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Burgeoning Russia-China Trade 'Shiny Spot Amid Gloom' in Global Economy

Trade between China and Russia has expanded dramatically in recent years, growing even as other nations are struggling to maintain trade volumes. Both nations are members of numerous international groups aimed at developing new trade routes centered on their needs and not the West's, creating great potential for development, an economist said.

As most of the world's nations gathered in Beijing to celebrate the 10-year anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), an infrastructure megaproject initiated by China with projects in more than 150 countries, Russian President Vladimir Putin called attention to the special relationship burgeoning between Moscow and Beijing.

Speaking at the forum on Wednesday, Putin said that China and Russia, as well as the majority of the world's countries, "share the desire for equal and mutually beneficial cooperation aimed at achieving sustainable and long-term economic progress and social well-being, while respecting the diversity of civilizations and the right of each country to its own model of development."

He added that the BRI was in line with Russia's "well-known proposal to form a large Eurasian space" for cooperation based on groups like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Eurasian Economic Union.

Dr John Gong, professor of economics at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing and a China Forum expert, told Sputnik that the China-Russia relationship, which has continued to expand even as the rest of the globe is struggling through economic malaise, can serve as the basis for a new way of doing things globally.

"I think from the Russian perspective [opening new trade corridors between Russia and China] represents a great opportunity against the backdrop of Russia's entire economy. Russia's foreign trade is undergoing a profound transformation, profound change in a way. In other words, I think that the Russian economy, Russian trade is geared towards the Orient. And for that to happen more smoothly and also in an inexpensive way, it needs a lot of infrastructure in the Far East. And I think this is something that the Russian government is definitely very interested in pushing," Gong said.

"And from China's perspective, of course, this represents a great opportunity. And also, I think, from a long term perspective, the China-Russia trade and bilateral investment relationship also represent a great direction of future promise because there is a lot of potential for cooperation ahead. Let's just look at the trade figures on the individual countries basis. Russia's already becoming China's, I think, fourth- or fifth-largest trading partner and is rapidly increasing in volume as well. So, this is one strategic area that China is very interested in exploring and pushing as well."

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Gong noted that several months ago, Xi and Putin pledged to push the bilateral trade volume between their two countries above $200 billion this year. “It looks to me that this target is going to be grossly, grossly exceeded,” he said.

“I think it's more likely that it's going to be close to $250 billion, let alone if we talk about the growth rate, it's 30%, year-on-year basis. You know, 30% is a huge number against the backdrop of slowing global trade, of a slowing macro environment - on a global basis, actually, look at the major economies around the world. Economic growth is experiencing a lot of difficulties and challenges. Global trade in particular is greatly affected. And if you look at China's trade picture, with each major trading partner, practically everyone is decreasing, actually. Other than just Russia increasing by 30%. So, you know, this is a shiny spot amidst a sort of a gloomy picture, even though China's trade is coming back a little bit in September. But overall, it's very anemic, in my view. But except with Russia - it's a very robust growth.”

The economist noted that there is broad global interest in moving beyond a global system of trade based on the US dollar.

“I mean, it's a theme, pursued by a lot of countries, actually. You know, when the Brazilian president visited China two weeks ago, he was talking about de-dollarization for trade settlements. The Indonesian president and Malaysia president were both talking about more or less the same thing. And there are other world leaders that have been talking about this,” he explained.

“As a matter of fact, within the BRICS framework - now it's BRICS Plus, like the BRICS Plus framework - I know there's an active initiative to explore the practical issues of implementing an alternative currency, regardless of what that is, I mean, it could be a synthetic currency. But anyway, I know there's a working group set up within the BRICS to explore that option. Among the member countries of the BRICS Plus, trade can be potentially settled in things other than the US dollar.”

“It was actually discussed at the panel that I was on during the Valdai annual meeting in Sochi just a few weeks ago, when President Putin came and gave a talk as well. During that panel, the former vice president of the New World Bank, which is the BRICS bank, was talking about their initiative,” he noted. “There's a serious effort to explore and implement a trade settlement mechanism among the BRICS member countries, to settle trade in currencies other than the US dollar.”

Gong said that while the last 10 years of accomplishments by the Belt and Road project had been impressive, the BRI was only just getting going.

“It's pretty obvious that the fact that more than 150 countries' leaders, signatories, came to Beijing to attend this meeting, I mean, this is a strong statement in itself - it's a statement of endorsement, it's a statement of support. And moving forward, I think the Belt and Road Initiative is going to continue to evolve. We're talking about spending over $1 trillion, over 3,000 projects in so many countries, 150 countries. There's never been a time in human history that such a large scale set of hard infrastructures were built - actually built - within a short period of just ten years.”

“Look at the history of the World Bank, for example, or other regional or international institutions: I mean, they've been spending decades trying to do something like this. But look at what the Belt and Road Initiative has achieved just within a decade.”

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“And so many loans are made. The most important thing, in my view, is that the money is spent on really building something. And, you know, don't underestimate and under-appreciate the challenges, the difficulties of putting things together for an infrastructure project. For a developing country that goes to the World Bank, for example, or let's say the African Development Bank, for an infrastructure project, it's a hard undertaking, you know, it takes a lot of effort. But in this case, I think, things are being done quite relatively fast and also relatively economical as well. So, at least I think China did something for the rest of the world.”
Gong said Putin’s visit to Beijing was “a very significant development in my view.”
“As far as I can recall, this is the first visit by President Putin out of Russia since the conflict in Ukraine erupted [in February 2022], and that happened in Beijing. So I think that underlies the relationship between the two countries. And I think the fact that President Putin was standing there among a very large crowd of world leaders, certainly mostly coming from the Global South, sends a strong signal to the West that the current global affairs is not just about the richest clubs of the world sort of preaching the rest of the world in a condescending manner. It's way beyond that stage, beyond that era.”
“And you mentioned the conflict in Israel, in the Gaza Strip. And I think here in Beijing, the world leaders are celebrating about building a lot of things while over there they're talking about bombing things. And I think this is a very large contrast in my view.”

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Archaeologists Aim to Use ‘Treasure Map’ to Find Ancient Sites Across Northwestern France

Archaeologists studying a mysterious stone fragment have made a startling discovery: the markings on the slab can be used to help them find other sites used by ancient humans, making it one of the oldest known maps of a territory.
The Saint Belec slab was first found in 1900 in western Brittany in a prehistoric burial ground dated to be some 4,000 years old. However, the artifact was lost for over a century before being rediscovered in the cellar of a chateau in 2014, when serious study of its markings resumed. Since then, archaeologists have been working to decipher the slab’s markings, realizing they are likely a map.
"Using the map to try to find archaeological sites is a great approach. We never work like that," Yvan Pailler, a professor at the University of Western Brittany (UBO), told US media. "It's a treasure map.”
"There were a few engraved symbols that made sense right away," he added.
The slab doesn’t have words on it, but the archaeologists realized the lines matched the contours of rivers and mountains in Brittany, France’s westernmost region, which is rich in megalithic sites made by prehistoric humans. Other markings include dots and pock marks, which might delineate burial sites or other locations of importance to the Bronze Age humans who made them.
"We still have to identify all the geometric symbols, the legend that goes with them," said Clement Nicolas from France's Center for National Scientific Research (CNRS).

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The slab is among the oldest known maps of a territory created by humans, dating to roughly 2,000 years before the Roman conquest of Gaul, or several hundred years after Stonehenge was built in England.

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Photos: Pentagon Declassifies Footage of 'Risky' Flying by Chinese Jets Near US Spy Planes

The Pentagon has levied new attacks against the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA), accusing it of "coercive and risky operational behavior" against US aircraft flying near its territory in the East and South China Seas.

A newly declassified dossier by the US Department of Defense includes dozens of photos and video footage representing 15 incidents of "risky" practices involving Chinese aircraft, although the Pentagon says it has material from more than 180 incidents.

The footage shows numerous types of Chinese aircraft, including JH-7, J-10, J-11, and Su-30 fighter aircraft, escorting US spy planes at close range. The closest encounters show the aircraft just 25 feet apart, with the Chinese pilots clearly visible from inside the American aircraft, while others show the Chinese jets some 900 feet away.

Some incidents include flare-firing, a defensive countermeasure against heat-seeking missiles that can also be used for harassment purposes, and in one incident, a Chinese fighter flies in front of the US spy plane, forcing it to fly through the Chinese jet's engine wash.

In one encounter, the Chinese pilot can be seen snapping a photo of the US spy plane just as the Americans snap a photo back.

