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10/11/23 Wednesday

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Holocaust Comparisons Seek to 'Exceptionalize' Hamas Violence, Not Contextualize It

In the 75 years since Israel was founded in 1948 there have been numerous civilian massacres by both Israelis and Palestinians - a context that has been erased in recent reporting on the killings of hundreds of Jewish civilians in towns on the Gaza border, a Jewish peace activist told Sputnik.

At least 260 bodies have been discovered at the site of the Supernova music festival near Sderot, an Israeli town on the border with Gaza that came under attack on Saturday after Hamas militants breached the border fence and poured into the Israeli countryside.

Between Sderot, several other towns that were attacked, and the massive barrage of rocket strikes on Israeli cities across the region, more than 1,000 Israelis have been killed by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, another militant group in Gaza.

The massacre at Supernova was widely reported as the deadliest single day for Jewish civilians since the Holocaust, when the Nazis systematically exterminated roughly 6 million European Jews - two-thirds of the continent's Jewish population.

The assault, dubbed Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, came after months of increased violent confrontations between Israelis and Palestinians in Jerusalem and the West Bank, including at the Temple Mount where the Al-Aqsa mosque is located.

Israel has responded by declaring a "complete siege" of the Gaza Strip, severing all electricity, water, and fuel connections to the densely populated territory, and mounting a relentless bombing campaign that has killed more than 1,100 in Gaza.

Ariel Gold, executive director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a multi-faith peace group, told Radio Sputnik's Political Misfits on Wednesday that comparisons to the Holocaust were inappropriate and designed to "exceptionalize" the massacre, which is just one event in a conflict that has been replete with mass civilian deaths.

"I think that multiple things can be true at once. I know it's a gut punch to me. As you said, [I] lost a lot of family members to the Holocaust, that this was the largest single-day loss [of Jewish lives] since then. So that, I think, speaks to Jewish pain, which is very real right now, including Jewish-American pain. That said, the references, as though there is a comparison about the circumstances, I think has to be really carefully not done, and I think when we do talk about that death toll, we have to frame it within Jewish pain, which is a very real thing."

"At the same time, I've heard Hamas compared to - 'they're just like the Nazis, they are the Nazis' - as well as compared to ISIS*. And I think those not only dehumanize Palestinians and distract from the current situation, which is very real, on the ground, but also take away from that Jewish pain, which is about loss of life."

"That doesn't have to do with the call for justice and the root causes of this conflict. Instead, it means that revenge is something that nobody benefits from, and in terms of Jewish safety, revenge makes the Jewish people far less safe - specifically the Israeli people. I mean, what is

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

occurring right now, and what is about to escalate, we can only acknowledge as genocide against the people of Gaza, will not make anybody between the [Jordan] river and the [Mediterranean] sea, including Israelis, any safer and it will not advance peace in the region in any way, shape, or form."

"So if we're to care about Jewish pain and Jewish safety, then we have to act in the interests of that, which are in the interest of all people, which means pursuing justice and equality, freedom and dignity, for Palestinians," Gold said.

Addressing the cycle of made-then-disproven claims in the media over the past few days about the killings in Israeli border towns, Gold asked: "Isn't the reality horrific enough? I mean, the atrocities are bad enough, why do people have to make stuff up?"

"I think there's a real attempt to exceptionalize the violence committed by the Hamas militants. And the reality is atrocities like that are most mundane - as Hannah Arendt said, the 'banality of evil' - and certainly has nothing to do with one's religion, ethnicity, nationality. We know very well - including Israeli soldiers, including during the Nakba, look at Sabra and Shatila, look at ordinary Germans in the Holocaust - all people are capable of committing atrocities. And there is nothing exceptional about that. Rather, it's a horrific human condition" that she noted in this instance was set in motion by "such loss of hope, such despair."

Asked about potential models for reconciliation, Gold noted that peace could only come through complete social and legal equality and coming to terms with the crimes of the past. Unfortunately, such developments seem increasingly far away in the region.

"The first thing we need is a ceasefire, the obvious first thing we need is to stop the killing. We need the ceasefire. And then we need to begin with exactly what [US President] Joe Biden did not say yesterday," she said, recalling Biden's use of the phrase "rules-based international order."

"You have to note when he says that that he's avoiding international law, because 'rules order' when he speaks of it is whatever he wants it to be. It's whatever the US wants to do in Afghanistan; it's whatever Israel wants to do, the genocide they want to commit in Gaza; whereas international law has boundaries, there are actually rules of war. I myself am a pacifist, my organization, we are pacifists, but there are, so we can begin there. And then there really needs to be a truth and reconciliation commission. We need to get the injustice, the past injustice [out in the open]. And it's very simple: we need equal rights and dignity and humanity for all people from the river to the sea."

However, she noted that the opposite trend was happening in Israel.

"What we have seen over the past decade is really the decimation of the Israeli peace movement and the Israeli left, and we have watched Israeli society embrace far-right, very racist ideology. That's how Israel ended up with this far-right, extremist coalition that has Kahanists in it. So I certainly think we're going to see gelling like post-9/11, but that isn't anything new there. In this case, they've now moved from the coalition government to the unity government by bringing Benny Gantz in. But it's not like Benny Gantz, prior to this, was reasonable. Prior to this, when Benny Gantz ran for prime minister, he bragged about bombing Gaza back to the stone age when he was in charge of the military. So I don't think you can really make the 9/11 comparison because we're looking at a society that is already suffering from that," she explained.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

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Meeting Notes Reveal US Federal Reserve Sees 'One or More' Rate Hikes as Necessary

The Federal Reserve is likely to raise interest rates at least one more time before bringing them back down, which will only come after the central bank feels inflation is returning to the 2% benchmark it expects, according to notes from the Open Market Committee's September meeting.

"A majority of participants judged that one more increase in the target federal funds rate at a future meeting would likely be appropriate, while some judged it likely that no further increases would be warranted," reads the meeting minutes, which were released to the public on Wednesday.

That said, the document notes all members of the FOMC, which sets the effective federal funds rate or interest rate, agreed that they should "proceed carefully" with any future moves, which must be based on new data rather than a pre-programmed path.

The minutes also noted the entire committee agreed "that policy should remain restrictive for some time until the Committee is confident that inflation is moving down sustainably toward its objective."

The Fed most recently raised interest rates in July, setting them at 5.25%, their highest in 22 years, ending a march upward that began in early 2022 in an effort to clamp down on record-high inflation. Even though aggregate inflation has slightly increased in the months since, the Fed has declined to raise rates again, including at the September meeting for which the minutes were released.

Still, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell noted at the time that there was "a long way to go" before inflation returned to 2% and that it was likely there would be another 25-point rate hike by the end of the year.

Fears that inflation could continue to rise were again sparked on Wednesday after the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) released its latest producer price index (PPI) report, which reported the costs for finished goods paid by producers increased more than expected. Like the past few months, the aggregate numbers were given a powerful boost by higher fuel prices.

Still, investors are betting against the Fed raising rates again, with the CME Fedwatch Tool giving a one-in-four chance of another rate hike before January 2024.

"If financial conditions are tightening independent of expectations for monetary policy" then "that will reduce economic activity," Michael Feroli, the chief US economist at JP Morgan, the nation's largest bank, told US media. "Things change, you change your forecast."

Part of the reason may also be market trends, such as the 10-year US Treasury bond hitting a 16-year high, a consequence of a flood of bonds hitting the market after the Treasury was forced to deplete its cash in order to avoid a default during the debt ceiling crisis earlier this year.

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Americans 'Thirsty' for Independent Candidates, But Kennedy Faces Big Challenges to Ballot Access

The campaign of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. has the potential to invigorate many disaffected voters, especially on the right, but steep restrictions on ballot access created by the two main US parties could make it impossible for him to win, political analysts told Sputnik.

On Tuesday, environmental lawyer Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. announced he was leaving the Democratic presidential primary race and launching an independent campaign for the US presidency in the November 2024 elections. Kennedy had been polling a distant second place in the Democratic race, with most liberal voters opting for the incumbent, US President Joe Biden.

"We declare independence from the cynical elites who betray our hope and who amplify our divisions," Kennedy said at an event in Philadelphia. "And finally, we declare independence from the two political parties."

Kennedy is the second high-profile candidate to announce an Independent race after progressive academic and public intellectual Cornel West said last week he was leaving the Green Party's ticket to launch a separate bid. Other independent candidates have also thrown their hat in the ring recently, including Claudia de la Cruz of the Party for Socialism and Liberation, a small communist party that in 2020 secured the most votes of any socialist candidate since the 1970s.

However, upon the announcement, Kennedy's family, a powerful one in US politics, issued a joint statement denouncing him as "perilous for our country."

Ryan Cristian, the founder and editor of The Last American Vagabond and a recipient of the Sabrina Shim Awards for uncompromising integrity in journalism, told Sputnik that RFK Jr.'s campaign was likely to invigorate many voters who feel unseen in the two-party presidential races, but that institutional structures would make it difficult for him to become a real threat to the Democratic or Republican candidates.

Despite Kennedy now being bereft of the massive Democratic National Committee funding apparatus, Cristian said he felt like the candidate "has a shot" at winning as an independent candidate, too.

"I mean, I have my criticism of RFK Jr. as well, but I think this is going to benefit him," he said. "I felt like he had a shot running as a Democrat. I feel like he has a shot. I mean, I feel like he had more of a shot if he would have started out running as an independent, quite frankly, I find it almost half-hearted to do so now. I understand the logic of it now, especially since the party seems to have bucked him from the beginning, but I think he kind of knew that going into it," Cristian said.

"Especially Democrats, I think, have been aware of what's been going on with the DNC for a long time. But my opinion is [that] all sides of the paradigm - the two-party illusion, as I would call it - but ultimately that an independent, I think is going to resonate more with most Americans," Cristian said. "One thing people don't fail to recognize in this country is that one of

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

the largest voting blocs that exists is people that don't even participate in the election. And then we have people that are voting, and of the people that participate - one of the largest parts in that are people that are independent. You know, we only ever get two sides of this conversation. So I think Americans have been thirsty for something like this for a long time."

While there are numerous smaller independent candidates in every presidential election, most tend to poll fairly low, with less than 2% of votes. However, in the 1990s, billionaire businessman Ross Perot ran in two elections as a third party candidate, netting 18.9% of the popular vote in 1996. Perot's campaign was largely self-financed - an option that RFK Jr. doesn't have, despite his family name.

"I would assume he probably has the resources to make something like that happen, but I'm not going to speak to inside information about what he might be able to do, I wouldn't know. But I think what you're ultimately asking is my point about why this will help him or not."

"I think there's two different ways to look at this: you have the side of it that is just people and the engagement of Americans. So that's what I'm ultimately talking about, is I, quite frankly, think aside from what will be weaponized against him, that most Americans want this kind of different perspective and are very aware of the game that's played of back-and-forth politics. That's my point: to most people who don't even want to participate because of how artificial it feels to most Americans, and there's polls all over the place that will make this clear. But the difference you're talking about - I agree, and it's a valid point - is that the system itself is set up in such a way that makes this [so] impossible. But I'm hoping that we can see something change."

"I mean, quite frankly, this is something that I've been worrying about, the third party idea being used against Americans in a way that might be surreptitious. But ultimately, I think that people are ready for it. And I argue that if it does work, it'll be largely because people inside the structure recognize a benefit to themselves politically or in creating a new dynamic to themselves going forward. They might lean into that. Otherwise, people that would have otherwise been invested in the classic structure... Because I think we all kind of feel that this thing is falling apart to a degree. But you make valid points. I argue that's probably one of the more likely situations: that this will be weaponized against him and he'll end up in a similar situation, and like Perot, people will probably argue he was used to remove votes from somebody else - which, I don't think that's what's happening, actually."

