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Photo: AI Deciphers Text on Charred Papyrus Scrolls From Buried Roman Herculaneum

Artificial intelligence has been successfully used to read several lines from a papyrus scroll that was charred by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE.

Located just a few miles from Mount Vesuvius, Herculaneum was destroyed in October 79 after the massive volcano erupted, pouring out tons of ash and pyroclastic rock that also destroyed the much more famous city of Pompeii. However, while the more distant Pompeii was buried in ash by surprise, Herculaneum was evacuated ahead of time and the pyroclastic surge preserved large amounts of organic materials, such as wood and fibers used in construction.

Unfortunately, such carbonized materials have the appearance of charcoal, meaning that until recently, any hope of reading scrolls or other items preserved in the blast was distant at best.

Enter Luke Farritor, a 21-year-old student at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln who devised a machine learning algorithm that has been able to detect several Greek letters on several lines of one papyrus preserved at Herculaneum. Farritor received a $40,000 cash prize from the Vesuvius Challenge, a group set up to encourage such novel tech-based deciphering of the hidden scrolls, after presenting his discoveryin August.

Farritor's program was mostly able to identify single letters, potential letters, or fragments of words, but it was able to spell out one entire word: πορφυρας (porphyras), which is the Greek word for the color purple.

"When I saw the first image, I was shocked," Federica Nicolardi, a papyrologist at the University of Naples in Italy and a member of the academic committee that reviewed Farritor's findings, said in a news release.

"It was such a dream," she said. Now, "I can actually see something from the inside of a scroll."

The scroll is just one of hundreds found in the remains of Herculaneum, a seaside escape for the wealthy Romans of Neapolis, the ancient ancestor of modern-day Naples. Many of the scrolls are believed to be works by their original authors and unknown in the present day, where most of the texts that have survived since ancient times have been passed down through copies of copies. Some other partially identified scrolls contain works of philosophy by followers of the Greek philosopher Epicurus, who preached a life of moderation in order to tolerate a cruel world in which it was impossible to leave one's mark.

Another is known to be by Philodemus, a little-known thinker to whom the scroll library might have belonged.

This isn't the first time archaeologists have leaned on artificial intelligence to help them decipher charred scrolls.

In 2016, researchers use X-ray computed tomography (CT) scans to "unwrap" a burned scroll from En-Gedi in Israel, revealing it to be a Torah scroll of the Book of Leviticus. However, that was made easier by the fact the ink has metal in it, while the ink on the Herculaneum scrolls is made of charcoal and water, which won't show up on a CT scan.

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Pentagon Orders 2,000 US Troops Ready for Deployment to Israel

When the US rushed weapons into Israel following the successful Arab sneak-attack on October 6, 1973, Arab oil-exporting nations declared an embargo against several Western nations, tripling the price of oil and triggering a profound economic shock.

As Israel prepares for a ground assault on the Gaza Strip, the Pentagon has quietly ordered roughly 2,000 troops to prepare for deployment to Israel for non-combat roles.

According to Defense Department officials, the troops are expected to be tasked with missions such as medical support and advisory roles for the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). They have not indicated from which units the troops would be pulled, only that they are currently deployed in the Middle East and in Europe.

The news comes after a second aircraft carrier strike group was ordered to the region and as US President Joe Biden prepares to visit Israel on Wednesday.

Biden previously voiced his uncritical support for Israel, saying the Jewish State had a right to "defend itself" after Hamas militants from the Gaza Strip attacked several border settlements, killing more than 1,300 Israelis earlier this month.

In retaliation, Israel has completely closed off Gaza from the world, severing electrical, water, and fuel lines into the enclave, and launched a bombing campaign that has killed more than 3,000 people in Gaza. On Tuesday, Gaza's health ministry said an Israeli bomb had landed on the Al-Ahli Arabi Baptist hospital in central Gaza city, where people injured in previous bombings as well as refugees were being sheltered. At least 500 are feared dead.

The IDF has amassed some 350,000 troops outside Gaza and ordered 1.1 million Palestinians in the enclave's north to relocate to the south, before it launches an all-out attack on the city aimed at destroying Hamas.

According to the US State Department, while in Israel, Biden "will receive a comprehensive brief on Israel's war aims and strategy" and "hear from Israel how it will conduct its operations in a way that minimizes civilian casualties and enables humanitarian assistance to flow to civilians in Gaza in a way that does not benefit Hamas."

In addition, the US has pledged to restock Israel's supply of Tamir missiles after firing thousands of munitions from its Iron Dome air defense system in an attempt to shoot down rockets fired at Israeli cities by Hamas. The militant group has devised tactics to get around the Iron Dome, allowing it to strike cities dozens of miles from the Gaza-Israel border.

It's unclear how regional nations will respond to a US deployment to Israel during the fighting. In October 1973, when the US rushed urgently-needed weapons into Israel after Egypt and Syria launched a successful sneak attack on the IDF, the Arab world responded with a boycott of petroleum sales to the US and several other Western nations that had supported Israel. The boycott lasted for six months, at the end of which the price of crude oil had increased by 300% and Western capitalist economies were in a recession.

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'Very Sensitive': Failure of Biden's Israel Trip Would be 'Curse' on 2024 Election Campaign

The two-state solution agreed upon in Oslo in 1993 remains the only viable path toward peace between Israelis and Palestinians, a Saudi expert told Sputnik. Sadly, the US has long since given up its leadership role in guiding either party toward such a solution.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced on Tuesday that US President Joe Biden would visit Israel in the coming days as the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) prepare to launch a ground invasion of the Gaza Strip.

Speaking in the Israeli coastal city of Tel Aviv, Blinken said Biden would "reaffirm the United States' solidarity with Israel and our ironclad commitment to its security," and would "receive a comprehensive brief on Israel's war aims and strategy" as it amasses 350,000 troops to invade Gaza.

Having traveled to Israel a day prior, Blinken has pressured the Israeli government to allow humanitarian corridors to open into Gaza, which has been under "complete siege" for more than a week. The IDF bombing campaign has killed more than 2,800 in Gaza since October 7, when Hamas launched an unprecedented raid into Israeli territory that killed more than 1,300 Israelis in several border settlements near Gaza.

Blinken said Biden would oversee implementation of "a plan that will enable humanitarian aid from donor nations and multilateral organizations to reach civilians in Gaza" without "benefiting" Hamas, which governs the Gaza Strip.

Riyadh-based political analyst Dr. Ahmed al-Ibrahim told Sputnik on Tuesday that regional trust had waned in Washington's ability or willingness to mediate the 75-year-long conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, but noted that the conflict would continue until both sides are willing to make hard choices to satisfy the others' concerns.

"Traditionally, the United States is the custodian of Israel and they have unlimited support for Israel. Biden wants to show that to the world - that the United States is standing behind Israel at anything that Israel needs and has unconditional support for the Israelis. Of course, let's not forget that he's taking this opportunity to position himself [in] the presidential election that's coming up, so he can get the Jewish votes inside the United States and show that he can turn things in the Middle East and use it in the favor of Israel."

"Definitely, this is going to be held as a kind of campaign for Biden, that he can still solve issues in the Middle East, and he's going to use it for his campaign," Dr. Al-Ibrahim said, noting that "it is very sensitive. It is not uncomplicated, because if he does not do it right, this thing is going to accelerate so much that it will be beyond control. So if Biden doesn't come with the right formula in order to solve it, it could be a curse on his election in 2024."

Dr. Al-Ibrahim said that after arriving in Israel, Biden would most likely not attempt to position himself as a mediator in the conflict between Israel and Hamas, but to support Israel as it prepares for a ground invasion of the Gaza Strip, which the commentator said would be "a big mistake."

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“It's only going to fuel [strife in] the whole Middle East and it's going to fuel probably 2 billion Muslims and 2.5 billion Christians. Palestine belongs to the great three religions and this is only going to put the Jewish state at stake, at risk, if these kinds of things are going to be done wrongly.”

“We know that Gaza is the most geographically dense location in the world. However, we all agree, Saudi Arabia agreed from before, that Hamas is not the government that should control Gaza. It should be another government, not radical, like Hamas. And this issue needs to be put on the table. If Biden doesn't balance the situation between the Palestinians and the Israelis, this can be expanded geographically. And it's a very sensitive issue for the Israelis right now and for the Palestinians to really have a permanent solution and to go back to the two-state solution. This is what basically [Saudi] Prince Mohammed bin Salman has conveyed very strongly to Secretary Blinken,” Dr. Al-Ibrahim said.

However, Dr. Al-Ibrahim said that people in the Middle East have “given up” on US policy in the region and “lost trust” that any American politician is actually interested in solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

“Is it incompetency? Is it the strategy? Nobody knows. The Middle East region lives off of conspiracies, these conspiracies are an issue with them. The Palestinian file is very close and dear to the Middle Eastern people and they are looking at the Palestinians and they see that their rights have been taken, and the Israelis are only gaining more land and not giving anything to the Palestinians - no dignities, no land, nothing.”

“Everybody blames America in this region for what's happening, everybody. It's not necessarily that they have an evil strategy in order to execute things,” he explained. “It's maybe incompetence. They are looking at the matters in their own country and not getting them right. Look at Iraq, look at Afghanistan, look at Ukraine - look at all these countries. The war starts, and there is no right execution, chaos and hell starts happening in the region. So if you look at things historically, America has not been executing things right.”

As a result, Dr. Al-Ibrahim said “there’s no trust” of the United States in the region. “That's why they left a vacuum for the Chinese, and China went in and brokered the deal between Saudi Arabia and Iran.”

“So obviously the stakeholder that's holding this file is not trusted by the people and by the leaders, in my opinion. So it has to be changed. And I'm telling you, if [former US President Donald] Trump was in the presidency, things might have taken a different route. But with this kind of administration we have, with this kind of policy that they are producing, the Middle Eastern people have no trust on the situation,” he added.

However, Dr. Al-Ibrahim said that if the Israelis and Palestinians failed to reach an agreement while Biden is present, it would be a failure for both the Americans and the Israelis. Such talks would be extremely tough, but “people need to give arm and a leg in order to reach a solution,” he said, which must satisfy both Israeli and Palestinian concerns.

“We already see the failure in the security and all the precautions that we've been mesmerized with for the past decades, about how strong Israel is at the border. And now Hamas did that [attack], and they actually went inside Israel and they occupied territories. This is only putting Israel at a risk. And you cannot live in that geographical area by pushing the Palestinians out of their own country. They need to have a way of relation, of coexisting.”