"All of these examples we've released today underscore the coercive intent of (China) by engaging in behaviors particularly in international airspace," Ely Ratner, assistant secretary of defense for Indo-Pacific security affairs, told US media.

"The bottom line is that in many cases, this type of operational behavior can cause active and dangerous accidents" and can lead inadvertently to conflict," Ratner said.

In 2017, the US began a major shift in its strategic thinking, moving away from the War on Terror that had dominated its concerns for most of the 21st century until that point and beginning to focus on what it characterized as "great power competition" with Russia and China. The US accused the two nations of seeking to upend the US-led "rules-based international order" and declared its intent to halt China's rise, moving extensive military assets to the Indo-Pacific region and stepping up its reconnaissance operations against China.

That has included a dramatic increase in spy plane flights off the Chinese coast, which have caused problems for civilian air traffic, especially when US planes have attempted to disguise themselves as civilian aircraft. It has also led to numerous close encounters as Chinese patrol craft are scrambled to intercept US planes that fly too close to their airspace - a standard practice for all nations, including the US.

The Chinese Ministry of Defense hasn't yet commented on the Pentagon's latest media dump, but in June, Defense Minister Li Shangfu said at Asia's biggest defense conference in

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Singapore: “We always say, ‘mind your own business, take care of your own territorial airspace and waters.’”
Li also took a swing at the US, saying “its so-called 'rules-based international order' never tells you what the rules are, and who made these rules. It practices exceptionalism and double standards and only serves the interests and follows the rules of a small number of countries.”
Earlier this week, a Chinese J-10 fighter intercepted a Canadian CP-140 Aurora maritime patrol aircraft in the South China Sea, flying close to the plane and launching flares, which Ottawa officials characterized as “reckless” and “unsafe.” However, Beijing officials said the Canadians had violated Chinese airspace.
Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told reporters on Tuesday the CP-140 “illegally intruded into the airspace of Chiwei Yu, an island affiliated to China's Diaoyu Islands, seriously violating China's sovereignty and threatening China's national security,” adding that Canada “has sent warplanes halfway around the world to stir up trouble and make provocations at China’s doorsteps.”
In April 2001, a Chinese fighter jet collided with a US spy plane off the coast of the Hainan Island in the South China Sea. While the US Navy’s EP-3E Aries II signals intelligence aircraft managed to limp to a Chinese airfield on the island and land, the PLA Air Force J-8 fighter crashed, with the missing pilot presumed dead. The 24 crew on the EP-3E were detained and interrogated by Chinese authorities, but released after the US apologized.

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Russian Air Defenses Well-Adapted to Taking Out Aged ATACMS Missiles US Gave to Ukraine

While Ukraine has received a new longer-range ballistic missile from the US, the weapon is of limited use due to its age, against which Russian defense systems are well-adapted, an expert told Sputnik. The weapon might cause problems for Russian forces, but its impact will be limited.
The US has confirmed that it transferred MGM-140 Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS) to Ukraine, which were then used to strike Russian forces in Berdyansk, on the Sea of Azov. The short-range surface-launched ballistic missile is fired from the HIMARS, which the US previously supplied to Ukraine along with missiles inferior to the ATACMS.
The US had previously hesitated to give Ukraine the longer-range ATACMS over fears that Kiev would use them to strike inside Russia, further escalating the conflict.
Commenting on the missile’s delivery, Russian President Vladimir Putin called it “a mistake” that would “prolong the agony” for Ukraine.
Sputnik spoke with Dmitry Kornev, founder of the MilitaryRussia.ru portal, to understand what the ATACMS is capable of, how Ukraine is likely to use the weapon, and how it will affect Russian forces engaged in the special operation in Ukraine.
How Will Kiev Use the ATACMS?

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“We already see how and where Ukraine can use these missiles,” he said. “It can be assumed that Ukraine will use them in those areas where it is conducting or plans to conduct active operations.”

“In the case of Berdyansk, it is the southern direction from Zaporozhye. Where will future missiles be used? The question is still complex, but most likely, somewhere around there, because due to the weather and simply out of the desire to do at least something before winter, the Ukrainian Armed Forces will continue to make some attempts to counterattack,” Kornev said.

“The US provided the Ukrainian Armed Forces - apparently, again, we don’t know the details - but apparently they provided the oldest version of the missiles. ATACMS, which was produced in the 1990s, has a range of approximately 160 kilometers and has a cluster warhead. That is, these are not the best ATACMS missiles. But it is possible that the United States was afraid, in general, of it being used at its maximum range - that is, against targets in Crimea.”

“Most likely, the United States will continue to supply these missiles depending on if the Ukrainian Armed Forces use the first batch of these missiles effectively and without negative PR,” he predicted.

Why Did US Give Kiev its Oldest Missiles?

“As stated in the United States, the range of the ATACMS missiles transferred to Ukraine is 165 kilometers,” he said. “ATACMS missiles exist in several versions. That is, the first versions of ATACMS missiles, from which they were produced until the 1990s, had a range of about 160 kilometers. Later versions of the missiles had different ranges: 250, 270, 300 kilometers. Under the name of ATACMS, there are about five to six, maybe even more, missile variants.”

“They have different types of combat units, they have different ranges, they have features in their guidance systems. It is clear that the United States, apparently, will not yet supply Ukraine with the most modern missiles, for fear of losing technological leadership in this area.”

“Most likely, the point here is that they decided to start with old missiles and see how the Ukrainian Armed Forces can handle them,” he explained, adding that the US could give Ukraine more advanced missiles in the future, which have GPS guidance instead of the inertial guidance used in the older weapons.

“Plus you need to understand that the United States, from a purely mercantile point of view, are interested in getting rid of old stocks - that is, those missiles that they themselves definitely don’t need,” he added.

Prior to 2019, US ground-based tactical missiles were limited to ranges of less than 500 kilometers by the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. After the US unilaterally shredded that treaty in 2019, it announced that a successor missile to the ATACMS, the Precision Strike Missile (PrSM) would have its range extended beyond 499 kilometers.

New Danger, But Not 'Miracle Weapon'

Kornev noted that ATACMS poses a new threat to Russian front-line aviation units, to which Russian forces will have to adapt.

“In general, yes. We see that the first use of ATACMS missiles was directed against front-line aviation airfields with helicopters. ATACMS missiles with cluster warheads can effectively target targets such as airfields. Accordingly, all helipads, airfields, some aviation units, warehouses, transport hubs - all this may come under attack from ATACMS missiles,” he said.

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“Such impacts would be extremely unpleasant for aircraft. And yes, this will lead to the fact that the Russian Armed Forces will be forced to move the bases of front-line aviation further from the line of contact. This, in turn, will lead to an increase in the time it takes for front-line aviation to appear at those points where it is needed at the moment,” he explained. “Their reaction time will decrease, there will be excess consumption of fuel, because you will have to fly longer, and you will have to introduce such a concept as duty [patrols] in the contact zone. It will become more difficult in any case.”

However, the military expert noted that “miracle weapons do not exist” and Ukrainian forces armed with ATACMS can’t change the course of the conflict by themselves.

“The secret of the parties’ success is in the integrated use of heterogeneous forces, in interaction, in the presence of a strategic plan, in the availability of human resources. If we take everything together, then only this can lead to one or another military success for either side,” he said.

“That is, the ATACMS missiles themselves, appearing on the line of contact, will not lead to an unconditional victory for the Ukrainian Armed Forces. But if, in addition to ATACMS missiles, all other listed factors are met … well, yes, then this will be one of the components of the possible success of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. But so far we do not see such a situation. This is just another factor. That's all there is to this confrontation.”

Can Russian Air Defenses Handle ATACMS?

Kornev noted that the ATACMS is broadly similar to Russia’s Iskander missile, which was introduced as a response to the ATACMS. Accordingly, Russian air defense systems from that period and later are capable of downing ATACMS missiles.

“These are medium-range complexes of the Buk type. Moreover, all modifications of Buks can operate on ATACMS missiles,” he noted. “These are complexes of the Tor type. At the final stage of the flight, they can also work on ATACMS missiles, because the Tor’s range is not the longest. Pantsir-type complexes, again at the final stage, can also work against ATACMS missiles at long and medium ranges, of course, and the S-300 and S-400 complexes, of course, can hit ATACMS missiles.”

