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10/16/23 Monday

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Huge City-Sized Comet Sprouts 'Horns' After Cryovolcanic Eruption

Huge balls of dust and ice left over from the formation of the solar system, comets are typically unassuming interstellar objects until they get close to the sun, which heats them up and shoots huge tails of gas behind them, putting on a dramatic show in the night sky.

A comet closing in on the sun has seemingly regrown "horns" of vaporized ice after a new cryovolcanic operation was triggered deep inside the interstellar object. Another eruption was observed in July.

As the comet 12/Pons-Brooks gets ready for its close approach to the sun next April, it is undergoing some dramatic changes, including huge eruptions of vaporized ice and gas from deep inside its 18-mile-wide core.

This isn't your typical comet's tail, which gradually grows bigger as the comet gets closer to the sun and the sun's radiation heats it up, vaporizing water and dust on it, which is then blown into space. These eruptions have been sudden and dramatic, increasing 12P's brightness by 100 times.

The gas is being vented through cracks in 12P that have broken due to the pressure, and their irregular shape has caused the gas to vent in a strange and oblong way. Thus, 12P hasn't developed a regular tail, but is shooting its gases out through two holes in one side, giving it the appearance of a pair of "horns."

The most recent eruption, which began on October 5, has increased its brightness by about 40 times, according to media reports. The huge venting of gas has created a cloud some 373,000 miles across, which is reflecting a lot more sunlight than before.

A Halley-style comet that comes around every 71 years, 12P is known to undergo these types of convulsions, with dramatic changes in brightness being observed during its close passes going back hundreds of years. Other comets with longer orbits might only return after thousands of years.

The comet is still about 3AU (three times the distance of Earth's orbit) from the sun, but it's expected to make its closest pass in April 2024, at which time it'll be about 1.55AU from the Earth. Comet 12P will be difficult to see with the naked eye, but should be easily visible in telescopes or binoculars, appearing about as bright as Jupiter's moon Ganymede.

If you miss it, you'll have to wait until 2095 to see Comet 12P again.

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Americans Show Record Low Approval for Military While US Boosts Aid to Ukraine, Israel

A former US military commander told Sputnik that the more weapons the US sends to other nations, the more it hurts its own readiness and training. The crisis comes at a time that military morale and public perceptions of the armed forces are both at historic lows.

Recently, a former senior US Army officer was the latest to raise the alarm about the impact of US military aid for Ukraine on the readiness status of American armed forces. Retired Brig. Gen. Don Bolduc told US media the program had "overstretched" US abilities, limiting its ability to intervene in other places, such as Israel, where the yearslong conflict with Hamas was renewed earlier this month.

The US military has sent some $46 billion worth of equipment to Kiev since February 2022, including ammunition, armored vehicles, and aircraft either from its own stocks or those of its allies, which it has then pledged to "backfill" afterward.

After Hamas started firing thousands of rockets toward Israel last week, overwhelming Israel's Iron Dome air defense systems, the US also stepped in to replenish their supply of Tamir missiles, as well as shipping thousands of rifles to arm Jewish settlers in the West Bank, where fortified Jewish-only settlements have been founded among older Palestinian towns.

"I would agree with that assessment," international consultant retired US Army Lt. Col. and Earl Rasmussen told Sputnik on Monday about Balduc's comments. " I think we're overcommitted and we've got readiness concerns as well and training concerns."

"I think we've been overstretched for a while. Our recruiting goals are not being met, some of the policies have changed," he noted, adding that on "that equipment side, when you're siphoning it off and you're sending it to other places, you're also at the same time degrading your training opportunities at home. I think we've got tensions between our allies, especially within NATO, there's the inner tensions going on as a result of the conflict in Ukraine and some of the policies."

The readiness crisis comes at a time that the US military overall is suffering from its lowest approval ratings and morale in decades, following the disastrous end of the 20-year war in Afghanistan, which saw the Taliban* seize power from the US-allied government in Kabul even before US forces had withdrawn.

A Gallup poll conducted in June found that 60% of members of the American public who were polled expressed "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in the US military - the lowest numbers recorded since 1997 and part of a continuous decline over the last five years. The decline was registered among Republicans, Democrats, and Independents alike.

Chronic Staffing Issues

That parallels an ongoing recruitment and retention crisis across the US military branches. Last year, the US Army missed its recruitment goal by some 15,000 soldiers - essentially an entire infantry division - and this year expects ao 10,000-soldier shortfall. The Air Force and Navy also expect similar recruitment shortfalls this year.

In the Navy, recruitment and retention issues have contributed to a chronic understaffing problem onboard ships, destroying morale and contributing to a series of maritime accidents in recent years, such as several collisions between US Navy warships and civilian vessels.

One report by the Military Times in 2014 was titled "America's Military: A Force Adrift" and described "morale indicators on the decline in nearly every aspect of military life." A US Navy

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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/17/2023 2:06:26 PM

survey of commanders' morale in 2017 following one such collision recorded one sailor on a US cruiser describing the mood on the vessel: "it feels like a race to see which will break down first, the ship or its crew."

While many suggested that recruitment troubles were caused by a problem of "wokeness" in the military. However, the most recent Monitoring the Future poll stated that just 5% of would-be recruits indicated this was the reason they haven't joined, with its data indicating the problem is actually more liberal youth being deterred by changing social attitudes about military service.

"I would say it's more of the political policies and political directions that are influencing that perspective versus the military itself," Rasmussen told Sputnik.

"There's more and more of a questioning of our foreign policy and the extent that our military are getting involved [overseas]," he explained. "I would say most people still respect the military, but perhaps some of that has diminished as a result of our - not necessarily as a result of the military, but more of the political policies that are being made and the use of the military that those policies are calling for."

"I think the military itself, as most people in the military, from my experience, are very patriotic, are very, very supportive, and believe strongly in the country. But sometimes you're called to do missions that maybe are not very popular, and they may not be popular within the military either, and definitely not within the population," he said, adding that the Biden administration had not paralleled its ramping up of tensions with other nations with an increase in pro-military messaging, which can also affect the public's perception.

Attempts to counter these attitudes by lowering recruiting standards have only created more problems, with a spike in sexual assaults being credited to the decision. These include waivers for English language proficiency, high school degrees, medical conditions, and even criminal records, according to experts.

Rasmussen noted that service members being "treated differently" can contribute to recruitment and retention problems by creating discipline issues and projecting an image of the service as not including people like them.

"I've never seen a more rapid shift in the environment in the military than I have in the last three years," he said.

"We're not meeting our recruiting goals. We're not meeting our objectives here. We've seen a recent shift in policies as well. There's certain problems within the discipline of the Army … if you're treated differently and stuff like that, that creates a problem. You have to also look at: who are the main people we're targeting for enlistment and for service and how will policies affect them or affect their openness to serve?"

"If I'm coming into the military, I'm expecting one thing, and expect to, you know, put my life down for my country. But, if my policies are not really addressing needs of the country or strategic needs or threats to the country, and I'm being wherever else and my training is not adequate, and then I have policies being implemented that I don't necessarily agree with … then you've got a problem in that," he said.

"Also my understanding [is] they've done increased [screening] on security threats and are actually asking - I don't know if it's true - they're asking political-type questions. So now I'm shaping my armed forces based on political awareness: are they liberal, or they conservative or whatever. Then people are going: 'Do I want to be here? Do I want to join? Do I make a career?

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Do I stay in?' You start to make people question that much more, especially when they don't see a direct relationship to their own values and to their own needs," Rasmussen explained.

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'Definitely Not Both': Former Army Commander Says US Can't Support Two Proxy Wars

Over the weekend, US President Joe Biden doubled down on his pledges to send weapons to both Ukraine and Israel. However, a former senior US military officer said supporting war on so many fronts was unsustainable and would further degrade US military readiness.

After Hamas launched attacks on Israeli border towns last week that killed more than 1,300 Israelis, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) declared a siege of the Gaza Strip and unleashed a relentless bombardment that has killed more than 2,750 Palestinians as of Monday evening, with another 1,000 missing and at least 10,000 injured. After Israel fired thousands of Tamir missiles from its Iron Dome system - shooting down Hamas rockets targeting several major cities, Biden said the US would step in to resupply Israel.

Since then, Biden has also sent thousands of small arms to Israel and deployed two aircraft carrier battle groups to the region. On Monday, US media reported up to 2,000 US troops were ready to deploy to Israel, with plans to use the in non-combat support roles for the IDF.

The rush to buttress the Israeli military comes amid a political fight in Washington over continued US military aid for Ukraine, which has topped $46 billion over the last two years. Now, the question is whether the US can not only support Ukraine, but Israel, too.

