' And then it turns out 'what could happen' is 'we can throw more taxpayer money at the industry so they'll have more resources to perpetrate the existing model, which doesn't keep people well."

"So when you have an article about Medicare for All, you don't actually talk about the savings it will generate. Even the Congressional Budget Office has said those savings are like $650 billion a year. They don't mention that, they're always [talking] about the cost. But how can something that costs less be expensive, relative to the existing system?" Lighty said. "Then they'll trot out the industry talking points: 'most people like their private health insurance, so these idealists aren't going to get rid of peoples' health insurance.' Well, let's examine that assumption: first of all, people are desperate to keep whatever they have; second, those who generally like their private health insurance haven't used it that much; and third, the real problem are the out-of-pocket expenses, the copays, the deductibles, the out-of-network charges - all of that stuff is the real financial barriers to care, if there is even a provider in your area that's accessible to you."

"And why is that? Because of how we finance health care, we don't actually ensure that every community is equitably served. We don't put money into that, we just, if you're a rural hospital

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and you can make money, you stay open, if you can't make money, well, you'll close and that's just the way it goes. And that whole model is uniquely American, no other country does it that way and we never heard about that. When does the Post ever report we have the only health care system that is organized as a profit-making industry and here are all the consequences in terms of health outcomes?"

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Huge Financial 'Burden' of Ukraine Support Driving 'Fatigue' in US & Europe

In Europe and the US, a kind of "Ukraine fatigue" is setting in, creating a political hole into which voices opposed to endless funding of Kiev's military operations have been able to step, experts told Sputnik. As the hopelessness of Ukraine's position and the futility of arming them becomes impossible to ignore, that hole will only widen.

Dan Kovalik, an American human rights and labor rights lawyer and peace activist and professor at the University of Pittsburgh, told Radio Sputnik's The Final Countdown on Thursday that because Democrats had staked their political reputations on being stalwart supporters of Ukraine and opponents of Russia, some Republicans had become more willing to depart from their longstanding pro-interventionist positions and oppose the Biden administration's policies.

"This is the first time Congress has really pushed back on funding for Ukraine. So I think this is significant, but it does appear, it's a very strong likelihood, that this is only temporary, that they will probably come up with more funding, I'm hearing the number of $6 billion instead of the $24 billion which Biden wants. So a lot less than Biden wants, a quarter of what Biden wants, but my guess is they will probably approve something along those lines within the next several weeks."

Kovalik noted that military aid for Ukraine was likely to remain a contentious issue as the House selects a new Speaker, following Rep. Kevin McCarthy's (R-CA) ouster by dissident Republicans on Tuesday - a faction that has been sharply critical of such aid.

"I think it's going to be a fight and I think they'll probably settle for something, less, a lot less than Biden wants. I'd be shocked if they weren't if they gave them nothing - I'd be happy, by the way, if they gave them nothing, I've been advocating for that for a long time - but I'd be surprised," Kovalik said.

"But I mean, they got rid of McCarthy because, you know, he was willing to make a deal over Ukraine and they really don't want to do that," he noted.

Kovalik pointed out that in addition to the moral and financial fatigue of supporting Kiev, the Pentagon was also facing very practical troubles with replenishing the vast quantity of weapons it had passed to the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Earlier this week, Pentagon Comptroller Michael McCord told leading lawmakers there is only $1.6 billion left of the $25.9 billion given them to replenish those weapons stocks.

"The irony is the US has offshored so much of its industry, it's hampered its military-industrial complex. Yes, the Russians have just been eating up all of NATO's munitions. That's why Biden decided to send the cluster bombs, by the way … because we didn't have anything left to send

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to Ukraine. So there are some realities that are sinking in, that we just can't keep this up anymore."

"But it's kind of interesting also, you know, who's taking positions on this that seem very dovish - it's the more extreme Republicans that are doing that," Kovalik noted.

That said, Texas Republican US Sen. John Cornyn has suggested a different method of dealing with Ukraine fatigue from having massive aid bills constantly in the news.

"It's obvious that there's some fatigue. And so my own view is we need to do it one time," Cornyn said on Monday. "We don't want to do this again every three months. Obviously, that's open for discussion. But I'm for one and done."

Kovalik told the hosts that Cornyn's idea would be "insane" and "the worst of all worlds."

"It allows both parties to insulate themselves politically from that type of decision. The goal would be, 'we'll just send you a lot of money now, a year's worth of money, and then we can all go into 2024 elections and not have to be debating this issue,' when this is the issue that should be debated. And that's been a problem all along - there's very little debate on this issue. Finally, we're getting some. To do what is being suggested would take this out of any political debate for a year and I think that is very, very dangerous," he said, adding, "I don't think it's realistic because if the speaker of the House was thrown out over the Ukraine funding issue, there is not going to be a taste for giving a huge amount of money to Ukraine as kind of a pre-payment for the year."

Kovalik said he thought Congress would have to be the institution to act if the US support for Ukraine that was keeping the conflict going was going to end, as Biden wouldn't want to be seen as a loser going into the 2024 elections.

"Sadly, I think as far as the Biden administration is concerned, I think they are in this to the end. I don't see them backing off this. I think that they do not want to be seen as losers in this war before the 2024 election and will try to keep the war going for that reason, because if it did end now, it would be Russia's victory. I think in the end it's going to take a new administration to change the policy on this - unfortunately, because such an administration is well over a year away and a lot of damage will be done in the meantime. But I just don't see Biden backing it off. But again, maybe Congress will intervene and force his hand in that regard."

Elijah Magnier, a veteran war correspondent with 35 years of experience in Iran, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Sudan, Afghanistan and Yugoslavia, told Radio Sputnik's Fault Lines on Thursday that in Europe, the progression of Ukraine fatigue in the political arena had advanced much further than in the US, with a new prime minister in Slovakia, Robert Fico, recently elected on a platform in support of immediate peace talks between Kiev and Moscow.

"The EU budget for 2023 was €168.16 billion, so to pay €5 billion is really a very insignificant amount for the EU countries. However, going to Kiev for all the ministers of foreign affairs to meet was a symbolic meeting to tell the world that 'we are still united' - but they are not united, because they failed to pay Ukraine and they failed to acknowledge the suggestion of people like Josep Borell, who acts more or less like the EU foreign minister," he said, noting the ongoing fight in the European Parliament over several Ukraine aid package proposals.

"Now, that has several reasons. First of all, the position of the US, that it has failed to allocate a new budget to the Ukrainians. Secondly, because of what [then-US House Speaker] Kevin McCarthy, before he was pushed out, rightly said, 'Where is your victory?' when Zelensky visited him in Washington."

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"So after four months of counteroffensive, the Ukrainian MPs and officials are saying 'the only thing we have managed is to recover 1% of the lost territory'. So recovering 1% of the lost territory when you have 50 nations sitting in one place in Ramstein in Germany, planning and supporting the war and supporting in logistics, intelligence, guiding the war, sending all the assets, all the military support they can, pushing Europe to empty their warehouses, and at the end of the day, 'we managed to recover 1% and the winter is knocking on our doors'. So that is a really slim victory for the tens of billions of dollars and euros that have been invested in this war," Magnier pointed out.

Magnier noted that by comparison, Russia has recovered a large part of territory since the start of the special military operation in February 2022, the Russian economy is not "on the floor," and Russia is united in its cause.

"Russia is producing less oil, but getting more money, because oil prices are rising above $80 and reaching between $90 and $97, depending on the day, and there is solidarity among the oil producing-countries not to increase the production. This is why the market, particularly the European, that is, an industrialized continent, is starving from energy and it's paying money that it doesn't have."

"So at the end of the day, by the lack of unity in Europe, the position of Hungary, the position of Slovakia … we don't know what's going to happen in Poland on the 15th of October, maybe the prime minister will no longer remain in place and we'll have possibly another person who also is fed up with financing the war, like Viktor Orban of Hungary and other European leaders. But at the end of the day, when we had the Europeans, like the minister of defense of the Netherlands, saying that Ukraine is a very cheap way to ensure that the Russian Federation does not pose a threat to NATO, it is just inviting the Europeans to be united because of the lack of unity," he said.