“Of course, we must understand that when using such missiles, they will most likely be used in groups. For example, the attack that we saw on Berdyansk, apparently, three ATACMS missiles were used, plus, probably, other types of missiles were also used in the same attack. Accordingly, there is a dispersion of air defense systems, forces, air defense systems and a group strike is more difficult to shoot down.”

“Plus ATACMS, well, let’s just say, is not the stupidest missile. It can perform anti-missile maneuvers. In general, at the first stage this will be a difficult goal, but our systems are able to shoot down such missiles - technically, they are capable of this. It will be necessary to develop methods and share these methods between air defense units and master them. And, in fact, it will just be combat work. After a while, there will be nothing supernatural in the defeat of a [ATACMS] missile,” he said.

Turning to the missile’s weak points, Kornev said the biggest problems for the Ukrainians will be political, not technical.

“If the United States rations the number of ATACMS missiles for the Ukrainian Armed Forces, then, of course, this will cause problems,” he said. “That is, technical problems, all missiles have them, but it is unlikely to greatly affect the results of their use.”

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Growing Portions of Americans Now Believe Democracy 'No Longer Viable System' - Poll

A new poll from the University of Virginia's Center for Politics shows shifting views on democracy, freedom of speech and political violence in the country.

As the United States continues to experience a major institutional crisis, a new survey shows declining support for concepts often claimed to be fundamental values of the country.

The new poll, released this month, shows almost a third of former US President Donald Trump's supporters agree with the statement that "democracy is no longer a viable system" within the intensely polarized country, and that "America should explore alternative forms of government to ensure stability and progress." Almost a quarter of President Joe Biden's supporters endorsed the statement.

Even greater numbers of the two candidates' supporters would favor "blue" or "red" states aligned with their beliefs "seceding from the union to form their own separate country." The tally on the statement came down to 41% of Trump backers supporting the idea while 30% of Biden supporters followed suit.

The poll finds that intense political polarization drives such beliefs: 47% of Trump supporters think the Democratic Party is "a threat to the American way of life," while 52% of Biden supporters believe Republicans are. Many Americans (38% of Trump backers and 41% of Biden supporters) even endorsed the long-stigmatized idea of political violence as an acceptable response to prevent supporters of the opposing party from "achieving their goals."

"We're… seeing people, whether it be politicians, or people in certain media outlets really start talking about violence," said political science professor David McLennan in response to the surprising findings. "So I think what it is, is a reflection of the culture."

Legal scholar Rick Hasen agreed, calling the findings "really troubling" in their demonstration of support for proposals considered authoritarian or unconstitutional.

On the issue of freedom of expression, large numbers of supporters of each candidate also support the regulation or restriction of "views considered discriminatory or offensive:" 47% of Biden supporters think the government should be tasked with this duty, and 35% of Trump supporters do.

Many went even further, agreeing that "it is necessary to limit certain rights, like freedom of speech, to protect the feelings and safety of marginalized groups." Again, the idea received more support from liberal respondents, with 31% of Biden backers endorsing the statement versus a quarter of Trump supporters doing so.

The findings come as online regulation of content on social media has emerged as a significant and highly controversial concern in Western countries.

Amidst the polarization, there do appear to be some areas of greater consensus on issues of policy however. Fifty-six percent of Biden supporters believe "all wealth above a certain limit should be redistributed to address income inequality," while a full 39% of Trump supporters

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believe the same. The finding aligns with recent pollingregarding the ongoing United Auto Workers strike that showed 76% of all Americans support the striking employees.
The loss of faith in the concept of democracy comes after decades of neoliberal economic policy implemented with bipartisan support in the United States. Billionaire venture capitalist and conservative political donor Peter Thiel once famously opined that "capitalist democracy," is an "oxymoron," voicing support for neoliberal economic policy at the expense of notions of democracy.

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'Not in Our Name': Hundreds of Protesters Demand Israeli Ceasefire on Capitol Hill, Dozens Arrested

Jewish protesters gathered in the rotunda of the Cannon House Office Building in the US capital to demand a ceasefire in Gaza amidst US support for Israeli airstrikes.
More than 1,000 protesters with the organizations If Not Now and Jewish Voice for Peace descended on the US Capitol complex in Washington, DC, on Wednesday, demanding a ceasefire amidst ongoing violence in Gaza.
The massive demonstration began in the city's National Mall area before protesters entered the Cannon House Office Building. There, individuals gathered on the floor in the building's rotunda and chanted protest slogans, many of them wearing black t-shirts that read "not in our name" and "Jews say cease fire now."
"Look at what's happening in Gaza. Look at the devastation in Gaza," said Linda Holtzman, 71, a rabbi from Philadelphia who traveled to Washington for the protest. "If you want to be able to live with yourself, you need to stand up and end the genocide."
"Open your eyes," said Holtzman in a message addressed directly to US President Joe Biden. Protester Hannah Lawrence from Vermont agreed, urging Biden to "use [his] power to save innocent lives."
"We are here because we abhor violence," said event organizer Medea Benjamin in an interview with Sputnik. "We don't want people killed anywhere, and we are desperate now to stop the killing in Gaza."
The account for US Capitol Police on the X platform addressed the arrest of over 100 protesters who were detained for their participation in the act of civil disobedience, explaining that "demonstrations are not allowed inside Congressional Buildings."
Former US Justice Department prosecutor Ronald Sievert told Sputnik that demonstrators who were arrested for their involvement in the protests on Capitol Hill are likely to face trespassing offenses similar to charges leveled against protesters from the January 6, 2021, storming of the federal building. "I would not expect lengthy jail time except for those who assaulted officers," Sievert said.
Benjamin joins a number of prominent Jewish Americans who have spoken out against US support for Israel recently, including commentator Katie Halper, "Chapo Trap House" co-host Felix Biederman and academic Norman Finkelstein.

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Large pro-Palestinian protests also continue to take place internationally in England, Scotland, and throughout the Arab world. German police used water cannons to disperse pro-Palestinian protests Wednesday. A French court upheld a ban on pro-Palestine protests enacted over a week ago by the Macron government, but demonstrators have taken to the streets regardless.
Back in Washington, US Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA) released a statement Wednesday that appeared to be aimed at intimidating Jewish protesters, calling Jewish Voice for Peace a "pro-Islamic antisemitic group."
"I am formally requesting that the United States Capitol Police preserve all video surveillance footage, photographic evidence, police reports, and arrest records," read the statement concerning Wednesday's peaceful protests. "The insurrectionists involved must be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."
Greene's comments mirrored a deteriorating democratic situation in Israel on Wednesday as a committee aligned with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu banned opposition lawmaker Ofer Cassif from parliamentary proceedings for 45 days. Cassif criticized his punishment as "political persecution," calling it "another nail in the coffin of freedom of political expression in Israel."
"As the hours tick by, the magnitude of the horror is revealed – horrific crimes that the mind does not tolerate against children, women and the elderly," read a statement by Cassif blasting Israel's recent conduct in Gaza. "Monstrous beastliness and scenes reminiscent of the Holocaust, nothing less than the burning of families and houses on those who are in them. There is no sane person who can not be shocked, seething and disgusted by these sights."
"The 'government of atrocities' is bringing a disaster upon both the people of Israel and the Palestinian people, and now also conducts a McCarthyism-style hunting campaign against critical voices within Israeli society."
Netanyahu's current cabinet has been criticized by observers as "beyond extreme" and includes at least one official who has openly self-identified as a fascist.
Israel Defense Forces continued to indefinitely delay a promised ground invasion of Gaza on Wednesday, instead firing rockets at mosques and other buildings in the territory. Meanwhile, Israeli troops killed two Palestinian teens in the West Bank amidst protests over Tuesday's destruction of a Gaza hospital.
Israel has been engaged in attacks on Gaza since an October 7 surprise attack by Palestinian group Hamas that killed 1,400 Israelis. The death toll among Palestinians quickly eclipsed that tally, in accordance with Israel's official policy of "disproportionate force," now standing at at least 2,750per Gaza's Health Ministry.
Unbalanced coverage in Western media has endangered Muslims globally as well; on Wednesday, hundreds gathered near Chicago, Illinois, to mourn the death of a 6-year-old Palestinian-American boy who was stabbed to death by his landlord. Reports indicated the landlord became radicalized by Islamophobic talk radio programs.
Israel has been engaged in violence against the country's indigenous Palestinian Arab population since large numbers of Zionist settlers arrived in the territory in 1948.

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Amateur Metal Detectorist Finds Treasure Trove of Bronze Age Jewelry in Carrot Field

Franz Zahn made the startling discovery in the northeast Swiss town of Güttingen while cleaning scrap metal from a farmer's field.