"We're the United States of America for God's sake, the most powerful nation in the history - not in the world, in the history of the world," Biden said in a pre-recorded US media interview that aired on Sunday. "We can take care of both of these and still maintain our overall international defense."

The White House is expected to ask Congress for an Israel aid bill, but the legislature remained locked in dispute over selecting a House speaker - a fight initiated, in part, but the previous speaker's insistence on including Ukraine aid in next year's budget.

"If there's a choice, if it has to be one or the other, the support will most likely go towards the Israeli side," international consultant and retired US Army Lt. Col. Earl Rasmussen told Sputnik on Monday.

"He's completely off-base," Rasmussen said of Biden. "There's no way we can support two - we can generate money and send more money I guess, but that's not going to do any good there. And Ukraine's a lost cause."

"He can promise that or whatever, but delivering those weapons is another story, and getting the funding through. I think it'd be very difficult to do it, especially if escalation occurred - a two-front conflict - and especially if we get involved directly with it. Meanwhile, we've got tensions increasing in Taiwan and with China. I think it's very unlikely they would be able to support both initiatives," Rasmussen said.

"I would say from a funding, from a capacity perspective: I do not see our weapons companies - we've drained so much with Ukraine, we're running low on everything, we even had ammunition

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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/17/2023 2:06:26 PM

that we had stockpiled in Israel directed and sent to Ukraine. So I guess Israel is apparently trying to get that back, which I don't think it's going to come back. So we are in a weakened position and I just do not see that happening. I would say that from a priority perspective, Israel will have a priority over Ukraine. It just has a more strategic importance to us as well."

The former US Army officer said the events of the past week illustrated the Biden administration's real priority is Israel, which would get any and all largesse it requires at the expense not just of Ukraine's war effort, but at the expense of Palestinian human rights as well.

"I think there's a lot of things going on here. What's interesting is, at least with the news here, very little has been saying about Ukraine this past week. Everything is about Israel and Hamas," he said, noting that "you see no kind of condemnation from the US government" of Israel's siege and bombing campaign against Gaza.

"As far as human rights go, we kind of threw it out the window," Rasmussen said. "I think for Biden, he has to support Israel, there's too much government influence from the Israeli lobby, too much money and contributions coming into the Congress. We already provide $4 billion a year to Israel as it is. I'm sure that's going to go up. Whatever necessary, we'll shift over from Ukraine to Israel. I think Ukraine is just not a high priority item anymore."

"I think this gives the Biden administration a shift, it's almost an exit ramp from Ukraine. Politically, he needs to support Israel. He can kind of gently shift the narrative away from Ukraine, perhaps," he suggested, noting that "this latest counteroffensive is being exposed as a complete failure."

Rasmussen suggested Biden wanted to return to the Middle East, including by playing peace broker between Israel and Hamas, but also that there are likely some in Biden's administration who want to see a war between Israel and Iran, which Jerusalem has attempted to blame for the recent outbreak of violence, and which would be a dramatic escalation that would drag in the US.

"This could blow up. This could be worse than the Ukrainian tensions, potentially. I don't think he wants to blow anything up before the election, but it does not look good and I don't think it looks good [politically] for Biden as well.

Asked about the capabilities of the US military-industrial complex in light of all the weapons being sent to Ukraine and Israel, Rasmussen said the US military posture had "weakened considerably" since February 2022 "and it's going to be weakened and stressed even more."

"The readiness of soldiers, I would say, especially with a major conflict - it's questionable," he said.

"I don't think the US military, both from a weapons and ammunition perspective, we've been drained extensively that 20 years of endless wars militarily goes. I don't think we're postured that we've shifted some of our policies and training and everything, and we're not meeting our recruiting goals either."

"I don't see the US capable of actually handling either one successfully - and definitely not both," he said. "I think it's our military, our readiness posture, it's significantly weakened over the last several years. We've drained our weapons caches a lot. Corporations are not, our military-industrial complex is not ramped up sufficient to meet the needs that are there. So it's a very dangerous and threatening situation," he said, predicting the US would likely lean on "proxy forces" in the Middle East, just as they have in Ukraine.

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Large Majority of Americans Want to Help Palestinians Flee Violence - Poll

Support is high among all political stripes of Americans, but the poll did not ask where they'd like the refugees to be settled.

A new poll says that a large majority of Americans want the US government to help citizens in Gaza flee the violence in the territory.

The poll closed as Israel continued to prepare a large ground invasion in Gaza targeted at Hamas. The country has been bombing Gaza since an October 7 surprise attack by Hamas killed 1,400 people and captured 199 more, according to Israeli authorities. The response by Israel has killed over 2,808 people in Palestine, the majority being citizens, according to Palestinian authorities.

The poll indicated 78% of respondents agreed with the statement, “American diplomats should actively be working on a plan to allow civilians fleeing fighting in Gaza to move to a safe country,” while 22% disagreed.

The support was seen across all political spectrums but was most pronounced among Democrats, with 94% of Democratic respondents saying they supported the statement compared to 71% and 73% for Republicans and Independents, respectively.

Support for Israel in general remains high among Americans, with 41% saying the US government should support Israel in the conflict. However, more Americans believe the US should act as a neutral mediator or not be involved at all. Combined, those two neutral options were supported by 48% of respondents (27% for neutral mediator, 21% for no involvement). Only 2% said they believe the US government should support Palestine and the support for Israel is higher than in 2014, when the country conducted a ground operation against Hamas in a smaller scale operation.

While support for helping refugees fleeing the violence is predictably high, there are questions about its viability. No neighboring country or other third-party country has committed to taking in large numbers of refugees. The Rafah crossing into Egypt from Gaza remains closed despite ongoing negotiations and Israel has closed all other routes out of the territory.

Israel has told citizens to move towards the southern area of the country ahead of the ground invasion.

Furthermore, Hamas has told civilians to stay in their homes and some fear a repeat of the 1948 Nakba or “catastrophe” in Arabic. That event, which coincided with the formation of Israel, saw at least 750,000 Palestinians being displaced from their homes and expelled from the borders of Palestine. They were never allowed to return and construction was later undertaken to establish new homes for Israelis.

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Trump Files Lawsuit in UK Court to Discredit 'Scandalous' Steele Dossier

The debunked Steele Dossier was cited by the media for years as evidence that former US President Donald Trump had coordinated with officials in Moscow during his 2016 presidential campaign.

Former US President Donald Trump has filed a lawsuit in a UK court against the company behind the infamous Steele Dossier, which included a variety of sensational claims targeting the then-presidential candidate during the 2016 US election.

The dossier, created by the company founded by former British spy Christopher Steele at the behest of the Hillary Clinton campaign, was published by US media days before Trump's inauguration. It made unsubstantiated and salacious allegations about the soon-to-be US president and was the basis for much of the so-called "Russiagate" controversy that hung over his presidency.

Much of the document was contradicted by the Mueller and Horowitz reports, with the Durham report criticizing the FBI for leaning on the dossier in its investigations into Trump when it couldn't corroborate anything in the report. It is now largely accepted to be a discredited document by most major media outlets.

Hugh Tomlinson, Trump's lawyer working on the recent legal case, has said Orbis Business Intelligence - the company founded by Christopher Steele and the creator of the document, violated Trump's data protection rights causing "personal and reputational damage and distress."

A lawyer for Orbis has called for the case to be dismissed, arguing the report was never meant to be made public and was published without authorization. They further argue it is too late to make a claim.

Tomlinson says people still believe the false allegations in the report, and that Trump plans to vindicate himself by proving the allegations false in court.

"Until there is such a judgment, I continue to suffer damage and distress as a result of people wrongfully believing that the data in the dossier is accurate," the former US president wrote in his witness statement.

The Steele Dossier included salacious and at-times bizarre claims about Trump, including the infamous "pee tape," and that the Russian government had been collaborating with Trump when he was the host of a reality TV show. It also accused Trump of bribery, among other crimes.

Steele has insisted his dossier has not been discredited and claims its "main tenets continue to hold up well," although he admits he cannot provide evidence for the outlined claims.

Trump previously tried to sue Steele, Clinton and her advisers and top FBI officials for allegedly working together to concoct the Russiagate conspiracy; however, that case was thrown out. By 2020, a British judge ordered Steele to pay $23,000 in damages to a Russian bank that was falsely named in the dossier.

The judge presiding over the latest legal filing has indicated that she would rule at an undetermined date if the case can move forward after hearing arguments in London's High Court.

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Political Drama: Jordan Inches Toward House Speakership With Vote Planned for Tuesday

US Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) was earlier ousted as House speaker after a handful of Republicans joined Democrats in a historic vote to remove the lower congressional chamber's leader. The House has remained without a speaker ever since, causing any potential legislation to enter a standstill until a new speaker is elected.