"So we understand now that Ukraine is becoming a burden, not only on the US population and those who are anti-war and against the US administration's policy to continue and pushing the whole world, particularly the Western world, toward a possible third world war/ Because every time Russia is pushing back the Ukrainians and all the Western support, Ukraine is failing, then the Americans are increasing in supplying Ukraine with more lethal and destructive weapons, just to push Russia to act outside the 'control area'.

"Well, it is not happening this way, because Russia is still in control. It is not going beyond the limit that is permitted," he noted.

"The world is waking up, what's happening with Ukraine is going nowhere. The Ukrainians are feeling very embarrassed because of this dim result and because they have less and less men. We heard how the UK former defense minister asked the Ukrainians to send not only women to the battlefield, but to start from the age of 18 to 60, so they can fight, because there are no more men to fight on the battlefield. So we understand that Ukraine is exhausting all its resources, Ukraine is exhausting European resources. The Americans have less appetite to supply Ukraine because the results are slim and Russia is [doing] better than ever, and there is a shortage in the market that is causing inflation and the devaluation of the currency in Europe and in the US. While on the other hand, we also see China rising, increasing power in the industrial and economic platform, and we see all the rest of the world that is supporting the war in Ukraine is sinking. So this is why we don't have any more appetite to support Ukrainians, and there is no longer unity among Europe."

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New Poll Shows Even Democrats Are Starting to Sour on Ukraine Aid

A growing number of congressional Republicans have been voting against sending further arms to Ukraine, including two of the representatives who announced they are seeking the House speakership.

A Reuters/Ipsos poll released on Thursday has revealed that support for sending additional funding to Ukraine is falling across both political parties in the United States.

The poll was conducted over two days, closing Wednesday. It showed that only 41% of respondents agreed the US "should provide weapons" to Ukraine, while 35% disagreed. Another 24% were unsure.

When asked that same question in May, 46% agreed, while only 29% disagreed and 25% were unsure.

While there remains a partisan split with more Democrats supporting Ukraine funding than Republicans, most of the drop since May has come from Democrats who are also souring on aiding the conflict. Among Republicans, support only dropped four points since May, from 39% to 35% but support from Democrats dropped nine points, from 61% to 52%.

The study comes as Congress is debating providing further military and financial aid to Ukraine. US President Joe Biden asked Congress for $24 billion in additional aid, but a large and growing group of Republicans in the House have begun opposing further aid and no package for Ukraine was included in the stopgap funding bill that kept the government open for another 45 days.

On Wednesday, Biden insisted that funding the Zelensky regime is crucial to US interests and is supported by the American people. "[T]he majority of the American people still [support] Ukraine, and the majority of the members of the Congress — both Democrat and Republican — support it," he said.

Biden claimed he had a method to get Ukraine more funding without congressional approval and promised to explain more at an upcoming "major speech." Details about the method and the date of the speech have not been clarified by the White House, although reports citing government insiders suggest Biden may be considering tapping on grants held by the US State Department.

Moscow has repeatedly condemned weapon shipments to Ukraine, warning that they will only escalate the conflict.

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New Evidence Suggests Humans Arrived in the Americas Before Ice Age

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Tens of thousands of years ago, a giant lake rested inside the Tularosa basin which sits in what is now southern New Mexico and West Texas. At that time, the area was a lush grassland and much less arid, but over time it dried into a desert with the park's trademark sand dunes.
Human footprint fossils found at White Sands National Park in New Mexico have been dated to between 21,000 and 23,000 years ago, lending more evidence to the theory humans arrived in the Americas long before previously thought.
Published on Thursday in the journal Science, the findings back up a previous study that was doubted by some researchers. In 2021, the footprints were estimated using radiocarbon dating methods on seeds from aquatic plants. But there were concerns that those seeds may have absorbed ancient carbon which could have thrown off the results.
The new study used ancient conifer pollen from the same sedimentary layer where the footprints were found and examined grains of quartz using a method that reveals when they were last exposed to light. Both methods backed up the original study, with the pollen dating between 21,000 and 23,000 years ago and the quartz being buried between 21,400 and 18,000 years ago.
These dates would suggest humans lived in the Americas during the last Ice Age.
For years, researchers believed humans did not arrive in the Americas until around 16,000 years ago at the earliest, after the Ice Age and right before the Bering land bridge, which connected Russia and Alaska, was covered by rising sea levels.
Study co-author Jeffrey Pigati, a geologist at the US Geological Survey, says the ages “are statistically indistinguishable from our original seed ages.”
Archeologists looking for evidence of early human settlers in the Americas have tended to focus on the Pacific coast because ice glaciers from the last Ice Age would have prevented travel from the Bering land bridge, but if humans were in New Mexico 21,000 years ago, they may have arrived just before the glaciers formed.
Some researchers remain skeptical. Loren Davis, an archaeologist at Oregon State University, says it is possible the clay containing the quartz grains may have come from the lake floor and then got redeposited on top of the younger lakeshore mud that covered the footprints. He also adds the sediment covering the footprints may have been blown there after being eroded from older rocks.
However, the study co-authors insist there is no evidence that either of those scenarios took place. And even Davis agrees archeologists should start looking for evidence of human habitation from before the Ice Age.
If they are right, "it resets the playing field of what’s possible," Davis admitted.
There have been a few other discoveries in recent years that point to pre-Ice Age colonization of the Americas by humans. In July, a study was published covering pendants made from ancient and now-extinct giant sloths that were found in Brazil. It was previously assumed ancient humans simply found the bones of the extinct animals, but the study suggested they were made between 25,000 and 27,000 years ago. Researchers believe the sloths went extinct roughly 10,000 years ago.
Another study of a giant sloth boneyard found in Uruguay suggested early humans may have hunted and eaten the massive animals as early as 30,000 years ago. Megatherium, the giant ground sloth of South America, grew up to 20 feet (6 meters) in length and weighed up to 8,800

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pounds (nearly 4,000 kilograms). Footprints of the giant sloths were also found at the White Sands National Park, along with many other animals including dogs and camels.

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Report: Biden Weighing Use of State Department Grants to Afford Ukraine Aid

A critical feature of the US government is the balance of powers. A major part of Congress, known as the legislative branch, is deciding what does, and does not, get funded.
The Biden administration is considering using a State Department grant to send aid to Ukraine after the president's funding request failed to get through Congress as part of the stopgap bill that temporarily averted a partial government shutdown.
The new findings come from two anonymous US officials speaking to a US media outlet. While making remarks on student loan aid on Wednesday, Biden promised a “major speech” on funding the Kiev regime and hinted he had “another” way to get funding to Ukraine without congressional approval.
“There is another means by which we may be able to find funding for that. But I’m not going to get into that now,” Biden said while promising more details during the speech.
According to one of the officials, the Biden administration is considering using a State Department program that provides financing for foreign governments buying US-made weapons known as the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program. It typically provides loans or grants to foreign governments.
The State Department has allocated $4.65 billion for the FMS program to support Ukraine and other countries impacted by the conflict. According to a State Department factsheet dated September 21, roughly $650 million of that allotment remains.
One official added that even if the Biden administration uses this method, they will still ask Congress for additional funding.
Last month, Biden requested $24 billion in additional funding for Ukraine. A smaller package was initially put into a stopgap funding bill intended to keep the government open while Congress debates a full funding bill. But that bill was unable to pass in the House of Representatives until the Ukraine funding was stripped out of it.
Rumors spread around Washington that then-House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) made a “secret side deal” with Democrats on Ukraine funding to get the funding bill passed, which led Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-FL) to launch a successful motion to vacate the speakership.
As such, no bills, for funding Ukraine or otherwise, will be taken up until a new speaker is selected. House Republicans are expected to meet on October 11, when they are expected to discuss potential replacements. Sometime after that, a formal vote will be held in the House.
On Thursday, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre refused to provide more details about the alternative funding method and said she had no new information about when Biden’s promised “major speech” would come.

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US House Contender Jordan Claims He Won't Oust Gaetz After Holding Talk With Trump

Former US President Trump's name has been floated as a possible candidate for the House speaker, but there are far more likely candidates currently serving in the lower congressional chamber.

US Rep. Jim Jordan (R-OH) said on Thursday that he spoke with former US President Donald Trump about his bid to replace Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) as House speaker.