An amateur archeologist in Switzerland uncovered a collection of Bronze Age jewelry dating back to about 1,500 BC, it was announced Wednesday.

The find was made in the Swiss town of Güttingen when amateur metal detectorist Franz Zahn was clearing scrap metal from a farmer's carrot field. Zahn's metal detector alerted him to the presence of a spiked bronze disk in the plowed field.

Further investigation revealed the disk, along with 13 others, made up an opulent ancient necklace identified by local archeologists as part of "typical costume jewelry" worn by women during the Bronze Age.

A large collection of other items was discovered nearby, including a bronze arrowhead, a perforated bear tooth, a rock crystal, a petrified shark tooth, a small ammonite and "several Bohnerz inks."

"The natural occurrence of these iron ore beads and the ammonite are probably located in the Schaffhausen area," according to a Swiss article about the discovery.

Researchers believe the items may have been thought to imbue special healing or protective qualities to the wearer, like an amulet.

Officials say the jewelry dates back to "a time when important advanced civilizations flourished in the Mediterranean." They noted that a similar find was made in the nearby area of Mäuseturm a few years ago, although the items recovered there only dated back to 1,000 BC.

Local officials say the items will be displayed in Switzerland's Museum of Archeology in Frauenfeld next year after restoration.

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Nearly Two Decades Later, Joran Van Der Sloot Admits to 2005 Murder of Natalee Holloway

The crime has captivated both the public in the US as well as those in the Netherlands, with never-ending news coverage and true crime books, as well as a 2008 TV sting operation attempt organized by a Dutch crime reporter.

After years of toying with authorities, as well as extorting the mother of his victim, Joran van der Sloot has confessed to murdering American teenager Natalee Holloway in 2005. The (now) 36-year-old Dutch man has long been connected to her murder, but due to lack of evidence has evaded arrest in the case.

As part of a plea agreement, Van der Sloot agreed to provide a "full, complete, accurate and truthful" account of how he murdered Holloway, in exchange for a 20-year sentence for extorting

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the victim's family. In his chilling confession, Van der Sloot said he kicked the then 18-year-old Holloway in the face, causing her to lose consciousness, and then proceeded to bludgeon her with a cinder block because she refused his sexual advances.

"Uh, when she knees me in the crotch, uh, I get up, uh, on the beach and I kick her extremely hard in the face," a transcript of his confession states. "Uhm, yeah, she's laying down unconscious, possibly even dead, but definitely unconscious."

After bludgeoning the teenager with a cinder block he found, Van der Sloot (who was also 18-years-old at the time), dragged her body into the ocean.

"I walk up to about my knees into the ocean and I push her into the – into the sea. Uhm, and uhm, yeah, after that I – I get out. I- I walk home," the transcript read.

"I would like to take this chance to apologize to the Holloway family, to apologize to my own family, to say I hope the statement I provided brings some kind of closure to everyone involved," Van der Sloot said. "I am no longer that person I was back then."

The murder took place in Aruba, after Van der Sloot met Holloway at a bar in downtown Oranjestad. Holloway, who was celebrating her high school graduation trip with classmates, was last seen leaving the bar at 1 a.m. local time with Van der Sloot and two other men. Aruba is a Caribbean island nation and a former Dutch colony where Van der Sloot was living at the time.

Van der Sloot is already serving a 28-year prison sentence in Peru for the 2010 murder of a Peruvian college student named Stephany Flores Ramirez, who was 21-years-old at the time. Florez was the daughter of Ricardo Flores, a prominent businessman who had once ran for vice president as well as for president in Peru.

The 2010 murder took place five years to the day that Holloway disappeared. Van der Sloot killed Flores by beating her and strangling her, and described the murder as an "impulsive act" to Peruvian police.

"Today marks the end of 18 years of wondering what happened to Natalee Holloway," Prim Escalona, the interim United States attorney for the Northern District of Alabama, told reporters after the hearing.

"You have brutally murdered, in separate instances years apart, two young women who refused your sexual advances," Judge Manasco said.

Van der Sloot's sentence for the murder of Flores will expire in 2045, but if he is released from prison sooner, he will have to serve the remainder of his 20-year sentence in the US.

"I paid my daughter's killer money. That's shocking. I don't think anyone can really wrap their mind around what that means," Beth Holloway, Natalee's mother, said.

After brutally murdering Holloway, Van der Sloot exploited grief-stricken Beth by extorting her for $250,000. He claimed to have knowledge of Natalee's remains, and proceeded to give the mother incorrect information regarding her daughter's remains.

"As far as I am concerned it's over. It's over," she said. "I'm satisfied knowing that he did it, he did it alone and he disposed of her alone." Adding that the confession "means we've finally reached the end of our never-ending nightmare."

"I have no doubt she would have made all her dreams come true. She really would have," Beth Holloway said of her daughter.

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Officials Detect Giant 'Zombie' Star on the Run

A zombie star forms when a star explodes during a supernova process, but is not completely obliterated, leaving behind the remnant star.

It turns out Earth is not the only sphere in our galaxy preparing for Halloween.

The second-closest star cluster to Earth, the Hyades star cluster, is just 153 light-years away from our planet and makes up the head of the Bull in the Taurus constellation. From this cluster, a “zombie” star has awoken and is now bursting its way out of the Hyades star cluster.

The zombie star is moving as fast as 22,000 miles per hour (10 kilometers per second) when compared to the Hyades star cluster from which it escaped. But instead of being alarmed by this runway star, scientists see it as an exciting opportunity that will help their unanswered questions surrounding the Hyades star cluster.

The Hyades star cluster is made up of several hundreds of stars, all formed around the same time—about 625 million years ago. But, the cluster only contains a few white dwarfs at its core. This is strange, considering 97% of stars in the Milky Way will experience their final stage in life as a white dwarf.

Astronomers have wondered what happens to these missing stars. One theory is they are launched out of the cluster due to interactions with other star clusters, as well as, possibly, gas clouds moving between the clusters. The stars in this particular constellation are also loosely bound, so it would be easy for them to be ejected through these interactions.

In order to test the theory, researchers from the University of British Columbia used data the Gaia spacecraft collected after it tracked over 1 billion stars in the Milky Way since 2013.

Officials found three white dwarfs they believe were ejected from the Hyades cluster, one of which was 1.3 times more massive than the sun. Most white dwarfs have a mass that is 0.6 times that of the sun, and are formed from stars that have run out of hydrogen fuel in their cores. In most cases, the celestial bodies are created once they pull material from a companion star.

However, the runaway white dwarf the astronomers were able to track down appears to have been created from just one star, which could mean it is the largest white dwarf created from a single star that has been discovered thus far.

"This provides a critical observational benchmark for white dwarfs created from single progenitor stars, demonstrating that single stars can produce white dwarfs with masses close to the Chandrasekhar limit," the team wrote.

"The combination of the unremarkable nature of the Hyades cluster and the benefits of its proximity suggest that open star clusters may be producing ultramassive white dwarfs, including white dwarfs which push the Chandrasekhar limit, more commonly than previously thought."

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You Snooze, You Lose? New Study Says ‘Snoozing’ Not as Bad as You Think

A study released on Wednesday shows that hitting your snooze button to grab some extra sleep in the morning isn’t all that bad.

Researchers in Sweden conducted two studies in order to examine what hitting the snooze button does to one’s sleep. In their first study, they began by asking respondents about their waking habits.

Officials surveyed over 1,700 people and found that nearly 70% of those people habitually hit their snooze button. Most said they did so because they were too tired to wake up. Just 17% said they did so because it felt good. Many of those who “snoozed” were also younger, with the average age of the test subjects being about 27.

For those who snooze, many also reported morning drowsiness and shorter sleep.

"In the first study we found that in general younger people were the ones snoozing and they were to a high degree night owls," Dr. Tina Sundelin, sleep researcher at Stockholm University, said.

Rejecting those who have a hard time sleeping anywhere but their bed—as well as those who experience insomnia, the researchers placed 31 “snoozers” in a sleep lab for several nights. On some mornings they were allowed to hit their snooze button every 10 minutes or so, for up to 30 minutes of additional rest. But on other days, they had to get up as soon as their alarm went off. Each time, upon waking, the test subjects were asked to perform a few cognitive tests, such as math, memory and word tests—even before pouring themselves a cup of coffee.