US Rep. Jim Jordan (R-OH) is closing in on securing the House speakership after shoring up support over the weekend, potentially setting up a political showdown for the chamber's leadership.

Jordan emerged as the front-runner for the House speaker position after his main rival, US Rep. Steve Scalise (R-LA), dropped out after winning an internal Republican vote but failing to secure enough support to win on the House floor.

Subsequent Republican caucus votes pitted Jordan against US Rep. Austin Scott (R-GA), with Jordan winning by a larger margin than Scalise, but still short of the 217 votes needed to secure the vote in the House.

As of Sunday night, 10 to 20 Republicans were planning to vote against Jordan, a number now down to seven, according to a House Republican who spoke to US media. The Republican added officials believe Jordan will secure the leadership position.

Republicans plan to call for a vote on the speakership Tuesday.

On Monday, some of Jordan's most staunch opponents expressed support for the Ohio Republican. Rep. Mike Rodgers (R-AK), who said on Sunday that there was nothing Jordan could do to win his vote, said he supported him after "two cordial, thoughtful and productive" conversations that addressed his concerns.

Reps. Ann Wagner (R-MO), Ken Calvert (R-CA) and Vern Buchanan (R-FL) also expressed support for Jordan on Monday after initially opposing him. Rep. Mike Lawler (R-NY) told a constituent this weekend that he plans to "probably just vote for" Jordan.

Insider media reports revealed late Monday that Jordan managed to clinch the much-needed support from his fellow lawmakers after floating potential concessions regarding funding for Ukraine and Israel, a key issue for many officials who have sternly opposed additional aid for Ukraine. However, a spokesperson for the Jordan camp has rejected claims that concessions were made.

The coalescing behind Jordan follows reports and comments by House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries that informal conversations had begun between moderate Republicans and Democrats about selecting a bipartisan speaker. A recent poll showed that a large majority of Democrats and a significant minority of Republicans would support such a move.

While no Republican representatives admitted that the development encouraged them to get behind Jordan, some expressed a desire to prevent Democrats from selecting a speaker.

"Too much is at stake to hand control of the House to radical liberal Democrats," Wagner said, "which is why we must elect a conservative as the next speaker."

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The last representative to vote for a member of the other party for speaker was Rep. Jim Traficant (D-OH) who voted for the Republican nominee in 2001. In response, Democrats stripped him of his committee assignments.

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Trump Files Lawsuit in UK Court to Discredit 'Scandalous' Steele Dossier

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White House Says Must Take Hamas Statements With 'Grain of Salt' Amid Hostage Situation

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - The United States must be skeptical of public statements issued by Hamas amid efforts to free foreign hostages taken by the Palestinian militants, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said during a press briefing.
"I cannot comment on the reports that Hamas might be willing to negotiate. They shouldn't have held any hostages in the first place. They should release them immediately," Kirby said on Monday. "We have to, obviously, take any public statements by Hamas with a huge grain of salt."
Earlier on Monday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanaani said that Hamas is prepared to release nearly 200 hostages in exchange for an end to Israeli airstrikes on Gaza. However, Hamas has not acknowledged making such a proposal.
On October 7, Hamas launched a surprise attack on Israel, prompting retaliatory strikes on Gaza. The conflict has left thousands of people dead and injured on both sides. In addition, Hamas took nearly 200 people hostage, including an indeterminate number of US citizens.
US President Joe Biden is set to discuss the hostage situation with Israeli officials during a trip to the country on Wednesday, Kirby said.

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Biden to Hold Bilateral Meeting With Netanyahu on Israel Visit Wednesday - White House

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will have a bilateral meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during his visit to Israel on Wednesday amid the Gaza conflict, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby told reporters.
"There'll be a bilateral with Prime Minister Netanyahu," Kirby said on Monday.

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Biden to Meet Abbas, Egypt's El-Sisi During Trip to Jordan This Week - White House

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden on the same day as a visit to Israel will meet with the leaders of Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority in Amman to reaffirm his commitment to Palestinian rights, dignity, self-determination, and address Gaza's humanitarian needs, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby told reporters.

"On the same day, he [Biden] will travel to Amman, Jordan, where he will meet with His Majesty King Abdullah, the Egyptian President El-Sisi and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas. He will certainly reiterate that Hamas does not stand for the Palestinian people's right to dignity and self determination. And he'll discuss again the humanitarian needs of all civilians in Gaza," Kirby said on Monday.

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Biden in Israel Visit to Get Update From Israelis on Strategy, Military Operations - Kirby

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden during his visit to Israel Wednesday will get an update from Israeli officials about their strategy against Hamas in Gaza including the pace of their military operations, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby told reporters.

"The President will reaffirm our solidarity with with Israel and he will look forward to getting an update from Israeli officials about about their strategy and the pace of their military operations and certainly expect to hear from Israel what they believe they need to continue to defend their people so that we can continue to work with with Congress to try to meet those needs," Kirby said Monday.

Biden will also have a chance to to discuss the issue of delivering humanitarian assistance to civilians in Gaza in a way that does not benefit Hamas, Kirby said. Kirby said Biden will also discuss the hostage situation.

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Biden Held Calls With Egypt, Iraq on Efforts to Contain Gaza Conflict - White House

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden held calls with his counterparts from Egypt and Iraq to discuss efforts to contain the Israel-Gaza conflict, the White House said in a press release.

"President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. spoke today with President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi of Egypt," the release said on Monday. "They discussed ongoing efforts to alleviate the worsening humanitarian crisis in Gaza, in coordination with the UN, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority,

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/17/2023 2:06:26 PM

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Israel, and other regional partners, and the need to preserve stability in the Middle East more broadly... The two leaders agreed to continue their close coordination to prevent the conflict from widening and ensure humanitarian assistance reaches those in need."

Biden in his call with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani discussed ongoing efforts to prevent an expansion of the conflict in Gaza in the wake of Hamas's attack in Israel, the White House said in a separate press release. The two leaders also discussed the importance of addressing the worsening humanitarian crisis in Gaza, in coordination with the UN and regional partners, the release added.

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Blinken Says Biden Visit to Israel Will Show 'Ironclad Commitment to Its Security'

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden during his visit to Israel on Wednesday will send a message of solidarity with the Jewish state and reaffirm America's commitment to its security, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in remarks to reporters at the US Embassy in Tel Aviv.

"And he's coming here to do the following: First, the president will reaffirm the United States' solidarity with Israel and our ironclad commitment to its security," Blinken said on Monday.

Blinken also said the visit aims to deter other actors from getting involved in the conflict.

Blinken added that Biden would again make clear that "Israel has the right, and indeed the duty to defend its people from Hamas and other terrorists."

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Blinken Says Biden to Visit Israel Wednesday

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken after talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said President Joe Biden will visit Israel this week.

"On Wednesday, President Biden will visit Israel. He's coming here at a critical moment for Israel, for the region and the world," Blinken said on Monday.

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UNSC Rejects Russian Resolution Calling for Humanitarian Ceasefire in Gaza

UNITED NATIONS, October 17 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council voted to reject a Russia-proposed draft resolution to resolve the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip.

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The vote on Monday was 5 in favor, 4 against, 6 abstained.

"We regret that the council once again has found itself a hostage to the ego, to the selfish intentions of the Western bloc of countries," Russian Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said after the vote.

Following other states' draft resolution proposals, the Russian mission to the United Nations included amendments to its resolution to condemn the indiscriminate Israeli strikes against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and call for a humanitarian ceasefire amid the dire situation for the civilians there.

The resolution does not condemn Hamas due to it being purely humanitarian in nature.

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Austin Talks With Israeli Counterpart Gallant on Operation to Restore Security - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin spoke with Israel Defense Minister Yoav Gallant and discussed Israel's operation to restore its security in the aftermath of Hamas attack, the Defense Department said.

"Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III spoke today with Israeli Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant to continue discussions on Israel's operations to restore security following Hamas brutal October 7 attack," the Defense Department said in a statement on Monday.

Austin underscored the United States' dedication to hastening security aid and curbing the rise of conflicts, the statement said.

In addition, Austin highlighted the importance of safeguarding civilians and expressed gratitude to Gallant for the initiatives to reestablish potable water supplies in Gaza, the statement added.

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US Actions Challenge Russia's Restraint on INF Missile Deployment - Vorontsov

UNITED NATIONS, October 17 (Sputnik) - Russia's unilateral moratorium on deploying intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) is challenged by the United States' active preparations to deploy such weapons in Europe, Foreign Ministry Non-Proliferation and Arms Control Department Deputy Director Kosntantin Vorontsov said.