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“In order for this to succeed and for the Israeli-Palestinian file to be done, the American administration needs to listen to Saudi Arabia and Egyptand really work with them and be fair about the decision they are going to make. And Israel needs to be put at the table and they need to be mandated to work with everybody to the best situation that it can be. Israel cannot push Hamas into the sea or cannot push it to Sinai. The Palestinian people have dignity. The Israeli people need their security. This cannot continue.”
“They need to listen to their true allies in the region, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, in order to move. If you're sitting 10,000 kilometers away in the Congress or in the White House, and trying to make a decision about this region, this is more complex and more complicated than anybody can think. This is the only way. In order to satisfy this file, this region needs everybody to agree on how things are done. They put their solutions on the table, and all the Arab nations, led by Saudi Arabia and Egypt, are going to make it implemented for the Palestinian Authority. But it needs Israel to be at the table and to accept the way that they move forward, giving the Palestinian people their dignity back and giving Israel their security back.”

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10 Years of BRI Helped Global South Nations 'Shape Their Own Destinies' - Experts

In just 10 years, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has helped to connect underdeveloped parts of the globe like never before, building multilateral partnerships for projects that are centered on the host nation's needs, not the interests of a far-away European ruling government, experts told Sputnik.
Chinese President Xi Jinping warmly welcomed his “dear friend,” Russian President Vladimir Putin, to Beijing on Tuesday. At a banquet, the two leaders toasted the coming of a multipolar world, with Xi saying “we firmly believe that the historical trends of peace, development, cooperation and mutual wins are unstoppable.”
However, Putin is just one of 130 world leaders to send delegations to China to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the launching of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), an infrastructure megaproject initiated by China that has taken on globe-spanning proportions over the last decade.
Professor Anna Malindog-Uy, vice president of the Manila-based think tank Asian Century Philippines Strategic Studies Institute, told Sputnik the BRI was a “visionary undertaking” that would have huge benefits for the parts of the globe historically neglected in industrialization and modernization processes over the last two centuries.
“I believe that the Belt and Road Initiative is a project of the century. First and foremost, we have to look at the BRI as a visionary undertaking that transcends border cultures and ideologies. It is without a doubt one of the most ambitious, huge and transformative initiatives of our time. Conceived by China, but embraced by nations across Asia, Africa, Europe, and even beyond, It has evolved into a collaborative effort that spans continents, reshaping the world's economic and political landscape.”

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“In this context, the BRI holds the power to revolutionize the fortunes of the Global South or the developing economy, and how it has the potential to be a true game-changer for the Developing World," she said.

“In terms of how it impacts or affects the global market and the world, first and foremost, the BRI is a lifeline in terms of infrastructure development to countries that have long grappled with inadequate connectivity. Infrastructure development forms the backbone of this initiative, offering a lifeline to countries that have long struggled with inadequate transportation networks and energy access.”

“This infrastructure translates into enhanced trade, investment and economic growth, elevating the economies of the Developing World or the Global South countries and fostering inclusive and sustainable development. The BRI networks of roads, railways, ports and digital connectivity enables goods and services to flow more freely, reducing trade costs and expanding business opportunities. This increase in trade leads to economic revitalization and job creation, particularly among BRI-participating countries.”

“It has challenged to a great extent existing Western-based economic infrastructure projects on many grounds,” she said. One major area is its “impressive” investment, which is both competing with and complementing existing Western infrastructure projects in Asia, Africa, and beyond.

“The challenge is how far it can compete when you talk about scale of financing, because if you look at the BRI, it has its funding and the scale is massive and it has a lot of money,” she noted. “So that is one of the challenges. The second one is quality and standards. The further success of the BRI will also depend on the quality of infrastructure it delivers. The way I see it, China being the lead in the BRI project, it will focus on high quality and sustainable projects which will be more competitive in the long run and may outperform Western-based projects, which in the long run may not be reliable anymore.”

Malindog-Uy noted that BRI is also based in multilateral cooperation, giving it a major advantage over typically unilateral Western-based projects.

“The fourth factor would be the global market impact. The competition or cooperation between the BRI and the Western-based projects can affect global markets in various ways. Increased competition can lead to better infrastructure options, potentially driving down the cost for development,” she explained.

“However, if there is competition, it may also create geopolitical tension and may exacerbate existing issues related to debt sustainability and transparency.”

“I think another one is diversification of financing. So if you really look at the BR, it's now trying to diversify its funding, but in many ways it's also trying to cooperate with Western-based institutions. On the other hand, the Western-based institution is still, you know, more based on IMF or World Bank funding. So I think this would be a tricky situation for both sides.”

To take one example, Malindog-Uy referred to the India-Middle-East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC), which she said was “another scheme and an attempt by the United States to contain the peaceful rise of China.”

“It is obviously an attempt to counter Beijing's growing economic and political influence across the world, more particularly the Global South, facilitated by the Belt and Road Initiative,” she said. “However, the huge question is how will this project really be funded and whether the United States is indeed financially committed to this project.”

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Indeed, she noted "the lack of financial commitment" by the US toward US President Joe Biden's Build Back Better infrastructure project, which has resulted in a slow implementation. But she noted that if the IMEEC is actually completed, Global South nations may still not be persuaded to use it instead of the BRI "because of the probable 'strings attached' or conditions that come with this project concerning human rights, promotion of democracy of the United States and the like."

"The success of the BRI in the last ten years is indicative of the emerging multipolar world, especially in the arena of geopolitics. The BRI introduces a transformative shift. It challenges the conventional Western hegemonic structures and is ushering in a multipolar world. If you really look at the Global South, especially countries that are participating in the in the BRI, what it means for them is they are now getting a prominent role in the global stage where developing nations gain ground and have greater say in how they shape their countries and how they shape their economies and how they shape their destinies and forging strategic partnerships."

Wan Chengcai, a senior adviser to the Chinese Association of Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies, told Sputnik that while this is Putin's 19th visit to China, this time the Russian president is leading a large governmental delegation, indicating he attaches special historic importance to the trip.

"Our Russian colleagues believe that, although this visit is not official, it is of historical importance. I agree. On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of Xi Jinping's 'One Belt, One Road Initiative,' China invited Putin as an important and honored guest to take part in this forum and make a speech at it - Putin happily agreed to this. This indicates that the Chinese side attaches great importance to Russia's participation in the construction of the 'One Belt, One Road'. Likewise, President Putin attaches great importance to the construction of this initiative," Wang said.

According to the expert, Russia's active participation is important for the construction of the Belt and Road.

"Putin's visit to Beijing is another important event in bilateral relations following the visit to Russia by Chinese President Xi Jinping in March this year, which will certainly contribute to the high-quality development of bilateral relations and strengthen cooperation between the countries in all fields," he added.

Wang said that he expects Xi and Putin to discuss practical questions of cooperation, as well as current global issues, and that the meeting will lead to further bilateral economic cooperation. With the world convulsed by such dramatic changes, China and Russia are likely to work together toward a multipolar and equitable new world order, Wang added.

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Marianne Williamson's Low-Polling 2024 Campaign Winds Up in Debt

Williamson is an author, spiritual leader, and a third-time political candidate. She is also the only Democratic primary challenger to US President Joe Biden ahead of the 2024 election.

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American author Marianne Williamson's campaign is now running in the red, according to recent quarterly disclosure documents.

The 71-year-old election contender is the only other Democratic primary candidate besides US President Joe Biden. Meanwhile, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is running as an Independent.

Williamson's most recent Federal Election Commission filing has revealed the campaign only raised $821,000 between July 1 and September 30, while spending over $825,000. Her campaign specifically noted the group was $347,000 in debt with only $101,000 available. (Her debt grew from $270,000 in the previous quarter to $347,000 in this quarter.)

A majority of the money raised, according to a Virginia-based news outlet, was from donors who gave less than $200. Williamson's campaign is run by Carlos Cardona, who served as the chairman of the Laconia Democrats, and worked as the production director for a New Hampshire-based telemarketing firm.

Worse still, the author's spending isn't helping with her polls, either. According to RealClearPolitics, Williamson is polling at just 4% in Democratic primary polls after first entering the race at 9%.

At the end of the last reporting period, the campaign also lost six staffers in a sweeping round of firings, as well as a series of resignations. According to staff salary reports, those who exited the campaign include the campaign's second South Carolina director, Brandon Upson, press Secretary Duran Brown, and staffers Cory Arichbald, Christian Castro and Molly Reed.

In a previous report from July, the Democratic candidate revealed her financial struggles during a Zoom call in which the audio was leaked.

"I have put my own money in, and I don't have the money to continue putting it in at the level I have," Williamson said during the call. "Cause remember I'm not making a living while I'm doing this.

In August, at least seven of Williamson's 2024 campaign staffers grouped together in writing a letter accusing the American author of deception, sabotage, gaslighting, emotional abuse, erratic behavior, and general dysfunction.

According to the letter, Williamson "consistently prevented staff from completing the work necessary to run a campaign to run an election." Williamson was also accused of abusive behavior by staffers who worked for her during her 2020 campaign, accusing her of "unpredictable, explosive episodes of anger."

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Hot Mic Catches Fox News Host Yelling 'Dumba**' During Jordan's Failed House Speaker Vote

US House Republicans rejected Rep. Jim Jordan (R-OH) as the next House speaker. His failure to secure the votes caused one Fox News host to openly voice his frustration.

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Fox News host Brian Kilmeade was caught on a hot mic on Tuesday, voicing his anger at House Republicans while voting was underway for the next House speaker. Rep. Jim Jordan (R-OH) ultimately failed on the first ballot as 20 House Republicans voted against him.

While co-hosting Fox News' "Outnumbered," Kilmeade called Rep. Don Bacon (R-NE) a "dumba**" after he voted for former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, who was ousted from the role in an unprecedented move by a group of hard-right Republicans. McCarthy has chosen not to run again for the position.

Jordan, who is serving his ninth term in the House, was once described by former Speaker John Boehner as a "legislative terrorist." He is the vice chairperson of the conservative congressional organization known as the House Freedom Caucus, and is a ranking member of both the House Judiciary Committee and its Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government. He previously was the top Republican on the House Oversight.

He is also a longtime supporter of former President Donald Trump, and has been accused of being a "vocal election denier" by Rep. Pete Aguilar (D-CA).

At least 217 votes were needed to win the position of House speaker. Representative Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) managed to lock in all 212 Democratic votes while Jordan received just 200.

For now, the House will remain at a standstill as House GOP members watch their control remain at a stalemate amidst intraparty fighting between moderate Republicans and hardline GOP members.

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Scientists Discover Surprising Cause of Mars' Record-Breaking Quake

Interior Exploration using Seismic Investigations (InSight) is a NASA mission that was first launched in May of 2018 with the purpose of investigating the interior structure, and composition of Mars.

Scientists have determined that an unusual marsquake that was detected in May 2022 on the red planet appeared to have been the result of movement of massive tectonic forces within Mars' crust.