Jordan did not elaborate on whether Trump said he supported his bid for speaker, only saying it was “a great conversation” and that they also talked about “all kinds of issues.”

During and after the Trump presidency, Jordan proved to be a close ally of the former commander-in-chief. He was one of the Republicans who did not vote to certify the 2020 election results and is one of the leading GOP members of the impeachment inquiry into current US President Joe Biden.

McCarthy was ousted as speaker earlier this week after US Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-FL) filed a motion to vacate the seat. Eight Republicans joined every Democrat in voting to oust McCarthy.

The move by Gaetz has angered some party members and a few have floated the idea of kicking him out of the caucus. Jordan said he would not support a move against Gaetz.

“I don’t think that’s warranted,” Jordan told US media. “We’ve got a four-seat majority, Matt’s a talented member of Congress.”

Jordan added, “I disagree with what he did [in removing McCarthy] …but he’s a great member of our committee … I think we gotta come together.”

Gaetz has expressed support for both Jordan and Rep. Steve Scalise (R-LA). Reps. Kevin Hern (R-OK) and Tom Emmer (R-MN) have also announced bids.

Some Republicans have also been calling for the repeal of the rule that allowed Gaetz to call for McCarthy’s removal. Jordan said if the conference supports that, he would also throw in his backing but added that it would be “fine” with him if they did not.

US Rep. Byron Donalds (R-FL), who received a peak of 20 votes during January’s election for House speaker, said he disagreed with Gaetz’s decision to call for a motion to vacate but added that his actions showed how things have changed in the US House of Representatives.

“If there was any doubt before, it is without doubt now that the era of leadership control over everything in this building is definitely over,” Donalds said.

Despite leading the impeachment inquiry, Jordan said that he would be able to form a working relationship with Biden while acting as speaker.

“If I get the votes and get the privilege of being speaker, that’s how it works in our system,” Jordan said. “We’ll deal with them, they’ll deal with us. That’s how it works.”

He was also asked about his relationship with Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY), particularly their vast differences on sending more aid to Ukraine. Jordan has vehemently opposed further aid to Ukraine while McConnell, who received $18,500 for his 2020 campaign from weapon manufacturer Raytheon, supports it.

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Jordan said his relationship with McConnell is “fine” and argued that his position on Ukraine is “where the American people are.”
A recent poll by Ipsos showed that only 41% of Americans agree that Washington should send more weapons to Ukraine. That poll also showed support for further funding is falling among both major US political parties.
Democrat support has fallen from 61% in May to just 52%. Meanwhile, Republican support has dropped four percentage points over the same period to 35%.

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US Jobs Up 336,000 in September, Rising 80% More Than in August in New Concern for Fed

WASHINGTON, October 6 (Sputnik) - US jobs growth smashed forecasts again in September, with the addition of 336,000 new positions reported by the Labor Department that came in some 80% above August numbers, suggesting new inflationary pressures for the Federal Reserve to contend with.
It was the highest jobs creation since January's 517,000, and came in way above the 187,000 growth in August and the 170,000 number forecast for September by Wall Street economists polled by US media.
"This is a problem as it validates the recent move up in Treasury yields," economist Adam Button wrote on the ForexLive forum, referring to yields that had hit 16-year highs amid a bonds selloff on worries that the Fed would carry out another interest rate hike in November to curb inflationary pressures.

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Partisanship Strongest Factor in US Uptake of New COVID-19 Vaccination – Poll

WASHINGTON, October 6 (Sputnik) – Partisan views remain the strongest indicator of whether Americans will get the updated COVID vaccination, Axios reported on Friday, citing an Ipsos poll.
About half of Americans say they intend to get the vaccine – a group that includes about 70% of Democrats and 28% of Republicans. Eight percent of Democrats say they have already received the latest vaccine, compared to 4% of Republicans.
Age is a secondary factor, with about two thirds of Americans 65 and older saying they will likely get the vaccine, compared to just over half of those aged 50-64, and a third of those aged 18-29.
The latest shot, cleared last month by the CDC, provides protection against more current strains of COVID-19.

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The nationwide poll of 1,025 adults was conducted September 29 to October 1.

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NAFTA Panel Rules Against US Duties on Canadian Lumber - Ottawa

WASHINGTON, October 6 (Sputnik) - A NAFTA panel ruled that elements of Washington's import duties on softwood lumber from Canada are not consistent with US law, Canadian Trade Minister Mary Ng said in a statement.

"Canada is pleased that the NAFTA dispute panel agrees that elements of the US dumping determination are inconsistent with US law," Ng said on Thursday. "These duties are unwarranted - the only fair outcome is for the United States to revoke all duties on Canadian softwood lumber without further delay."

Ng said the panel directed the US Commerce Department to review key aspects of its determination while Ottawa maintains an "active voice" during the process.

The dispute over Canadian softwood lumber dates back to the early 1980s and has been a drag on the two countries' bilateral trading relationship for decades, including mutual complaints through the World Trade Organization.

Last month, Ng said the "unfair, unjust and illegal" 7.99% duty on softwood lumber products imported from Canada has hurt the Canadian wood industry and played a role in the rising housing costs in both countries.

In 2006, the two sides reached a settlement under which the United States agreed to suspend lumber duties. The deal expired in 2015 and the administration of former US President Donald Trump subsequently imposed new tariffs on Canadian lumber.

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White House Has Begun Planning Biden-Xi Meeting for November in San Francisco - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 6 (Sputnik) - The White House has begun making plans for a November meeting in San Francisco between US President Joe Biden and Chinese leader Xi Jinping, The Washington Post reported, citing senior administration officials.

"We're beginning the process [of planning a meeting]," a Biden administration is quoted as saying in the report.

If it takes place, it will be the first time the two leaders meet since last November, the report added.

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

Ex-US House Treasurer Admits to Conspiring in Fraudulent Financial Reporting - US Attorney

WASHINGTON, October 6 (Sputnik) - Former US House of Representatives treasurer Nancy Marks pleaded guilty to conspiring to commit fraud and obstructing the Federal Election Commission (FEC), the US Attorney's Office announced.

"With today's guilty plea, Marks has admitted that she conspired with a congressional candidate to lie to the FEC and, by extension, the public about the financial state of the candidate's campaign for New York's Third Congressional District, falsely inflating the campaign's reported receipts with non-existent contributions and loans," the US Attorney's Office said in a statement on Thursday.

During the 2022 election cycle, Marks served as treasurer for a principal congressional campaign committee in New York's Third Congressional District and an undisclosed candidate, and engaged in a "fraudulent endeavor," the statement said.

The strategy entailed submitting deceitful reports to the FEC, falsely inflating the campaign's financial numbers, thereby misleading the FEC and the public, the statement said.

The specific objective of the scheme was to meet the national party committee's program criteria, which required showcasing a minimum of $250,000 in fundraising from third-party contributors within one quarter, to secure financial and logistical backing, the statement added.

Upon successfully implementing their plan, Marks and the candidate not only met the required financial thresholds, but also ensured that the congressional campaign received the necessary financial assistance upon qualifying for the program, according to the statement.

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Trump Says He Would Accept Becoming House Speaker for 'Short Period'

WASHINGTON, October 6 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said that he is ready to become a temporary House speaker for a short period of time until the Republicans decide on the permanent candidate.

"They have asked me if I would take it for a short period of time for the party until they come to a conclusion - I'm not doing it because I want to - I will do it if necessary, should they not be able to make their decision," Trump told Fox News on Thursday.

Trump added that he has been asked to serve as a "unifier" for his party because he has "so many" friends in Congress.

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Oil Down Another 2%, Heading for Worst Week at Least Since April

NEW YORK, October 6 (Sputnik) - The selloff in oil continued with little pause on Thursday, with crude prices headed for their worst week at least since April as worries over the global economy and how demand for energy would fare in a recession roiled a market that gained nearly 30% in the past three months.

New York-traded West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude for delivery in November settled down $1.91, or 2.3%, at $82.31 per barrel. WTI had fallen nearly 6% in the prior session - the most in a year - and was down around 9% for the week, accounting for its worst week since April. Just last week, the US crude benchmark hit a one-year high of $95.03. On Thursday, it fell to a five-week low of $82.28.