"We observe a unilateral moratorium on the deployment of ground-based INF missiles, which, however, is subject to serious pressure due to the active preparations of the United States for the deployment of such weapons in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region," Vorontsov said during a meeting of the UN General Assembly First Committee on Monday.

On February 21, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Russia was pausing its involvement in the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) without formally exiting the accord. Putin highlighted the need for Russia to account for not just the United States' arsenals but also

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those of other NATO nuclear powers like the United Kingdom and France.

By February 28, Putin had authorized a law temporarily halting Russia's participation in the New START treaty.

Vorontsov said that Russia is taking a number of measures to maintain stability and predictability regarding nuclear missiles.

"We continue to adhere to the central quantitative restrictions provided for by the New START Treaty and notify the United States of upcoming launches of ICBMs [inter-continental ballistic missiles] and SLBMs [sea-launched ballistic missiles]," Vorontsov added.

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Biden Considering Trip to Israel, Planning Underway - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden is considering making a trip to Israel as soon as this week to demonstrate support for the country following a surprise attack by Hamas, NBC News reported, citing three administration officials.

Planning for the potential trip has already begun, including in Israel itself, the report said on Monday.

However, it is not certain whether Biden would visit any other country while traveling to the region, the report said.

Earlier on Monday, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said that there is no travel for Biden to officially announce, but confirmed that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had invited the US president to visit the country.

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Trump Says Will Ban Refugees From Gaza, Other Mideast Countries That Threaten US Security

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump during a speech in Iowa said he will ban refugees from Gaza and other Middle East countries that threaten US security if he returns to the Oval office.

"In my second term, we're going to expand each and every one of those [travel] bans because we have no choice," Trump said on Monday. "Some very rough people, some very, very rough people come out of those areas. They want to blow up our country. We aren't bringing in anyone from Gaza, Syria, Somalia, Yemen or Libya, or anywhere else that threatens our security."

Trump added that his administration will also seek to revoke the student visas of "radical anti-American and anti-semitic" individuals at US universities and deport them.

Trump described pro-Palestinian protesters as "barbarians" in light of the Hamas attacks

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/17/2023 2:06:26 PM

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against Israel.

On October 7, Palestinian movement 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.

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Russia Views Attacks Against Its Political Leaders Unacceptable, Inappropriate - Antonov

(Updates with more details, background in paras 5-7)

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - Russia considers any attacks against its political leaders unacceptable and inappropriate, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said.

"We consider attacks against the Russian political leadership unacceptable and inappropriate," Antonov said on Monday in reference to US President Joe Biden's recent comments in an interview. "We may have different points of view, but it is unacceptable to stoop to obscene characterizations, once again fueling the already flourishing Russophobia in the country."

Antonov pointed out that the United States has never realized the essence or causes of the Ukrainian conflict.

"They did not understand that an attempt to pit two fraternal peoples against each other at the hands of US political strategists would not lead to anything good," Antonov said. "All efforts undertaken by the collective West to 'inflict strategic defeat on Russia,' and even more so, victory over the Russian soldier on the battlefield, are doomed to failure. This is a given, confirmed by many historical facts."

Antonov also said that it is time for US politicians to finally realize, despite their "hawkish" approach, that Russia will not disappear from the world map and to start thinking how to coexist together.

"All the fervor of emotions must be focused on the main problems, including maintaining global strategic stability, strengthening the WMD non-proliferation regime, building a new international security architecture, fighting terrorism and climate change. In all of these areas we have accumulated significant competence, while in the majority of those we have experience of useful bilateral cooperation. To forget this and not use it in the interests of humanity would be a crime. Responsibility for which lies entirely with the American authorities," Antonov said.

Russia has been conducting a special military operation in Ukraine since February 24, 2022. Russian President Vladimir Putin has said the operation aims to protect people subjected to genocide for eight years by the Kiev regime. The ultimate goal is to liberate Donbas and create conditions that guarantee Russia's security, he also said.

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US Ready to Work with Russia to Return to Full Implementation of New START Treaty-Diplomat

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik)- US Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament Bruce Turner conveyed the United States' commitment to engage constructively with Russia on the revival of the New START treaty.

"The United States remains ready to engage. We are prepared to work constructively with Russia on a pathway back to full implementation of the New START treaty, and on Nuclear Risk Reduction, and on a post 2026 nuclear arms control framework," Turner said during the United Nations First Committee session on Monday.

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Oil Down Again After Last Week's Rally, Brent Below $90 Per Barrel

NEW YORK, October 17 (Sputnik) - Crude prices fell on Monday, with global benchmark Brent finishing below the key bullish mark of $90 per barrel, on reports that US sanctions on Venezuela could ease if Caracas agrees to an election date - one of Washington's prerequisites for normalizing trade and other relations with the South American country.

Oil markets were also pressured by a lack of fresh upward catalysts from the Israel-Hamas war that threw a lifeline last week to those long on crude.

Also weighing on prices was data showing hedge funds and other big players in oil dumping

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their bullish holdings at an alarming rate last week despite Friday's outsized rally.

New York-traded West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude for delivery in November settled at $86.66 per barrel, down $1.03, or 1.2%. Last week, the US crude benchmark finished up almost 6%, with most, if not all, of that coming from a run-up Friday.

London-origin Brent crude for the most-active December contract settled at $89.65, down $1.24, or 1.4%. Last week, the global crude benchmark gained 7.5%.

The US and Venezuelan governments were getting ready to sign a pact in Barbados as early as on Tuesday to ease Washington's sanctions on Venezuela's oil industry in return for a competitive, monitored presidential election next year, media reports said.

Fewer sanctions on Venezuela's oil industry could lead to an increase in supply - now restricted by output cuts from the global producer alliance OPEC+, which includes Russia and Saudi Arabia.

Traders were also optimistic that the war between Israel and Hamas would remain confined to Gaza, without dragging in Iran, which supports the Palestinian Islamist group.

Hedge funds and other money managers, meanwhile, sold the equivalent of 140 million barrels in the six most important petroleum futures and options contracts over the week to October 10, before another crude price spike on October 13.

It was one of the largest weekly investment reversals in petroleum futures over the last decade. As per records filed with ICE Futures Europe and the US Commodity Futures Trading Commission, sales during the week to October 10 was the 14th largest in 552 weeks since March 2013.

Trade data also shows that fund managers in oil slashed their total positions by 197 million barrels over the most recent three weeks, reversing about half of the 398 million barrels purchased over the previous 12 weeks since the end of June.

As a result, the combined position of longs in the market was reduced to 483 million barrels, down from 680 million barrels on September 19.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) -

ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR

* About 200-250 prisoners are in the Gaza Strip and at least 22 were killed as a result of the Israeli strikes on the enclave, Al-Qassam Brigades spokesman Abu Obaida said on Monday.

* The Al-Quds Brigades, the military wing of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement, said on Monday that it is carrying out missile strikes against Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and several other cities in Israel.

* At least 1,200 people, including 500 children, remain under the rubble from the Israeli strikes on the Gaza Strip, a representative the Palestinian Health Ministry said.

* Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke by telephone with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/17/2023 2:06:26 PM

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Netanyahu and discussed the crisis due to the serious escalation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the Kremlin said.

RUSSIA-EGYPT TALKS

* Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Sisi and Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed over the telephone the crisis in the Gaza Strip and the ways to return the situation under control, Sisi's office said.
* Putin expressed concern over the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict Palestine during phone conversations with the regional leaders, the Kremlin said.
* Putin discussed with Sisi Egypt's assistance in the evacuation of Russian citizens and those from CIS countries from the Gaza Strip, the Kremlin said.

RUSSIA-CHINA RELATIONS

* Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping will discuss the further development of the Russian-Chinese comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation in Beijing, the Kremlin said on Monday.
* Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin and Chinese State Council Premier Li Qiang may soon hold a meeting, which is expected to result in the signing of several substantive agreements and agreements, Kremlin aide Yury Ushakov said.
* Relations between Russia and China are of strategic nature and demonstration resistance to any external pressure, Ushakov said.

BIDEN'S VISIT TO ISRAEL

* US President Joe Biden may pay a visit to Israel on October 18, the Haaretz newspaper reported on Monday, citing an Israeli source.
* Biden has postponed his trip to the US state of Colorado to stay at the White House for national security meetings, the White House said amid the escalating Israel-Gaza conflict.
* The White House has no plans to announce regarding a potential visit by Biden to Israel, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* The Russian military has repelled ten attacks in the Donetsk direction in the past 24 hours and the armed forces of Ukraine lost up to 460 soldiers as killed or injured, the Defense Ministry said on Monday.
* The West can not allow Ukraine to lose the conflict with Russia, US Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen said.