The researchers found little difference between the cognitive ability of those who woke up at the sound of their alarm, and those who chose to “snooze” in. In fact, they found that those who were allowed to sleep for an additional 30 minutes actually performed better on the cognitive tests. They were also asked about their mood, and had their cortisol levels taken.

“When snoozing, as opposed to when having to wake up right away, I would say that they came to alertness quicker, even though there was no difference in how sleepy or alert they felt subjectively,” said Sundelin.

Dr. John Saito, a spokesperson for the American Academy of Sleep Medicine who was not involved in the study, said that being able to snooze could allow sleepers to have a more pleasant experience when waking as opposed to snapping out of a deep sleep too quickly. However, Dr. Rachel Salas, an assistant medical director of John Hopkins Center for Sleep and Wellness, points out that those who habitually hit their snooze button could have more serious problems with their sleep, like narcolepsy and sleep apnea.

“The findings indicate that there is no reason to stop snoozing in the morning if you enjoy it, at least not for snooze times around 30 minutes," Sundelin said in a release. "In fact, it may even help those with morning drowsiness to be slightly more awake once they get up."

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San Francisco Police Chief Announces No Homeless Sweeps During APEC Summit

SAN FRANCISCO, October 19 (Sputnik) - San Francisco Chief of Police William Scott said there would be no sweeps of the homeless in preparation for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders' Summit.

"So first of all... we're [SFPD] not going to be conducting sweeps, and we have an infrastructure in the city to address some of the challenges with our own homeless population," Scott said when asked about the homeless population affecting the event.

In November, the US is set to host APEC summit in San Francisco with the theme "Building a Future of Sustainability and Resilience for Everyone."

Since its inception in 1989, APEC has been a crucial platform for the US to promote equitable trade, investment, and sustainable growth in the increasingly interconnected Asia-Pacific region.

Scott also said that the San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) would utilize the infrastructure to ensure that those in need receive assistance and emphasized that their primary concern is the public safety and the safety of the event.

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APEC Leaders' Summit Security Boosted by SFPD, CHP, FBI - Police Chief

SAN FRANCISCO, October 19 (Sputnik) - San Francisco Chief of Police William Scott announced San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) officers, California Highway Patrol (CHIPs) officers, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) will secure the upcoming Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in San Francisco.

"Hundreds of... SFPD officers [will be] dedicated to this APEC conference to ensure the safety of visitors and dignitaries in both the city limits and at the San Francisco International Airport," Scott said at a press conference on Wednesday to discuss the security measures that will be in place during the APEC Leaders' Summit.

The California Highway Patrol and over a dozen local agencies are provided personnel to supplement the need for the uniformed law enforcement, he added.

In November, the US is set to host APEC summit in San Francisco with the theme "Building a Future of Sustainability and Resilience for Everyone."

Since its inception in 1989, APEC has been a crucial platform for the US to promote equitable trade, investment, and sustainable growth in the increasingly interconnected Asia-Pacific region.

"The FBI is committed to ensuring that these leaders, other visitors and the city of the residents in the Bay Area can enjoy these events have safe and secure environment," FBI Special Agent In Charge, SF Field Office Bob Tripp added during the press conference.

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Canada Announces Renewed Sanctions Against Iran for Nuclear Proliferation Activities

WASHINGTON, October 19 (Sputnik) - The office of Global Affairs Canada has announced new sanctions against Iran, citing nuclear proliferation and threats to national security.

"As concerns related to Iran's nuclear program persist, Canada is implementing these actions in coordination with the European Union, the United Kingdom and the United States to ensure that collectively, we can continue to impose pressure on the Iranian regime for its nuclear and ballistic missile programs, as well as its proliferation of unmanned aerial vehicles," said Global Affairs Canada in a release Wednesday.

These measures are set to replace previous JCPOA restrictions that were set to expire today, according to the release.

The release added that the package targets former or current senior officials of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and affiliated entities and demonstrates Canada's continued efforts to impose costs on the Iranian regime for its nuclear and ballistic missile proliferation activities.

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US Easing of Venezuela Oil Sanctions Doesn't Apply to New Russian Investment - Treasury

WASHINGTON, October 19 (Sputnik) - The easing of US sanctions on Venezuela's oil and gas industry does not apply to new investments or services from entities owned or controlled by Russia, the US Treasury Department said in a notice.

"Paragraph (b)(2) provides that GL [General License] 44 does not authorize the provision of goods or services to, or new investment in, an entity located in Venezuela that is owned or controlled by, or a joint venture with, an entity located in the Russian Federation," the notice said on Wednesday. "GL 44 does not authorize any transactions related to new investment in oil or gas sector operations in Venezuela by a person located in the Russian Federation or any entity owned or controlled by a person located in the Russian Federation."

Earlier in the day, the US Department of Treasury announced it issued a six-month waiver easing US sanctions on Venezuela's oil and gas industry, which will be renewed only if Venezuela meets its commitments under the electoral roadmap as well as other commitments with respect to those who are wrongfully detained.

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Anti-Gaza War Protesters Arrested at US Capitol Won't Serve Long Jail Time - Ex-Prosecutor

WASHINGTON, October 19 (Sputnik) - Demonstrators arrested for protesting against the Gaza conflict inside a building on Capitol Hill may face trespassing charges similar to January 6

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protesters, but they are not expected to serve lengthy jail time, former US Justice Department prosecutor Ronald Sievert told Sputnik.

"My guess is that there is a trespass statute similar to that used against 1/6 [January 6] protesters that will be used," Sievert said on Wednesday. "I would not expect lengthy jail time except for those who assaulted officers."

US Capitol Police said earlier in the day that they have arrested more than 100 people at the Cannon House Office Building who were peacefully protesting the Israel-Hamas war and demanding a ceasefire.

At least three individuals are being charged with assault on a police officer for their conduct during processing, the Capitol Police said.

The participants, which included more than 1,000 Jews, demanded that US lawmakers pass a resolution calling for a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas conflict.

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US Official Says Partial Sanctions Relief Doesn't Impact Venezuelan Frozen Assets

WASHINGTON, October 19 (Sputnik) - A senior US administration official told reporters the partial lifting of sanctions on Venezuela does not impact Venezuelan frozen assets in the United States or the judicial process related to the CITGO bankruptcy case.

"This actually does not affect the judicial process related to the CITGO bankruptcy trial nor does it impact the frozen assets of Venezuela in the United States or other jurisdictions," the official said on Wednesday.

Earlier in the day, the US Department of Treasury announced it issued a six-month waiver easing US sanctions on Venezuela's oil and gas industry, which will be renewed only if Venezuela meets its commitments under the electoral roadmap as well as other commitments with respect to those who are wrongfully detained.

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Hundreds of Demonstrators Protesting Gaza Conflict Arrested at US Capitol

WASHINGTON, October 19 (Sputnik) - It has taken the US police over two hours to put several hundred arrested demonstrators protesting over the Gaza crisis into the police buses and vans to transport to the detention center, a Sputnik correspondent reported from the scene.

According to the local media, citing the DC police, at least 300 people were arrested during protesting against the Israel-Hamas war at the US Congress in Washington,.

Several buses and vans filled with protesters left the area while many more waited to be taken away as well.

The arrests began after 4:00 p.m. local time and three hours later they were still awaiting their

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transfer.
A couple of dozen people are still rallying outside chanting "Free Palestine."
Some passers were sending air kisses and some even yelled “we love you” to support the arrested while the participants of the rally sang "Bella Ciao" along with those handcuffed. Several buses and vans are being used to transport those arrested.
Hundreds of members of the Jewish Voice for Peace advocacy group were inside the Cannon House Office Building on Capitol grounds to demand a ceasefire in the Israeli-Hamas war.
According to the group, some 500 protesters consisting of Jews, rabbis and descendants of Holocaust survivors were inside the Cannon building chanting "Let Gaza Live" while another 10,000 demonstrators gathered outside.
Several dozen demonstrators remained on Capitol grounds singing and chanting in support of Palestine, the correspondent reported, adding that at the moment the protest is peaceful and the majority of the participants have left.
The demonstration started at noon and has been ongoing for at least six hours.
The US Capitol Police said in a statement that the demonstrations were not allowed inside Canon Congressional Building and arrested them when they failed to comply to warnings to stop demonstrating.
Capitol Police said the Cannon Rotunda is all clear of protesters but they are still processing arrests. Among those arrests, three people have been arrested and charged with assault on a police officer during processing, police said.