"With WTI failing to find buyers at $84, the decline can extend to $81," Sunil Kumar Dixit, a technical chartist for oil at SKCharting.com, said.

London-traded Brent crude for the most-active December contract settled down $1.74, or 2%, at $84.07. Brent was down almost 12% for the week, on track for its worst week since March. It hit a five-week low of $83.84 on Thursday, after last week's one-year high at $83.84.

"When oil prices tank, it is hard to estimate where prices could find support," Ed Moya, analyst at online trading platform OANDA, said.

Part of the slump in crude prices is attributable to the long-running selloff in US bonds by investors seeking higher yields in return for economic uncertainty - a process that has also bumped up the dollar, hurting international demand for commodities, including oil, from holders of other currencies.

If the run on US bonds continues and global currencies keep wilting against the dollar, a worldwide recession is almost certain, hurting demand for almost everything, including energy, economists say.

Crude prices also fell hard on Wednesday after the US government's latest weekly update on energy inventories showed stockpiles of gasoline - the country's premier fuel product - rising by 6.5 million barrels last week for its highest build since January 2022.

While its typical for gasoline inventories to see builds at this time of year as American families take fewer road trips with children in school, a rise of more than 6 million barrels was uncharacteristically large, suggesting refiners had been dumping products on the market as well in the midst of processing as much oil as they could over the past months when profit for refining was at multi-year highs.

Adding to the downside of oil was the absence of a new announcement on production cuts at Wednesday's monthly meeting of OPEC+.

OPEC+ is made up of the 13 Saudi-led oil exporting countries and the ten independent oil producers, including Russia. At Wednesday's meeting, the alliance reaffirmed the joint Saudi-Russian pledge to continue removing at least 1.3 million barrels a day from the combined daily production of the two countries until the end of the year.

But OPEC+ did not talk about extending those cuts into 2024, something the oil trade had come to expect after Saudi Arabia created the impression in recent months that it can continue surprising the world with one production squeeze after another.

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US Officials Speak at Funeral Service for Senator Dianne Feinstein

WASHINGTON, October 6 (Sputnik) - US officials including President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris delivered remarks at the funeral service for late US Senator Dianne Feinstein in San Francisco.

"[Feinstein] was always tough, prepared, rigorous and compassionate," Biden said on Thursday. "She always served the people of California and our nation for the right reasons."

Harris and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer also spoke at the funeral service in honor of the late lawmaker.

Feinstein died last week at the age of 90 after serving several decades in the upper chamber of Congress. Feinstein was the longest-serving female senator in history and the first woman to chair the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, October 6 (Sputnik) -

ARMS CONTROL

* Russia has signed and ratified the treaty banning nuclear weapons tests unlike the United States, which stopped short of ratification, President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday.
* Putin rejected suggestions that Russia's nuclear doctrine should be changed to broaden the circumstances in which a nuclear strike could be launched.
* Russia has almost finished working on the Sarmat intercontinental ballistic missile and has only to complete the necessary bureaucratic procedures in the near future, Putin said.
* US Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security Bonnie Jenkins said there is always hope that a successor treaty to New START will be negotiated with Russia, but such talks would be "very challenging" amid the Ukraine conflict.

IMF GLOBAL ECONOMIC FORECASTS

* Stronger-than-expected demand in the first six months of 2023 has improved the chances for the global economy to experience a "soft landing" amid economic challenges, including high inflation, International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Thursday.
* Global growth remains weak, well below the pre-pandemic average of 3.8%, and medium-term prospects have weakened further, Georgieva said.
* Avoiding a premature policy easing is paramount because of the risk of resurging inflation,

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Georgieva said.
* The rate of inflation is decreasing in most countries, but is likely to remain elevated and remain so in some states until 2025, Georgieva said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE
* A Ukrainian attack on Horlivka with cluster munitions killed three civilians and injured nine more, Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) head Denis Pushilin said on Thursday.
* Ukraine has lost over 90,000 fighters since the start of its counteroffensive on June 4, Russian President Vladimir Putin said.
* The White House will adjust its approach to securing aid for Ukraine based on whom the House of Representatives elects to serve as its next speaker, The Washington Post reported.
* Russia did not start a so-called war in Ukraine, on the contrary, its goal is to end the conflict, Putin said.

SYRIA DEVELOPMENTS
* External interference in Syrian affairs and attempts to create quasi-states on Syrian territory lead to no good and can only prolong the conflict, Russian President Vladimir Putin said at the plenary session of the Valdai Discussion Club on Thursday.
* A drone attack on a military college in the city of Homs in western Syria killed at least 80 people and injured approximately 240 others, Syrian Health Minister Hassan Muhammad Al-Ghabash said.
* Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder confirmed that a US F-16 jet had shot down a Turkish drone in Syria, but said there is no indication Turkey was intentionally targeting the US forces stationed in the region.
* Militants in Syria's Idlib de-escalation zone are preparing a provocation using toxic substances to discredit Russian forces in Syria, and they have already delivered chlorine to the town of Arihah, Vadim Kulit, the deputy head of the Russian Defense Ministry's Center for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in Syria, said.

NAGORNO-KARABAKH
* Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday disagreed with a claim that Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan was brought to power by some external forces to "surrender" the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan, saying that the Armenian people elected him.
* Imposing sanctions on Azerbaijan is counterproductive, what is needed is dialogue with Baku, French President Emmanuel Macron said.
* Russian peacekeepers have shut down their temporary observation points along the former line of contact in three regions of Nagorno-Karabakh, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
* Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and European Council President Charles Michel called on Yerevan and Baku to release all detainees and facilitate demining operations.

ENERGY MARKETS
* Ukraine is attempting to damage the TurkStream gas pipeline with the support of English-speaking specialists, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday.

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* There are still no results of the investigation into the Nord Stream pipelines explosions, and they are unlikely to appear, Putin said.

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US SEC Says Sued Musk to Force Him to Testify in Twitter Probe

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) said on Thursday that it has filed an application forcing Elon Musk to testify in his Twitter probe.

"The Securities and Exchange Commission announced that it has filed an application seeking an order directing Elon Musk to comply with an investigative subpoena calling for his appearance for testimony, with which Musk failed to comply," the SEC said in a statement.

The case relates to an ongoing investigation by the SEC regarding potential violations of various provisions of the federal securities laws in connection with Musk's 2022 purchase of Twitter and statements and filings related to it.

The SEC, according to the statement, wants to acquire more information from Musk to conduct its lawful investigation.

It is claimed that Musk defrauded former X shareholders by not disclosing for too long that he has invested in X, formerly known as Twitter. Elon Musk was sued in April 2022 in Manhattan for alleged securities fraud following him failing to disclose he purchased a 5 percent stake in X within a US required time frame.

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US Will Resume Removal Flights to Venezuela Within Next Few Days - Senior Admin. Official

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - The United States will begin removing Venezuelans who illegally enter the country back to Venezuela via direct repatriation flights, senior administration officials said on Thursday.

"Today, the United States is announcing the resumption of removal flights to Venezuela," a senior administration official said.

Venezuelans who unlawfully cross the US border and are not found to have a legal basis to stay may be repatriated to Venezuela, following a decision by the Venezuelan government to accept back their nationals, the official said.

The US has identified individuals who will be removed from the US in the next few days, a senior administration official said. The US will continue to send some Venzuelans to Mexico, where they have been sent when repatriation to Venezuela has not been possible, the official said.

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Biden Admin. Mulls Using US State Department Grants to Fund Weapons for Ukraine - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is considering using State Department grants to fund the supply of weapons to Ukraine, Politico reported on Thursday, citing two administration officials.

The White House is considering the State Department grants idea among a number of options to provide Ukraine with military support after Congress removed it from a deal to avert a government shutdown, the report said.

The grants are used to help US partner countries purchase weapons and defense-related equipment intended for Ukraine and for other states affected by the conflict with Russia there, the report said.

However, Defense Department spokesperson Patrick Ryder said that a decision has not been made, to his knowledge, whether to go that route.

"Reprogramming" is always an option for urgent needs but no decision has been made on using reprogramming as a way to support Ukraine security assistance, the report cited Ryder as saying.

Ryder confirmed the Biden administration's commitment to working with Congress on the Ukraine supplemental and on receiving a full budget, the report said.