PRESIDENTIAL IMPEACHMENT IN GEORGIA

* The Georgian Constitutional Court ruled on Monday that President Salome Zourabichvili violated the law due to trips abroad in defiance of a government ban and allowed impeachment proceedings to begin, Chairman Merab Turava said.
* The Georgian parliament will vote on the issue of Zourabichvili's impeachment this week, the leader of Georgia's ruling party Georgian Dream, Irakli Kobakhidze, said.
* Zourabichvili said that she does not plan on resigning after the Constitutional Court ruled that

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she violated the law.

RUSSIAN OIL MARKET

* Russia will increase duty on oil exports by $2.3 to $26.2 per one tonne starting from November 1, the Russian Finance Ministry said on Monday.

* The average price of Russian oil brand Urals amounted to $83.35 per barrel from September 15 to October 14, while the Brent benchmark was trading at $93.43 per barrel, bringing the Russian oil's discount to $10.08 per barrel, the Russian Finance Ministry said.

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PREVIEW - US House Set to Hold First Floor Vote to Elect New Speaker

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives is set to hold its first floor vote on Tuesday to elect a new speaker, after ousting Congressman Kevin McCarthy from the leadership role earlier this month in a historic first.

House Republicans have held a series of internal meetings since booting McCarthy from the leadership role, in an effort to select a new nominee to run the lower chamber of Congress. The Republican conference initially selected Majority Leader Steve Scalise to run for speaker, although he later canceled his bid.

On Friday, House Republicans nominated Judiciary Committee Chairman Jim Jordan as speaker-designate in a vote of 124-81, selecting him over McCarthy ally Austin Scott. However, Jordan failed to garner enough votes within the Republican conference to secure the speakership with a floor vote.

Nevertheless, the House of Representatives is scheduled to hold a vote to elect a new speaker on Tuesday at approximately 12:00 p.m., House Democratic Whip Katherine Clark said. House Democrats are set to rally their support behind Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries.

A nominee for speaker must secure a majority of votes on the House floor, 217, in order to win the leadership post. Republicans hold 221 seats in the House of Representatives, while Democrats control 212.

House lawmakers are unable to conduct normal legislative business until they elect a new speaker or grant extra powers to speaker pro tempore Patrick McHenry. The US Congress must pass legislation to fund the federal government before November 17, lest the government shutdown. A number of lawmakers have also urged Congress to get back to work to pass legislation in support of Israel and Ukraine.

However, some House Republicans including Congressman Matt Gaetz have criticized McHenry, who is responsible for scheduling House activities, for giving lawmakers the weekend and Monday off from work.

The so-called Swamp is attempting to delay a vote to elect Jordan as speaker in hopes that House Republicans will revert their support back to McCarthy, Gaetz, who led the motion to vacate McCarthy as speaker, said. McHenry continues to take orders from McCarthy despite his departure as House speaker, Gaetz alleged.

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Some House Republicans want to make a deal with Jeffries to elect a speaker, Congressman Thomas Massie said. Republicans must unite behind Jordan and avoid giving control of the House of Representatives to Democrats, who hold the Senate and White House, Massie said.

House Democrats want to find a bipartisan path to reopen the House of Representatives, Jeffries said. A group of "extremists" in the Republican Party have broken the House of Representatives, Jeffries said, adding that only a "bipartisan governing coalition" can fix the issue.

Jordan sent a letter to colleagues on Monday, vowing to unite House Republicans behind him if elected speaker. The country and the House Republican conference cannot afford infighting at the moment, the letter said.

"The role of a Speaker is to bring all Republicans together. That's what I intend to do," the letter said.

Jordan will focus his speakership on empowering committees to work through regular order, passing responsible government funding legislation and expanding the Republican majority in the House of Representatives, the letter said.

Jordan also told reporters on Monday that House lawmakers will hold a floor vote on his speaker bid on Tuesday, regardless of whether he can secure 217 votes ahead of time. The House of Representatives "will elect a speaker" on Tuesday, Jordan said, when asked whether there could be multiple floor votes needed.

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Trudeau on Israel-Hamas War: International Humanitarian Law Must Be Upheld by All

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) - Canada continues to stand behind Israel's right to defend itself in accordance with international law, but humanitarian law must be upheld by all, including in the Gaza Strip, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Monday.

"Canada fully supports Israel's right to defend itself in accordance with international law. And in Gaza, as elsewhere, international law, including humanitarian law, must be upheld by all. Even wars have rules," Trudeau said at the House of Commons.

Canada calls for the creation of a humanitarian corridor toward the Gaza Strip and the unimpeded delivery of vital assistance such as food, water and fuel, to Palestinians civilians, Trudeau said.

The prime minister emphasized that it is an imperative for such a humanitarian corridor to be created.

Trudeau said ten evacuation flights had departed from Tel-Aviv outbound to Athens, transporting more than1,300 Canadian citizens and permanent residents, and also a bus had left the West-Bank in the direction of Jordan.

Canada is committed to the rule of law and diplomacy regardless of the circumstances, he said.

Trudeau also said that Canada does not see Hamas as a liberation or resistance movement but rather as a terrorist organization, which continuously instigates violence toward Jews.

"Terrorism is always indefensible and nothing can justify Hamas' acts of terror," Trudeau said.

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Hamas is not representative of the Palestinian people and neither of their legitimate aspiration, Trudeau added.

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US Welcomes Announcement Venezuela Gov't, Opposition Resume Talks - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) - The United States welcomes the announcement that President Nicolas Maduro's government and the opposition party will resume negotiations, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

"The United States welcomes the announcement by Maduro representatives and the Unitary Platform to resume Venezuelan-led negotiations in Barbados," Miller said in a press release.

The United States, along with its partners and allies of Venezuela, will continue efforts to unite the international community in support of the Venezuelan-led negotiation process, Miller added.

Earlier in the day, US media reported that the Biden administration reached a deal with Maduro to ease sanctions on Venezuela's oil industry in exchange for Caracas holding a a competitive, internationally-monitored presidential election in 2024.

The report, citing sources, said that Maduro's government and the US-backed opposition are expected to sign an agreement on Tuesday in Barbados regarding fair elections in 2024, after which the US will announce the oil sanctions relief.

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China’s Interception of Canadian Military Plane Unacceptable – Defense Minister

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) – The interception of a Canadian military plane that took place recently over international waters by Chinese fighter jets was unacceptable and unprofessional, Canadian Defense Minister Bill Blair said on Monday.

“The interaction unfortunately that took place very recently is one that was not professional and not safe, and the actions of the Chinese military in these circumstances, I think, was unacceptable and put our aircraft and their mission at significant risk,” Blair said during a press briefing. “It was quite frankly dangerous and reckless and we will express that to the People’s Republic of China in the most appropriate way.”

According to Blair, Canada has been taking part in a United Nations mission to oversee the sanctions imposed on North Korea for the past several years and Chinese aircraft have been increasingly interacting with Canadian planes during the overfly missions.

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Schumer Says US Senate Crafting Emergency Military, Humanitarian Aid Package for Israel

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) - US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said on Monday that he is working with the Biden administration to assemble an emergency military and humanitarian aid package for Israel.

"In the coming days I will be working with the administration on putting together an emergency supplemental that will give Israel the tools it needs to defend itself," Schumer said during remarks on the Senate floor. "That means military assistance, intelligence assistance, diplomatic assistance and humanitarian assistance to care for innocent civilians."

The Senate must promptly consider the legislation, despite the House of Representatives being in "disarray" without an elected speaker, Schumer said.

The Senate will do everything it can in the coming weeks to help Israel eliminate the threat posed by the Palestinian Hamas organization, Schumer said. Schumer and other US lawmakers consulted with Israeli leaders on their needs during a recent trip to Israel, the majority leader said.

The Senate must also promptly confirm a US ambassador to Israel, Schumer said. Schumer urged the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to advance the nomination of Jack Lew without partisan delays so that the full chamber can confirm him as ambassador.

Senators will hold a classified briefing on Wednesday to receive an update from Biden administration officials on the situation in Israel, Schumer added.

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FBI Opens Probe Into Murder of Palestinian Child, Illinois Governor Labels It Hate Crime

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) - The FBI in Chicago on Monday said it launched a federal investigation following the death of 6-year-old Wadea Al-Fayoume and an attack on his mother in Plainfield, Illinois.

Last week, Al-Fayoume, an American Muslim of Palestinian descent, was fatally stabbed 26 times, in what is believed to be a hate crime by his 71-year-old landlord. Wadea's mother was also attacked, and is currently receiving treatment in the hospital.

"The Chicago FBI Field Office, the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice, and the US Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Illinois have opened a federal investigation into the recent death of 6-year-old Wadea Al-Fayoume and the attack on his mother Hanaan Shahin at their home in Plainfield, Illinois," the FBI said in a statement.