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US to Reinstate Sanctions on Venezuela Oil If Maduro Fails to Meet Commitments - Official

WASHINGTON, October 19 (Sputnik) - The United States will reinstate sanctions being partial lifted on Venezuela's oil and gas industry if Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro fails to meet commitments made with the opposition to hold fair elections in 2024, a senior US administration official said during a conference call.
Earlier in the day, the US Department of Treasury announced it issued a six-month waiver easing US sanctions on Venezuela's oil and gas industry, which will be renewed only if Venezuela meets its commitments under the electoral roadmap as well as other commitments with respect to those who are wrongfully detained.
"The administration has been clear that other sanctions and restrictions imposed by the United States on Venezuela remain in place," the official said on Wednesday. "The United States government retains the authority to abandon oil authorizations should Maduro and his representatives fail to follow through on their commitments."
Venezuela must make progress on its commitments before the end of the November before the United States begins reconsidering reinstating sanctions, the official said.

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

Qatar Helped US Encourage Venezuela Election, Sanctions Relief Deal - Senior US Official

WASHINGTON, October 19 (Sputnik) - Qatar partnered with the United States to encourage a deal with Venezuela to bolster election integrity in exchange for limited sanctions relief, a senior Biden administration official said.

"The United States with the assistance of Qatar has worked to support and encourage this process as well, and make sure that an incentive structure to make real changes exists," the official said on Wednesday.

Earlier on Wednesday, the US Treasury Department announced limited sanctions relief for Venezuela, primarily in the energy sector, in response to Caracas' plan to implement free and fair elections.

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US Issues 6-Month Waiver Easing Sanctions on Venezuela's Oil Industry - Treasury

WASHINGTON, October 19 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Treasury announced in a press release it issued a six monty waiver easing US sanctions on Venezuela's oil and gas industry.

"Treasury today: issued a six month general license temporarily authorizing transactions involving the oil and gas sector in Venezuela," the release said on Wednesday. "The license will be renewed only if Venezuela meets its commitments under the electoral roadmap as well as other commitments with respect to those who are wrongfully detained."

Moreover, the US Treasury issued a license authorizing dealings with Venezuelan state-owned gold mining company Minerven and removed secondary trading ban on certain Venezuelan sovereign bonds, PDVSA debt and equity, the release added.

The United States is providing partial sanctions relief in response to the agreement reached between the Venezuelan government and opposition on the holding of the presidential election in 2024.

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US Capitol Police Make Over 100 Arrests as Peaceful Protesters Demand Ceasefire in Israel

WASHINGTON, October 19 (Sputnik) - The US Capitol Police announced they have arrested more than 100 people at the Cannon House Office Building who were peacefully protesting the Israel-Hamas war and demanding a ceasefire.

"A large group of protesters are walking in the roadway around the House side of the Capitol Complex. For safety reasons, we have temporary rolling road closures in effect," US Capitol

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Police tweeted.
At least three individuals are being charged with assault on a police officer for their conduct during processing, the Capitol Police said.
The police has blockaded the streets around the Cannon House Office Building, which were also filled with protesters.
The participants, who include more than 1,000 Jews, are demanding that US lawmakers pass a resolution calling for a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas conflict.
US President Joe Biden is visiting Israel on Wednesday to showcase the United States' support for the country in its efforts to destroy Hamas.
Jewish Voice For Peace, an organization affiliated with the protest, said many are mourning their Israeli and Palestinian friends and loved ones.
"We are in pain and grief, trying to process a week of horrific violence that has left so many that we know injured, traumatized, kidnapped or killed. But we refuse to let our grief be weaponized to justify the murder of more Palestinians. As American Jews, we demand a ceasefire now. No genocide in our name," the organization said on its website.

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Biden to Address Nation on Thursday to Discuss Gaza, Ukraine Conflicts - White House

WASHINGTON, October 19 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will address the nation on Thursday night to discuss the Hamas attacks on Israel and the conflict in Ukraine, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said in a press release.
"Tomorrow, President Biden will address the nation to discuss our response to Hamas' terrorist attacks against Israel and Russia's ongoing brutal war against Ukraine," Jean-Pierre said on Wednesday. "This speech will be delivered from the Oval Office at 8:00 p.m. ET."

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Biden Says Not Suggesting Hamas Behind Attack on Gaza Hospital

WASHINGTON, October 19 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden told reporters that he is not suggesting the Palestinian Hamas group was behind the explosion at the Al-Ahli hospital in Gaza.
Earlier in the day, Biden said he reviewed intelligence from the Pentagon indicating that the bombing of the Gaza hospital was not due to an Israeli airstrike, but from "the other team."
"I'm not suggesting that Hamas literally did it either," Biden said during remarks in Germany on Wednesday.
On Tuesday, a missile hit the Al-Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City, causing a massive blast in which more than 500 people were killed, according to the Health Ministry of Gaza. Hamas

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blamed the explosion on an Israeli strike. The Israel Defense Forces said that the hospital was hit by a failed rocket launch by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement.

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US House Will Hold Next Floor Vote to Elect New Speaker on Thursday - Congressional Source

(Update: adds details in para 3)
WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives will hold the next floor vote to elect a new speaker on Thursday, a congressional source familiar with the matter told Sputnik on Wednesday.
"Next round of voting for Speaker is tentatively set for tomorrow," the source said in a statement.
House lawmakers are expected to hold the vote no earlier than 12:00 p.m. ET, a spokesperson for Democratic Whip Katherine Clark also said in a statement to Sputnik.
Earlier on Wednesday, the House of Representatives held its second floor vote to elect a new speaker, after lawmakers ousted Congressman Kevin McCarthy from the leadership position. However, Republican nominee Jim Jordan failed to secure enough votes to win the speakership.
More than 20 House Republicans voted for alternative candidates, including McCarthy, placing Jordan below the 217-vote threshold needed to become speaker. Republicans hold a 221-212 majority in the House of Representatives.
Democrats have unified behind Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, who won a plurality of votes.
The House of Representatives is unable to conduct normal legislative business until they elect a new speaker or empower temporary speaker pro tempore Patrick McHenry. The US Congress must pass government funding measures before November 17 or face a shutdown.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, October 19 (Sputnik) -

PUTIN-XI MEETING
* China is ready to strengthen interaction and cooperation with Russia within the framework of multilateral structures, Chinese President Xi Jinping said on Wednesday.
* Xi expressed hope that the construction of the China-Mongolia-Russia gas pipeline will make progress as soon as possible.
* The prime ministers of Russia and China will sign an interaction plan until 2030 in Bishkek, Russian President Vladimir Putin said.

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* Russia is interested in the development of China's Road and Belt initiative, Putin said.

ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR

* Egypt together with the United Nations and the Red Crescent will control the delivery of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said on Wednesday.
* The Biden administration has assessed that Israel is not responsible for the missile attack on the hospital in Gaza that claimed the lives of hundreds of people, National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson said.
* The representative of the Palestinian Hamas movement, Fawzi Barhoum, said on Wednesday that the group will provide evidence of Israel's involvement in the strike on a hospital in the Gaza Strip.
* Civilians in the Gaza Strip are "unfortunately harmed" when Israel targets legitimate targets belonging to the Hamas movement, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said.

UN SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING ON MIDDLE EAST

* Some 1,000 Russian citizens and their family members are being held hostage by Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Wednesday.
* Nebenzia called for an objective investigation into Tuesday's missile attack on the hospital in Gaza and called for prosecuting the individuals responsible for the attack.
* Nebenzia has called for the resumption of the tenth Emergency Special Session of the UN General Assembly to address the pressing issue of civilian protection in Palestine.
* The United States on Wednesday vetoed a Brazilian draft resolution that calls on Israel to rescind its evacuation order for Palestinians in Gaza.
* France regrets that the United States vetoed the UN Security Council resolution on the Israel-Hamas war, French Ambassador to the United Nations Nicolas de Riviere said.
* China is shocked and disappointed that the UN Security Council failed to adopt the Brazilian draft resolution pertaining to the Israel-Gaza conflict, Ambassador to the United Nations Zhang Jun said.

BIDEN TRIP TO ISRAEL

* US President Joe Biden said on Wednesday that the deadly attack on the hospital in the Gaza Strip appears to be a result of the rocket fired by the Islamic Jihad.
* Biden announced that later this week he will request from Congress an unprecedented defense aid package for Israel.
* Biden announced $100 million in new funding for humanitarian assistance to Gaza and the West Bank.
* The United States will continue to work with Israel and partners in the region to prevent the killing of innocent civilians, Biden said.