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Pentagon Confirms Downing Turkish Drone in Syria, Calls It 'Regrettable Incident'

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - Pentagon Press Secretary Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder confirmed on Thursday that a US F-16 jet had shot down a Turkish drone in Syria, but said there is no indication Turkey was intentionally targeting the US forces stationed in the region.

"As regrettable incident, but we have no indication that Turkey was intentionally targeting US forces," Ryder said during Pentagon briefing.

Ryder said that a Turkish UAV had been heading toward the location of US forces. He mentioned that US commanders had assessed the UAV, which had come within a half-kilometer of US forces, as a potential threat.

In response to the perceived threat, US F-16 fighters had been subsequently deployed to engage the UAV in self-defense, he stated.

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Pentagon Says Not Considering Reprogramming US Funds to Support Ukraine

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department is not considering a reprogramming request at this time to gather the funds to continue supporting Ukraine, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said on Thursday.

"Reprogramming is always an option for urgent needs. At this time right now, though, to my knowledge, no decision has been made on using reprogramming as a way to support Ukraine's security assistance," Ryder said during a press briefing.

Reprogramming involves changing the application of funds or transferring funds between appropriations or legal subdivisions within an appropriation, according to the Defense Department Comptroller.

The Pentagon has several billion dollars remaining to help support Ukraine before funds run out, due to a lack of new spending measures by the US Congress.

The Defense Department remains committed to working with Congress on a Ukraine supplement and receiving a full budget, Ryder said.

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Klyushin's Defense Files Motion to Appeal Sentencing in US Court - Lawyer

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - The defense of Russian national Vladislav Klyushin, who was sentenced to 9 years in a US prison on hack-and-trade charges, filed a motion to appeal the court decision, the defendant's lawyer Maksim Nemtsev told Sputnik on Thursday.

"We filed an appeal on September 18. Clerks collect transcripts. Due date is December," Nemtsev said.

After completing this process, the appeal will be filed "in accordance with the schedule" established by the court, he added.

The lawyer also noted that the US authorities sent his client to Fort Dix prison in New Jersey, but they have not delivered him there so far.

The US court sentenced Klyushin on September 7. The defense sought a three-year sentence to include time served in Switzerland and in the United States. US prosecutors asked that Klyshin be sentenced to 14 years in prison.

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Biden to Host German President in Washington on Friday - White House

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will host German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier at the White House on October 6, Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Thursday.

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"President Joe Biden looks forward to welcoming President Frank-Walter Steinmeier to the White House on Friday, October 6, 2023 to commemorate German-American Day," Jean-Pierre said in a statement.

The two presidents will emphasize the strong ties between the US and Germany, including their commitment to providing support to Ukraine, the statement added.

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Trump Weighing Visit to US Capitol Next Week, Open to Running for House Speaker - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump is weighing a trip to the US Capitol next week to potentially pitch himself as a candidate for Speaker of the House, Politico reported on Thursday.

Trump is considering going to Capitol Hill, where he is open to the idea of serving as House speaker, the report said, citing a Republican familiar with internal talks.

Earlier this week, the House of Representatives ousted Congressman Kevin McCarthy as speaker in a historic first. House lawmakers are unable to conduct normal legislative business until they elect a new speaker that can bridge divides within the Republican conference.

Republicans are set to meet on Tuesday for an internal candidate forum, followed by an internal speaker election on Wednesday, the report said. Trump is expected to visit the Capitol prior to the internal election.

House rules do not require the speaker to be a member of Congress, making Trump eligible for the position. However, Republican conference rules require that leaders indicted for felonies step aside.

Nevertheless, several Republican lawmakers have expressed support for the idea of Trump as speaker. On Wednesday, Trump said that many people have called him about the idea and that he is willing to help US House Republicans select a new speaker, but his primary focus remains on winning the 2024 presidential election.

The Speaker of the House is third in the line of presidential succession, meaning that Trump could reclaim the Oval Office as speaker if the president and vice president were to be compromised.

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Trump Asks to Dismiss Election Meddling Indictment Based on Presidential Immunity - Filing

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump has asked a Washington, DC court to dismiss the federal election interference indictment against him on the grounds of presidential immunity, court documents filed on Thursday showed.

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"President Trump moves to dismiss the indictment in this matter, with prejudice, based on Presidential immunity," the filling said.

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Biden Waives 26 Federal Laws to Allow Border Wall Construction in South Texas - DHS

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration finds it necessary to waive 26 federal laws to build additional border barriers between Texas and Mexico, the Department of Homeland Security said in a notice on Thursday, contradicting previous sentiments and public promises.

"There is presently an acute and immediate need to construct physical barriers and roads in the vicinity of the border of the United States in order to prevent unlawful entries into the United States in the project areas," Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said in the notice, published on the Federal Register.

According to the notice, the new barriers will be placed in Starr County, Texas and paid for using funds previously earmarked for border barriers.

The move by the administration stands in direct contrast to statements made by Biden, who during his candidacy pledged to cease all border wall construction and vocalized that he was against the practice.

"The money was appropriated for the border wall. I tried to get them to reappropriate, to redirect that money. They didn't. They wouldn't. In the meantime, there's nothing under the law other than they have to use the money for what it was appropriated for. I can't stop that," he said when asked about his administration's recent decision.

Some of the laws being bypassed by the administration to undergo the border wall project are also statutes that Biden has vocally tried to protect, including the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act.

According to the DHS notice, the funds need to be used for their intended purpose by the end of fiscal year 2023.

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UN Concerned by Latest Rounds of Violence in Northwest Syria - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, October 5 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is concerned about the latest rounds of violence in the Northwest of Syria and about the suffering of the civilians, UN Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Thursday.

"We're very concerned about the latest rounds of violence that we're seeing, and again, creates the situation where civilians have paid or pay a very high price," Dujarric told a briefing.

The Secretary General of the United Nations Antonio Guterres is also deeply concerned over

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retaliatory shelling by the pro-government forces. Nationwide ceasefire is essential, he added.
On Sunday, Turkish Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said that two terrorists had carried out an explosion near the ministry building in the Turkish capital, with one terrorist detonating himself and the other neutralized. Two police officers were wounded. Turkish media reported later that the PKK claimed responsibility for the attack. Later on Sunday, the Turkish Defense Ministry said that the country's military conducted air strikes against objects of the PKK in northern Iraq.
Syria has been engulfed by a civil war since 2011, with Syrian President Bashar Assad's forces fighting various armed insurgent groups. Since 2016, the Turkish armed forces have also been conducting air and ground operations in Syria against the Kurdistan Workers' Party, which wants to establish Kurdish autonomy in Turkey. Damascus has repeatedly called the presence of Turkish forces in Syria illegal and urged Ankara to withdraw its troops.

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IMF Deploys $1 Trillion in Global Liquidity, Provides $320Bln to 96 States - Georgieva

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has deployed $1 trillion in global liquidity and provided $320 billion in financing to 96 countries in the past two years, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Thursday.
"Since the pandemic, we have deployed $1 trillion in global liquidity and reserves through our lending and the allocation of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs). We have provided around $320 billion in financing to 96 countries," Georgieva said in a curtain raiser speech ahead of the upcoming IMF and World Bank annual meetings.
The IMF has also increased five times its interest-free financing to 56 low-income countries through the Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust, she said.
Georgieva emphasized that the IMF began working with member states with stronger economies to provide support to more economically vulnerable countries.
Th cooperation enabled generating some $100 billion in new financing through IMF trusts for the countries facing the most significant socio-economic challenges, Georgieva said.

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No Change in Russia-Belarus Nuclear Stance Without US-NATO Shift - Russian Ministry

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - Russia and Belarus will not revise their joint nuclear stance unless the United States and NATO abandon their own dangerous course of action, Deputy Head of the Russian Delegation Konstantin Vorontsov said on Thursday.
"The very question of revising Russia and Belarus's joint nuclear decisions is entirely impossible, unless the US and NATO renounce their dangerous trajectory toward undermining our security and unless they fully withdraw American nuclear weapons from Europe," Vorontsov

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said during a meeting of the United Nations First Committee.