In a separate statement on Monday, Illinois Governor JB Pritzker said the death of Al-Fayoume was a "hate crime." The governor also said all Illinois residents, including those from Muslim, Jewish, and Palestinian backgrounds, should live without such threats.

According to media reports, prosecutors allege the suspect, Joseph Czuba, had become "obsessed" with the Israel-Hamas war and confronted the boy's mother over it the night before

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the attack.

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US STRATCOM Base Restricts Access to Civilians Due to Heightened Global Tensions -Advisory

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) - Offutt Air Force Base, home to US Strategic Command (STRATCOM) said on Monday it is suspending unrestricted access to civilians due to heightened security tensions around the world.

"Due to heightened worldwide tensions and out of an abundance of caution, trusted traveler at Offutt Air Force Base has been suspended until further notice," the base said in an advisory.

The trusted traveler program allows military personnel and other individuals with base credentials to vouch for occupants inside their vehicle.

Military personnel entering the base with civilians who do not have valid credentials must stop by a visitor center to obtain a pass, according to the advisory.

The conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Hamas movement has contributed to the heightened tensions around the world. Mass protests have taken place in major cities around the world in support of Palestinians.

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US Activists Rally Near White House, Urge To Stop Military Actions in Gaza

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) – Several dozens of US activists gathered near the White House in Washington, DC, on Monday, calling on President Joe Biden to influence Israel and to stop military actions in Gaza, a Sputnik correspondent reports.

Initially, the activists met at Farragut Square and then marched to the White House. Many of them held small posters urging to stop the genocide in Gaza and reach an agreement on a ceasefire immediately. “No to war. No to apartheid,” one of the posters said.

The crowd also chanted: “Free Palestine!”

The police were present at the peaceful rally but did not interfere in it.

On October 7, 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. Israel has reported over 1,000 deaths, while the death toll in Gaza has topped 2,000. Thousands of injured have been reported on both sides as a result of the escalation.

A UN commission tasked with probing the conduct of Israeli and Palestinian combatants concluded in a report out Monday that Israel's attacks on the Gaza Strip and its 16-year blockade of the territory constituted war crimes.

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US Envoys on Kiev Trip Discuss Private Sector Role in Ukraine's Recovery - State Dept

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) - Two senior US officials traveled to Ukraine on Monday to discuss future recovery efforts with the country's political leadership and private sector, the State Department said.

"Special Representative for Ukraine's Economic Recovery Penny Pritzker and Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs James O'Brien traveled to Ukraine today," the statement said.

During the trip, they met with Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, other government officials and representatives of the private sector.

They "discussed private sector engagement in Ukraine's future recovery," the statement said.

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Biden-Harris Campaign Says Opened Account on Trump's Truth Social Media Platform

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) - The Biden-Harris reelection campaign on Monday announced the launching of its account on Donald Trump's Truth Social media platform.

"We just joined Truth Social, mostly because we thought it would be very funny," the campaign said via X (previously known as Twitter).

In the first hour after registering, the Biden-Harris account gained nearly 900 subscribers.

"Let's see how this goes. Converts welcome!" the initial message said on Truth Social.

After the introductory post, the Biden-Harris campaign published several posts criticizing Trump, including posting statements of his Republican competitors.

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Trump Says Will Appeal US Court Gag Order in 2020 Election Results Case

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said on Monday that he will appeal a gag order issued by a district judge as part of the case against him for allegedly attempting to overturn 2020 election results.

Earlier on Monday, US District Judge Tanya Chutkan granted a request by prosecutors to limit Trump's free speech rights in an attempt to prevent undue influence on the court case. The order bars Trump from attacking prosecutors, court staff and potential witnesses.

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"Will appeal the gag order ruling. Witch hunt!" Trump said in a statement via social media platform Truth.

Trump also characterized the court order as a "terrible thing" for democracy in the United States. Trump's defense team has argued that such restrictions could limit his 2024 reelection bid and infringe on his First Amendment rights to freedom of speech.

US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene also criticized the gag order as a weaponization of the government against Trump.

"Today, a Democrat judge issued an order gagging President Trump, destroying the First Amendment," Greene said in a statement via social media platform X. "This entire operation is run by Joe Biden, his political opponent, and nothing more than election interference. This is the weaponization of government!"

Chutkan made the federal courtroom a "Ministry of Truth," Greene said, comparing the US to an Orwellian dystopia.

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US Lawmakers Introduce Resolution Calling for Ceasefire in Israel, Aid to Gaza

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) - A group of US House Democratic lawmakers said on Monday that they are introducing a resolution calling for a ceasefire between Israel and Palestinian Hamas fighters, as well as the provision of aid to civilians in Gaza.

"Today… [lawmakers] announced a resolution urging the Biden administration to call for an immediate de-escalation and ceasefire in Israel and occupied Palestine, to send humanitarian aid and assistance to Gaza, and to save as many lives as possible," the lawmakers said in a statement.

The legislation, dubbed the Ceasefire Now Resolution, is backed by House Democrats including Cori Bush, Rashida Tlaib, Jamaal Bowman, Ilhan Omar and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

Earlier this month, Hamas launched a surprise attack on Israel, which was met with retaliatory strikes on Gaza. The fighting has left more than 1,400 Israelis and 2,700 Palestinians dead, and thousands more wounded, according to the resolution text.

The resolution urges the Biden administration to urge and facilitate de-escalation and a ceasefire. Moreover, the resolution calls on the Biden administration to provide and ensure the flow of humanitarian aid to Gaza.

"The United States bears a unique responsibility to exhaust every diplomatic tool at our disposal to prevent mass atrocities and save lives. We can't bomb our way to peace, equality, and freedom," Bush said in the statement.

The resolution is also backed by groups including the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation, Council on American Islamic Relations and Jewish Voice for Peace Action, the statement said.

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UNRWA Says No Water for Vast Majority of Gazans, Warns of Waterborne Diseases

UNITED NATIONS, October 16 (Sputnik) - The majority of Gazans still has no access to drinking water after Israel said it had turned the water supply back on, which raises concern about the potential spread of waterborne diseases in the exclave, UNRWA said on Monday.

"Let me start with a question on water and to confirm that there continues to be no water for the vast majority of the population in Gaza," Director of Communications Juliette Touma.

"We are following this story very closely because we are very concerned about the spread of waterborne diseases if water continues to be unavailable in Gaza, because we do know that people are resorting to dirty water resources," she added.

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UN Chief Travels to China to Participate in Belt and Road Forum- Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, October 16 (Sputnik) - The United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres travels to China and participates in the third international forum One Belt - One Road, the UN Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Monday.

“He is on his way to Beijing, in China at the invitation of the Chinese government,” Dujarric told a briefing. “He will take part in the third Belt and Road forum for international cooperation and is scheduled to deliver remarks during the forum’s opening ceremony…”

Guterres will also participate in a high-level meeting on climate.

Last week, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov announced that he will visit China on October 16-18 and hold a meeting with his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, during the third international forum One Belt - One Road.

Russian President Vladimir Putin will also participate and meet the Chinese President Xi Jinping. As of now, it is unclear if President Putin will also meet the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

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Russia Backs Presidential, Parliamentary Elections in Libya at 'Same Time' - Polyanskiy

UNITED NATIONS, October 16 (Sputnik) - Russia supports the idea of holding presidential and parliamentarian elections in Libya at the same time, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Monday.

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"The best scenario would be to conduct both elections at the same time," Polyanskiy said during a meeting of the UN Security Council.

The Russian diplomat urged all interested parties in Libya and influential regional and other countries to unify their efforts with the assistance of the UN. "We underscore our country's preparedness to work with all interested players," he said.

Polyanskiy underscored Russia's support of the efforts undertaken by UN Special Representative for Libya Abdoulaye Bathily to foster a country-wide political processes.

The Russian diplomat said the political processes should be transparent and inclusive, noting that the spectrum of political forces, including former officials, must have an equal right to participate in Libya's political life.

The Libyans themselves should play a central role in the political process, Polyanskiy added.

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US Federal Government Settles Border Family Separation Class Action Lawsuit - Justice Dept

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) - The US has reached a settlement in a class action lawsuit brought by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) that would effectively prevent it from reinstating a migrant family separation policy at the southern border for eight years, according to a Department of Justice release.

"On Oct. 16, the United States reached a settlement in Ms. L., et al. v. ICE, et al., a class action litigation filed in 2018 seeking injunctive relief relating to the separation of parents and children at the southwest border. The proposed settlement agreement is subject to final approval by the district court after notice to the class and an opportunity to object," the release stated.