On May 4 of 2022, NASA's InSight lander recorded a quake on Mars that registered as a magnitude 4.7, and caused vibrations throughout the red planet that lasted for at least six hours.

A global team of scientists believed the quake and aftershock must have been caused by a meteoroid impact, and so they launched a search for what would undoubtedly be a new crater on Mars' surface.

The study's lead author, Dr. Benjamin Fernando from the University of Oxford, sought the assistance of the European Space Agency, the Indian Space Research Organization and the United Arab Emirate Space Agency. The occurrence of which may be the first time that all missions have collaborated on one project.

However, after months of searching, the scientists walked away empty handed.

The team ultimately concluded the quake was caused by the tectonic force within Mars' interior, indicating the red planet is much more seismically active than was previously known.

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“We still think that Mars doesn't have any active plate tectonics today, so this event was likely caused by the release of stress within Mars' crust. These stresses are the result of billions of years of evolution; including the cooling and shrinking of different parts of the planet at different rates,” Fernando explains.
“We still do not fully understand why some parts of the planet seem to have higher stresses than others, but results like these help us to investigate further. One day, this information may help us to understand where it would be safe for humans to live on Mars and where you might want to avoid!” he continued.
Dr. Constantinos Charalambous, co-author of the study and of the Imperial College London, remarked that the "absence of a crater in our image search for S1222a marks a significant milestone in interpreting seismic signals on Mars, crucial for distinguishing impact events from tectonic forces on the red planet."
The findings were published in the journal Geophysical Research Letters.

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NASA Captures Jaw-Dropping Image of Jupiter’s Fire & Ice Moon Io

NASA’s Juno mission was first launched with the goal to peer below the planet's dense clouds and learn about the largest planet in our solar system, including how the celestial body has changed since its formation.
NASA’s Juno probe is shocking human beings on Earth with its new, incredible images of the Io - known as one of the third-largest moons in Jupiter's orbit.
The probe’s original mission first wrapped in July of 2021, but it has since then been given an extended mission with a deadline set for 2025.
Jupiter’s moon, which is made up of fire and ice, has a surface temperature of negative 250 degrees Fahrenheit, but is covered in more than 400 active volcanoes which produce hot lava that can reach temperatures of 3,000 degrees Fahrenheit (1,000 degrees hotter than on Earth). And if that doesn’t already sound like a terrifying place to visit, the moon also features large lakes of lava that are more than 100 miles across in length, changing volcanic deposits, as well as fountains of fire that unpredictably erupt.
Io is one of Jupiter’s 95 known moons, and is one of the four largest. The other three include: Europa, Ganymede and Callisto.
Juno was able to pass by the dangerously terrifying moon, which is just slightly larger than Earth's moon, at a safe distance of 11,645 kilometers on October 16. But on Juno’s current orbit, it will steadily get closer to the moon, until in February of 2024 it will be within 1,500 kilometers of Io’s surface. The probe is expected to take more exciting images, as it inches closer to the fire and ice moon.

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Report: Brazil's Bolsonaro Plotted to 'Set the Country on Fire' in Failed Coup Attempt

Brazil's Congress found that former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro schemed to remain in power after his 2022 election loss in a report that also implicated top military officers.

Despite Brazil's popular image, the country of Carnaval and rowdy street parades suffers the recent collective trauma of a US-backed military dictatorship that smothered civil society for over 20 years. Now, a new investigation claims a controversial former leader brought the country perilously close to returning to authoritarian rule.

The preliminary report, released on Tuesday by the National Congress of Brazil, found that ex-President Jair Bolsonaro was the "intellectual or moral" architect of "a willful and premeditated coup attempt" after his loss in last year's presidential election.

"Unlike what the Bolsonaro supporters maintain, the eighth of January was not a spontaneous or disorganized movement," said Senator Eliziane Gama, referring to the ransacking of government buildings in the country's capital earlier this year that has become infamous in Brazil. "It was an idealized, planned and prepared mobilization in advance."

The lengthy report, comprising more than 1,300 pages, suggests Bolsonaro should be charged with criminal association, political violence, abolition of democratic rule of law and coup d'état under Brazil's penal code.

The evidence will now be brought before the country's attorney general, who is tasked with making the final decision as to whether to charge the former leader.

The investigation determined Bolsonaro sought to work through a number of channels to create a generalized climate of chaos that would give the country's military an excuse to intervene. The bombastic ex-president is known for praising the country's former military dictatorship, which lasted until 1985; he once claimed "the only mistake of the dictatorship was torturing and not killing." In fact, hundreds of Brazilians were killed or disappeared during military rule, and some 20,000 were tortured.

Unlike in neighboring Argentina, Brazil has never formally reckoned with the legacy of its dictatorship or brought charges against military leaders. That could change if the recommendations of Tuesday's report are followed, which endorses charges against several military officers, including former Army and Navy generals and Bolsonaro's vice presidential candidate and former Minister of Defense General Walter Braga Netto.

The military figures are among the 61 people the report maintains were part of Bolsonaro's plot to undermine Brazilian democracy, including the events earlier this year which saw the country's Supreme Federal Court, National Congress and presidential palace vandalized.

"There was one goal only: to storm or to allow the three branches of government to be stormed, destabilize the administration, set the country on fire, provoke chaos and political disorder – and even, if necessary, a civil war," read the report.

Bolsonaro served as president of Brazil from 2019 until 2022. His anticommunist rhetoric and praise for the country's military was seen as a throwback to the country's years of military dictatorship that took place after the United States backed the removal of constitutional President João Goulart in 1964.

The military dictatorship was a linchpin of Operation Condor, a US-backed campaign of political terrorism, repression, and assassination throughout Latin America during the Cold War.

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Attack of the Robots: SEC Chair Predicts AI May Cause Financial Crisis

In July, a data leak prompted the US Federal Trade Commission to open an investigation into the popular ChatGPT language model known to sometimes provide false information. Now, regulators are urging similar scrutiny of the use of artificial intelligence in the financial industry.
Observers of the US stock market will recall a curious event in early 2010, when algorithms drove a series of high-frequency trades that momentarily crashed indices by over one trillion dollars. The market recovered in a matter of minutes, but the head of the US Securities and Exchange Commission is warning a similar event driven by artificial intelligence (AI) technology may cause a more serious crisis by the end of the decade.
“I do think we will in the future have a financial crisis,” said SEC chair Gary Gensler in an interview with UK media. “In the after action reports people will say ‘Aha! There was either one data aggregator or one model… we’ve relied on.’ Maybe it’s in the mortgage market. Maybe it’s in some sector of the equity market.”
Although artificial intelligence drives financial market actions via a variety of implementations, Gensler notes a small number of AI models such as OpenAI’s ChatGPT currently power such tools. Contributing to the problem is the proprietary, closed-source nature of such models which prevents public scrutiny.
The variety of industries involved also contributes to the dilemma, Gensler noted, because AI tools developed in Silicon Valley may fall outside the typical reach of government financial regulatory bodies.
“I’ve raised this at the Financial Stability Board. I’ve raised it at the Financial Stability Oversight Council. I think it’s really a cross-regulatory challenge,” said Gensler.
The European Union has already drafted broad regulations governing the use of AI, but the United States has been slower to act. A more modest rule was proposed in July requiring firms to disclose “conflicts of interest” regarding their use of predictive analytics tools.
Broader regulatory action, including the SEC’s proposed rule forcing publicly-traded companies to disclose information about carbon emissions, has been met with legal challenges and pushback from Republican Party officials. Such an environment may prove to be an impediment to more comprehensive action on the part of the US financial regulatory body.
AI technology’s ability to convincingly simulate real human interaction has led to concerns in a number of areas. A recent survey of financial fraud and risk professionals found that the use of AI tools for fraudulent online banking activity was a growing and recognized problem.
Meanwhile, the disquieting ability of AI to simulate phone calls from friends and loved ones in distress has generated significant headlines.
“The very technology that empowers us may also imperil us,” said author and privacy expert Nick Shevelyov. "Everything is accelerating. The technologies used to defend against [fraud] are getting better, but also just the proliferation of false identities are also increasing."

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Democrat 2024 Strategy Memo: Make Republicans Own Jim Jordan

Republicans put the conservative representative forward as a candidate for speaker after House Majority Leader Steve Scalise failed to gain the necessary votes within his party last week. But the Ohio lawmaker is proving to be an even more controversial pick so far.

A strategy memo shared with US media reveals Democrats are looking to use a US Rep. Jim Jordan (R-OH) as a means to tie Republicans to former US President Donald Trump and the far-right wing of the party if the lawmaker clinches the House speakership.

Democrats famously cast the 2016 US presidential election as a referendum on Trump, stoking fear of the consequences if "Dangerous Donald" were elected to the White House. The message was a spectacular flop seven years ago, but Democrats are betting it will be a winner in 2024 in regards to Jordan.

"A Speaker Jordan means extremism and far-right priorities will govern the House of Representatives," begins a strategy memo from the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee released Tuesday.

The memo continues by linking messaging about Jordan to the key themes of US President Joe Biden's reelection campaign, claiming his "speakership would negatively impact working families across the country, threaten democratic norms, and weaken relationships with our allies."

Key to the strategy will be the moves taken by more moderate Republicans as the party works to overcome a House leadership crisis now going on its third week.

Twenty members of Jordan's party refused to back the conservative firebrand during a House vote on Tuesday. Republicans like Rep. Mike Turner (R-OH) have raised the fear the party would lose control of the process if Democrats successfully propose a compromise candidate such as Trump critic and former Republican Congresswoman Liz Cheney. Turner urged his colleagues to vote for Jordan.

If moderate Republicans eventually give in and support Jordan, Democrats say they'll portray the move as a cave-in to radical elements of the party associated with Trump.

"It's clear Republicans are incapable of governing themselves and instead look to the indicted former president for guidance on everything," read one talking point the memo advised Democrats to employ.

"Jordan is a conspiracy theorist who has espoused talking points associated with the Great Replacement Conspiracy Theory in official government hearings," read another. "Jordan has repeatedly voted against common-sense, bipartisan legislation including disaster relief, aid for 9/11 victims, funding for medical research and opioid treatments, and expanded health care benefits for our veterans."

The memo also attacked Jordan for votes to cut Medicare and Social Security and claimed he "supports a nationwide abortion ban with no exemptions for rape, incest, or the life of the mother."

Polling shows a tight race between Biden and Trump, with a recent survey indicating the former commander-in-chief holds a slight lead.

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Democrats hope abortion and other issues will propel Biden to victory just over a year from now, but the octogenarian president faces a rapidly-evolving set of challenges in regards to foreign policy, with the unfolding crisis in Gaza adding to an increasingly unpopular war in Ukraine and continued tensions with China.