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IMF New Trust Provides Affordable Financing to Low-Income States - Georgieva

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has created a new $40-billion strong Resilience and Sustainability Trust to provide affordable financing to low-income and vulnerable countries to undertake climate-related reforms, the IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Thursday.

"It provides longer-term affordable financing to help lower-income and vulnerable emerging market economies to undertake climate reforms," Georgieva said in a curtain raiser speech ahead of the upcoming IMF and World Bank annual meetings.

Georgieva noted that the IMF had already approved 11 specific programs through the Resilience and Sustainability Trust.

"Six of them in Africa, with many more to follow over the next year or two," she said.

Georgieva urged member states to help the poorest countries in the world deal with significant debt issues given that the latter remain at high risk of "debt distress."

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Georgieva Says Paramount to Avoid Premature Easing of Policy Due to Risk of Inflation

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - Avoiding a premature easing of policy is paramount because of the risk of resurging inflation, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Thursday.

"It is paramount to avoid a premature easing of policy, given the risk of resurging inflation. New IMF analysis shows the growing importance of inflation expectations as a driver for price increases," Georgieva said in a curtain-raising speech ahead of the upcoming IMF and the World Bank annual meetings.

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Global Inflation Easing But Likely to Remain Above Target Until 2025 - IMF

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - The rate of inflation is decreasing in most countries, but is likely to remain elevated and remain so in some states until 2025, International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Thursday.

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"Thanks to the decisive actions of central banks and responsible fiscal policies, inflation in most countries is going down, but is likely to remain above target for some countries all the way until 2025," Georgieva said in a curtain raiser speech ahead of the upcoming IMF and World Bank annual meetings.

Georgieva said that fighting inflation is the number one priority for the global community given that inflation undermines consumer and investor confidence, erodes the foundation for growth and hurts the poorest people the most.

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Global Growth Remains Weak, Well Below Pre-Pandemic Average of 3.8% - IMF

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - Global growth remains weak, well below the pre-pandemic average of 3.8%, and medium-term prospects have weakened further, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Thursday.

"As you will see from our updated forecast next week, the current pace of global growth remains quite weak, well below the 3.8 percent average in the two decades before the pandemic. And looking ahead over the medium term, growth prospects have weakened further," Georgieva said.

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Stronger Demand in 1st Half of 2023 Boosts Chance for Global Economy Soft Landing - IMF

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - Stronger-than-expected demand in the first six months of 2023 has improved the chances for the global economy to experience a "soft landing" amid economic challenges, including high inflation, International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Thursday.

"The world economy has shown remarkable resilience and the first half of 2023 has brought some good news, largely because of stronger-than-expected demand for services and tangible progress in the fight against inflation. This increases the chances for a soft landing for the global economy," Georgieva said in a curtain raiser speech ahead of the upcoming IMF and World Bank annual meetings.

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US Army Plans Major Cutbacks to Special Operations Forces, Green Berets - Reports

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WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - The Defense Department and the US Army are planning major cuts to the manpower levels of their Special Operations Command (SOCOM) active units, the Wall Street Journal reported on Thursday.

The cutbacks reflect the switch in US strategy over the past six years from fighting terrorism around the world, especially in the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa, to preparing for possible future full scale conflicts with potential peer adversaries like China, the report said.

The cutbacks also reflect the Army's increasingly difficult challenge in attracting enough higher level recruits in a still healthy jobs market, the report said.

The first cutbacks will amount to 3,700 soldiers from special forces units comprising about 10% of their total, the report added.

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Belarus Supports Russian-Chinese Space Treaty to Prevent Orbital Arms Race - Official

UNITED NATIONS, October 5 (Sputnik) - Belarus supports the Russian-Chinese draft treaty prohibiting the placement of weapons and restricting the use of force in outer space, Head of the Office for International Security and Arms Control Vasily Pavlov said on Thursday.

"It's important to maintain our focus on preventing an arms race in outer space. In this context, we support the Russian-Chinese draft treaty on the non placement of weapons in outer space, or the threat or use of force against space objects," Pavlov said during the United Nations First Committee.

The Nuclear Threat Initiative, the proposed draft treaty by Russia to the Conference on Disarmament (CD) in 2008, necessitates State Parties to commit to a set of mandates: to abstain from positioning objects equipped with any form of weaponry into orbit, from installing weapons on celestial bodies, and from threatening or using force against outer space objects.

Moreover, State Parties must comply with mutually agreed-upon confidence-building measures, fortifying the agreement's central aim of ensuring space remains a sphere free from conflict and militarization.

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Musk Says 'Feasible' to Do Uncrewed Test Landing on Mars Within Next 4 Years

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) – It is "feasible" to test an uncrewed landing on the surface of Mars within the next four years, but would require a tremendous increase in the number of launches and amount of cargo transported to the orbit and beyond, US entrepreneur and multi-billionaire Elon Musk said on Thursday.

"I think it's sort of feasible within the next four years to do an uncrewed test landing [on Mars]," Musk said during a 2023 International Astronautical Congress in Baku, Azerbaijan

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According to Musk, creating a self-sustaining city on Mars will require a radical increase in the number of space launches, up to about 1000 per year, to deliver about a million tons of useful load to the surface of the red planet, which will, in turn, require at least 5 million tons of cargo to be put into orbit.

Musk added that he is optimistic about the possibility of using an unmodified version of SpaceX's Starship with special legs to land on Mars and with minor modifications on the moon.

Once a propellant plant for fueling spacecraft is established on Mars, it will allow it to go to the asteroid belts and the moons of Jupiter, Musk said. If it is possible to establish a propellant plant there as well, then the road is open to go to the moons of Saturn and all the way into the Kuiper belt in the outer Solar System.

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USAID Says Resuming Food Aid for Refugees in Ethiopia, Bolstering Oversight

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - The United States is resuming the delivery of food aid to refugees in Ethiopia, as well as bolstering oversight of assistance, US Agency for International Development (USAID) spokesperson Jessica Jennings said on Thursday.

"In Ethiopia, USAID has made the decision to resume food assistance to refugee populations after the Ethiopian government and implementing partners made reforms to Ethiopia's refugee food assistance structure," Jennings said in a statement.

The Ethiopian government transferred responsibility for the storage and distribution of food aid to USAID's implementing partners, the statement said. USAID previously suspended food aid due to the discovery of a coordinated diversion scheme.

Oversight reforms strengthen program monitoring, reinforce commodity tracking and improve beneficiary registration processes, the statement said.

Although USAID is resuming assistance for refugees in Ethiopia, aid for other food-insecure populations in the country remains suspended until USAID can obtain further assurances from beneficiaries, the statement said.

USAID aims to resume food assistance for those in need as soon as possible in all regions, the statement added.

USAID has appointed a new agency coordinator to implement bolstered oversight initiatives and created a working group to review staffing and monitoring across programs, the statement said. The measures will enable USAID to more quickly identify and address diversion risks and deliver assistance to those in need, according to the statement.

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Belarus Nuclear Cooperation With Russia Complies With NPT - Arms Control Chief

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UNITED NATIONS, October 5 (Sputnik) - Belarus and Russia's collaboration in nuclear matters adheres to international law and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), Head of the Office for International Security and Arms Control Vasiliy Pavlov said on Thursday.

"Belarus and Russia's cooperation in this area swiftly complies with international law and the NPT," Pavlov said during the United Nations First Committee.

Highlighting the substantial pressures on Belarus, Pavlov conveyed that the country is undergoing unprecedented political and economic strain and has experienced violations of the Budapest Memorandum for several years.

He said this was occurring amidst an escalation of tensions in the region, an increase in military capacity in the territory of neighboring NATO states, and the intensification of military hostilities right at their doorstep.

Therefore, he added, Belarus was forced to respond to national security challenges and risks by taking measures to strengthen its own defense capabilities.

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UPDATE - US Saw Huge Increase in Child Death Rate From Firearms Between 2011-2021 - Reports

(Corrects typo in para 2 to read "up from 1,311 in 2011," not "2021;" adds background in para 6)

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - Firearms were the number one cause of death among children under 18 in the United States in 2021, while fatal car accidents involving children fell nearly by half, The New York Times reported on Thursday, citing analysis published by the journal Pediatrics.

The number of gun deaths among children under 18 in the United States increased by 87% during the decade studied with some 2,590 children and teenagers who died from firearms injuries in 2021 alone, up from 1,311 in 2011, the report said.