NEW US SANCTIONS

* The United States has added several Russian organizations, which have already been designated by Washington, to a new list of Iran-related sanctioned entities, the US Treasury

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Department said on Wednesday.
* The United States has imposed Iran-related sanctions on ten individuals and eight entities, the Treasury Department said.
* The United States has imposed sanctions on nine individuals and a Gaza-based virtual currency exchange over their links to Hamas, the Treasury Department said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE
* Russia's air defense on Wednesday intercepted two Ukrainian S-200 missiles over Crimea and the incident did not result in any material damage or casualties, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
* The Russian fleet is repelling air attack on Sevastopol, Governor Mikhail Razvozhaev said.
* Ukraine has lost up to 170 soldiers in the South Donetsk direction over the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
* The United States should take away its weapons from Ukraine if it believes that Russia lost, Russian President Vladimir Putin said.

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Biden, Egypt's Sisi to Cooperate on Humanitarian Response to Gaza Conflict - White House

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden and his Egyptian counterpart Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi in a telephone call agreed to work closely together on encouraging a robust international humanitarian response to the Gaza conflict, the White House said on Wednesday.
"President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. spoke today with President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi of Egypt," the White House said in a press release. "The two leaders discussed ongoing coordination to deliver humanitarian assistance to Gaza and mechanisms to ensure the aid is distributed for the benefit of the civilian population. The two leaders agreed to work together closely on encouraging an urgent and robust international response to the UN's humanitarian appeal."
The two leaders also agreed on the need to maintain stability in the Middle East and prevent escalation of the Gaza conflict, the release added.

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US House Will Hold Next Floor Vote to Elect New Speaker on Thursday - Congressional Source

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives will hold the next floor vote to elect a new speaker on Thursday, a congressional source familiar with the matter told Sputnik on Wednesday.
"Next round of voting for speaker is tentatively set for tomorrow," the source said in a statement.

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Earlier on Wednesday, the House of Representatives held its second floor vote to elect a new speaker, after lawmakers ousted Congressman Kevin McCarthy from the leadership position. However, Republican nominee Jim Jordan failed to secure enough votes to become a new speaker.

More than 20 House Republicans voted for alternative candidates, including McCarthy, placing Jordan below the 217-vote threshold needed to become speaker. Republicans hold a 221-212 majority in the House of Representatives.

Democrats have unified behind Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, who won a plurality of votes.

The House of Representatives is unable to conduct legislative business until they elect a new speaker or empower temporary speaker pro tempore Patrick McHenry. The US Congress must pass government funding measures before November 17 or face a government shutdown.

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US Intelligence Analysts Say Netanyahu Aims to Turn Gaza Into Hiroshima - Seymour Hersh

WASHINGTON, October 18, (Sputnik) - Renowned US investigative journalist Seymour Hersh said on Wednesday that US intelligence analysts have determined that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu aims to eradicate Hamas while turning Gaza City into Hiroshima.

"Netanyahu's attitude, as assessed by the intelligence analysts, I was told, amounts to a determination to wipe out Hamas... Gaza City is in the process of being turned into Hiroshima with no nuclear weapons used," Hersh said on Wednesday.

US intelligence analysts believe that Netanyahu, the leading figure in Israel's new emergency unity government, does not intend to let any member of Hamas live, Hersh said.

"They believe he does not care about the troubles of the Gaza City residents who fled south toward Egypt and now find themselves with no food or water, and confronted with the reality that economically stricken Egypt has no interest in opening its border to a million or more refugees in need of food, housing and medical care," Hersh said.

Moreover, US intelligence assesses that Israel does not have plans for allowing a Palestinian state, Hersh added.

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Donald Trump Says He 'May Go' to Israel

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump said on Wednesday that he is considering going to Israel, when answering a question from a reporter if he would travel there.

"I may go," Trump told reporters while attending his New York civil fraud trial.

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US Senators Say Reviewed Intel Showing Hospital Explosion Not Due to Israeli Airstrike

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - US Senate Intelligence Committee leaders Mark Warner and Marco Rubio said in a joint statement on Wednesday that they reviewed intelligence allegedly showing that the explosion on al-Ahli hospital in Gaza was not the result of an Israeli airstrike.

"The Senate Intelligence Committee has received and reviewed intelligence related to the attack on al-Ahli hospital in Gaza," the statement said. “Based on this information, we feel confident that the explosion was the result of a failed rocket launch by militant terrorists and not the result of an Israeli airstrike."

President Joe Biden, while in Israel earlier in the day, also said he reviewed intelligence from the Pentagon indicating that the bombing of the Gaza hospital was not due to an Israeli airstrike.

On Tuesday, a missile hit the Al-Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City, causing a massive blast in which more than 500 people were killed, according to the Health Ministry of Gaza. Hamas blamed the explosion on an Israeli strike. The Israel Defense Forces said that the hospital was hit by a failed rocket launch by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement.

Russian Permanent Representative to the UN Vassily Nebenzia on Wednesday called for an “objective” investigation into the incidents and for the perpetrators to face prosecution.

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US Embassy in Turkey Says Closed Consulate in Adana Amid Mass Protests Regarding Palestine

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The US embassy in Turkey said on Wednesday that it will close the consulate in Adana in the southeast part of the country amid mass protest against the United States and Israel after the latter hit a hospital in the Gaza Strip with a missile the previous day, killing more than 500 people.

"The US Consulate in Adana will remain closed to the public until further notice. US citizens can reschedule their appointments to the US Embassy in Ankara," the embassy said on its website. "Large demonstrations related to events in Israel and Gaza are expected throughout Turkey for the next several weeks. Any gathering, even those intended to be peaceful, could escalate and turn violent."

US diplomatic personnel in Turkey have also been put on alert and instructed to minimize movements and avoid travel to the Adana consulate, the embassy said.

US citizens in Turkey are being advised to avoid areas around protests and demonstrations, avoid crowds and keep a low profile, the embassy said.

The missile strike on Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital in Gaza caused an uproar in Turkey, which

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declared three days of mourning. Thousands of Turks took to the streets to protest the strike and some attempted to attack the US and Israeli diplomatic missions.

Israel denies any wrongdoing and claims the explosion at the hospital occurred as a result of an unsuccessful missile launch by the Islamic Jihad. The Biden administration has said it does not consider Israel to be responsible for the incident. Israel has undertaken more than 6,000 strikes on the Gaza Strip since Hamas attacked Israelis on October 7.

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Hundreds Gather Near US Capitol for Peaceful Protest Calling for Israel-Gaza Ceasefire

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - Hundreds of people have gathered outside the Capitol Building in a peaceful protest organized by Jewish anti-occupation groups Jewish Voice for Peace and IfNotNow, organizers told a Sputnik correspondent on scene Wednesday.

"I can guarantee that this crowd is 100% peaceful. We are here because we abhor violence. We don't want people killed anywhere, and we are desperate now to stop the killing in Gaza," Medea Benjamin, one of the organizers, told Sputnik. "There will be no violence from anyone in this crowd."

The participants, who include more than 1,000 Jews, are demanding that US lawmakers pass a resolution calling for a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas conflict.

Republican Sen. Marjorie Taylor Greene said earlier on Wednesday that members of Congress had been warned by the Capitol Police to stay inside and utilize underground tunnels to navigate the Hill to avoid what they characterized as potential targeted attacks by protestors.

The peaceful protest comes just hours after the opening of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee's hearing on Wednesday to nominate Jack Lew as ambassador to Israel was briefly interrupted several times by protestors seeking to advocate for the Palestinian people.

US President Joe Biden visited Israel on Wednesday to showcase the United States' support for the country in its efforts to eradicate Hamas.

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Israeli Strikes in Gaza Do Not Meet Int'l. Standard, Self-Defense Has Limits - UN Official

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - Israel's response to the Hamas attacks have not met international standards, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories Francesca Albanese said on Wednesday.

"The response that Israel has given doesn't meet international standards either ... even self-defense has limits," Albanese said during an event hosted by the Arab Center in Washington.

Albanese criticized Israel for dropping at least 6,000 bombs on the Gaza Strip, a small territory

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packed with more than two million Palestinians, half of them children.
The blockade Israel initially imposed on Gaza, if meant to intentionally cause starvation, constitutes a crime against humanity, Albanese said.
Earlier on Wednesday, US President Joe Biden said that humanitarian aid will be allowed to flow from Egypt to Gaza soon.
Albanese also said that Hamas committed war crimes by killing Israeli civilians and taking civilian hostages.
However, the Palestinians have a right to resist as per international law since they are under an illegal Israeli occupation, Albanese added.