Cristian said it was "hard to say" which major party was more concerned about the threat Kennedy now poses with an independent campaign.

"I think that at the moment, I think it's clear he has much more support from the right, and I think that probably threatens them. But I think even his own statements - he says they're both right, he's going to go after both sides' votes, right? And I think they're both concerned about it because - again, same point - people are interested in something different. That's why [in 2016] Trump resonated with a lot of people, because as much as I don't think it was necessarily honest, he came out and said what people wanted to hear in a different way. It wasn't the politician kind of an argument, right? So I think that right now both of them are very concerned that at the very least, he'll pull away some of their votes, which will then affect whether or not they can be elected. But if I had to pick, I would say probably the right, because I do think he aligns much more with the 'medical freedom' side that's much more on the right of this conversation."

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

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An IPSOS poll published last week found that in a hypothetical three-way race between Biden, Trump, and Kennedy, RFK Jr. would get 14% of the vote, while Biden would take 31%, and Trump 33%. However, if Kennedy were removed, Biden and Trump would each get 35%, with 11% saying they would vote for some third-party candidate.

Political activist, organizer, and radio host Misty Winston told Sputnikthat a major factor in Kennedy's success would likely be the fate of former US President Donald Trump, the GOP pack leader and presumed nominee who is facing dozens of felony charges in four separate court cases.

"I feel like there's a couple variables that go into that equation, because I feel like if the GOP does, in fact, nominate Donald Trump - listen, Trump supporters are incredibly loyal, they're not going anywhere, they're going to stick with Trump. However, if Trump is not, for whatever reason, the nominee - if he's in jail, if he's, you know, for whatever whatever reason, he is not the GOP nominee - I think that that could switch things a little bit," she explained. "So I think if Trump is the nominee, I think definitely Kennedy is going to hurt Democrats more. I think that if [Trump] is not the nominee, I think [Kennedy] is going to hurt the GOP more."

"Listen, if you look at polling, he has, generally speaking, more support from Republicans. However, I think that that support isn't going to go very far if Trump is the nominee - because, again, Trump supporters are very loyal," Winston told Sputnik. "I think a lot of Republicans would rather vote for Kennedy than they would for [Florida Governor Ron] DeSantis or [former Vice President] Mike Pence or [former UN Ambassador] Nikki Haley or any of the other characters from the clown car on the GOP side."

"I don't think he's going to hurt either one bad enough to where it's going to make any significant difference. I think that all of this is a lot of pearl-clutching over nothing," she pointed out. "He's going to be very lucky to even get ballot access. I mean, it's going to be a mountain to climb just to get ballot access. So I think that this is a lot of, you know, much ado about nothing. And the same with Cornel West."

"Now that Cornel West is running as an independent - which, I still don't understand that decision. He went from a party that at least has like 30 states' ballot access to zero. And it is really difficult to get ballot access in all 50 states. It is an incredibly difficult task. It costs a lot of money, you've got to get a lot of signatures, it is ridiculous. So, Kennedy's not going to be on all 50 ballots, Cornel West is not going to be on all 50 ballots. Will they be on enough ballots to make an impact in certain states? Maybe. But I just don't think that it's going to be all that significant."

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Who is Steve Scalise, Lawmaker Nominated by GOP to Serve as Next House Speaker?

US House Republicans want to avoid a repeat of the chaotic process that formerly made Kevin McCarthy speaker earlier this year, but a congressional source told Sputnik that Scalise likely still lacks sufficient support within his party.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

House Republicans selected Rep. Steve Scalise (R-LA) to be the party's nominee for speaker of the House of Representatives on Wednesday in a secret ballot that saw the lower chamber's majority leader win the vote of 113 of 221 party members.

At present, a floor vote for the entire House of Representatives remains unscheduled. Scalise will need to win the votes of 217 House representatives to become speaker if all members of the body are present. All members of the minority Democratic Party are expected to vote for Rep. Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY), meaning Scalise will need to increase his margin of support among Republicans to clinch a victory.

A source within Congress has told Sputnik they believe a full vote of the House will be delayed, saying they "don't know that Scalise has the votes to bring it to the floor." This echoes earlier sentiments expressed by Capitol Hill insiders speculating he still lacks enough support from his colleagues to win a full confirmation vote.

As House members work to fill the leadership void left after Rep. Kevin McCarthy's (R-CA) dismissal just over a week ago, here's what you need to know about Republicans' current nominee for the speakership.

Bayou-Style Politics

Scalise is a Southerner representing Louisiana's First Congressional District. The southernmost congressional district in the state, it's also the most Republican. The Cook Political Report gives Republicans a typical advantage of about 23% in the district, making it more Republican than the district represented by McCarthy and one of the most heavily-Republican House districts in the country.

The district covers Republican-leaning suburbs of New Orleans and a small portion of the city, as well as the cities of Slidell and Houma. The district was redrawn in the 1970s to ensure Louisiana complied with the Voting Rights Act, a Civil Rights bill passed to ensure states with a history of racial discrimination provided congressional representation to African Americans and other racial minorities on par with their statewide population.

Scalise has represented the district since 2008 and last won reelection in 2022 with more than 70% of the vote. He has never received less than 65% of the vote during his time in the House, meaning his continued reelection is all but assured. Parties in the US Congress often prefer to choose figures with high popularity in their districts for top positions to avoid the embarrassment of a member of leadership being removed by voters.

Social and Economic Conservatism

Scalise is a strong conservative in line with the majority right-wing tilt of the Southern United States.

He is a Roman Catholic and holds traditionalist views on social issues, opposing marijuana legalization and gay marriage. He also rejects environmental regulation and the premise of anthropogenic climate change.

The Louisiana lawmaker is an opponent of US President Barack Obama's signature Affordable Care Act health care legislation. He is a strong supporter of the Second Amendment and rejects gun control efforts, earning an A+ rating from the National Rifle Association. Scalise remained steadfast in his support for gun rights even after being shot by a political extremist at a congressional baseball game in 2017.

Scalise's conservative views extend to economic issues as well. Rep. Tim Burchett (R-TN), one of the Republicans who voted to oust McCarthy, signaled his support for Scalise, saying, "He

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

understands fiscal conservatism. He has a track record of handling tough legislation in the past, and I think that's going to serve him very well."

Scalise provoked controversy almost a decade ago when it was revealed that in 2002 he spoke at a convention of the European-American Unity and Rights Organization, a white supremacist-aligned group founded by former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke. Scalise claimed at the time that he was unaware of the group's views and said speaking at the event was "a mistake I regret, and I emphatically oppose the divisive racial and religious views groups like these hold."

Strong Trump Ally

In regards to former US President Donald Trump, Scalise has come out as a strong supporter of the former commander-in-chief and has thrown his backing for Trump's 2024 reelection bid.

In 2017, Scalise backed Trump's so-called "Muslim ban" executive order that barred citizens of seven majority Muslim countries from traveling to the United States. "It's very prudent to say, 'Let's be careful about who comes into our country to make sure that they're not terrorists,'" Scalise then remarked.

Scalise supported Trump's challenge of the 2020 presidential election results, voting in the House to decertify then President-elect Joe Biden's wins in Pennsylvania and Arizona. He then backed Trump's legal efforts to challenge the results and voted against certification of the final Electoral College tally.

Crucially, although Scalise criticized the riots at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, he's never broken from Trump and his claims of election fraud. Scalise continues to maintain that Trump won the 2020 presidential election. McCarthy had claimed Trump's conduct on January 6 was "atrocious and totally wrong," although he later made amends with the former president.

Scalise's unwavering defense of Trump may shore up his support among populist elements within the House Republican Party, although it could ultimately make it more difficult to work across the aisle with Democrats in the chamber.

Perilous Times Ahead?

The vote among House Republicans to nominate Scalise for the speakership proved close: Scalise received 113 votes while his main challenger for the position Rep. Jim Jordan (R-OH) received 99.

Scalise may be seen as a compromise candidate for the speakership in contrast to the establishment-aligned McCarthy and Jordan, the founder of the conservative House Freedom Caucus.

The speaker nominee is currently serving as House majority leader, making him second in command in the chamber and suggesting a high degree of support from establishment elements in the party. Meanwhile, his allyship with Trump boosts his populist credentials.

The lawmaker has so far won the support of a few key House Republicans, including McCarthy. Jordan has also stated his support for Scalise as a consensus pick, planning to offer the nominating speech for him on the House floor when Republicans decide to bring a vote to the full body.

Among the eight Republicans who previously voted to oust McCarthy, Scalise so far has the support of Reps. Tim Burchett (R-TN) and Matt Gaetz (R-FL), who initiated the historic removal effort against McCarthy.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

“I’m excited for [Scalise],” said Gaetz to reporters on Wednesday. “I can’t wait to go vote for Steve Scalise. Long live Speaker Scalise.”



US Representative Matt Gaetz (R-FL) speaks to the press outside the US Capitol after voting in the House in Washington, DC on September 29, 2023.
© AFP 2023 / ANDREW CABALLERO-REYNOLDS

McCarthy opponent Rep. Bob Good (R-VA) has stated he is undecided about whether he will vote for Scalise, calling him a “status quo” candidate for the speaker position.

"It’s hard to envision that he will be a change agent,” said Good. “I think the country recognizes the Congress needs to be changed.”

White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre responded to the drama on Wednesday, saying “we want to see the chaos be done with” so that the Biden administration can once again work with Congress to pass legislation.

Although the lower congressional chamber is currently functioning under an unelected speaker pro tempore - Rep. Patrick McHenry (R-NC), House rules dictate the acting leader can only hold proceedings on matters directly related to the election of a new speaker.

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Biden Officially Enters 2024 Race With Nevada Primary Bid

Biden formally entered the 2024 presidential race on Wednesday with his application to appear on Nevada's Democratic primary ballot, but a new poll shows the swing state may be turning a redder shade of purple.

US President Joe Biden filed paperwork on Wednesday to appear on Nevada's Democratic Party primary ballot next year, making official his candidacy in the 2024 US presidential election.

The Democratic Party holds 57 nominating contests to choose its candidate for president every four years: one for each state plus contests in Washington, DC, five US territories, and a poll of Democrats living abroad. Nevada's October 16 filing deadline is the first of the 57 contests.

Although some have questioned the wisdom of Biden's candidacy at the age of 80, he has faced little formal challenge within his party. Robert F Kennedy Jr., perhaps the biggest potential threat to Biden's re-nomination, announced he would run as an independent earlier this week after polling at only around 15% support within the Democratic Party. Author Marianne Williamson, who is running as a Democrat, has typically polled at 10% or less.

The Democratic Party hasn't seen a major internal challenge to a sitting president since Ted Kennedy's abortive run against Jimmy Carter in 1980.

The Democratic Party's 2024 primary calendar currently remains unsettled. Party leaders, with the urging of Biden, have sought to move South Carolina to the leadoff spot after the president's primary win in the Palmetto State in 2020 put him on the path to clinch the nomination.

However, officials have insisted a law on the books in New Hampshire requires the New England state to vote before any other. Democrats will presumably be looking to resolve the impasse before the state's October 27 filing deadline; otherwise Biden could skip the contest, making it irrelevant.

Meanwhile, new general election polling from Nevada shows a tight race in the Silver State with Biden and former US President Donald Trump at 46% and 45% support, respectively. Some 7% of voters polled said they were undecided.