Firearm injuries are also now a leading cause of death for Americans under 20 if deaths of premature infants are excluded, the report said.

In addition to the increase in child deaths from firearms, there has also been a double increase in drug poisoning in children under 18 and a 12.5% increase in suffocations, the report added.

At the same time, the rate of nonfatal injuries dropped by more than half between 2011 and 2021 - from 11,592 per 100,000 to 5,359 per 100,000, while the rate of fatal injuries surged from 14.07 to 17.3 per 100,000, according to the report.

In 2021, guns also continued to be the leading cause of death for young adults under the age of 25, the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions said in a June report, citing CDC data.

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US Fighter Jet Shoots Down Turkish Drone Over Syria - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - A US fighter jet has shot down a Turkish drone over Syria, the Wall Street Journal reported on Thursday, citing an unnamed source.

The United States was aware in advance of the downing that the drone was armed, the report cited a US official as saying.

The drone was considered a threat to the US forces stationed in northeastern Syria.

However, the Turkish Defense Ministry denied that the drone was one of its own, according to US media reports.

There are approximately 900 US troops stationed in northeast Syria allegedly to counter the remainder of the Islamic State terror group (outlawed in Russia). The Syrian government has said the US troops are in the country illegally and are stealing Syrian oil.

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Elon Musk Says Has Not Seen Evidence Aliens Really Exist, Calls Humanity Aliens

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) – US entrepreneur and multi-billionaire Elon Musk said on Thursday that he has not seen any convincing evidence that aliens exist and thinks that humans are alone in the universe.

“People often ask me if I'm seeing any evidence of aliens and I unfortunately have seen no evidence of aliens yet. We are the aliens as far as I can tell,” Musk said during a 2023 International Astronautical Congress in Baku, Azerbaijan. “What this perhaps suggests is that this tiny candle of consciousness that is humanity is all that exists in a vast darkness. And we should do everything we can to ensure that the candle does not go out.”

In April, US All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO) Director Sean Kirkpatrick said that cases of unidentified aerial phenomena (UAP, also known as UFOs) show no signs of extraterrestrial involvement, although there are indications the incidents could be linked to foreign actors.

UAP hotspots around the world include the eastern and western coasts of the United States, the Middle East, and East Asia, according to AARO data.

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Musk Says SpaceX Working on New Space Telescope With Lens 7-8 Meters in Diameter

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - US billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk said on Thursday that his company SpaceX is currently working on producing a new space telescope that will have a lens of seven or eight meters in diameter.

"One of the exciting projects that we are working with [Dr.] Saul Perlmutter at [the University of

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California at] Berkeley is on a space telescope. It's got an enormous lens, I think it's perhaps a seven- or eight-meter diameter lens," Musk said virtually during a 2023 International Astronautical Congress in Baku, Azerbaijan.

The new telescope will effectively be a satellite with a regular set of lenses that will be launched into orbit to avoid obfuscation caused by the atmosphere, thereby increasing its power and accuracy, Musk said.

Musk explained that that is exactly why the NASA Hubble Space Telescope, which is relatively small and has a lens with a diameter of 2.4 meters, has been way better than any ground telescope.

The future of space science lies in the use of such space telescopes, which must certainly operate in vacuum conditions, Musk said.

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UAW Strikes Cause 'Ripple Effect' Impacting 2,100 Workers Across GM Plants - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - The United Auto Workers (UAW) strikes at General Motors (GM) plants are currently impacting more than 2,100 employees across four US states, GM spokesperson Kevin Kelly told Sputnik.

"Overall, the ripple effects due to the UAW leadership's targeted strikes at GM's Wentzville and Lansing Delta Township Assembly plants are currently impacting five additional GM plants across four states and more than 2,100 team members," Kelly said on Thursday.

The impacted areas include the Marion Metal Center in Indiana (34 workers); Parma Metal Center in Ohio (130 workers); Fairfax Assembly in Kansas (1,585 workers); Lockport Components in New York (48 workers); and Toledo Propulsion in Ohio (358 workers).

Kelly said GM has repeatedly said no one would win in a strike because the repercussions extend far beyond employees and are adversely affecting customers, suppliers and communities.

"We will continue to bargain in good faith with the union to reach an agreement as quickly as possible," Kelly said.

Approximately 19,000 American automotive employees at different facilities of Ford, General Motors and Stellantis have engaged in strikes following unsuccessful negotiations for a 46% salary increase and a 32-hour working week, among other demands.

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Hotels Cancel Bookings for US Army-Navy Football Game to Accommodate Migrants - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - Hotels in the US state of Massachusetts canceled reservations for veterans seeking to attend the Army-Navy football game in December in order

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to accommodate an influx of migrants, CBS News reported on Thursday.

Three hotels run by Giri Hotel Management canceled reservations for the game in order to lease out the rooms to the state of Massachusetts to house migrants, the report said, citing travel agent Mark Mansbach.

At least 70 of the agent's clients had reservations impacted by the company's decision to continue the lease with the state, the report said. Massachusetts maintains a "right to shelter" law that guarantees housing to homeless families and pregnant women.

A spokesperson for Giri Hotel Management reportedly said that the company is working with the government to house migrants as a gesture of solidarity and humanitarian responsibility.

However, Mansbach said that he has never before had hotels cancel reservations without receiving any form of compensation.

Massachusetts Governor Maura Healey said that she was distressed to hear that veterans may have had their reservations canceled and directed the Office of Veteran Services to investigate the situation.

The Army-Navy game, in which teams representing the two services' military academies face off, is scheduled for December 9th at Gillette Stadium in Foxborough. The event marks the first time the Army-Navy game has been held in New England in its 124-year series.

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US Saw Huge Increase in Child Death Rate From Firearms Between 2011-2021 - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - Firearms were the number one cause of death among children under 18 in the United States in 2021, while fatal car accidents involving children fell nearly by half, the New York Times reported on Thursday, citing analysis published by the journal Pediatrics.

The number of gun deaths among children under 18 in the United States has increased by 87% during the decade studied with some 2,590 children and teenagers who died from firearms injuries in 2021 alone, up from 1,311 in 2021, the report said.

Firearm injuries are also now a leading cause of death for Americans under 20 if deaths of premature infants are excluded, the report said.

In addition to the increase in child deaths from firearms, there has also been a double increase in drug poisoning in children under 18 and a 12.5% increase in suffocations, the report added.

At the same time, the rate of nonfatal injuries dropped by more than half between 2011 and 2021 - from 11,592 per 100,000 to 5.359 per 100,000, while the rate of fatal injuries surged from 14.07 to 17.3 per 100,000, according to the report.

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Musk Says Use of Starship on Earth Can be 'Economically Viable'

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - Elon Musk believes that use of Starship on Earth can be economically profitable and it will allow people to travel from Los Angeles to Sydney in 20 minutes.

"If you can land on the Moon and Mars, then you could technically use Starship as a mode of transportation on Earth. And I think it has a shot at being economically viable," Musk told the room at the International Astronautical Congress (IAC) on Thursday. "You could go from Los Angeles to Sydney in about 20 minutes, against 14 hours with an airline."

You will not need any pilots or bathrooms, he added. The public in the auditorium reacted with great enthusiasm.

Elon Musk continued by saying that the traveler could have "breakfast in LA, lunch in London, supper in Singapore and be back in time for bed in LA."

Elon Musk and SpaceX are now awaiting their next Sharship test flight. However, SpaceX is pending a license from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). The US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) must finish up their review of the impact the Starship has on the surrounding environment.

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White House Will Adjust Ukraine Aid Approach Based on New US House Speaker - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - The White House will adjust its approach to securing aid for Ukraine based on whom the House of Representatives elects to serve as its next speaker, The Washington Post reported on Thursday.

The Biden administration has not yet determined a new strategy to secure aid for Ukraine from Congress, following the House of Representatives' historic decision to oust Congressman Kevin McCarthy as speaker, the report said, citing a senior administration official.

The new approach will depend on who becomes speaker, and could take the form of either a large package to cover most of 2024, or a smaller package to cover short-term needs, the report said.

The White House is no longer pursuing the $24 billion for Ukraine aid included as part of a supplemental funding request, the report added.