Under the proposed settlement, new standards will be established to limit the circumstances for family separation for eight years. The settlement also provides for continued family reunifications, immigration relief, and support services for separated families inside the US, including behavioral health services, medical assistance, and immigration legal services.

The settlement does not involve paying monetary damages.

On February 26, 2018, a plaintiff identified as "Ms. L" filed a complaint in the Southern District of California alleging she had been unlawfully separated from her child. The ACLU later filed an amended complaint to add class action claims, contending that the separation of parents from their children violated procedural and substantive due process and the asylum statute.

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US Judge Restricts Trump's Speech Rights Amid 2020 Election Court Case - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) - US District Judge Tanya Chutkan issued a gag order to limit former President Donald Trump's free speech rights amid the court case linked to his

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alleged attempts to overturn the 2020 US presidential election results, CBS News reported on Monday.

Chutkan issued the order at prosecutors' request to restrict Trump's ability to make statements that could allegedly harm the court case, such as making statements that criticize prosecutors, court staff or potential witnesses, the report said.

Defense attorney John Lauro expressed concern about the gag order and its impact on Trump's ability to conduct his 2024 reelection campaign and engage in First Amendment-protected speech.

US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene also said that she would appear at the courthouse to observe the case and see whether the court would "destroy" Trump's free speech rights.

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US National Security Team Updates Biden, Harris on Conflict in Gaza - White House

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris on Monday received an update from the US national security team on the ongoing escalation of conflict in Gaza following a Hamas attack on Israel earlier this month, a White House official said in a press release.

"This morning, President Biden and Vice President Harris were briefed by their national security team on the latest updates in the wake of Hamas's abhorrent attack in Israel and the resulting conflict in Gaza," the release said.

National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines, and Director of the Central Intelligence Agency Bill Burns led the briefing, the release added.

On October 7, 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. Israel has reported over 1,000 deaths, while the death toll in Gaza has topped 2,000. Thousands of injuries have been reported on both sides as a result of the escalation.

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CAF Plane Intercepted by Chinese Jets When Monitoring DPRK Sanctions Enforcement - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) – A Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) flight meant to ensure the enforcement of sanctions on North Korea was intercepted by Chinese fighter jets, Global News said on Monday.

The flight was part of Canada's Operation NEON which aims at monitoring sanctions enforcement on North Korea.

CAF's Aurora aircraft was "aggressively" intercepted by at least two Chinese military jets over a

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span of several hours on international waters off the coast of China, the report said citing Maj.-Gen Iain Huddleston, who added he considered it unsafe and unprofessional.

Huddleston further said that such “aggressiveness” from the Chinese side was unexpected and unnecessary considering the nature of the flights mission, noting that China’s fighter jets got as close as 5 meters from them, the report continued.

Moreover, one of the fighter jets was particularly aggressive, the report said, as it was equipped with air-to-air missiles and repeatedly flied back and forth, sometimes blind spotting the Aurora plane.

The report further noted that one of the Chinese jets launched multiple flares shortly after the surveillance plane reported losing base contact following a communications equipment “glitch”.

However, most of the interception made during the eight hours long flight were done in an appropriate matter, the report said.

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FBI Warns of Rising Threats Within US, Particularly Against Jewish, Muslim Groups- Reports

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) -FBI Director Christopher Wray said threats within the US are escalating, particularly against Jewish and Muslim institutions, CBS News reported on Monday.

"Here in the U.S. we cannot and do not discount the possibility that Hamas or other foreign terrorist organizations could exploit the conflict to call on their supporters to conduct attacks on our own soil," Wray said, as cited by the report.

Wray also said that Jewish and Muslim houses of worship have been threatened in the US, according to the report.

Earlier, Hamas launched a surprise large-scale attack on Israel. which claimed the lives of hundreds of people from both sides of the conflict. 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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Two Iranians Captured at US Border in Potential 'Major' Security Threat - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) - Two Iranians flagged by the Terrorist Screening Database (TSDB) have been detained at US borders in the last two weeks, a development seen as a potential "significant security threat" by US Customs and Border Protection, Fox News reported on Monday.

Citing sources with US Customs and Border Protection, the report describes the two men as having appeared on the central terrorist watchlist, which is consolidated by the FBI's Terrorist Screening Center and used by multiple agencies to compile their specific watchlists and for

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screening.

Additionally, a different Iranian man attempting to cross into the United States in Eagle Pass, Texas, was taken into custody on Sunday night after triggering red flags on the same database, making him the fourth Iranian captured since October 1 in the Del Rio sector, the report added.

The report comes after the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) released a statement last month warning of an increased number of individuals on the US terrorist watch list being intercepted at US Borders.

The DHS also warned that these numbers could be influenced by attempts by foreign terrorist groups to establish support networks overseas, including in the United States, the report said.

In fiscal year 2023, which began at the start of last October, there were 151 total hits on the TSDB through the period ending on August 31, the report said, which is more than the number recorded at US border checkpoints during the previous six fiscal years combined.

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IMF Reaches Staff-Level Agreement With Kosovo Paving Way for 2 Disbursements

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said in a statement on Monday that it has reached a staff-level agreement with the Kosovo authorities which paves the way for a disbursement of $25.9 million and $40 million.

“The IMF team and the Kosovar authorities have reached staff-level agreement on the completion of the first reviews of the precautionary SBA [Stand-By Arrangement] and the RSF [Resilience and Sustainability Facility] arrangements. Subject to approval by the IMF Executive Board, the completion of the first reviews - expected in November - will make available an additional SDR 20.03 million (€24.6 million) under the SBA and SDR 30.976 million (about €38 million) under the RSF arrangement,” IMF Mission Chief Gabriel Di Bella said in the statement.

The agreement was reached after the two sides held talks in Pristina on September 25 - October 6.

Di Bella said Kosovo has continued to implement prudent fiscal and financial policies and the local authorities have made progress in implementing their policy agenda under the IMF-supported arrangements.

“The fiscal balance and government deposits at the Central Bank (CBK) have remained so far in 2023 comfortably above program floors and public investment absorption has increased considerably compared to 2022; staff expect end-2023 targets to be met. The quality and liquidity of CBK assets has been preserved in line with program objectives,” Di Bella said.

The IMF official also welcomed Kosovo's alleged significant progress in advancing its climate policy agenda. Di Bella said that implementing a number of projects and adopting laws would pave the way for increasing clean energy generation via competitive auctions. These measures would allow Kosovo to reduce pollution and increase energy efficiency, Di Bella added.

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Joly Advises Canadian Citizens in Lebanon to Leave While Flights Still Available

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) - Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Melanie Joly said on Monday that Canadians currently staying in Lebanon should consider leaving that country while commercial flights are available.

"As the crisis in Gaza, the West Bank and Israel continues to unfold, the security situation in the region is becoming increasingly volatile. Canadians in Lebanon should consider leaving while commercial flights remain available," Joly said via X (formerly Twitter).

Over the weekend, the Canadian government updated its travel advisory for Lebanon, recommending against traveling anywhere south of the Litani River near the Lebanon-Israel border due to a heightened risk of terrorist attacks and/or war.

The government called on the Canadians in Lebanon to ensure their travel documents are up to date and to register with the Registration of Canadians Abroad service.

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Russia's UNSC Draft Better Meets Humanitarian Needs of Gaza Civilians- UN Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, October 16 (Sputnik) - The proposed UNSC draft by the Russian Mission to the UN is more suitable to the needs of the people in Gaza because it is purely humanitarian and does not contain political language, the Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Monday.

"We are convinced that our draft better meets the humanitarian needs of the civilian population in Gaza and doesn't contain political elements that could divide members of the UNSC and affect its role in the settlement of the crisis," Polyanskiy wrote on his Twitter page.

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US Puts 2,000 Troops on 'Prepare-to-Deploy' Order to Support Israel – Reports

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) – The United States has put about 2,000 troops on prepare-to-deploy order in a move to support Israel amid its renewed war against Hamas, The Wall Street Journal reported on Monday, citing US defense officials.

The troops, which are currently stationed in the Middle East region and outside of it, will be providing advising, and medical support, and are coming from a range of the US armed services. They will not take part in a combat role with no infantry having been put on prepare-to-deploy order, the report said.

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Yellen Says US National Security Approach Not Intended to Harm China's Progress

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) - US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said the United States' national security approach to China is not intended to harm that country's progress, Sky News reported in an interview aired on Monday.

"With respect to national security, our objective is not to harm progress in China; it is really oriented at national security. We will try to design our interventions of things like export controls narrowly to keep them focused on real national security concerns," Yellen said.

The treasury secretary also said the United States was "not attempting to decouple from China" and US-China trade and investment were mutually beneficial.