Nevada is traditionally a swing state; Democrats have won it in every election since 2008, but with increasingly narrow margins each time. In 2020, the vote count in the state appeared to be headed towards a contentious, drawn-out process as in neighboring Arizona before Biden ultimately won with 50.1% of the vote.

In a potentially ominous sign for Biden's performance next year, 55% of Biden supporters in Nevada said they were backing him primarily in order to beat Trump. Only 44% of Biden's supporters claimed they were motivated mainly by support of the candidate himself. Sixty-three percent of Trump backers in the poll said they would vote for Trump out of love for the former president.

Trump stomped his Republican primary opponents in the poll, leading his closest rival Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis 65%-13%. No other Republican candidate registered above mid single-digit support.

Fifty-five percent of likely Republican voters polled said the economy was the main issue driving their support for their preferred candidate in their party's primary. Some 19% said they were motivated primarily by the issue of immigration, while 11% claimed they most cared about "voting rights and election integrity."

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Political Warfare - Cartoon

Fighting rages on in Gaza, as well as Washington.
The attack came by surprise: quick, sudden, deadly. The assailant moved with stealth, sizing up his victim, waiting for just the right moment. By the time the plot was discovered, it was far too late. Such was the political decapitation last week of the House Republican leadership by Florida Representative Matt Gaetz.
After the recent launch of impeachment hearings against President Joe Biden, House Freedom Caucus members set their sights within their own Republican Party. Now, former Speaker Kevin McCarthy is licking his wounds, and Republicans are struggling to choose a new leader, with renewed commitment to their political base.
No one seems to know for sure what the consequences will be. Establishment figures denounced the move and the disruption that ensued. But with Congress' approval rating standing at around 19%, does Gaetz have anything to lose by attacking political institutions?
On some issues, it appears there is more lively debate within the Republican Party than among Democrats, at least if discourse around funding for Ukraine is any indication. Events may play to Republicans' favor if the party is seen as more dynamic, more anti-establishment, less reverent of sacred cows.
One such shibboleth was on display this week as politicians from both parties rushed to express America's undying support for Israel in the shadow of Hamas' attack. So far, the question is not over whether to send aid to the Middle Eastern ally, but how much. House members suggested they may even send it before resolving the leadership question.
As the old saying goes, "politics stops at the water's edge," and America's foreign policy habits die hard. While the fight for the speakership rages on, bipartisan support for Israel remains sacrosanct.

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Apocalyptic Scenes Unfold in Argentina's Córdoba Province as Wildfires Rage

An ongoing heat wave worsened massive forest fires that prompted evacuations Wednesday in the central Argentine province home to wineries and the country's second-most populous city.
Argentina's Córdoba province is known for its picturesque foothills and vast plains, but on Wednesday portions of the region were engulfed in massive wildfires.
Córdoba Governor Juan Schiaretti took to social media to urge people in affected areas to heed evacuation orders.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

“I call on the population to respect the indications of the firefighters and authorities who are working in the affected areas,” said Schiaretti. “The most important thing is to save lives, wherever evacuation is necessary, it will be done.”
Dozens of people have fled their homes so far as the fires encroach on rural towns. The government said 960 firefighters had been dispatched to calm the flames from land and by air.
A 27-year-old man was arrested for starting a campfire that burned out of control on Monday near the city of Villa Carlos Paz. Authorities urged citizens to take preventative measures amid adverse weather, including high temperatures, dry conditions, and strong winds.
It had been reported by Argentina’s National Fire Management Service that there were five active wildfires in Córdoba on Tuesday, in the provincial departments of Santa María, Punilla, Totoral, Minas, and San Justo.
Wildfires also burned in the San Luis, La Pampa, Catamarca and Jujuy provinces.
South America has seen unseasonably warm temperatures as the continent experienced a heat wave last month while it was still technically winter in the Southern Hemisphere. Researchers attribute the unusual weather conditions to climate change.

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House Republicans Reveal Resolution to Expel 'Stain' George Santos From Congress

The scandal-plagued lawmaker has remained under the microscope for months, going back to late 2022 after US media first shined the light on findings that proved the New Yorker lied about various aspects of his résumé. In the months since, he has admitted to the fabrications and remained under investigation by multiple officials.
House Republicans are now taking decisive action to expel scandal-ridden US Rep. George Santos (R-NY), just one day after the freshman lawmaker was slapped with new federal charges related to identity theft, credit card fraud, conspiracy and wire fraud.
"Today, I'll be introducing an expulsion resolution to rid the People's House of [a] fraudster, George Santos," US Rep. Anthony D'Esposito (R-NY) wrote on social media on Wednesday.
The expulsion resolution is backed by several GOP members from the Empire State, including Reps. Nick LaLota, Mike Lawler, Marc Molinaro, Nick Langworthy and Brandon Williams.
Today, I’ll be introducing an expulsion resolution to rid the People’s House of fraudster, D’Esposito told reporters he considered Santos to be “a stain” on the House, as well as the state of New York.
“It’s time that we move on from George Santos,” said the Republican lawmaker, echoing similar statements by LaLota that the "sooner" Santos is out of Congress "the better."
LaLota earlier commented he saw Santos as “immoral" and “untrustworthy."
"I predict this resolution is going to catch fire," he said. "Many people feel how we do."
US Rep. Robert Garcia (D-CA) first introduced a resolution to expel Santos in early February; however, that measure lost steam as Republicans were reluctant to follow suit. In March, Santos managed to avoid trial with Brazilian prosecutors on a separate charge after he formally admitted to swindling a man out of $1,300 and agreed to pay restitution.

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But by May, then-House Speaker Kevin McCarthy said he would not seek a resignation from Santos, wary that the representative had not yet sat through trial, despite Santos facing a 13-count indictment. House Republicans then requested the House Ethics Committee to investigate Santos, which they have been doing since March.

Tuesday's charges, which allege Santos falsified campaign finance reports and used the personal information of donors for his financial benefit, now bring Santos' total counts to 23.

Article I, section 5 of the US Constitution dictates that any member of the House can be expelled with a vote by two-thirds of the chamber:

"Each House [of Congress] may determine the Rules of its proceedings, punish its members for disorderly behavior, and, with the concurrence of two-thirds, expel a member."

To date, only 15 members have been expelled from the US Senate since 1789, with 14 of those being persons who supported the Confederacy during the Civil War, chamber records reveal. Since that same period, just five members of the House have ever been expelled.

The most recent expulsion was in 2002, with the vote to expel being 420 - 1. House Democrat James A. Traficant from Ohio was expelled after being convicted by a federal jury in Cleveland on 10 counts of racketeering, bribery and tax evasion.

Santos has brushed off the fresh charges against him, adding that he would "fight to prove his innocence," and that he would not take a plea deal. He has vowed to run for reelection despite the new charges.

"If they want to be judge, jury and arbitrator of the whole god***n thing let them do it," Santos said, responding to the new Republican resolution. "They just want to silence the people of the 3rd congressional district."

Santos is due to appear in court on October 27.

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US Coast Guard Recovers New Debris, 'Presumed' Human Remains Linked to Titan Implosion

The Titan submersible experienced a disastrous implosion in June early on in its trip to see the wreckage of the Titanic, located some 13,000 feet below the surface of the Atlantic Ocean.

The US Coast Guard announced on Tuesday that officials recovered "additional presumed human remains," as well as remaining debris from the Titan submersible that imploded as it made its descent toward the Titanic in June.

The agency detailed that the human remains were "carefully recovered from within the debris" and later "transported for analysis by US medical professionals."

Officials added that its Marine Board of Investigation would coordinate with the US National Transportation Safety Board in order to review the recovered remains from the accident. Both agencies, as well as the Transportation Safety Board of Canada, have been working together to conduct the salvage operation.

The new traces of debris and human remains were initially found on October 4, more than three months after five passengers were killed in an implosion while on board the Titan, a 23,000-pound sub said to be about the size of a minivan.

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On June 18, the Titan plunged below the water to begin its voyage to see the Titanic wreckage, but about 1 hour and 45 minutes into the journey the crew lost contact with their mother ship, which was providing surface support about 900 nautical miles east of Cape Cod, Massachusetts.

Following a search-and-rescue mission, and a subsequent recovery mission, the Coast Guard found the sub's tail cone and other debris on the ocean floor, about 1,600 feet from the bow of the Titanic on June 22.

American businessman and engineer Stockton Rush, 61, was the founder of OceanGate Expeditions and the pilot of the Titan. Rush charged each passenger up to $250,000 for a ride that would ultimately end in their deaths, as well as his own. In 2018, a professional trade group had warned OceanGate that their experimental approach to the design of their sub could lead to potentially catastrophic outcomes.

The Coast Guard Marine's Board of Investigation (MBI) has been leading the investigation into the cause of the implosion alongside authorities from Canada, France and the United Kingdom. Investigators are expected to look for possible "misconduct, incompetence, negligence, unskillfulness or willful violation of law" by OceanGate.

A public hearing on the accident is also expected in the future.

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Chemists Make Exciting New Discovery About Leonardo's 'Mona Lisa'

Leonardo's enigmatic "Mona Lisa" painting has captivated even those unfamiliar to the art world for decades. Researchers have noted the treasured portrait depicts Madam Lisa Giocondo, the wife of a wealthy Florentine silk merchant from the early 1500s.

Groundbreaking research has offered new insights into the chemical structure of Leonardo da Vinci's famous "Mona Lisa" painting, revealing the Renaissance painter created his own unique formula for his oil paints.

Using x-rays, the researchers examined a small fragment taken from the painting that was no larger than the diameter of a strand of hair, and came from the top right edge of the painting. Then, using a synchrotron, they were able to accelerate the particles to the near speed of light, and analyzed the fragment's chemical composition at an atomic level.

"He was someone who loved to experiment, and each of his paintings is completely different technically," said Victor Gonzalez, the study's lead author and a chemist at France's national center for scientific research, the CNRS.

"In this case, it's interesting to see that indeed there is a specific technique for the ground layer of 'Mona Lisa,'" he said in an interview with the New York news agency.

The artist used an oil-paint recipe for the base layer of the world famous painting that differed from his other work. Using the rare compound plumbonacrite, Leonardo was able to thicken and dry his paint more quickly. The powder would be diluted in linseed or walnut oil by heating the mixture. Per Gonzalez, the color would be similar to honey in texture and color.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

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Historians long suspected the artist used the compound, which is a byproduct of lead oxide, for his work; however, it wasn't until now that scientists were able to confirm the find.
“Plumbonacrite is really a fingerprint of his recipe,” Gonzalez said. “It’s the first time we can actually chemically confirm it.”
Gonzalez further indicated that the compound was also found in the work of the Dutch Golden Age painter Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (Rembrandt), in a period which followed Leonardo’s time.
“There are plenty, plenty more things to discover, for sure. We are barely scratching the surface,” Gonzalez said. “What we are saying is just a little brick more in the knowledge.”
The findings were published on Wednesday in the Journal of the American Chemical Society.