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American Gag - Cartoon

A legal order issued Tuesday threatens to deprive Trump of one of his greatest skills: the ability to speak his mind without a filter.
US Federal Judge Tanya Chutkan issued a gag order against former President Donald Trump on Tuesday, coming after a similar order issued by a New York state judge earlier this month. While the earlier mandate by Judge Arthur Engoron proved fairly modest - only preventing Trump from attacking the civil servants that make up his court's staff, the latest order forbids him from making comments interpreted as endangering potential witnesses, or the team working under special counsel Jack Smith.
In the age of a fully neoliberal Democratic Party, Republicans thrive on the ability to occasionally sound as if they relate to average people, even as their policy serves elites. "I am your voice," Trump famously declared in a 2016 campaign that sought to court disaffected working-class voters.
The successful marketing was enough to propel Trump to victory in 2016, and he's been trying to recapture that magic ever since.
The dynamics of next year's election may superficially resemble those of 2016, with Trump once again running against an emblem of the Washington political establishment. But unlike in 2016, Trump is no longer a political wildcard, but a figure who has dominated headlines for eight years.

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12-Million-Year-Old Ape Skull Reconstructed Via Digital Imaging

Technology is providing insight into the appearance of Pierolapithecus catalaunicus, which was first discovered in fossil form in 2002 and scientifically described in 2004.
A recently-discovered ancient fossil is shedding light on the nature of the "missing link" that served as the last common ancestor of humans and apes.
Though the term has fallen out of favor among scientists, the so-called "missing link" has long played a major part in the public's imagination as scientists search for fossil evidence of the transitional species between apes and humans and their primitive ancestors.

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That evidence still eludes paleontologists, but technology is allowing them a look at a closely-related “monkeylike” creature after a damaged skull was found in a Barcelona landfill. The skull belonged to Pierolapithecus catalaunicus, an extinct ape that lived some 12 million years ago.

“One of the persistent issues in studies of ape and human evolution is that the fossil record is fragmentary and many specimens are incompletely preserved and/or distorted,” scientists wrote in their findings. “Here, we reconstruct the face of Pierolapithecus catalaunicus and analyze its morphology in an evolutionary framework.”

The team of researchers performed a CT scan of the fossil then reconstructed its cranium digitally. Along with the rest of the skeleton, they were able to draw important conclusions about the species, such as inferring that it was able to maintain an upright posture.

The digital facial reconstruction also allowed scientists to gain a more complete picture of the appearance of the last common ancestor of hominids – the so-called “missing link.”

The findings were published Monday in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

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RPT - Israeli Invasion of Gaza Far From Certain, Risks Wider Conflict Involving Iran - Experts

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - Any Israeli invasion of Gaza in response to the Hamas incursion and music festival massacre remains far from certain and risks wider conflict involving Iran, experts told Sputnik.

US President Joe Biden is flying to the region to talk with Israeli and other regional leaders in an attempt to avert escalation and a wider crisis. During his trip, Biden will meet with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and get an update about Israel’s strategy against Hamas in Gaza including the pace of their military operations.

On Tuesday, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said the US has no plans to put troops on the ground in Israel despite placing 2,000 US military personnel in the Middle East on notice.

There remains a general expectation across the Middle East that Israel still plans to launch a full scale invasion of Gaza. However, former United Kingdom (UK) Ambassador to Syria, veteran diplomat and Middle East expert Peter Ford advised that this was still a far from inevitable outcome.

"All the experts say Israel will invade. I say it's far from certain," Ford said.

Tehran's role in either resolving the crisis or escalating it in response to Israeli actions remained crucial, Ford said.

"Iran is not bluffing. If Israel invades Gaza it had better be ready for full scale war on at least three fronts and probably four - Lebanon, Syria, Gaza, West Bank. Iran will never have a better chance to puncture the myth of Israeli deterrence power," Ford said. "The Israeli army has not had much time to prepare and is ill-equipped to handle street fighting in Gaza. The Israelis appear to have fewer trained battle-hardened troops than Hamas."

Israel is a small country which can only fight short intense wars, Ford added, and keeping

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300,000 reservists away from their jobs and the whole economy on a war footing for extended periods is not sustainable.

Independent Institute Center for Peace & Liberty Director Ivan Eland said Hamas had prepared well for a long and sustained bitter urban conflict that would inflict heavy casualties on Israeli forces.

"The ground invasion may run into a quagmire of urban warfare, including in tunnels. I think maybe this is Iran's/Hamas's plan. Also, Hezbollah could attack from the north as soon as Israel is committed in Gaza," Eland, who spent fifteen years working for Congress on national security issues, said.

Iran was more likely to urge Hezbollah to escalate hostilities on Israel's northern border rather than at first directly intervene itself, Eland said.

"Iran usually slyly intervenes indirectly through proxies. The intervention could come through a Hezbollah attack," he said.

Biden sincerely wanted to end the suffering of the civilian population in Gaza but his unqualified public support for Israel without mentioning the history and context of Israeli theft of Palestinian land mitigated these efforts, Eland added.

Middle East analyst and author Arun Kundnani predicted Israel would still invade, but only after Biden had completed his visit to the region.

He also said the Israeli leadership had not yet decided if the aim of the land invasion would be to permanently re-occupy parts of Gaza or a temporary incursion on the pretext of freeing hostages and destroying Hamas.

"Iran will not intervene directly. Hezbollah will become engaged only if Israel decides to carry out a policy of eliminating Palestinians entirely from Gaza," he said.

US policy should be to end military and financial support and force it to accept a genuine peace process with Hamas.

"Without US support, Israel would be unable to act," Kundnani said.

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China's Weaker Growth to Impact Negatively Country's Trade Partners in Asia - IMF

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on Tuesday that China's weaker-than-expected economic growth will impact negatively Beijing's trade partners in the Asia-Pacific region.

"A weaker-than-expected recovery in China could trigger negative spillovers to its trading partners," the IMF said in its Regional Economic Outlook report.

However, the IMF expressed confidence that the risks to the near-term outlook are more balanced now than before despite being tilted to the downside.

The IMF also warned in the report that the slowdown in China's property sector will weigh on demand throughout the region.

"Upgrades to growth in the United States and Japan will do less to offset the drag from China than historical patterns suggest, as global demand is rotating from goods to services and from

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foreign sources to domestic manufacturers - both factors will provide less of a boost to the Asia-Pacific region," the report said.

Structural slowdown in China and weaker productivity growth in many other regional countries will also lead to additional growth decrease in the middle term, the report said.

Inflation is projected to continue the decline toward central banks' targets.

"Except for Japan, inflation is expected to return to within target ranges by the end of 2024," the report added.

Such an improvement will put Asia ahead of the rest of the world, where inflation will return to the norm not earlier than 2025, according to the report.

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White House Says 31 Americans Killed, 13 Missing After Hamas Attacks in Israel

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The number of Americans killed by the Palestinian Hamas movement during a surprise attack against Israel has increased to 31 and 13 others are missing, White House National Security Council John Kirby told reporters.

"There's 31 Americans that have been killed and the number of unaccounted for is at 13 right now," Kirby said Tuesday evening.

Kirby said Biden will first have a small bilateral meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu when he arrives in Tel Aviv later on Wednesday followed by a meeting with Israel's war cabinet.

According to Kirby, Biden will ask Israeli officials "tough questions" about their military operations and other plans regarding the Gaza conflict.

Moreover, Kirby said the White House expects humanitarian aid will soon be able to arrive in Gaza following Secretary of State Antony Blinken's consultations with Arab leaders in the region over the last several days.

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White House Says Will Submit Israel Supplemental Request to Congress This Week

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The White House will submit a supplemental funding request to provide further support for Israel, and possibly Ukraine, later this week, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby told reporters.

"We still anticipate being able to make a supplemental request to Congress this week," Kirby said Tuesday evening. "I'm not going to get ahead... We're in active conversations with Congress about what that can look like."

Kirby declined to comment on the price tag of the anticipated supplemental package request or whether it will also include funds for Taiwan and US border security. However, according to

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media reports, the White House plans to ask Congress for $100 billion that would include security assistance for Israel, Ukraine, Taiwan, as well as for US border security.

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White House Says US 'Optimistic' Humanitarian Aid Will Start to Reach Gaza

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is optimistic that humanitarian aid will start to flow into Gaza, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby told reporters en route to Israel where President Joe Biden will meet Israeli leaders Wednesday to discuss military plans and aid needs.

"We feel optimistic that that kind of assistance will start to flow," Kirby said during a press briefing on Air Force One on Tuesday.

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White House Confirms Providing ATACMS to Ukraine to Use Against Russia

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - A White House National Security Council spokesperson confirmed to Sputnik that the United States has already provided Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS) to Ukraine to use against Russian forces.

"The United States recently provided Ukraine with a type of ATACMS capable of ranging out to 165 km as part of our ongoing support for the people of Ukraine as they defend their territory against Russia's brutal invasion," the spokesperson said on Tuesday.

The ATACMS give Ukraine the ability to strike deep area targets in Ukraine to "deny Russian forces safe haven," the spokesperson added.

The United States believes the ATACMS will bolster Ukraine's battlefield capabilities without risking US military readiness, according to the spokesperson.

Earlier in the day, US media reported Ukraine on Tuesday used US-supplied ATACMS for the first time to strike nearby Russian troops near Luhansk and Berdyansk.

The United States has secretly shipped a small number of ATACMS to Ukraine in recent days to provide Kiev with a long-range strike capability against Russian forces amid the ongoing counteroffensive, media reported.

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UN Secretary-General Condemns Gaza Hospital Strike Killing Hundreds

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UNITED NATIONS, October 18 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned a strike on a Gaza hospital that killed hundreds of Palestinian civilians.

"I am horrified by the killing of hundreds of Palestinian civilians in a strike on a hospital in Gaza today, which I strongly condemn. My heart is with the families of the victims. Hospitals and medical personnel are protected under international humanitarian law," Guterres said in a social media post on Tuesday.

The UN chief said he had two humanitarian appeals, calling on Hamas to free hostages and Israel to allow unimpeded access for humanitarian aid to civilians in Gaza.

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Biden Says 'Outraged' by Gaza Hospital Strike, Directed National Security Team to Probe

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said in a press release that he is outraged about an explosion at a hospital in Gaza that killed hundreds of Palestinians and directed his national security team to find out what exactly happened.

"I am outraged and deeply saddened by the explosion at the Al Ahli Arab hospital in Gaza, and the terrible loss of life that resulted," Biden said on Tuesday. "Immediately upon hearing this news, I spoke with King Abdullah II of Jordan, and Prime Minister [Benjamin] Netanyahu of Israel and have directed my national security team to continue gathering information about what exactly happened."

The United States stands unequivocally for the protection of civilian life during conflict and mourns the patients, medical staff and other innocent people killed or wounded in the incident, Biden added.