The United States and China need to cooperate on global challenges such as climate change and debt, Yellen added.

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Ford Warns of 'Major Impact' on US Economy as UAW Strike Threatens Auto Supply Chain

WASHINGTON October 16, (Sputnik)- Ford Motor Co. Executive Chairman Bill Ford on Monday expressed deep concern over the ongoing United Auto Workers (UAW) strike and cautioned that the entire US auto supply base could start to collapse if the labor dispute persists.

"If it [the UAW strike] continues, it will have a major impact on the American economy and devastate local communities. The supply base is very fragile, and will start collapsing with an expanded strike," Ford said during a speech on the future of US manufacturing.

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US, Maduro Government Reach Deal to Ease Sanctions on Venezuelan Oil - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) - The White House has reached a deal with Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro to ease sanctions on Venezuela's oil industry in exchange for the South American country holding a competitive, internationally-monitored presidential election in 2024, The Washington Post reported Monday, citing two sources.

The sources said that Maduro's government and the US-backed opposition are expected to sign an agreement on Tuesday in Barbados regarding fair elections in 2024, after which the US will announce the oil sanctions relief.

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Blinken, Netanyahu Discuss Provision of Humanitarian Aid to Civilians in Gaza– State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken discussed ways to provide civilians in the Gaza Strip with humanitarian aid during his meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu amid the escalation, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken returned today to Israel to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu," Miller said in a press release. "The Secretary discussed with Prime Minister Netanyahu the United States' close coordination with the UN and regional partners to facilitate the provision of humanitarian aid to civilians."

The US top diplomat reiterated his firm support for Israel's right to defend itself and reaffirmed Washington's readiness to provide everything Israel needs to defend itself, the release added.

This is Blinken's second meeting with Netanyahu in the last week alone. It took place after his trip to Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE in the past few days, where a number of issues related to the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine in the aftermath of the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7 were discussed.

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Over 1,150 Canadians Airlifted From Israel Since October 7 - Embassy

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) - Over 1,150 Canadians have been evacuated from Israel on flights via Athens, the Canadian embassy in Tel Aviv said on Monday.

According to the Canadian government, 4,200 Canadians were registered in Israel and 475 in Palestine when the armed conflict began. Last Friday, Global Affairs Canada said that over 2,500 Canadians are seeking help to leave Israel, among whom 1,300 have requested to leave by air. Another 150 individuals in Gaza and 190 in the West Bank have also requested evacuation assistance.

"1,150+ Canadians have left Israel on assisted departure flights since the October 7 terror attack," the embassy wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Flights will continue as long as there is demand, the mission added.

On October 7, the Palestinian movement Hamas launched a surprise large-scale rocket attack on Israel, prompting the latter to declare a state of war the following day and launch retaliatory strikes. On October 9, 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 over 1,000 deaths and thousands of injured as a result of the escalation.

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US Can 'Absolutely' Afford to Support Both Ukraine, Israel Wars – Yellen

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) – US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said the US can "absolutely" afford to support both Ukraine and Israel in their respective wars, Sky News reported in an interview aired on Monday.

"I think the answer is absolutely," Yellen said in response to whether the US could afford a second war. "America can certainly afford to stand with Israel and to support Israel's military needs and we also can and must support Ukraine in its struggle against Russia."

Yellen added that the US economy was "doing extremely well."

She insisted that US aid to Ukraine was "not charity," arguing that it was in the interest of the US and its allies to support Ukraine. Working with Congress to secure aid for Ukraine was a "top priority" for US President Biden, she added.

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West Can Not Allow Ukraine to Lose Conflict With Russia – Yellen

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) – The West can not allow Ukraine to lose the conflict with Russia, US Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen said on Monday.

"We cannot allow Ukraine to lose the war for economic reasons when it has shown an ability to succeed on the battlefield," Yellen said at the Eurogroup Finance Ministers meeting in Luxembourg.

She confirmed US commitment to supporting Ukraine as long as it takes.

"Strong support for Ukraine of course remains a top priority for both the United States and Europe," she added.

The recent Hamas attack against Israel forced the West to turn its attention from the conflict in Ukraine to events in the Middle East. However, US President Joe Biden reassured on Sunday that Washington has the capacity to "take care" of both Ukraine and Israel while still maintaining its own international defense.

Yellen welcomed the plan to set up a 50 billion euro Ukraine Facility to provide sustained economic and reconstruction aid.

"Economic support to Ukraine should have maximum concessionality. Flexibility is also important, as it could enable front-loading budget support in the immediate term when it is needed most," she said.

Yellen also stressed the importance of keeping sanctions against Russia, including maintaining a price cap on its oil. She reminded that the US imposed sanctions last week and pointed out that the EU is considering its 12th package of restrictions, which will be a demonstration of the West's unity and its readiness to deprive Russia of revenue.

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Saudi Prince Made Blinken Wait All Night for Meeting Amid Israel-Gaza War - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) - Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman kept US Secretary of State Antony Blinken waiting for hours for a meeting in Riyadh scheduled Saturday evening and only showed up the next morning, The Washington Post reported.

The alleged snub marks a frosty point in the fragile US-Saudi relationship during the Biden administration. It had appeared warmer in recent months as the White House sought to broker the normalization of ties between Saudi Arabia and Israel.

Saudi Arabia reportedly ended the normalization talks after the Hamas-Israel conflict broke out on October 7, although US President Joe Biden has insisted that a deal is still possible.

During his Sunday meeting with Blinken, bin Salman emphasized the need to rein in Israel's retaliatory response to Hamas' attacks and stop its military operations and siege on Gaza's civilian population.

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NBC News to Host Third Republican Presidential Debate on November 8

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) - NBC News said on Monday it will host the third Republican presidential primary debate on November 8.

The debate will be held at the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts of Miami-Dade County and air from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m.

It is still unclear who will moderate the discussion and how many candidates will participate in it.

The second Republican presidential debate took place in California last month. It featured seven candidates - Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, Sen. Tim Scott, former US envoy to the United Nations Nikki Haley, businessman Vivek Ramaswamy, former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum, and former Vice President Mike Pence.

Former US President Donald Trump missed the first two debates. His campaign suggested canceling all such gatherings and refocusing efforts on defeating Democrats.

To participate in the debate this time, candidates have to meet a number of conditions. They must gain campaign contributions from at least 70,000 unique donors and receive the support of at least 4% of voters in two national polls, NBC News reported.

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US Looking Into Conflicting Reports on Gaza Water Supply - White House

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) – The United States is looking into conflicting reports about whether Israel has truly turned the water supply back on in Gaza, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Monday.

"We're still looking into those conflicting reports," Kirby told CNN in an interview.

He added that it was "high" on Secretary of State Antony Blinken's agenda during his visit to the region.

Israel stated on Sunday that it had turned back on the water supply in Gaza, but the local water authority refuted the claim. Following Hamas' attacks in Israel, the humanitarian situation in Gaza has become increasingly dire – in addition to a round-the-clock barrage of airstrikes, including on civilian sites, Israel announced a siege on Gaza last Monday, depriving the blockaded population of basics like food, water, medicine, fuel, and electricity.

The US believes "it's essential that humanitarian assistance, food, water medicine, also electrical power, remain available to the people of Gaza as much as possible," Kirby said. "They are the victims here too. They didn't ask for this. We want to make sure humanitarian assistance can continue to get in."

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No Plans to Announce Regarding Possible Biden Visit to Israel - White House

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) - The White House has no plans to announce regarding a potential visit by President Joe Biden to Israel, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Monday.

"I don't have any travel to speak to or announce with respect to Israel, there was an invitation from the prime minister, but again, no travel to speak to now," Kirby told CNN.

Earlier in the day, Haaretz reported, citing an Israeli source, that Biden may visit Israel on Wednesday.

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UNSC to Vote on Russian, Brazilian Draft Resolutions on Israel, Gaza on Monday - President

UNITED NATIONS, October 16 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council on Monday will vote on Brazilian and Russian draft resolutions on the conflict between Israel and Gaza, the Brazilian mission to the United Nations told Sputnik.

Brazil holds the UNSC presidency during the month of October.

"Our resolution is in blue, voting will be at 6 P.M. [22:00 GMT]," the Brazilian mission said.

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The council will also vote on a Russian-proposed resolution.

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RPT - Biden Postpones Colorado Trip to Focus on National Security Amid Reports of Israel Visit

(Repeats to fix para 4)
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"The President's trip to Colorado is postponed and it will be rescheduled. The President will remain at the White House to participate in national security meetings," a White House official said, as quoted by the press pool.
Biden was due to visit CS Wind in Pueblo, Colorado — the largest wind tower manufacturer in the world — on Monday to highlight his Bidenomics agenda.

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