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Documentarians Find Nearly Intact 128-Year-Old Shipwreck Below Lake Huron

The pair of filmmakers made the discovery while composing a documentary on the ecological damage caused by invasive freshwater mussels introduced to the Great Lakes region more than three decades ago.
Documentary filmmakers made a stunning discovery in June after uncovering the nearly intact remains of a 128-year-old vessel that met its end in the waters of Lake Huron in 1895, new findings have revealed.
Filmmakers Yvonne Drebert and Zach Melnick were investigating the effects of the invasive zeba and quagga mussels in the lakebed after a source from the United States Geological Survey told them scientists had detected something strange in sonar readings.
Using remotely operated vehicles, the team scanned the bed of Lake Huron - in an area just off the coast of Ontario's Bruce Peninsula - expecting to find nothing but a “pile of rocks,” Drebert said.
Instead, they discovered the Africa, an American cargo steamer that disappeared in 1895 during transit from Ashtabula, Ohio, to Owen Sound, Ontario. The Africa and all 11 members of its crew on board were lost following a snowstorm.
The ship was also towing a barge at the time, the Severn, which became disconnected during the storm. Severn ran aground, and its crew were saved, but the Africa's fate saw it laying at the bottom of the lake.
Sending their remote vehicles almost 280 feet (85.3 meters) below the surface of the water, the couple made the discovery as soon as they stumbled upon a “huge structure.”
Officials later determined the near-perfect intact ship was caked in the invasive mussels that were the subject of the couple's documentary. But while the mussels do damage shipwrecks, they also filter the lake’s waters, making it clearer and easier to find shipwrecks.
"There are so many quaggas filtering the Great Lakes, that the lakes are up to three times as clear as they were before the mussels," Drebert explained. "The quaggas are the reason we're able to see the shipwreck in almost 300 feet of water without any additional lights. But they're also responsible for making wreck identification in the Great Lakes incredibly difficult."

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

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Drebert's husband agreed with the irony of their discovery, noting the mussels inadvertently helped in the cultural discovery despite their adverse ecological effects.
"Before discovering the Africa, our work focused on the ecological impacts of the mussels – which have devastated fisheries around the lakes. We hadn't considered the effect they could have on our cultural heritage," said Melnick, adding that "the mussels have truly changed everything in the deep waters of the Great Lakes."
In March of this year, another shipwreck was discovered in Lake Huron, off the coast of Michigan. The cargo vessel, named the Ironton, had long eluded shipwreck hunters since it sank in September of 1894.

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US Consumer Prices Grow 3.7% on Year in September, Same Increase as in August

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - US inflation was higher than expected for a third month in a row as September consumer prices grew by an annual rate of 3.7%, the same as in August, and higher than the 3.6% forecast by Wall Street economists.
"The all items index increased 3.7 percent for the 12 months ending September, the same increase as the 12 months ending in August," the Labor Department said in a statement.
The latest reading of the Consumer Price Index suggests the Federal Reserve had stalled since July in its target to return inflation to 2% per annum, after making steady progress toward the target earlier this year.

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Blinken Says as Long as America Exists It Will Always be by Israel's Side

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken reaffirmed on Thursday that the United States will always be by Israel’s side as he arrived to Tel Aviv in show of support amid the escalating war with Hamas.
"The message that I bring to Israel is this: You may be strong enough on your own to defend yourself but as long as America exists, you will never ever have to, we will always be there by your side," Blinken said at a joint press conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Tel Aviv.
Israel has "the right, indeed an obligation to defend itself and to ensure that this will never happen again," the secretary reiterated.
The US is supplying ammunition and interceptors to replenish Israel’s Iron Dome, alongside other defense materiel. The first shipments of US military support have already arrived in Israel, and more is on the way, Blinken said.
The US also continues to work closely with Israel to secure the release of people taken hostage

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

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by Hamas, he stressed.
The US is pursuing intensive diplomacy throughout the region to prevent the conflict from spreading, Blinken said.

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Blinken Urges Every Possible Precaution to Avoid Harming Civilians in Israel-Hamas War

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Thursday stressed the importance of taking every precaution to avoid harming civilians during the ongoing hostilities between Israel and Hamas.
"It is so important to take every possible precaution to avoid harming civilians. That is why we mourn the loss of every innocent life, civilians of every faith, every nationality who've been killed," Blinken said at a joint press conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Tel Aviv.
The number of innocent lives claimed by "Hamas heinous attacks" continues to rise, Blinken said. Among those are at least 25 American citizens, he added.

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Russian Convents in Israel Continue Peaceful Life But Some People Nervous - Archimandrite

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - All Russian Orthodox convents in Israel continue their daily life peacefully, but ongoing fighting in Gaza has made many people nervous, Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem head Archimandrite Roman (Krassovsky) told Sputnik.
"Everything is peaceful pretty much in our monasteries, but the people that live there, nuns and monks, are anxious and alarmed, and we are hoping it will not turn into a full Intifada," Roman said.
When asked about the possible scenarios as to how the situation may develop, Roman said that this is the first time in 50 years that Israel's long-experienced security problem has worsened to such an extent.
"Everything is possible now. It is really a matter of calming down the passions of everybody and finding some sort of a peaceful stop to all the battles of the war," Roman said.
On Saturday, Hamas launched a surprise large-scale attack on Israel, which claimed the lives of at least 2,300 people on both sides. Israel declared a state of war with Hamas and announced a complete water, electricity and food blockade of the Gaza Strip.

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Russian Orthodox Mission in Israel Reports No Casualties, Damages Amid War - Archimandrite

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - All Russian Christian Orthodox sites in Israel are safe and there are no casualties among clergy and the believers caused by the ongoing fighting in and around Gaza, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem Archimandrite Roman (Krassovsky) told Sputnik.

ROCOR has three convents and several parishes and communities in different parts of Israel.

"There are no problems with the property, the holy places, and there have been no casualties among ROCOR clergy and believers," Roman said.

Battles are currently waged in the southern part of Israel where ROCOR has no property, but riots have taken place outside of the Convent of Ascension on Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, so the nuns there were advised not to leave the premises unless absolutely necessary, Roman said.

"All our sacred places are opened, no problems in coming to or going from the convents, but at the same time, it is better if people are pretty much staying within the convents," Roman said.

The archimandrite noted that the issue between the Arabs and the Jews stretches back in history but the situation in the last 70-80 years has exacerbated the problem.

When asked about possible ways to resolve the conflict, Roman emphasized the importance of prayer.

"I am not a politician, so I can not speak on that. Our point right now is to pray that God would and could bring about some sort of a peaceful settlement," Roman said.

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RPT: PREVIEW - Blinken Embarks on Trip to Israel in Show of Support Amid War With Hamas

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will visit Israel and Jordan from October 11-13 in a show of support for the Jewish state amid its escalating war with Hamas.

The secretary is expected to arrive in Israel on Thursday. In both countries, the top US diplomat will meet with senior officials to discuss measures to bolster Israel’s security and underscore the US's unwavering support for Israel’s right to defend itself, according to the State Department.

Blinken told reporters before boarding a plane Wednesday that he plans to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, President Isaac Herzog, and other senior officials, and is looking forward to seeing US embassy teams in the country.

Blinken will follow up on the discussions that he and President Joe Biden have been having with their Israeli counterparts since the launch of Hamas' attack on Israel.

"It will be a message of solidarity and support," State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday during a press briefing. "We’re there to support them as they fight against these brutal terrorist attacks, to talk about what additional assistance we can provide them."

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

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The secretary will also use this opportunity to reiterate his condolences for the victims of the attacks against Israel and condemn them in the strongest terms, the State Department said.

"We will be reiterating, reaffirming the very strong message that President Biden has delivered to any country or any party that might try to take advantage of this situation, and that message is 'Don't'," Blinken told reporters.

The trip will also focus on the issue of American citizens who have been missing since the beginning of the Hamas attack. The number of US nationals killed in the Israel-Hamas war since Saturday has reached 22 as of Wednesday and will continue to grow, according to Blinken.

On Saturday, the Palestinian group Hamas launched a surprise large-scale attack on Israel, prompting the latter to declare a state of war the following day. On Monday, Israel put the Gaza Strip under full blockade, with no food, water, gas, or electricity supplies. Both Israel and Palestine have so far reported hundreds of dead and thousands of injured as a result of the escalation.

From the very beginning of the attack on Israel by Hamas, the United States declared its full unwavering support for Israel and its readiness to provide its closest ally in the Middle East with everything it needs to protect itself.

Within 24 hours of the start of the escalation, the United States decided to send the USS Gerald R. Ford carrier strike group to the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. On Tuesday, the Pentagon confirmed considering sending a second carrier strike group to the region in a show of support. The move prompted criticism from Russia and Turkey, which have warned it will only exacerbate the situation in the region.

At the same time, the US underscores it does not plan to have boots on the ground or to take any military action to support Israel in repelling the ongoing attacks.

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UAW Strikes at Major Ford Truck Plant, Defying Offered Contract - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - The United Auto Workers (UAW) initiated a strike at Ford's Kentucky Truck Plant despite the automaker offering a beneficial contract, Ford spokesperson Dan Barbossa told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"The decision by the UAW to call a strike at Ford's Kentucky Truck Plant is grossly irresponsible but unsurprising given the union leadership's stated strategy of keeping the Detroit 3 wounded for months through reputational damage and industrial chaos," Barbossa said on Wednesday. "In addition to our offer on pay and benefits, Ford has been bargaining in good faith this week on joint venture battery plants, which are slated to begin production in the coming year."

Ford alleges to have presented a proposal intended to notably elevate the living standards of the 57,000 UAW-represented workers, who are among the highest-remunerated hourly manufacturing workers on a global scale.

"The UAW leadership's decision to reject this record contract offer – which the UAW has publicly described as the best offer on the table – and strike Kentucky Truck Plant, carries serious consequences for our workforce, suppliers, dealers and commercial customers,"

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

Barbossa added.
According to the statement, Ford's Kentucky Truck Plant, a paramount auto factory situated in Louisville, and producer of prominent models like the F-Series Super Duty, Ford Expedition, and Lincoln Navigator that bring forth $25 billion in annual revenue, faces significant ramifications with its strike, affecting 9,000 direct employees and endangering associated operations which employ over 100,000 people.

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Biden, UAE Counterpart Discuss Humanitarian Aid Access to Israel-Gaza Area - White House

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden and United Arab Emirates (UAE) President Mohamed bin Zayed discussed ensuring people in Israel and Gaza have access to humanitarian assistance, the White House said in a press release.
"President Joseph R. Biden Jr. spoke today with President Mohamed bin Zayed to discuss the terrorist attacks on Israel," the release said on Wednesday. "The two leaders also discussed the importance of ensuring humanitarian assistance reaches those in need."
Biden also again emphasized his warning against anyone else who might seek to attack Israel, the release said.
Moreover, the release said Biden highlighted the history of relations between the Untied States and the UAE, including the US commitment to peace and security in the Middle East.
The two leaders agreed to remain in close contact directly and through their teams, according to the release.

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US Raises Travel Advisory for Israel, West Bank to Level 3 - State Dept.

WASHINGTON October 12, (Sputnik) - The US government raised the Travel Advisory Level for Israel and the West Bank to Level 3 amid increased demonstrations and growing terrorist threats, the State Department said in a press release.
"The Department of State raised the Travel Advisory Level for Israel and the West Bank to Level 3 - Reconsider Travel... The Travel Advisory for Gaza remains Level 4 - Do Not Travel," the release said on Wednesday. "Violence can occur in Israel and the West Bank and Gaza without warning. There has been a marked increase in demonstrations throughout Israel, some with little or no warning."
Terrorist groups, lone-actor terrorists and other violent extremists continue plotting potential attacks in Israel and the West Bank and Gaza, the release added. They may attack tourist locations, transportation hubs, markets/shopping malls, and local government facilities, according to the travel alert.

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US at Present Doesn't Believe Hezbollah Likely to Join Hamas War Against Israel - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - The United States at present does not think Hezbollah is likely to join the Palestinian group Hamas in the war against Israel, CNN reported citing US officials.

The report said on Wednesday that US officials believe US warnings so far have been effective in preventing other parties hostile to Israel from getting involved in the conflict.

Earlier in the day, US President Joe Biden said that the United States has made it clear to Iran to "be careful' amid the escalation of violence in the Middle East.