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UNSC Voting on Israel-Gaza Draft Resolution Postponed Until Wednesday - Brazil Mission

UNITED NATIONS, October 18 (Sputnik) - The voting of the United Nations Security Council on the Brazil-drafted resolution on Israel-Gaza was postponed until Wednesday morning because the Council members need more time to work on the language, the Brazilian Mission to the UN told Sputnik.

"Voting postponed for tomorrow at 10:00 a.m, [EST]… Countries asked for more time to work on the language," the spokesperson of the Brazilian mission said.

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US Capitol Bolstering Security Wednesday Due to Possible Protests - Sergeant-at-Arms

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The US Capitol will bolster its security on Wednesday due to the potential for protests on the Capitol grounds, following the escalation of fighting between Israel and Hamas, the US House sergeant-at-arms said.

"Due to the potential for demonstration activity on US Capitol grounds, a heightened security posture and an increased police presence will be in place on Wednesday, October 18, 2023," the sergeant-at-arms said in a statement on Tuesday.

The bolstered security was implemented to ensure continued operations throughout the Capitol Campus, the statement said.

Law enforcement will restrict access to the Capitol Square to members of Congress, staff and people on official business due to the potential for "civil disturbance," the statement said. People should use the tunnels to conveniently traverse the campus and allocate extra time to arrive and depart the area, the statement added.

The potential protests come after Israel reportedly conducted a strike on a hospital in the Gaza Strip, killing more than 500 people. Hamas has pinned responsibility for the attack on Israel, but the Israeli Defense Forces have denied any role in the strike.

On October 7, Hamas launched surprise attacks on Israel, killing more than 1300 soldiers and civilians, and taking more than 100 hostage. Israel declared a state of war and began strikes on targets in Gaza ahead of an expected ground operation.

The Lebanese group Hezbollah said on Tuesday that October 18 will be a "day of anger" against Israel, encouraging people to take to the streets to pressure governments for the attacks on Palestinians in Gaza and elsewhere in Israel to stop and for Palestine to obtain statehood.

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Palestinian UN Envoy, Arab Group Demand Immediate Ceasefire After Gaza Hospital Strike

UNITED NATIONS, October 18 (Sputnik) - The Arab group of the United Nations calls for an immediate end to the conflict in Gaza in the wake of the hospital strike that killed 500, a situation the Security Council could have prevented, Palestinian Ambassador to the UN Riyad Mansour told reporters while standing alongside Arab counterparts.

On Monday, the UNSC rejected a Russian-proposed draft resolution to resolve the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip.

"We as an Arab group, demand immediately a ceasefire because the continuation of the war... means killing more Palestinians every moment," Mansour said on Tuesday. "Had the Security Council showed that it's responsible, civil responsibility, yesterday... then we would have been able to have those 500 killed still alive and with us. So the Security Council has to wake up."

Preliminary information from the Palestinian Health Ministry said an Israeli strike on the Al-Ahli Arab Baptist Hospital in central Gaza resulted in more than 500 deaths and wounded Palestinians.

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Biden Postpones Trip to Jordan for Meeting With Arab Leaders - White House

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden is postponing his trip to Jordan on Wednesday where he was initially scheduled to meet with his counterparts from Egypt, Palestine, and Jordan, a White House official said in a statement.

Earlier, Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi told broadcaster Al Mamlaka Jordan would not host the meeting amid the developments in Gaza, where 500 were killed in a strike.

"After consulting with King Abdullah II of Jordan and in light of the days of mourning announced by President Abbas of the Palestinian Authority, President Biden will postpone his travel to Jordan and the planned meeting with these two leaders and President Sisi of Egypt," the official said on Tuesday. "The President sent his deepest condolences for the innocent lives lost in the hospital explosion in Gaza, and wished a speedy recovery to the wounded."

Biden will remain in regular and direct contact with each of these leaders over the coming days, the official added.

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US House Will Hold Second Floor Vote to Elect New Speaker at 11 A.M. ET Wednesday - Whip

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives will hold a second floor vote in an attempt to elect a new speaker at 11 a.m. ET on Wednesday, Democratic Whip Katherine Clark said in a statement.

“Members are further advised that the House will meet at 11:00 a.m. tomorrow and begin a quorum call by recorded vote. Following the quorum call, there will be nominating speeches for candidates for Speaker. After nominating speeches, the House will take a vote on the election of the Speaker by manual roll call,” the statement said on Tuesday.

Earlier on Tuesday, Republican speaker-designate Jim Jordan failed to secure enough support in the first floor vote to win the speakership. Twenty House Republicans voted for alternative candidates, including Congressman Kevin McCarthy, who was ousted from the leadership role earlier this month in a historic first.

House Democrats rallied behind Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, who received a plurality of votes due to the Republican divisions. Democrats are urged to again vote for Jeffries on Wednesday, the statement said.

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White House Praises Poland on Record Voter Turnout, Awaits Engagement With New Govt.

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson congratulated Poland for the record turnout in the country's elections over the weekend.

"We congratulate the people of Poland on their record turnout in Sunday's elections, which is a strong reflection of democratic will," Watson said on Tuesday.

Watson also said the United States looks forward to working with Poland's new government to continue strengthening the close ties between the two countries.

Last week, Poland's Law and Justice Party (PiS) clinched a victory in the parliamentary elections by securing 35.38% of the votes, but failed to secure a majority.

The PiS secured just 34 seats in the upper house of parliament, a decrease from the 48 seats they won in the 2019 parliamentary elections. Meanwhile, the opposition commands a significant presence with 66 senators in the upper chamber of parliament.

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US Congressman Urges Bill Gates To Ensure His Companies Not Supporting Hamas – Statement

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) – US Congressman Mike Waltz urged billionaire Bill Gates on Tuesday to ensure that neither his companies nor employees are providing material support to official events hosted by Hamas.

"I urge you to ensure that neither your companies, nor your employees, nor you yourself are providing such materiel support to Hamas or any other FTO [foreign terrorist organization]," Waltz wrote in a letter to Gates.

The congressman noted that senior Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal reportedly used the Four Seasons Hotel in Doha, Qatar, for a press conference in 2015 and for a closed-door meeting with then-Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu in 2016. Waltz also added that Gates' firm, Cascade Investment, has had a share in this hotel chain since 2007.

"As you are the founder and owner of Cascade Investment, L.L.C, which has a controlling stake in Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, I write with dual purpose: to warn you of the counterterrorism sanctions to which you and your employees are potentially exposed and to ask you to take a personal stand against Hamas by publicly pledging to ban it from using the Four Seasons or any other properties you own," Waltz said.

The lawmaker expressed concerns over Gates' silence on the current spike of violence in Israel. He called on the billionaire and his company to make a statement supporting the Israelis and pledging to prevent any future use of the Four Seasons by Hamas.

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

PREVIEW - Biden Departs for Tel Aviv to Demonstrate US Solidarity With Israel

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden is on his way to Tel Aviv to demonstrate the United States' commitment to supporting Israel amid the war with the Palestinian group Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

On Monday, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said that Biden will get an update from Israeli officials about their strategy against Hamas, including their military operations' plans.

Israel is expected to start a ground offensive against Hamas in Gaza after Biden ends his trip to Israel, according to US media reports.

During his visit, Biden will meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Later on Wednesday, the US president will travel to Jordan for a meeting with Jordanian, Egyptian and Palestinian Authority officials to discuss the Israel-Hamas war.

Biden will discuss humanitarian assistance deliveries to civilians in Gaza in a way that does not benefit Hamas as well as the situation regarding Israeli hostages.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited the region over the last several days for talks on the attempt to keep the war from expanding. Blinken met with the leaders from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, Egypt, the Palestinian Authority and the United Arab Emirates,

The United States is deploying two aircraft carrier strike groups to the region and 2,000 Marines off the coast of Gaza and Israel, in an effort to show its commitment and assuage Israel's security concerns.

The Dwight D Eisenhower carrier strike group is on its way to join the Gerald R. Ford carrier strike group, which is already in the Eastern Mediterranean to serve as a deterrent to any third parties that might be considering joining the war.

The Defense Department said the US Marine detachment would be placed on standby and will be possibly deployed to Israel to serve in a non-combat supportive role if needed.

US Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander Gen. Michael Kurilla was in Israel earlier on Tuesday for a meeting with Israeli military officials.

The White House has already said that the United States will provide Israel with enough security assistance, including missiles to replenish its Iron Dome air defense system, and will ask Congress to approve additional aid.

On Tuesday, the White House said that Biden spoke over the telephone with a bipartisan group of senators who recently returned from a trip to Israel, where they met with Israeli officials.

US Senator Chuck Schumer said on Monday he will work with the Biden administration on an emergency supplemental package to support Israel's security needs. Schumer underscored that the Senate must begin work on the legislation since the House of Representatives continues to struggle to confirm a speaker.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) -

ISRAEL STRIKE ON HOSPITAL IN GAZA

* More than 500 people have been killed in an Israeli strike on the Al-Ahli Arab Baptist Hospital in the Gaza Strip, Al-Jazeera reported on Tuesday, citing a representative of the Gaza Health Ministry.
* The unprecedented atrocity that is taking place in Gaza must stop, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said.
* Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said the news about the destruction in Gaza by Israeli strikes, including of the Al-Ahli Arab Baptist Hospital, has been horrific, illegal and unacceptable, and added that international humanitarian law must be upheld in call cases.
* Russia and the United Arab Emirates have requested a UN Security Council emergency meeting for Wednesday following the deadly strike on hospital in Gaza City, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said.
* The Israeli Defense Forces said on Tuesday that the Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement is responsible for attack on the hospital in Gaza.

ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR

* The Hamas military wing, the Al-Qassam Brigades, said on Tuesday that it is shelling Tel Aviv in response to mass killings of Palestinian civilians.
* The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) said that they are currently striking the positions of the Hezbollah movement in Lebanon.
* The position of the United States and the West did not allow adopting the Russian draft resolution on a humanitarian ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.
* The United Nations urges avoiding escalation and miscalculation amid reports of the US preparing to deploy 2,000 troops off the coast of Gaza and Israel, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.
* The head of the Israeli Directorate of Military Intelligence, Aharon Haliva, took responsibility for not preventing the October 7 attack on Israel carried out by Hamas, and admitted that the intelligence has failed.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* The naval aviation of the Russian Black Sea fleet destroyed an unmanned Ukrainian vessel in the Black Sea, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Tuesday.
* The version of the Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS) that the United States delivered to Ukraine is equipped with cluster munitions, US media reported.
* Ukraine used ATACMS to strike nearby Russian troops near Luhansk and Berdyansk, marking the first use of the US-made long-range missiles in the conflict, The Wall Street Journal reported on Tuesday, citing people in the know.
* The Russian forces have repelled nine attacks in the Donetsk direction in the past 24 hours, and Ukraine's military casualties have reached 485, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

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RUSSIAN GAS SUPPLIES TO EUROPE

* Russian President Vladimir Putin, Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak and Gazprom CEO Alexey Miller have assured the Hungarian delegation during a meeting in China on Tuesday that Moscow will fulfill all contractual gas supplies obligations to Hungary, despite Bulgaria's decision to raise transit fees, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto said.