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US August Trade Deficit at Below $60Bln, Lowest Since Pandemic - Commerce Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - The US trade deficit fell to below $60 billion for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic, according to Commerce Department data on Thursday.

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"The goods and services deficit was $58.3 billion in August, down $6.4 billion from $64.7 billion in July, revised," the Bureau of Economic Analysis, a unit within the Commerce Department, said in a news release.

Economists hailed the number, saying this could result in a much-higher-than-forecast GDP growth for 2023.

"This is [the] best reading since the pandemic and indicates that the strong dollar isn't a problem for trade," economist Adam Button wrote on the ForexLive platform. "That's bullish and will lead to upward revisions to Q3 [third quarter] GDP estimates."

The US dollar has risen since the end of July to a 11-month high this week.

While GDP growth for the second quarter officially came in at just 2.1%, expectations are growing that the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, a regional wing of the US central bank, could cite as much as 5% growth for the third quarter from its previous projection of 4.9%.

"What's more is that a high number is getting increasingly easy to believe," Button said.

The trade deficit was a result of a 1.6% month-on-month growth in exports in August, to $256 billion. Imports, meanwhile, shrank by 0.7% to $314.3 billion.

Of the actual $4.1 billion increase in exports, nearly 40% came from one source alone: crude oil. Of the $2.3 billion drop in imports, the largest component was made up of cell phones and other household goods that accounted for $1.5 billion.

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State Dept on Post-New START Treaty: There Is Always Hope, But Talks Challenging Now

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - US Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security Bonnie Jenkins said on Thursday there is always hope that a successor treaty to New START will be negotiated with Russia, but such talks would be "very challenging" amid the Ukraine conflict.

"There is always hope," Jenkins said, when asked whether there is hope of getting Russia to the table to negotiate what happens after 2026.

"Right now, obviously, with the war in Ukraine, sitting down to discuss the future of the START after 2026 is very challenging, but we have been very clear... that we are willing to sit down and talk about nuclear issues," she added.

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US Congressman Says 'Fiscal Insanity' Must End After US Govt. Spends $3.3Bln on Furniture

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Matt Rosendale said on Thursday that the United States must end its fiscal insanity, after it was revealed that the federal government spent $3.3 billion on new furniture from 2020 to 2022.

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The US government spent millions on new and "trendy" furniture, hundreds of thousands to improve empty conference rooms and hundreds of thousands more on solar-powered picnic tables, Rosendale said in a statement via social media platform X, citing US media reports.

Overall, federal agencies spent $3.3 billion on office furniture between 2020 and 2022, despite office capacities being reduced by the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the reports.

"And we wonder why we are $33 trillion in debt? [mind-blown emoji] This fiscal insanity must end! And the only way to do that is to utilize the 12 appropriations bills and go line-by-line to cut wasteful spending," Rosendale said in the statement.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention spent $237,960 on solar-powered picnic tables, the State Department spent $117,250 on dozens of luxury leather recliners, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency and Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency spent more than $200,000 each to renovate conference rooms, the New York Post reported, citing an exclusive watchdog analysis.

However, a Government Accountability Office analysis also found that 17 of 24 federal agencies are using just 9%-49% of their office space even four years after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

US agencies spent more than $1 billion annually on furniture, which is consistent with pre-pandemic spending despite the decline in government personnel working from offices.

The US Congress is seeking to pass a series of appropriations bills before November 17 to fund the federal government and avoid a shutdown, although the House of Representatives cannot conduct normal legislative business until it selects a new speaker.

Rosendale, who was one of eight Republicans who voted alongside Democrats to oust Congressman Kevin McCarthy as speaker, has called for an immediate resumption of business in the House of Representatives to resume work on appropriations bills.

House lawmakers are set to adjourn until next week while the two conferences consult on speaker elections. The House of Representatives should stay in session until a speaker is selected and a spending plan is passed, Rosendale and three other House Republicans said in a letter to Speaker Pro Tempore Patrick McHenry on Wednesday.

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World Bank Revises Upward Growth Forecast for Europe, Central Asia to 2.4% in 2023

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - The World Bank on Thursday revised upward its economic growth forecast for the countries in Europe and Central Asia by 1% to 2.4% in 2023.

"Economic expansion in ECA [Europe and Central Asia] is projected to strengthen to 2.4% in 2023 from the 1.4% projected in June, reflecting largely better growth in Russia because of a surge in government spending on the military and social transfers, and consumer resiliency and reduced policy uncertainty in Turkey," the World Bank said in a report.

However, the World Bank warned in the report that growth is projected to remain weak relative to the long-term pre-pandemic average.

"The divergence within the region has widened as growth projections were left unchanged or

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downgraded for about half of the ECA countries," the report said.
For the period 2024-2025, the World Bank forecast the economic growth to stand at 2.6% per year. High inflation, weak economic results in the European Union and tighter financial conditions are the major causes to impact the situation, the report said.
Ukraine's economy is likely to grow by 3.5% this year after contracting 29.1% in 2022 amid Russia's special military operation, the report said.
World Bank Vice President for the Europe and Central Asia region Antonella Bassani said shocks from the conflict in Ukraine, a cost-of-living crisis and climate risks are creating serious challenges to the region.
"A new approach will be necessary for countries to revive productivity growth, achieve better economic and social outcomes, improve resilience and accelerate efforts to decarbonize the economy," Bassani added.

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International Community Should Develop Common Rules for Fair Cyberspace- Chinese Official

UNITED NATIONS, October 5 (Sputnik) - China would like to foster a more equitable cyberspace but in order to do that, the international community has to develop common rules and interoperable data, the Chinese Director General of the Department of Arms Control Sun Xiaobo said on Thursday.
"We should develop common rules, interoperable data and the supply chain security to foster cyberspace that is more equitable, fair, open …," Xiaobo told the First Committee members.
The Chinese representative also mentioned that the current negative political atmosphere of 'absolute Cold War mentality' and 'zero sum game' undermines the stability of the world.
Furthermore, Xiaobo spoke about the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), being the right solution to the Iranian issue. The United States should actively respond to Iran's issues, he added.

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US Wants Sustained Military-to-Military Dialogue with China - Pentagon

(Adds details in paras 3-5)
WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - The United States wants sustained military-to-military communication with China after the past year of episodic interactions, the Pentagon said Thursday.
"We have seen the PRC demonstrate a concerning lack of interest in maintaining open lines of military-to-military communication where our defense and military officials can discuss their concerns," Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Ely Ratner said at an

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event hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies.
He added that military-to-military communications between the Pentagon and its counterparts in Beijing have been "largely turned off over the last year" in spite of what he characterized as "episodic interactions."
Ratner said that such "fits and starts" were "not a substitute" for sustained dialogue and communications.
He warned that in the event of the crisis, the US and China lacked the habits, relationships, and channels to communicate within a tight timeframe.

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"We have seen the PRC demonstrate a concerning lack of interest in maintaining open lines of military-to-military communication where our defense and military officials can discuss their concerns," Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Ely Ratner said at an event hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

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US Concerned About China's Lack of Transparency Over Nuclear Buildup - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) – The United States is concerned about China's "lack of transparency" over its alleged rapid buildup of nuclear weapons, the Pentagon said Thursday.
"We are watching very carefully what is a rapid, unprecedented military buildup of nuclear weapons in China and we are concerned about the lack of transparency about its intentions," Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Ely Ratner said at an event hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies
The US wants sustained military-to-military dialogue and communication with China, not episodic interactions, the official stated.

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World Bank Revises Upward Russia's 2023 GDP Growth by 1.8% to 1.6% - Report

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WASHINGTON, October 5 (Sputnik) - The World Bank said on Thursday that it has revised upward its forecast for Russia's GDP growth in 2023 by 1.8% to 1.6%.

"Russia's GDP is expected to grow by 1.6% in 2023 because of resilient consumption and a surge in government spending on the military and social transfers," the World Bank said in its updated report on Europe and Central Asia.

The World Bank pointed out in the report that the Russian energy sector contracted less than it was anticipated earlier.

However, the World Bank said it expects Russia's growth to remain relatively weak in the near future and the country's economy to add 1.1% per year on average between 2024 and 2025.

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