Within 24 hours of the start of the escalation, the United States decided to send the USS Gerald R. Ford carrier strike group to the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. On Tuesday, the Pentagon confirmed considering sending a second carrier strike group to the region in a show of support.

The move prompted criticism from Russia and Turkey, which have warned it will only exacerbate the situation in the region.

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IRS Wants Microsoft to Pay back $28.9 Bn in Taxes, Penalties, Interest - SEC Filing

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - Microsoft Corporation received Notices of Proposed Adjustment (NOPAs) from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), seeking $28.9 billion plus penalties and interest for tax years 2004 to 2013.

"On October 11, 2023, Microsoft Corporation announced the receipt of Notices of Proposed Adjustment (“NOPAs”) from the Internal Revenue Service (the “IRS”) for the tax years 2004 to 2013. The NOPAs were received on September 26, 2023. The primary issues in the NOPAs relate to intercompany transfer pricing. In the NOPAs, the IRS is seeking an additional tax payment of $28.9 billion plus penalties and interest," Microsoft Corporation said in Securities and Exchange Commission filing on Wednesday.

Microsoft said that the allowances for income tax contingencies were adequate as of September 30, 2023. Additionally, the corporation expressed disagreement with the proposed adjustments and affirmed its intention to vigorously contest the NOPAs through the IRS’s administrative appeals office, and if necessary, through judicial proceedings, according to the file.

"We do not expect a final resolution of these issues in the next 12 months. Based on the information currently available, we do not anticipate a significant increase or decrease to our tax contingencies for these issues within the next 12 months," filing said.

Microsoft will continue to work with the IRS to reach a mutual resolution and provide updated

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

on developments through public quarterly and annual reports, financial statements, the filing stated.

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No Decision Made on Adding Ukraine, Taiwan Aid to Israel Funding Request - US Official

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - The White House has not made a decision on whether it will tie in assistance for Ukraine and Taiwan in a supplemental funding request it is preparing to submit to Congress seeking additional aid for Israel, a US official told Sputnik.

Earlier in the day, US media reported that the White House is preparing to make a supplemental funding request to Congress asking for aid to support Israel, Ukraine, Taiwan, and US border security.

"No decisions have been made," the official said on Wednesday.

According to the report, the supplemental request would address the strain placed on US military stockpiles, which have been depleted by support to allies.

On Monday, US Army Secretary Christine Wormuth said the US military will need additional support from Congress to be able to provide security assistance to Ukraine and Israel simultaneously.

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Biden Says US Made Clear to Iran to Be Careful Amid Escalation of Violence in Middle East

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said that the United States has made it clear to Iran to "be careful' amid the escalation of violence in the Middle East.

"And [we] made it clear, made it clear to the Iranians - 'be careful,'" Biden said on Wednesday.

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Biden Says Told Netanyahu That Israel Should Operate by Rules of War

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden said at a meeting with Jewish Community leaders that he told Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that Israel should abide by the rules of law as it responds to Hamas attacks.

“The one thing that I did say [in a call with Netanyahu] that it is really important that Israel, all the anger, frustration, I just cannot explain it, that exists, is that they [the Israelis] operate by the

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rules of war. There are rules of war," Biden said on Wednesday.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) -

ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

* The death toll in the Gaza Strip from Israeli attacks reached 1,100 and another 5,300 people have been injured, the Health Ministry of the Gaza Strip said on Wednesday.
* The United States will provide Israel with additional Iron Dome interceptors to protect itself amid the escalating war with Hamas, US Secretary of Defense said.
* The key goal of Israel's ongoing military operation is to prevent all possible scenarios of terrorist attacks against the country, Foreign ministry spokesman Lior Ben Dor told Sputnik.
* Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the chairman of the Israeli National Unity opposition party, Benny Gantz have agreed to form an emergency government, Israeli newspaper Haaretz reported.

UKRAINE DEFENSE CONTACT GROUP

* The US Defense Department said on Wednesday that the earliest time the Ukrainian pilots will have sufficient training to gain the initial capability to fly F-16 jets is next spring.
* US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said he has no announcement to make regarding the long-range Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS) for Ukraine amid the ongoing conflict with Russia.
* The United States will lead a coalition of countries that will help Ukraine develop its air force, with a focus on the F-16 fighter aircraft capability, Austin said.

CIS SUMMIT

* Moscow is aware of the reasons for the absence of Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan at the summit of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) heads of state in Kyrgyzstan, Kremlin aide Yury Ushakov said on Wednesday.
* Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Azerbaijan counterpart Ilham Aliyev will discuss the situation in Karabakh, including the possibility of return of Armenians, and the issue of Russian peacekeepers during a meeting in Kyrgyzstan on Thursday, Ushakov said.
* Putin and his Kyrgyz counterpart, Sadyr Japarov, will discuss bilateral relations and exchange views on international issues during a meeting on Thursday in Kyrgyzstan, Ushakov said.
* Putin and his Tajik counterpart, Emomali Rahmon, will discuss the regional security and functioning of the Russian military base in Tajikistan during a meeting in Kyrgyzstan on Friday, Ushakov said.

GLOBAL ENERGY MARKETS

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

* Germany is not accepting Russian energy despite having such opportunity as one line of the Nord Stream gas pipeline is not damaged, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Wednesday.
* It is highly likely that Ukraine is partly using Russian gas, Putin said.
* Cooperation within the framework of OPEC + will likely continue, Putin said.
* Russian energy giant Gazprom supplies less gas to Europe and receives less revenue, but the company is coping fine, Putin said.
* Turkish Energy Minister Alparslan Bayraktar said that he discussed with Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak new opportunities for cooperation between Ankara and Moscow, as well as energy projects.

IRAQ-RUSSIA RELATIONS
* Russian companies have invested over $10 billion in Iraqi economy, and contacts between countries are mutually beneficial, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Wednesday.
* Iraqi and Russia are discussing integration of two major infrastructure projects, the Development Road and the North-South Route, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Al Sudani said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE
* Belgium will create a 1.7 billion euro ($1.8 billion) fund to support Ukraine using proceeds from frozen Russian assets, Belgian Prime Minister Alexander de Croo said on Wednesday.
* The Ukrainian armed forces have lost up to 330 soldiers as killed and injured in the Donetsk direction in the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
* Canada will send winter gear and several types of ammunition rounds as part of its new C$25 million ($18.4 million) military assistance package for Ukraine, National Defense said.

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US Senators Introduce Bill to Block Iran's Access to Unfrozen $6Bln in Funds - Statement

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - US Senators Tom Cotton and Mitch McConnell are introducing legislation to block the release of $6 billion in recently unfrozen funds to Iran, following a surprise attack by Palestinian Hamas militants on Israel over the weekend, the lawmakers said in a statement.
The bill prohibits Iran from accessing the billions in funds made accessible by the Biden administration as part of a prisoner swap deal in August, the statement said on Wednesday.
Some US lawmakers have alleged that the funds could be funneled to Iranian proxy groups and terrorists, although the Biden administration has said the funds can only be used for humanitarian purposes.
"The Biden administration's decision to let Iran access the $6 billion immediately freed up other money for the regime to fund its attacks in Israel. The Biden administration should immediately re-freeze the funds," Cotton said in the statement.
The world must impose serious consequences on Iran for backing the attack on Israel,

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

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McConnell said. The United States must lead by example by freezing the Iranian assets, McConnell said.

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PREVIEW - Blinken Embarks on Trip to Israel in Show of Support Amid War With Hamas

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will visit Israel and Jordan from October 11-13 in a show of support for the Jewish state amid its escalating war with Hamas.

The secretary is expected to arrive in Israel on Thursday. In both countries, the top US diplomat will meet with senior officials to discuss measures to bolster Israel's security and underscore the US's unwavering support for Israel's right to defend itself, according to the State Department.

Blinken told reporters before boarding a plane Wednesday that he plans to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, President Isaac Herzog, and other senior officials, and is looking forward to seeing US embassy teams in the country.

Blinken will follow up on the discussions that he and President Joe Biden have been having with their Israeli counterparts since the launch of Hamas' attack on Israel.

"It will be a message of solidarity and support," State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday during a press briefing. "We're there to support them as they fight against these brutal terrorist attacks, to talk about what additional assistance we can provide them."

The secretary will also use this opportunity to reiterate his condolences for the victims of the attacks against Israel and condemn them in the strongest terms, the State Department said.

"We will be reiterating, reaffirming the very strong message that President Biden has delivered to any country or any party that might try to take advantage of this situation, and that message is 'Don't'," Blinken told reporters.

The trip will also focus on the issue of American citizens who have been missing since the beginning of the Hamas attack. The number of US nationals killed in the Israel-Hamas war since Saturday has reached 22 as of Wednesday and will continue to grow, according to Blinken.

On Saturday, the Palestinian group Hamas launched a surprise large-scale attack on Israel, prompting the latter to declare a state of war the following day. On Monday, Israel put the Gaza Strip under full blockade, with no food, water, gas, or electricity supplies. Both Israel and Palestine have so far reported hundreds of dead and thousands of injured as a result of the escalation.

From the very beginning of the attack on Israel by Hamas, the United States declared its full unwavering support for Israel and its readiness to provide its closest ally in the Middle East with everything it needs to protect itself.

Within 24 hours of the start of the escalation, the United States decided to send the USS Gerald R. Ford carrier strike group to the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. On Tuesday, the Pentagon confirmed considering sending a second carrier strike group to the region in a show of support. The move prompted criticism from Russia and Turkey, which have warned it will only exacerbate the situation in the region.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

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At the same time, the US underscores it does not plan to have boots on the ground or to take any military action to support Israel in repelling the ongoing attacks.

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Fed Prioritized US Economy Over Inflation by Not Raising Interest Rate, Could Do It Again

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - Federal Reserve officials prioritized economic uncertainty over inflation in withholding an interest rate hike in September, according to minutes of the US central bank's meeting last month that were released on Wednesday, suggesting the same might happen in November.

Since that last Fed meeting that ended on September 20, US economic data has been clouded with uncertainty as an upbeat performance by the manufacturing sector was followed by a drop in consumer spending - which accounts for 80% of gross domestic product, or GDP. This has constantly led to debates among officials on the central bank's policy-making Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) on whether another interest rate hike may be in order before the end of the year.

"A vast majority of participants continued to judge the future path of the economy as highly uncertain," the September meeting minutes said. Ultimately, the Fed decided to leave rates unchanged despite a 12-7 majority on the FOMC indicating in the bank's updated economic projections that at least another quarter-point will be needed at either one of the central bank's two remaining meetings in November and December.

The Fed hiked interest rates 11 times between March 2022 and July 2023, adding 5.25 percentage points to a prior base rate of 0.25%, to contend with inflation, which reached 40-year highs of above 9% in June 2022.

Fed hesitancy for more rate hikes was visible on Tuesday when two of its senior policy makers, Neel Kashkari and Raphael Bostic, suggested that current rate levels may work just fine in bringing inflation to the central bank's target - with a little help from markets.

Kashkari said the Fed might not have to raise interest rates any further to cap inflation as a bond market selloff could temper rising prices despite strong labor and wage growth.

Bostic said monetary policy was sufficiently restrictive in bringing inflation back to the Fed target of 2% per year from the current 3.7%, as measured by the Consumer Price Index.

The central bank has repeatedly pointed to an overheated labor market and wage growth, aside from soaring energy prices, as reasons for inflation remaining well above 3% per year versus its target for 2%.

US average hourly earnings have virtually grown without stop since they began creeping up in July 2020 right after the labor market began springing back from the loss of some 20 million jobs right after the initial outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic.