* Szijjarto and Serbian Deputy Prime Minister Sinisa Mali said in a joint declaration that the Bulgarian authorities' decision to raise transit fees for Russian gas threatens the energy supply of their countries.

MONGOLIA-RUSSIA TALKS

* Trade between Russia and Mongolia, which increased 40% last year, has adjusted this year and attention needs to be paid to this development, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Tuesday.

* Mongolian President Ukhnaagiin Khurelsukh said during a meeting with Putin that a priority of his country's foreign policy is developing relations with Russia.

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US Senate to Approve Emergency Aid Package for Israel, Ukraine by Week End - Schumer

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - The US Senate plans to approve its new emergency aid package for Israel and Ukraine by the end of this week, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said on Tuesday.

"We intend to get the aid package for Israel by the end of this week," Schumer said. "We would like to get the supplemental packages moving as quickly as possible because the needs are great in both Israel and Ukraine. ... I am working with [Republican Minority Leader Mitch] McConnell to get it done as quickly as possible."

The House of Representatives, narrowly controlled by a divided Republican majority, failed to approve Representative Jim Jordan as its new speaker earlier on Tuesday so the Senate planned to move ahead with overwhelming bipartisan support to put pressure on the House to also agree to it, Schumer said.

"The House is a mess. Therefore we think the best thing to do is to pass a strong bipartisan supplemental, and that may force the House to act," Schumer also said.

Schumer said he visited Israel over the weekend in a bipartisan group of five senators and they discussed Israel's security needs with the country's top political and military leaders.

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Biden Mulls Asking Congress to Approve $100Bln for Israel, Ukraine, Taiwan - Reports

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WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden is considering making a $100 billion supplemental funding request to Congress to provide support to Israel, Ukraine, and Taiwan, Bloomberg News reported on Tuesday citing sources.

The report said the package would also fund US border security and provide assistance to other nations in the Indo-Pacific.

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INDOPACOM Commander Says Two Aircraft Carriers Executing Deterrence Missions in Region

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - Admiral John Aquilino, Commander of the United States Indo-Pacific Command said on Tuesday that two US aircraft carriers are currently at sea along with the joint military are carrying out deterrence missions in the region.

"By the way, there are two aircraft carriers right now at sea as well along with a large portion of the joint force, executing deterrence missions in my theater," Aquilino said in a press briefing.

Aquilino added that also two more are dispatched to the Eastern Mediterranean.

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Trump Seeks Appeal of Partial Gag Order in 2020 Federal Election Case - Court Filing

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump has filed a notice to appeal a partial gag order related to his 2020 federal election case, according to a court filing submitted on Tuesday.

The filing comes after US District Judge Tanya Chutkan of Washington DC banned Trump on Monday from verbally attacking US prosecutors, court staff, and witnesses involved in the case.

Trump has 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.

Trump is facing numerous charges over allegations of meddling in the 2020 election and unauthorized retention of classified materials, among others.

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Russia, UAE Seek Urgent UNSC Meeting for Wednesday After Strike on Gaza Hospital - Mission

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UNITED NATIONS, October 17 (Sputnik) - Russia and the United Arab Emirates have requested an emergency UN Security Council meeting for Wednesday following the deadly strike on Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital in Gaza City, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy said.

"Russia and the United Arab Emirates have requested an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council for the morning of October 18 in connection with the attack on the hospital in Gaza," Polyanskiy wrote on Telegram.

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Five US C-17 Aircraft Missions Have Delivered Security Aid to Israel Recently - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - Five US C-17 aircraft missions have successfully delivered a range of security assistance to Israel over the last few days, Pentagon Deputy Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said on Tuesday.

"There have been five C-17 aircraft missions that have successfully carried a range of security assistance into Israel," Singh said during a press briefing. "Those flights occurred between October 12 and October 16 timeframe."

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White House Has Discussed US Military Response if Hezbollah Attacks Israel - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - The White House has been discussing potential US military intervention should Hezbollah engage in the ongoing conflict by attacking Israel, Axios reported on Tuesday.

President Joe Biden in a call on Saturday expressed concern to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu about the war expanding along the Israeli-Lebanese border, the report added, citing US and Israeli officials.

Biden asked Netanyahu to keep Israel Defense Forces' operations in Lebanon as restrained as possible and warned of actions that might escalate tensions with Hezbollah.

Furthermore, two US officials highlighted that Secretary of State Antony Blinken communicated to Arab leaders the US's strong stance, emphasizing the country's significant military presence in the region to support Israel, the report added.

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Israeli Invasion of Gaza Far From Certain, Risks Wider Conflict Involving Iran - Experts

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - Any Israeli invasion of Gaza in response to the Hamas incursion and music festival massacre remains far from certain and risks wider conflict involving Iran, experts told Sputnik.

US President Joe Biden is flying to the region to talk with Israeli and other regional leaders in an attempt to avert escalation and a wider crisis. During his trip, Biden will meet with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and get an update about Israel's strategy against Hamas in Gaza including the pace of their military operations.

On Tuesday, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said the US has no plans to put troops on the ground in Israel despite placing 2,000 US military personnel in the Middle East on notice.

There remains a general expectation across the Middle East that Israel still plans to launch a full scale invasion of Gaza. However, former United Kingdom (UK) Ambassador to Syria, veteran diplomat and Middle East expert Peter Ford advised that this was still a far from inevitable outcome.

"All the experts say Israel will invade. I say it's far from certain," Ford said.

Tehran's role in either resolving the crisis or escalating it in response to Israeli actions remained crucial, Ford said.

"Iran is not bluffing. If Israel invades Gaza it had better be ready for full scale war on at least three fronts and probably four - Lebanon, Syria, Gaza, West Bank. Iran will never have a better chance to puncture the myth of Israeli deterrence power," Ford said. "The Israeli army has not had much time to prepare and is ill-equipped to handle street fighting in Gaza. The Israelis appear to have fewer trained battle-hardened troops than Hamas."

Israel is a small country which can only fight short intense wars, Ford added, and keeping 300,000 reservists away from their jobs and the whole economy on a war footing for extended periods is not sustainable.

Independent Institute Center for Peace & Liberty Director Ivan Eland said Hamas had prepared well for a long and sustained bitter urban conflict that would inflict heavy casualties on Israeli forces.

"The ground invasion may run into a quagmire of urban warfare, including in tunnels. I think maybe this is Iran's/Hamas's plan. Also, Hezbollah could attack from the north as soon as Israel is committed in Gaza," Eland, who spent fifteen years working for Congress on national security issues, said.

Iran was more likely to urge Hezbollah to escalate hostilities on Israel's northern border rather than at first directly intervene itself, Eland said.

"Iran usually slyly intervenes indirectly through proxies. The intervention could come through a Hezbollah attack," he said.

Biden sincerely wanted to end the suffering of the civilian population in Gaza but his unqualified public support for Israel without mentioning the history and context of Israeli theft of Palestinian land mitigated these efforts, Eland added.

Middle East analyst and author Arun Kundnani predicted Israel would still invade, but only after Biden had completed his visit to the region.

He also said the Israeli leadership had not yet decided if the aim of the land invasion would be

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to permanently re-occupy parts of Gaza or a temporary incursion on the pretext of freeing hostages and destroying Hamas.

"Iran will not intervene directly. Hezbollah will become engaged only if Israel decides to carry out a policy of eliminating Palestinians entirely from Gaza," he said.

US policy should be to end military and financial support and force it to accept a genuine peace process with Hamas.

"Without US support, Israel would be unable to act," Kundnani said.

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Trudeau Says Israeli Strike on Hospital in Gaza 'Horrible, Unacceptable, Illegal'

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Tuesday that the news about the destruction in the Gaza Strip by Israeli strikes, including of the Al-Ahli Arab Baptist Hospital, has been horrific and unacceptable and international humanitarian law must be upheld.

"The news coming out of Gaza is horrific, absolutely unacceptable. International humanitarian and international law need to be respected in this and in all cases. There are rules around wars and it's not acceptable," Trudeau said.

Asked whether he believes that Israel's strike on the hospital was legal, Trudeau said, "No, it is not legal."

Preliminary information from the Palestinian Health Ministry said an Israeli strike on the Al-Ahli Arab Baptist Hospital in central Gaza resulted in more than 500 deaths and wounded Palestinians.

Israel said the Israeli Defense Force would investigate the incident.

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US Seeing Sharp Increase in 'Coercive, Risky' Behavior by China in S. China Sea - Official

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - The United States has seen a sharp increase in coercive and risky behavior by China in the South China Sea, US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Ely Ratner said on Tuesday.

"I'd like to take this opportunity today to speak about the newly declassified pictures and videos shared by the department today that depicts the PLA's [People's Liberation Army] sharp increase in coercive and risky operational behavior in the East and South China Seas," Ratner said during a press briefing.

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UN Says No Independent Confirmation of Reports of White Phosphorus Use in Lebanon

UNITED NATIONS, October 17 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is unable to independently verify reports that Israel used white phosphorus munitions in its military operations in Lebanon, but is aware of them, spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday.

"We don't have any independent confirmation... We're very much aware of the open source reports of the alleged use of white phosphorus in populated areas," Dujarric told a briefing, when asked about reports that Israel shelled a Lebanese border town with white phosphorus munitions.

Dujarric further mentioned that the UN secretary-general is deeply troubled by the reports and the potential dangers to civilians. He emphasized that every party to the conflict should follow international humanitarian law, which bans warfare methods causing indiscriminate harm or excessive suffering.

"And he [UN Secretary General] calls on all parties to the conflict to avoid the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and to take combat out of urban areas altogether," Dujarric added.

Human Rights Watch reported last week that Israeli forces used white phosphorus artillery shells against Lebanon and the Gaza Strip on October 10 and 11.

This comes after a large-scale attack by Hamas on Israel earlier this month. In response, Israel declared a state of war with Hamas, imposing a complete blockade on the Gaza Strip and pounding the Palestinian exclave with massive air strikes.

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Congressman Jim Jordan Fails to Win US House Speakership in First Floor Vote

(Update adds background in paras 5-6, details throughout)

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Jim Jordan failed to secure enough votes to become House Speaker during the first floor vote on Tuesday, after 20 House Republicans refused to back Jordan as the party's nominee.

The 20 diverging House Republicans cast ballots for alternative candidates, splitting the House Republican conference and putting Jordan under the 217 votes needed to secure the speakership.

House Democrats rallied their support behind Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries. The final vote was 212 members in favor of Jeffries, 200 in favor of Jordan and 20 divided between several other Republican lawmakers, including former speaker Kevin McCarthy.

Earlier this month, the House of Representatives ousted McCarthy as speaker, leaving the lower chamber of Congress leaderless and unable to pass legislation.

The House of Representatives went into recess after failing to elect a speaker in the first floor vote.

House lawmakers must elect a speaker or empower speaker pro tempore Patrick McHenry in

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order to pass government funding legislation before November 17, as well as to provide aid to Israel amid its conflict with Hamas.

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UN Says Stands Against Use of Cluster Munitions in Conflicts

UNITED NATIONS, October 17 (Sputnik) - The United Nations cannot verify reports that the United States has provided Ukraine with the models of ATACMS missiles that are armed with cluster munitions, but opposes the use of such munitions in conflicts, spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday.

"I don't have a way to verify those reports. But we have long spoken out against the use of cluster munitions in any conflict," Dujarric told a briefing.

Earlier in the day, The New York Times reported that a version of the Army Tactical Missile Systems that the United States supplied to Ukraine is equipped with cluster munitions. The US secretly delivered a small number of ATACMS to Ukraine in recent days.

Ukrainian forces used the missiles on Tuesday for the first time, hitting two air bases in Russian-held territory, the report said.

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Jim Jordan Fails in US House Speakership Bid in First Floor Vote

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Jim Jordan failed to secure enough votes to become House Speaker during the first floor vote on Tuesday, after several House Republicans refused to back Jordan as the party's nominee.

Several Republicans cast ballots for alternative candidates, splitting the House Republican conference and putting Jordan under the 217 votes needed to secure the speakership.

House Democrats rallied their support behind Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries.

Earlier this month, the House of Representatives ousted Congressman Kevin McCarthy as speaker, leaving the lower chamber of Congress leaderless and unable to pass legislation.

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Biden Held Call With Senators That Returned From Israel Visit - White House

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden held a telephone call with a bipartisan group of Senators who recently returned from a trip to Israel where they participated in high-level talks with Israeli officials, the White House said on Tuesday.

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"Today, President Biden convened a call with the bipartisan Congressional delegation led by Leader Chuck Schumer that recently returned from a trip to Israel," the White House said in a statement.

The meeting consisted of Schumer, Senators Bill Cassidy, Mark Kelly, Jacky Rosen and Mitt Romney as well as White House Chief of Staff Jeff Zients, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, Counselor to the President Steve Ricchetti, Deputy National Security Advisor Jon Finer and Director of Legislative Affairs Shuwanza Goff, according to the White House.

On Monday, Schumer said he will be working with the Biden administration on an emergency supplemental package to support Israel's security efforts. The Senate Majority Leader underscored that the Senate must begin work on the legislation since the House of Representatives continue to struggle to confirm a speaker.

Moreover, Schumer urged the Senate to immediately confirm Jack Lew to be the next US ambassador to Israel.

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IMF, Moldova Reach Agreement Paving Way to $92Mln Arrangement - Mission Chief

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the government of Moldova reached a staff-level agreement that paves the way to a $92 million arrangement, IMF Mission Chief Clara Mira said on Tuesday.

"The authorities and the IMF team have reached staff-level agreement on policies to complete the fourth review under the ECF/EFF [Extended Credit Facility/Extended Fund Facility] arrangements," Mira said in a statement. "Completing the review will make SDR 70.95 million (US$92 million) available, bringing total disbursements under the program to about $461.3 million."

The agreement, however, is subject to approval by the IMF Management and Executive Board, Mira said.

The Moldovan government has maintained a strong program implementation, which continues despite multiple challenges, Mira said.

The government met all quantitative performance criteria and continued advancing structural reforms, she said.

The Moldovan economy continues to face challenges, particularly as a result of the conflict in Ukraine despite the deceleration of inflation, Miro said.

"The escalation of the war and renewed energy shocks could aggravate prospects going forward. However, progress in EU accession, a faster recovery in domestic demand or in trading partners could boost growth and confidence," Mira said.

The outlook for Moldova remains highly uncertain and significant downside risks remain in place, Mira added.

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UN Urges for Need to Avoid Escalation Amid Reports of US Deploying Troops to Middle East

UNITED NATIONS, October 17 (Sputnik) - The United Nations urges for the need to avoid escalation and miscalculation amid reports of the US preparing to deploy 2,000 troops to the Middle East region, the UN Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday.

"I have seen the press reports. I think we are at a time of extreme tension where all the work is to move away from further escalation and any possible miscalculation," Dujarric told a briefing.

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New US Export Rules to Block Chinese Arms Makers From Accessing Supercomputing Chips

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - The United States has upgraded its export rules for semiconductors to block prized US chips from particularly getting into the hands of sanctioned Chinese weapons makers, Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said Tuesday.

"Today's rules reinforce the October 7, 2022, controls to restrict the PRC's ability to both purchase and manufacture certain high-end chips critical for military advantage," Raimondo said in a statement that referred to the acronym used to describe the People's Republic of China. "These controls maintain our clear focus on military applications and confront the threats to our national security posed by the PRC Government's military-civil fusion strategy."

The package of rules redesigned by the Department of Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security govern the export of advanced computing semiconductors and semiconductor manufacturing equipment, as well as items that support supercomputing applications and end-uses, to arms-embargoed states like the PRC, the statement said.

"As we implement these restrictions, we will keep working to protect our national security by restricting access to critical technologies, vigilantly enforcing our rules, while minimizing any unintended impact on trade flows," Raimondo said.

These updates were necessary to maintain the effectiveness of these controls, close loopholes, and ensure they remain durable, the statement said.

The controls were strategically crafted to address, among other concerns, the PRC's efforts to obtain semiconductor manufacturing equipment essential to producing advanced integrated circuits needed for the next generation of advanced weapon systems, it said.

They are also to circumvent Chinese access to US-made high-end advanced computing semiconductors necessary to enable the development and production of technologies such as artificial intelligence, or AI, used in military applications, the statement added.

"By imposing stringent license requirements, we ensure that those seeking to obtain powerful advanced chips and chip manufacturing equipment will not use these technologies to undermine US national security," Thea D. Rozman Kendler, assistant secretary of commerce for export administration, was quoted saying.

Advanced AI capabilities — facilitated by supercomputing, built on advanced semiconductors

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— present US national security concerns because they can be used to improve the speed and accuracy of military decision making, planning, and logistics, the statement said, adding that these could also be used for cognitive electronic warfare, radar, signals intelligence, and jamming.

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UN Official Says 20 Staffers Killed in Israel Strikes on Gaza

UNITED NATIONS, October 17 (Sputnik) - Fifteen staffers working for the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and five working for the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement have been killed in Israeli strikes on the Gaza Strip after Hamas attacked Israel, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Joyce Msuya said on Tuesday.

"Humanitarians have not been spared. Fifteen UNWRA [staffers] and five from the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement have been killed. UN premises are among the vast number of civilian objects damaged," Msuya said.

The UN official warned that in the event of increased hostilities, the number of killed staffers and of targeted UN compounds will increase and the already difficult humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip will worsen.

Msuya said that fuel used to operate desalinisation plants in the Gaza Strip will last for a week and fuel to maintain health services is almost depleted.

"Twenty out of 23 hospitals in Gaza have been already only offering partial services," Msuya said.

Israeli strikes on Gaza have resulted 2,800 Palestinian deaths and 10,850 wounded while hundreds are believed to be trapped under the rubble, Msuya said.

The Israeli authorities have reported that 1,300 Israeli civilians and soldiers have been killed and 4,100 injured in the attacks by Hamas, Msuya said.

Nearly 200 Israelis are being held captive by Hamas, Msuya added.

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OHCHR Urges Israel to Refrain From Indiscriminate, Disproportionate Strikes

UNITED NATIONS, October 17 (Sputnik) - UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ilze Brands Kehris on Tuesday urged Israel to avoid carrying out indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks against Gazans amid the war with Hamas.

"I urge the Israeli forces to take immediate steps to avoid targeting civilian objects including hospitals or conducting aerial bombardment, indiscriminate or disproportionate attacks, and to take effective precautions to avoid, and in any event to minimize incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians and damage to civilian objects," Kehris said at a UN briefing for the Arab

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Group.

Kehris highlighted the high civilian death toll as an indication that insufficient steps have been taken on the matter, as restraint is not being practiced by the Israeli side.

The assistant secretary-general said that Israel's total siege of Gaza, exacerbated by the evacuation order to nearly 1.1 million Palestinians from the northern part of the exclave amounts to collective punishment.

These actions constitute a violation of international law and the human rights of Gazans, Kehris said.

Kehris called on Israel to immediately lift the blockade and urged all involved parties to allow the creation of a humanitarian passage between Gaza and Egypt through the Rafah border crossing.

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Canada Seeks to Force Russophobia on Other Jurisdictions With Moldova Sanctions - Stepanov

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government is trying to impose its Russophobia on other jurisdictions by sanctioning alleged "Russian collaborators" in Moldova, Russian Ambassador in Ottawa Oleg Stepanov told Sputnik.

Earlier on Tuesday, Canada targeted nine individuals and six television stations with new sanctions against "Russian collaborators" in Moldova. The sanctioned individuals are linked to oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc and politician Ilan Shor, Global Affairs Canada said. The TV stations, including Perviy Kanal in Moldova, RTR Moldova and NTV Moldova, were sanctioned for allegedly promoting "Russian disinformation."

"Canada's sanctions policy - completely illegal from the point of view of international law - is becoming increasingly absurd. Russophobia is so rampant that they are trying to spread it to other jurisdictions," Stepanov said.

The ambassador dismissed the sanctions as "empty posturing" that proves that sanctions have not worked and are not working and their potential has been exhausted.

A new round of sanctions against media outlets confirms "the false nature" of the liberal democracy the Canadian government preaches, Stepanov stated.

When the suppression of freedom of speech and the press is introduced at the state level, this is no longer democracy, he added.

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US House Majority Leader Says Working on Military Aid for Israel, Iran Sanctions

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WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - US House Majority Leader Steve Scalise said on Tuesday that House lawmakers are working on a military aid package for Israel, as well as sanctions on Iran.

"We are also working with this Israeli government and this Biden administration to prepare military assistance so that we can replenish the Iron Dome and other critical military needs," Scalise said during remarks to the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

The House of Representatives is also preparing legislation to impose further sanctions on Iranian oil revenue, which is used to finance terrorism, Scalise said.

Moreover, House lawmakers are also drafting legislation to target Iran-backed terrorist groups and block the release of $6 billion in Iranian funds that the Biden administration agreed to unfreeze as part of a prisoner swap, Scalise said.