Oil prices hit one-year highs of above $97 a barrel for global crude benchmark Brent, before retreating sharply last week.

The runaway jobs market is a complicated issue for the Fed, which is tasked with ensuring both "maximum employment" and "manageable inflation" for Americans.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

While policy-makers the world over typically celebrate on seeing good jobs numbers, the Fed is in a different predicament. The central bank wishes to see an easing of conditions that are a little "too good" now for the economy's own good - in this case, unemployment at more than 50-year lows and monthly wages that have grown at annual rates of 4% to 5% since July 2021. Such job security and earnings have cushioned many Americans from the worst price pressures since the 1980s and encouraged them to continue spending, further feeding inflation. The Fed's mandate for maximum employment means an unemployment rate below 4%. That has been achieved since January 2022, with last month's rate remaining at 3.8%. Its goal for inflation remains elusive though. Before the COVID-19 breakout, US prices expanded at less than 2% a year. The pandemic measures and the trillions of dollars of relief spending by the government had, however, triggered runaway inflation since mid-2021.

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Putin Signs Law on Mandatory Sale of Foreign Currency Revenue by Some Exporters

MOSCOW, October 11 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed a law on the mandatory sale of foreign currency revenue received by some Russian exporters under foreign trade contracts, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Wednesday.

"The decree determines the list of such exporters. Starting from the date set by the Russian government, they will have to transfer the earned foreign currency to their accounts in authorized banks and carry out mandatory sale of this foreign currency on the domestic market," Peskov said.

The percentage of the currency that will be subject to mandatory sale will be set by the Russian Cabinet, the spokesman said, adding that the Federal Financial Monitoring Service Rosfinmonitoring will be observing the implementation of the decree.

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EDITED: US Threatened Countries Not to Vote for Russia's UNHRC Membership - Eritrean Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, October 11 (Sputnik) - The United States employed threats and other bullying tactics to discourage nations from voting in favor of Russia's bid to join the United Nations Human Rights Council, Permanent Representative of Eritrea to the UN Sophia Tesfamariam told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"The Human Rights Council elections yesterday does not reflect the will of the people. There were countries that were bullied, there were countries that were threatened to not vote for Russia," Tesfamariam said, adding that the US was the main country behind these pressure tactics.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

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Tesfamariam said the results of the vote indicate that a small number of countries "are allowed to run the stystem," a situation that could jeopardize UN's legitimacy, efficacy and credibility.

Earlier this week, Russia was unsuccessful in its bid to gain a seat on the UN Human Rights Council for the 2024-2026 term. Within the group of Eastern European states, Albania and Bulgaria successfully secured spots with 123 and 160 votes, respectively, overshadowing Russia's 83 votes.

Following the vote, Maria Zabolotskaya, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the UN, asserted that the US exercised substantial pressure on nations, urging them to favor Albania over Russia during the voting process.

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Asteroid Bennu Samples Have Record High Carbon Levels, Water Molecules - NASA Chief

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - Scientists have already confirmed the highest quantity of carbon and far higher proportions of water molecules in the samples from the surface of the asteroid Bennu returned by the OSIRIS-REx mission than they ever expected, NASA Administrator Bill Nelson said on Wednesday.

"The OSIRIS-REx sample is the biggest carbon-rich asteroid sample ever delivered to Earth and will help scientists investigate the origins of life on our own planet for generations to come," Nelson said during a press conference.

The 4.7% level of carbon in the returned materials on the outside of the returned capsule analyzed so far is the highest abundance of carbon that NASA scientists have ever measured in any meteorite or other extraterrestrial material that has been returned to earth, Nelson said.

"The sample return capsule landed in Utah right on the money. It is a picture perfect m mission. ...First analysis shows hydrated clay minerals and they contain carbon," Nelson said.

Scientists estimate the return capsule delivered to earth about 8.8 ounces (250 grams) of material from the asteroid when it safely landed in the US state of Utah on September 24 - far more than the goal of returning 2.1 ounces (60 grams) of material, NASA said.

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US House Speaker-Nominee Scalise Does Not Have Enough Support to Hold Full Vote - Source

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - US House of representatives Speaker-nominee Steve Scalise does not have enough support from his colleagues at present to hold a full confirmation vote, a congressional source told Sputnik.

"Don’t know that Scalise has the votes to bring it to the floor," the source said on Wednesday.

The House of Representatives must elect a new speaker before conducting normal legislative

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

business, such as passing bills.
Earlier on Wednesday, House Republicans voted to nominate Scalise, the Majority Leader, as speaker in a vote of 113-99, beating Congressman Jim Jordan.
However, several Republicans have said they would still vote for Jordan in a full vote on the House floor.

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UN Security Council to Hold Meeting on Israel, Palestine on Friday Afternoon - UN Diplomat

UNITED NATIONS, October 11 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council will hold a meeting on Israel and Palestine this Friday at 3:00 p.m. EST, a UN diplomat told Sputnik on Wednesday.
"Yes, the [UN Security Council] Presidency convened a meeting on Friday at 3:00 p.m.," the diplomat said.

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NASA Asteroid Mission Has Only 20% Chance of Thursday Launch - Official

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - NASA's launch of its unmanned mission to explore the metal-rich Psyche asteroid has only a 20% chance of being cleared for launch on Thursday due to potential rainstorms, US Space Force Launch Weather Officer Arlena Moses told a podcast teleconference.
"Right now we are looking at 19% [of] go conditions," Moses said on Wednesday. "There are still concerns with clouds in the area."
There will be a 50% chance on Friday as conditions improve, Moses added, but only a 40% chance on Saturday.
Weather conditions at Cape Canaveral look likely to deteriorate slightly but still offer a possibility of launch on Saturday morning, Moses continued.
NASA officials were looking at 31 miles per hour as the highest winds in which they would approve any launch, NASA Senior Launch Director Tim Dunnn added.

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US State Dept. Says Exploring Options to Move Americans Out of Israel to Nearby Countries

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - The US State Department said on Wednesday it is exploring options to facilitate the movement of Americans out of Israel to nearby countries amid

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

escalating tensions in the region.

"We are also exploring contract options to facilitate US citizen travel to nearby countries," the State Department said in an advisory.

Moreover, the advisory said commercial flights are still available in Israel for US citizens who want to leave the country, even if they are not direct flights to the United States.

Earlier in the day, the State Department said 22 Americans have been killed in the Israel-Hamas war since Saturday. Several Americans are also being held hostage by Hamas as well, according to US officials.

On Saturday, Hamas launched a surprise large-scale attack on Israel, which claimed the lives of hundreds of people on both sides of the conflict. Israel declared a state of war with Hamas and announced a complete water, electricity and food blockade of Gaza Strip.

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Kirby Says Israel Rightly Focused on Hamas, Doesn't Want to See Conflict Widen More

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - The US does not want to see this conflict widen "any more than it already has," Israel is rightly focused on Hamas, White House Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Wednesday.

“We don't want to see this conflict widen any more than it already has. Israel is focused rightly on Hamas, opening up additional fronts for them , obviously, would just be a horrible scenario. We don't want to see that happen here," Kirby said.

On Saturday, Hamas launched a surprise large-scale attack on Israel, which claimed the lives of hundreds of people on both sides of the conflict. Israel declared a state of war with Hamas and announced a complete water, electricity and food blockade of Gaza Strip.

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Biden Files For Nevada's Democratic Primary, Formalizing Candidacy for 2024 Race - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden has filed the required paperwork to appear on Nevada's Democratic primary ballot next year, formally establishing his 2024 candidacy for reelection despite growing concerns about his chances of success, NBC reported on Wednesday.

Though Biden is not expected to face much competition, there are a several other candidates who have filed to run in Nevada, including Democratic challenger Marianne Williamson, the report said.

The filing comes as a number of Democrats have been vocal about their concerns over Biden's age, cognitive ability and pending investigations into him and his family for alleged criminal activities, the report said.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

Some Democrats feel that these factors should encourage Democrats to consider the challenges they present to the current US president.

Representative Dean Phillips from Minnesota was quoted in the report as saying that he celebrates Biden but has been disappointed that he decided not to "pass the torch" amid concerns by ominous polling and the desire of many Americans to turn the page to the future.

Phillips added that he felt the United States would be best served by a "respectful and responsible competition" in order to ensure the best candidate moves forward to the general election in 2024.

Nevada's October 16 filing deadline is the first one out of 57 Democratic nominating contests. The filing period for New Hampshire's primary opened on October 11 and closes on October 27. Seven more states have filing deadlines in November, according to the report.

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US House Will Not Hold Vote on New Speaker on Wednesday - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives will not hold a vote on Wednesday to elect a new speaker, after ousting Congressman Kevin McCarthy from the role last week, CNN reported.

House lawmakers will meet at 3:00 p.m. ET on Wednesday and then recess, the report said, citing a source familiar with the matter. The House of Representatives must elect a new speaker before conducting normal legislative business, such as passing bills.

Earlier on Wednesday, House Republicans voted to nominate Majority Leader Steve Scalise as speaker in a vote of 113-99, beating Congressman Jim Jordan. However, several Republicans have since said they would still vote for Jordan on the House floor.

However, a congressional source told Sputnik that House Republicans still seek to hold a vote on a new speaker on Wednesday, although Scalise must confirm the support of 217 members before a vote is held.

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US Watching Closely For Possible Attacks by Hezbollah in Central, S. America - General

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - The United States is closely monitoring for any potential attacks by Hezbollah or other Iranian proxies in Central and South America following the Hamas attacks on Israel, US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) Commander Gen. Laura Richardson said on Wednesday.

"Watching very, very closely," Richardson said during panel discussion with the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD). "In terms of working with our partner nations, obviously, they're concerned too and they're watching very closely."

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

US intelligence indicates that key Iranian leaders were not aware of Hamas' plans to attack Israel, sparking skepticism about claims that Tehran was directly involved in the planning of the attacks, according to US media.

In addition to the United States, Israel and US regional allies in the Middle East have not found evidence directly tying Iran to Hamas' plans to attack Israel, the report said.

On Saturday, Palestinian group Hamas launched a surprise large-scale rocket attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip, prompting Israel to declare a state of war the following day and launch retaliatory strikes. On Monday, Israel ordered a complete blockade of the Gaza Strip, home to more than 2 million people, cutting off supplies of water, food and fuel. Both Israel and Palestine have reported hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries as a result of the escalation.

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US Congressman Jordan Offers to Nominate Majority Leader Scalise as Speaker - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Jim Jordan offered to nominate House Majority Leader Steve Scalise as speaker, after the two Republican lawmakers emerged as the favorites to fill the vacant leadership role, Punchbowl News reported on Wednesday.

Jordan met with Scalise at the Capitol, where he offered to nominate the majority leader to serve as speaker, after the House of Representatives ousted Congressman Kevin McCarthy from the position last week, the report said.

Republicans nominated Scalise as speaker in a closed-door meeting earlier on Wednesday in a vote of 113-99, a congressional source told Sputnik.

Scalise must receive a majority of votes in the lower chamber of Congress to be elected speaker. The House of Representatives must elect a speaker before holding votes on normal legislative business.

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UN Chief Regrets Niger's Decision to Send Out Coordinator Within 72 Hours - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, October 11 (Sputnik) - The United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres regrets that Niger has asked for the departure of the UN Resident Coordinator in Niger within the 72 hours, saying that it will worsen the ability of the UN to implement its mandate, the UN Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Wednesday.