However, the House of Representatives is unable to pass legislation until it elects a new speaker or empowers speaker pro tempore Patrick McHenry. House lawmakers will consider a bipartisan resolution supporting Israel and condemning Hamas first thing when they return to business, Scalise said.

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Congressman McCaul Says Does Not Want Deployed US Marines to Enter Israel-Hamas War

WASHINGTON October 17, (Sputnik) - The decision by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin to send US Marines off the coast of the Gaza Strip and Israel to act as a deterrent is a sound one, but the United States does not want to see them join the Israel-Hamas war, US House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul said on Tuesday.

"Secretary Austin now has 2,000 Marines Expeditionary Force off the coast of Gaza and Israel, I'd say northern Israel near Hezbollah, as a deterrent to ensure it does not invade Israel," McCaul said in a statement.

McCaul said he agrees with the decision and is "glad" Austin deployed aircraft carrier strike groups there complete with the Marine detachment, but emphasized that he is against the Marines getting involved directly in the war.

"[T]he expeditionary force of Marines is very telling because that would be a kinetic force that if they land on the ground, they're boots on the ground going to war. And we don't want that to happen," McCaul said.

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Robert F. Kennedy Jr Says Average US Income Does Not Meet Basic Needs

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LOUISVILLE, Kentucky, October 17 (Sputnik) Lenka White - Presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said late Monday evening that average US income is $5000 short of meeting basic needs like food and as a result, private credit card debt is a trillion dollars, the highest in US history.

"The average income in this country is now $5,000 less than the cost of basic human needs, food, transportation and housing," Kennedy told the audience during his "Independent Tour" in Louisville, Kentucky. "...There's still $5.000 in debt at the end of the year. How are they paying that debt? They are putting it on their credit cards. So three weeks ago, we passed a critical milestone of a trillion dollars in private credit card debt. You've never had that kind of debt before in history."

Kennedy also pointed out that despite the increasing debt, people can only afford low-quality food from the supermarket or fast food.

"(People can afford] not even good food, just food, not even a Whole Foods. Food you get at McDonald's or the grocery store that is very low on nutrition and very high on Atrazine and glyphosate, pesticides,..." he said. The low food quality has also contributed to the increase in chronic diseases - from 6% to 60%, the candidate continued.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is a presidential candidate in the 2024 race who decided to run as an independent. Kennedy explained that there is a rising tide of discontent in the US, wanting to make a "new declaration of independence"- from corporations, the media, and the two major political parties.

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Version of ATACMS Missiles US Sent to Ukraine Equipped With Cluster Munitions - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - The version of the Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS) that the United States delivered to Ukraine are equipped with cluster munitions, the New York Times reported on Tuesday.

The United States provided the Ukrainian military a small number of ATACMS missiles, the report said citing a Biden administration official.

The Ukrainian forces used the missiles for the first time earlier on Tuesday and hit two air bases in the Russian-controlled area, the report said.

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US Senator Introduces Bill to Freeze $6Bln in Iranian Funds - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - US Senator Tim Scott has introduced legislation to freeze the $6 billion in Iranian funds that the Biden administration previously unfroze in exchange for the release of imprisoned US citizens as well as to prevent Tehran from accessing

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funds in the future, Politico reported on Tuesday.

The bill is a "comprehensive approach" to wielding US economic sanctions tools against Iran by freezing the $6 billion and ensuring Congress has the information necessary to prevent Iran from accessing funds in the future, the report cited Scott as saying.

The United States should confirm its commitment to maintain sanctions against Iran and not waive restrictions on frozen Iranian funds held by other nations, the report said.

The bill would limit the US administration's ability to loosen sanctions regarding the Iranian funds, the report said.

The legislation would also require the Treasury Department to report to Congress on other Iranian assets frozen by the US government, the report also said.

Scott also urged the Senate Banking Committee to invite Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen to participate in a hearing on sanctions imposed on Iran, the report added.

In September, the Biden administration released $6 billion in frozen Iranian oil revenues as part of a prisoner swap deal with Tehran. The funds were moved to restricted accounts in Qatar, according to reports.

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US Has No Plans to Put Troops on Ground in Israel, Despite Boosted Force Posture - Kirby

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - The United States has no plans to put troops on the ground in Israel amid the war with Hamas, despite placing approximately 2,000 US military personnel stationed in the Middle East on notice to prepare to deploy, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"There are no plans or intentions to put the US boots on the ground in combat in Israel. Everything we are doing right now is about sending a strong signal of deterrence," Kirby told CNN.

The Pentagon confirmed on Tuesday it has put about 2,000 personnel and a range of units on a heightened state of readiness through a prepare to deploy order. However, no decisions have been made to deploy any forces at this time.

Kirby said that by preparing additional forces, the US is sending a "signal of deterrence." The US does not want to see an escalation of the conflict, he added.

Speaking about the possibility of talks with Hamas on hostages, Kirby emphasized that it is up to Israel to decide.

"What I can tell you is that we are working literally by the hour to develop options to get our hostages home. We are working very closely with partners in the region, partners who have open communications with Hamas," he said.

The US has no detailed information about the whereabouts of the hostages but believes there is a "very small number" of American hostages, Kirby added.

On Monday, the White House confirmed that President Joe Biden will visit Israel on October 18.

During his trip, Biden will meet with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and get an update about Israel's strategy against Hamas in Gaza including the pace of their military operations. On

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the same day, he will travel to Amman to meet with King Abdullah, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Sisi and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

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Ukraine Fires US-Supplied ATACMS Missiles at Russian Forces for First Time - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - Ukraine on Tuesday used Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS) to strike nearby Russian troops near Luhansk and Berdyansk, marking the first use of the US-made long-range missiles in the conflict, The Wall Street Journal reported on Tuesday, citing people in the know.

The United States has secretly shipped a small number of surface-to-surface missiles to Ukraine in recent days to provide Kiev with a long-range strike capability against Russian forces amid the ongoing counteroffensive, the report said.

The versions of the ATACMS that were provided have a range of about 100 miles (160 km).

The US has not formally announced the transfer of the longer-range missiles.

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US Requests EU Imposes Transit Visas for Uzbek, Tajik Nationals Flying to US – Reports

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) – The United States government has requested for the European Union (EU) to impose an airport transit visa requirement for nationals coming from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, Bloomberg reported on Tuesday.

The US Government has requested from the EU the imposition of an airport transit visa requirement for Uzbek and Tajik nationals in a bid to curb the potential arrival of terrorist elements from the Central Asian states, the report said citing two sources familiar with the issue.

According to the report, the demand was made in light of an incident earlier this year that involved the entrance of migrants through the US southwest border, aided by a smuggler tied to the Islamic States (IS, terrorist group banned in Russia).

The event raised concerns in the US, the report said, adding that Washington was worried that passengers transiting through the EU may end up trying to illegally enter the country.

In late August, media reported that the FBI were investigating a dozen Uzbek nationals who had sought asylum at the US-Mexico border after illegally entering the country with the help of the IS-tied smuggler.

However, although US authorities said they were scrutinizing 15 migrants as possible criminal threats, none of those individuals could at that moment be tied to any terrorist plot.

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US, South Korea, Japan Hold Talks on DPRK's Engagement With Russia - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - Officials from the United States, South Korea, and Japan met in Jakarta on Tuesday to discuss an alleged threat posed by North Korea and its engagement with Russia, the US State Department said in a press release.

"U.S. Special Representative for the DPRK Ambassador Sung Kim hosted Republic of Korea Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs Kim Gunn and Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Director General for Asian and Oceanian Affairs Namazu Hiroyuki for bilateral and trilateral meetings in Jakarta, Indonesia, on October 17, to discuss trilateral cooperation to curb the threat posed by the DPRK," the release said.

"The three senior officials shared assessments of recent developments on the Korean Peninsula and the DPRK's engagement with Russia," the release added.

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Canada Targets 9 People, 6 TV Stations in Moldova With 'Russian Collaborators' Sanctions

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - Canada has targeted nine individuals and six television stations in new sanctions against "Russian collaborators" in Moldova, Global Affairs Canada said on Tuesday.

"These sanctions are being imposed against 9 Moldovan individuals who are associated with influential oligarchs, such as Vladimir Plahotniuc and Ilan Mironovich Shor, who have previously been sanctioned by Canada. Some individuals being sanctioned today are also connected to Mr. Shor's political party, the Shor Party, sanctioned by Canada in June 2023 in response to its continued efforts to destabilize the democratically elected Moldovan government in favour of Russia," the ministry said in a statement.

Canada has also imposed sanctions on six television stations, including Perviy Kanal in Moldova, RTR Moldova and NTV Moldova, for allegedly promoting "Russian disinformation."

The stations had their operating licenses revoked by Moldova's Commission for Exceptional Situations.

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US Imposes Export Restrictions on 13 Entities in China - Commerce Department

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - The United States is imposing export restrictions on 13 entities in China, the Commerce Department said on Tuesday.

"In this rule, the Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) amends the Export Administration

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Regulations (EAR) by adding 13 entities to the Entity List under the destination of the People's Republic of China (China). These entities have been determined by the U.S. Government to be acting contrary to the national security or foreign policy interests of the United States," the notice said.

The sanctions list includes chip designer Moore Thread Intelligent Technology and its subsidiaries.

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UNSC to Vote on Brazilian-Drafted Resolution on Israel-Gaza War at 22:00 GMT - President

UNITED NATIONS, October 17 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council on Tuesday will vote on a Brazilian-drafted resolution that condemns Hamas attacks on Israel and urges the immediate rescission of Israel's evacuation order for the north of Gaza, the Brazilian mission told Sputnik.

The vote is scheduled for 6:00 p.m. NYT (22:00 GMT), the mission said.

Brazil holds the UNSC presidency during the month of October.

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CENTCOM Chief Arrives in Tel Aviv to Discuss Israel's Defense Needs

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) - US Central Command chief Gen. Michael Kurilla has arrived in Israel to discuss the Middle Eastern ally's defense needs amid the war with Hamas, CENTCOM said.

"I'm here to ensure that Israel has what it needs to defend itself, and am particularly focused on avoiding other parties expanding the conflict," Kurilla said in a statement released by CENTCOM on Monday.

In Tel Aviv, Kurilla will meet with Israel's military leadership, including Chief of Defense Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi to "gain a clear understanding of Israel's defense requirements," outline US support efforts to avoid expansion of the conflict, and reiterate the US's ironclad support for Israel, the statement added.

On Monday, the White House confirmed that President Joe Biden will visit Israel on October 18.

During his trip, Biden will meet with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and get an update about Israel's strategy against Hamas in Gaza including the pace of their military operations. On the same day, he will travel to Amman to meet with King Abdullah, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Sisi and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

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