"The Secretary-General deeply regrets that, on 10 October, the Conseil National pour la Sauvegarde de la Patrie (CNSP) ordered the departure of the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator of the United Nations in Niger, Ms. Louise Aubin, within 72 hours," the statement said.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

"The decision to order the departure of the Resident Coordinator hampers the ability of the Organization to effectively carry out its mandates and disrupts the essential work we do for the people of Niger, where 4.3 million are in need of humanitarian assistance, mostly women and children," it added.

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Biden Announces 'Comprehensive Action' to Eradicate Hidden Junk Fees - White House

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden has declared imminent mandatory regulations to protect consumers from concealed junk fees and further outlined the roles of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and Consumer Financial Protection Bureau in establishing and enforcing the regulations, the White House said in a statement on Wednesday.

"I'm proud to announce that my administration has taken our most comprehensive action ever to eliminate junk fees and fees in industries and sectors across the board across the entire economy," Biden said in the statement.

Biden highlighted the crucial role of US federal agencies, specifically noting the FTC's development of a new rule that intends to abolish hidden fees across multiple economic sectors by requiring companies to transparently disclose comprehensive pricing.

The disclosures include providing clear details to consumers upfront about the fees' purpose, total amount and refundability, the statement said.

Biden also outlined initiatives for consumer protection in the financial sector, highlighting that the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau aims to prohibit banks and credit unions from imposing fees for fundamental services such as checking account balances, accessing bank records and inquiring about loan balances, the statement said.

The rules are finalized and will be made mandatory, the statement added.

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US Crude Oil Exports at Record High of 4Mln Barrels Per Day in First Half 2023 - EIA

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - Crude oil exports by the United States hit a record high just shy of 4 million barrels per day in the first half of the year, the Energy Information Administration (EIA) said Wednesday, as US supplies appeared to fill pockets underserved by OPEC+ production cuts.

"US crude oil exports in the first half of 2023 averaged 3.99 million barrels per day (b/d), which is a record high for the first half of a year since 2015, when the US ban on most crude oil exports from the United States was repealed," the EIA said on its website.

It noted that exports rose almost 20% in the first half of this year compared with the first six months of 2022, rising by 650,000 b/d.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

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OPEC+, the global alliance of oil producers led by Saudi Arabia and Russia, has been aggressively cutting crude supplies on the global market in recent months, citing uncertainties about demand. The Saudis have pledged to cut 1 million b/d until the end of the year while Russia has said it will reduce daily supply by 300,000 barrels. The rest of the 23-nation strong OPEC+ is contributing about 1.5 to 2.0 million b/d in cuts.

Those familiar with the industry said US exports had surged this year by making inroads into some markets underserved by the OPEC+ cuts.

"It's a function of natural and available supply filling demand that's unfulfilled and required," said John Kilduff, partner at New York energy hedge fund Again Capital.

The EIA said Europe was the largest regional destination for US crude oil exports by volume, at 1.75 million b/d, led by exports to the Netherlands and UK.

Asia was the regional destination with the next-highest volume, at 1.68 million b/d, led by exports to China and South Korea.

The United States also exported significantly smaller volumes of crude oil to Canada, Africa, and Central America and South America.

Although exports increased in the first half of 2023, the United States still imports more crude oil than it exports, meaning it remains a net crude oil importer.

The United States continues to import crude oil despite rising domestic crude oil production in part because many US refineries are configured to process heavy, sour crude oil rather than the light, sweet crude oil typically produced in the United States.

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Ukraine to Need Additional $3Bln in Funding in 2024 With Total of $32Bln Required – IMF

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) – Ukraine will require an additional $3 billion in financial support in 2024 to meet Kiev's needs and help restore external and debt sustainability while a total of $31.9 is required, International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Wednesday.

"Our latest estimate is that external financing needs for 2024 will be US$3 billion higher than at the time of the first review—with official support of US$31.9 billion required. It is essential for all of us to work together to ensure that such financing continues on the timing and terms necessary to meet Ukraine's needs and help restore external and debt sustainability," Georgieva said in her remarks prepared for delivery at the Fourth Ministerial Round table Discussion for Support to Ukraine.

In March, the IMF Executive Board approved $15.6 billion under a new Extended Fund Facility (EFF) Arrangement for Ukraine as part of a $115 billion overall support package for a four-year time frame.

Georgieva added that after the fund brought the 2023 IMF support for Ukraine to $3.6 billion, an additional $900 million will become available in December upon the completion of the second review by the board.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/12/2023 11:08:04 AM

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US in Active Talks With Congress About Additional Funding for Israel, Ukraine - Kirby

WASHINGTON October 11 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is in active discussions with Congress about additional funding for Israel and Ukraine, White House Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Wednesday.

"We are in active conversations with members of Congress about additional funding for Ukraine and for Israel," Kirby said during a press briefing.

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Kirby Says US in Urgent Talks with Israel, Egypt on Safe Passage for Gaza Civilians

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - The United States is actively engaged in discussions with Israeli and Egyptian authorities for the safe passage of civilians in the region, Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Wednesday.

"I know many of you have been asking about expressing some interest in the idea of safe passage in Gaza for civilians, let me just say right up front, we're actively discussing this with our Israeli and Egyptian counterparts, we support safe passions for civilians, civilians are not to blame for what Hamas is done," Kirby said during a press briefing at the White House.

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White House to Ask Congress for Additional Aid for Israel, Ukraine And Taiwan - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - The White House is preparing to make a supplemental funding request to provide additional security assistance to Israel, Ukraine, and Taiwan, NBC reported on Wednesday citing US officials.

The report also said the supplemental request will include additional funding to bolster US border security.

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US Space Force Bans Generative AI Tools Over Security Concerns - Spokesperson

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WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - The US Space Force has placed a temporary ban on online generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools over cybersecurity concerns, US Air Force spokesperson Tanya Downsworth told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"A strategic pause on the use of Generative AI and Large Language Models within the US Space Force has been implemented as we determine the best path forward to integrate these capability into Guardians' roles and the USSF mission. This is a temporary measure to protect the data of our service and Guardians," Downsworth said in a statement.

Earlier on Wednesday, Bloomberg reported, citing a September 29 staff memorandum from Space Force's chief technology and innovation officer Lisa Costa, that the use of any government data with such tools was not authorized, unless specifically approved.

The memorandum added that new guidance would be released within 30 days, the report said.

Downsworth confirmed to Sputnik the authenticity of the memorandum.

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UN Chief Raises Issue of Humanitarian Corridors in Call With Abbas - Palestinian Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, October 11 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in his call with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas raised the issue of humanitarian corridors for civilians in Gaza amid the escalating war between Israel and Hamas, Palestinian Ambassador to the UN Riyad Mansour said on Wednesday.

"The Secretary General ... was in contact with President Abbas two days ago. And he raised with President Abbas the efforts of the Secretary General to have humanitarian corridors and to address the extremely critical and catastrophic situation of the civilians in the Gaza Strip," Mansour told reporters.

Palestine is supporting these efforts, he added.

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US House Republicans Nominate Steve Scalise as Speaker - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - US House Republicans are nominating Congressman Steve Scalise to serve as the next House speaker, after the lower chamber of Congress ousted Kevin McCarthy from the role last week, The Hill reported on Wednesday.

House Republicans nominated Scalise during a closed meeting in a vote of 113-99, the report said, citing multiple lawmakers familiar with the matter. Scalise currently serves as House Majority Leader.

The House of Representatives will now vote to elect a speaker, which they must do before conducting regular legislative business. House Democrats are set to put their support behind Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries.

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Biden Says Received Update From Netanyahu on Situation in Israel

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden said on Wednesday that he and Vice President Kamala spoke again with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and received from him an update on the situation in Israel.

"We continue to monitor the situation in Israel very closely and the Vice President line and the bulk of my security team spoke with the Prime Minister Netanyahu again this morning," Biden said.

The White House issued a statement underscoring the United States' sustained commitment in support of Israel in its defense and security maintenance efforts.

The United States commitment is especially pronounced given the fighting instigated by the Palestinian organization Hamas, the statement said.

Biden, Harris and Netanyahu agreed to maintain their regular communications to better navigate through the multifaceted challenges faced by Israel, the statement added.

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UN Has Seen No Indication Israel Uses White Phosphorus Munitions in Gaza - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, October 11 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is not aware of any reports of white phosphorus munitions being used by the Israeli military in Gaza, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Wednesday.

"I have not seen any report …. I have not been told that we have seen those kinds of munitions being used. I can only speak to that," Dujarric said during a press briefing.

On Tuesday, the Palestinian Foreign Ministry accused the Israeli military of using munitions containing white phosphorus, which are prohibited by international conventions.

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UN Secretary-General Says Spillover of Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Must Be Avoided

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday that a possible spillover of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be avoided and he is concerned about the recent exchange of fire along the United Nations-demarcated blue line with Lebanon.

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"We must avoid spillover of the conflict," Guterres said in a statement. "I am concerned about the recent exchange of fire along the blue line and recent reported attacks from southern Lebanon."

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World Needs 'Unimpeded Access' to Gaza, All Israeli Hostages Should be Released - Guterres

UNITED NATIONS, October 11 (Sputnik) - The United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday that the world needs to have unimpeded and quick access to Gaza and that all Israeli hostages have to be released.

"Crucial life saving supplies, including full food and water must be allowed into Gaza. We need rapid and unimpeded access, now," Guterres told a briefing.

The United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres also called for "immediate release of all Israeli hostages held in Gaza."

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US Lawmaker Says Egypt Warned Israel of Impending Hamas Attack Three Days Prior

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - Egypt gave Israel a three-day advanced warning about the looming Hamas attacks that took place over the weekend, House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul said on Wednesday.

"We're not quite sure how we missed it, we're not quite sure how Israel missed it," McCaul told reporters regarding the Hamas attacks. "We know that Egypt had warned the Israelis three days prior that an event like this could happen."

McCaul further said it had been known that the Hamas attacks on Israel over the weekend were planned as long as a year ago.

The Congressman emphasized that there is concern about the fidelity of US intelligence and the escalation of a conflict in the Middle East that could turn into a global jihad movement in Israel.

US intelligence indicates that key Iranian leaders were not aware of Hamas' plans to attack Israel, sparking skepticism about claims that Tehran was directly involved in the planning of the attacks, according to US media.

In addition to the United States, Israel and US regional allies have not found evidence directly tying Iran to Hamas' plans to attack Israel, the report said.

On Saturday, Palestinian group Hamas launched a surprise large-scale rocket attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip, prompting Israel to declare a state of war the following day and launch retaliatory strikes. On Monday, Israel ordered a complete blockade of the Gaza Strip, home to more than 2 million people, cutting off supplies of water, food and fuel. Both Israel and

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Palestine have reported hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries as a result of the escalation.

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US Senators Urge Defense Secretary to Send 2 Iron Dome Batteries to Israel - Statement

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - A bipartisan group of senators in a letter to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin have requested that the United States supply Israel with two additional Iron Dome batteries and other defense assets amid its escalating war with Hamas.

"I'm leading a bipartisan push requesting to supply Israel with two additional Iron Dome batteries, which are in the possession of the United States but are not being used. We also request more defense assets to help Israel protect its population," Sen. Jacky Rosen said in a statement via the social media platform X.

Sen. Rosen, supported by Senators M. Michael Rounds, Kirsten Gillibrand, and Rick Scott, is awaiting a response to their request by October 13.

The request was submitted on Tuesday.

Austin announced on Wednesday that the US will provide Israel with additional Iron Dome interceptors to protect itself.

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US Intelligence Indicates Iranian Leaders Unaware of Hamas Plans to Attack Israel- Reports

WASHINGTON, October 11 - US intelligence indicates that key Iranian leaders were not aware of Hamas' plans to attack Israel, sparking skepticism about claims that Tehran was directly involved in the planning of the attacks, the New York Times reported on Wednesday.

According to the report, the intelligence explicitly indicates that Iranian officials were not privy to the looming attack against Israel.

In addition to the United States, Israel and US regional allies have not found evidence directly tying Iran to Hamas' plans to attack Israel, the report said.

The identities of the key Iranian officials who should have information related to military operations and would involve Iran's paramilitary organization Quds Force remain undisclosed by the US authorities, the report added.

However, US authorities have signaled that the ongoing intelligence investigation has not concluded and may still unearth evidence that connects Iran or other nations to Hamas, according to the report.

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

No Indications of More Players Getting Involved in War With Israel – Top US General

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) – Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr. said on Wednesday that he has not seen any indications that additional regional players are going to get involved in the ongoing war with Israel.

"I have not seen any indications of additional players that are going to get involved to the detriment of Israel, and this is one of the reasons we have addressed it in our force posture. It's not only in support of Israel, but it's also to deter future action," Brown said during a press briefing following the conclusion of the 16th meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group in Brussels, Belgium.

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Ukrainian Pilots Will Have Initial F-16 Capability Next Spring at Earliest - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) – The Pentagon said Wednesday that the earliest that Ukrainian pilots will have sufficient training to gain the initial capability to fly F-16 jets is next spring.

"What it will take to provide an initial capability, this will take months as we said before, so earliest is next spring when we can begin to see an initial capability," US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said after the 16th meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group in Brussels.

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Pentagon Chief Says No Announcements on ATACMS for Ukraine Today

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said on Wednesday he has no announcement to make regarding the long-range Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS) for Ukraine amid the ongoing conflict with Russia.

"I don't have any announcements on ATACMS to make today," Austin said during a press briefing following the conclusion of the 16th meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group in Brussels, Belgium.

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US to Provide More Iron Dome Interceptors to Israel - Austin

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WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) – The United States will provide Israel with additional Iron Dome interceptors to protect itself amid the escalating war with Hamas, US Secretary of Defense said on Wednesday.

"We'll be providing more Iron Dome interceptors so that Israel can protect its citizens and cities," Austin told reporters after a meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group in Brussels.

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US to Lead Coalition to Develop Ukraine's Air Force, Focus on F-16 Capability – Austin

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - The United States will lead a coalition of countries that will help Ukraine develop its air force, with a focus on the nation's F-16 fighter aircraft capability, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said on Wednesday.

"I am proud to announce that the United States will step up again to help lead the coalition of countries working with Ukraine to develop its Air Force. By leading this capability coalition, the US will coordinate closely with Ukraine and other partners with the focus on developing Ukraine's F-16 fighter aircraft capability," Austin told reporters after a meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group.

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UPDATE: Two Canadians Dead, 3 Missing Following Hamas Attacks on Israel - Joly

(Updates with more details, background in paras 4, 8)

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - Two Canadians have been confirmed dead, one is presumed to have died and three are missing following the attacks by the Palestinian organization Hamas on Israel, Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Melanie Joly said on Wednesday.

Alexander Look, 33, and Ben Mizrachi, 24, are the only two Canadian nationals confirmed dead so far. They are among the nearly 260 casualties of Hamas' attack on the open-air Tribe of Nova music festival attended by nearly 3,500 persons on Saturday.

"We have two confirmed deaths and one presumed, as well as three people missing," Joly said during a press conference from Ottawa.

Joly reiterated that Israel has a right to retaliate in line with international law, adding that Hamas is not representative of Palestine's aspirations and the Palestinian people as a whole.

The foreign affairs minister pointed out that the Canadian government has been in contact with the families of the missing persons, while Canadian officials in Israel have been in contact with their local counterparts to gather more information.

However, Joly declined to confirm whether any Canadian nationals were held hostage in Gaza by Hamas, adding that giving a confirmation could "increase their value" and put their lives in

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danger.

The Canadian government is in contact with Israel's chief negotiator on hostages, Joly said, further noting that Canada would be sending an expert team in support of his work.

On Saturday, Hamas launched surprise large-scale attacks against Israel from the Gaza Strip, prompting Israel to declare a state of war the following day and launch retaliatory strikes. On Monday, Israel ordered a full blockade of the Gaza Strip, home to more than 2 million Palestinians, cutting of supplies of water, food and fuel. Israeli and Palestinian officials have reported hundreds of dead people and thousands of injured as a result of the escalation in fighting.

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US Lawmakers Urge State Dept. to Use 'All Tools' to Return Americans From Israel - Letter

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - A group of 146 US lawmakers sent a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday, urging the State Department to use all available tools to evacuate US nationals from Israel amid conflict in the country.

"Given the rapidly escalating situation as Israel launches a counteroffensive, it is imperative that you use all tools at your disposal to return all US nationals in Israel home who wish to do so," the letter said.

On Saturday, fighters with the Palestinian group Hamas launched a surprise attack on Israel, prompting Israeli leadership to declare a state of war. The fighting has resulted in thousands of casualties, including 11 Americans.

US congressional offices have received reports that Americans are among hostages taken by Hamas in Gaza, the letter said. The State Department should use all available resources, including charter or military flights, to help Americans in Israel return to the United States, the letter said.

The letter is signed by a bipartisan group of lawmakers including Grace Meng, Nicole Malliotakis, Yvette Clarke and Elise Stefanik.

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Joly Says Concerned Hamas Attack on Israel 'Second Front' in Current Worldwide Situation

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Melanie Joly on Wednesday expressed concern that the Hamas attacks on Israel could be a "second front" to what is happening in the world, given that the first front is in Ukraine.

Joly said she has held talks with officials from the United States, Israel, Egypt and the Palestinian Authority as well as from Jordan and Saudi Arabia, to address the latest escalation in the region and to reiterate Canada's condemnation of Hamas' terrorist attacks.

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"I'm working with partners to de-escalate because I'm concerned about what's going on in the region. I'm concerned that this could be a second front to what is happening in the world as we are also dealing with Ukraine, which is a first front. And so that's why I've been talking to many, many of my colleagues and have been in contact with them every hour," Joly said during a press conference in Ottawa.

Joly noted that during the course of two years while serving as foreign affairs minister, Canada has organized two assisted departure operations in less than six months - first from Sudan and now from Israel - and the country must be ready to face similar situations.

"We'll have to be ready to do more because the world is getting much more of a difficult place to live in. We're living in an international security crisis," Joly said.

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Two Canadians Dead, 3 Missing Following Hamas Attacks on Israel - Joly

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Alexander Look, 33, and Ben Mizrachi, 24, are the only two Canadian nationals confirmed dead so far. Both individuals are part of the nearly 260 casualties following Hamas attack on the open-air Tribe of Nova music festival attended by some 3500 people on Saturday.

"We have two confirmed deaths and one presumed, as well as three people missing," Joly said during a press conference in Ottawa.

Joly pointed out that the Canadian government has been in contact with the families of the missing persons, while Canadian officials in Israel have been in contact with their local counterparts to gather more information.

However, Joly declined to confirm whether any Canadian nationals were held hostage in Gaza by Hamas. adding that giving a confirmation could "increase their value" and put their lives in danger.

The Canadian government is in contact with Israel's chief negotiator on hostages, further noting that Canada would be sending an expert team in support of him and his work.

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Scalise Says Would Pass Resolution Backing Israel for First Move as US House Speaker

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Steve Scalise said on Wednesday that House lawmakers would consider a resolution in support of Israel as the first order of business under his potential leadership as speaker.

"It's really, really important that this Congress gets back to work," Scalise said ahead of a

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closed House Republican meeting. “The first order of business under Speaker Steve Scalise is going to be to bring a strong resolution expressing support for Israel.”

The House of Representatives would take up a bipartisan resolution authored by House Foreign Affairs Committee leadership, Scalise said. The resolution, which is backed by nearly 400 members of Congress, expresses support for Israel and condemns Palestinian group Hamas for launching a surprise attack over the weekend.

House Republicans are meeting ahead of votes to elect a new speaker, following the House of Representatives’ decision to oust Congressman Kevin McCarthy from the role last week in a historic first. House Republicans are considering Scalise and Congressman Jim Jordan as the leading candidates.

The House of Representatives is unable to conduct normal legislative business, such as passing bills, until it elects a new speaker.

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UPDATE - US House Panel Launches Probe Into 'Secret' Negotiations With Iran – Letter

(Updates with additional details in paras 3-7, background in para 8)

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - The US House Oversight Committee announced on Wednesday it has launched an investigation into the Biden administration’s alleged secret dealings with Iran amid the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

“The Committee on Oversight and Accountability is investigating the Biden Administration's efforts to conceal details about its ongoing secret nuclear negotiations with the Islamic Republic of Iran from Congress, ignoring statutory obligations for congressional oversight,” the committee said in a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken. “We request documents, information, and a briefing to assist the Committee's investigation of these matters.”

Congressmen James Comer and Glenn Grothman, who are leading the probe, believe that the Biden administration has recently made concessions to Iran in a potential violation of the Iranian Nuclear Review Act (INARA), while former Special Envoy for Iran Robert Malley was in charge of negotiating with Tehran the resumption of the Iranian nuclear deal, according to the letter.

The committee is mainly interested in obtaining all documents and communications pertaining to Malley and former member of his negotiating team Ariane Tabatabai’s contacts with Iranian officials and Tehran’s proxy groups as well as documents linked to their security clearance, the letter stated.

Among other documents, the committee requests Blinken provide all documents and communications linked to US citizens or permanent residents detained in Iran, including Siamak Namazi, Morad Tahbaz, Emad Shargi, Shahab Dalili, and Afshin Sheikholeslami Vatani, according to the letter.

The State Department must provide the requested documents no later than October 25, the letter said.

Besides documents, the committee requests that Blinken provide a staff-level briefing on the matter by no later than October 18, the letter said.

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Malley was suspended from his position without pay and his security clearance was revoked this summer while the FBI is investigating allegations that he mishandled classified documents pertaining to Iran while leading the negotiation process on the Iranian nuclear deal.

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US House Oversight Panel Launches Probe Into 'Secret Negotiations' With Iran - Letter

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"The Committee on Oversight and Accountability is investigating the Biden Administration's efforts to conceal details about its ongoing secret nuclear negotiations with the Islamic Republic of Iran from Congress, ignoring statutory obligations for congressional oversight," the committee said in a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken. "We request documents, information, and a briefing to assist the Committee's investigation of these matters."

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Taiwan Officials Reiterate Commitment to Peace Amid Hamas-Israel Conflict

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) – Taiwanese officials reiterated on Wednesday their commitment to peace while fortifying Taiwan's self-defense in light of the outbreak of conflict between Hamas and Israel.

"I think the unfortunate Russian invasion of Ukraine, as well as the evolving situation of the conflict between Hamas and Israel over the last few days continue to remind us that we can never take peace for granted, especially as Taiwan faces increasing levels of coercion and threats against our democratic existence," Representative of Taiwan to the United States Hsiao Bi-khim said at the Global Taiwan Institute's annual symposium.

"So in light of these circumstances, Taiwan has also invested heavily in fortifying our own self defense," Hsiao added.

Taiwan's Foreign Affairs Minister Joseph Wu also reiterated Taiwan's commitment to the status quo, echoing the US position that war with China is "neither imminent nor inevitable."

"Peace is the only option for the consequences of war will be too serious for the rest of the world to bear," Wu said.

He added that Taiwan had made it clear to Beijing that it was open to dialogue to find a way to co-exist based on the status quo.

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