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US, Israel Uncertain About Death Toll From Gaza Hospital Strike - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The United States and Israel are both uncertain about the death toll from a blast at a hospital in Gaza, Newsweek reported on Wednesday.
"We don't know how many people died, nor does Israel. Not yet," a US Air Force officer working on the matter reportedly said.
However, initial US and Israeli intelligence assessments suggest that a few dozen people were killed at most, the officer said. Claims about hundreds of people dying in the incident were "blatant lying" by Hamas, the officer added.
Israel did not target the hospital, a senior US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) officer also reportedly said. Imagery and intercepted signals intelligence appear to show that a rocket fired from inside Gaza itself struck the hospital, the DIA officer said.
On Tuesday, the Health Ministry of Gaza said that more than 500 people were killed in a strike on Al-Ahli Hospital. Hamas blamed the blast on Israel, while the Israel Defense Forces pinned responsibility on a failed rocket launch by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement.
Russian Permanent Representative to the UN Vassily Nebenzia on Wednesday called for an "objective" investigation into the incidents and for the perpetrators to face prosecution.

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UN Chief Welcomes Partial Agreement Between Venezuelan Government, Opposition

UNITED NATIONS, October 18 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres welcomes the "partial agreement" reached between the Venezuelan government and the opposition Unitary Platform of Venezuela, spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Wednesday.
"The Secretary-General welcomes the partial agreement announced by the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the Unitary Platform of Venezuela, signed in Barbados under the facilitation of the Kingdom of Norway, and the accompanying countries of the

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Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Russian Federation," Dujarric said in a statement.
Guterres hopes it will lead to "credible elections in 2024," the statement added.

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US Crude Oil Stocks Down 4.5Mln Barrels Last Week as Exports Surge Again Amid OPEC+ Cuts

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - Crude stockpiles in the United States fell by 4.5 million barrels last week as exports accelerated from overseas market share gained by US oil firms, while supply cuts by OPEC+ resulted in lesser imports, the Energy Information Administration (EIA) Weekly Petroleum Status Report showed on Wednesday.

Declines were also recorded in inventories of gasoline, the premier US fuel product, and distillates - a raw material for diesel and heating fuel, the report showed.

Typically at this time of year, demand for fuels is softer in the United States. But with the US refining industry on one of its seasonal maintenance periods, larger-than-usual declines in fuel stocks are not unusual either with limited replenishments coming in.

The US crude inventory balance fell by 4.491 million barrels during the week ended October 13, according to the EIA. That contrasted with a 10.176 million jump in the prior week to October 6, led largely by a sharp decline in exports.

In the latest week though, crude exports regained their mantle to reach 5.301 million barrels versus the prior daily rate of 3.067 million.

Imports, meanwhile, fell 387,000 barrels per day, amounting to a weekly total of 2.709 million.

OPEC+ is a 23-nation alliance that groups the 13-member Saudi-led Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries with 10 independent oil producers that include Russia.

Moscow and Riyadh announced previously that they would hold back a joint 1.3 million barrels per day of their regular production till the end of the year, with 300,000 of that coming from Russia and the balance 1.0 million from the Saudis. The OPEC+ cutbacks have allowed US oil exports to make inroads into some markets.

Aside from the headline draw for US crude, the EIA also noted a 758,000-barrel decline at the Cushing, Oklahoma delivery point for US crude, on top of the previous week's draw of 547,000.

That was the lowest for Cushing storage levels since October 2014, historical EIA data showed. Oil held in Cushing has dropped sharply this year, prompting concerns that it might reach such critical lows to complicate operations at the storage hub.

On the fuel side, the EIA reported a gasoline inventory slide of 2.37 million barrels and distillate stockpile drop of 3.185 barrels. In the prior week, gasoline saw a 1.3134-million barrel build while distillates experienced a 1.837 million drop.

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Russia Questions on US Military Biological Program in Ukraine Remain Unanswered - Official

UNITED NATIONS, October 18 (Sputnik) - The questions posed by Russia to the United States and Ukraine about their military biological program remain unanswered and need to be addressed, Russian Foreign Ministry Non-Proliferation and Arms Control Department Deputy Director Kosntantin Vorontsov said on Wednesday.

"Our well-founded questions to the US and Ukraine have yet to receive a proper response. They remain open and need to be addressed," Vorontsov said during a meeting of the UN General Assembly First Committee.

Vorontsov pointed out that Russia has provided a "mass of evidence" regarding the US military biological program and emphasized that the facts regarding its implementation in Ukraine with the support of the Defense Department and affiliated entities requires close attention.

"The projects carried out in Ukrainian laboratories lead to the conclusion that biological weapons components were being developed in close proximity to Russian territory," Vorontsov said.

Since March 2022, Russia has repeatedly accused the United States of conducting in Ukraine biological research for military purposes. Russia has pointed out that up to 30 biological laboratories in Ukraine were likely involved in biological weapons production. The United States has denied the allegation.

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Congressman Jordan's Speakership Bid Fails in Second US House Floor Vote

(Update: edits headline, provides details throughout)

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - Republican US Congressman Jim Jordan's speakership bid failed on the second floor vote to elect a new speaker, after 22 House Republicans split from the rest of the party to back alternative candidates on Wednesday.

The 22 House Republicans cast votes for candidates including Congressman Kevin McCarthy, whom lawmakers ousted from the leadership role earlier this month. Jordan must receive 217 votes to win the speakership; House Republicans hold a narrow 221-212 majority.

On Tuesday, just 20 House Republicans cast votes against Jordan. House Democrats have united behind Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries during both floor votes, winning him a plurality each time.

The House of Representatives is unable to conduct normal legislative business until it elects a new speaker or empowers temporary speaker pro tempore Patrick McHenry.

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US Home Building up 7% in September But Future Construction Affected by High Loan Rates

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - New home building in the United States increased by 7% in September, rebounding from the sharp drop in August, US Commerce Department data showed on Wednesday.

Home building rose by an annual pace of 1.36 million units last month. In August, housing starts tumbled 11.3% to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 1.283 million units, the lowest level since June 2020. Housing starts peaked at 1.8 million in April 2022.

Despite the September rebound in new construction, building permits - a sign of future construction - fell 4.4% to a 1.47 million.

Soaring interest and mortgage rates have discouraged first-time home buyers in the United States, who typically form the core of the demand circle for housing in the country.

US mortgage rates for housing loans neared 23-year highs at the end of September, according to Freddie Mac, the federal agency responsible for assisting Americans with home buying.

The 30-year fixed-rate mortgage hit 7.31%, a peak since 2000, up from 6.65% during this same time in 2022. The 15-year fixed mortgage rate was at 6.72% compared with 5.95% from a year ago.

The surge in mortgage rates came after the Federal Reserve hiked US interest rates by 11 times between March 2022 and August 2023, raising them by 5.25% from a base rate of just 0.25%. The Fed is scheduled to decide on rates again at its next two-day policy meeting ending on November 2.

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US Senate's Nomination Hearing for Israel Ambassador Interrupted by Protesters

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The opening of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee's hearing on Wednesday to nominate Jack Lew as ambassador to Israel was briefly interrupted several times by protesters seeking to advocate for the Palestinian people.

"Our families are dying! We need a ceasefire now!" a man holding up a poster yelled during Chair Cardin's opening remarks. "Ceasefire now!" he chanted as he was escorted out by security.

He was followed a few minutes later by another solo protester and then a third, both of whom were quickly removed by security. It was unclear if the protesters had coordinated their efforts.

Cardin said disruptions to the hearing "would not be tolerated."

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USGS Issues Emergency Alert to SF Residents, Earthquake Detected - Sputnik Correspondent

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SAN FRANCISCO, October 18 (Sputnik) - The United States Geological Survey (USGS) issued an urgent emergency alert to residents of San Francisco on Wednesday after detecting an earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 4.6 in Sacramento County.

"An earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 4.6 hit in Sacramento County Wednesday morning," the United States Geological Survey said.

The USGS later downgraded the magnitude of the earthquake in the San Francisco area to 4.1.

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US Senate Seeks to Urgently Confirm Ambassador to Israel

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) – The US Senate is seeking to urgently confirm an ambassador to Israel by next week, with former Obama-era Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew the top contender despite lingering concerns over his implementation of the Iran nuclear agreement.

"I cannot overstate the urgency for the United States to have a confirmed ambassador on the ground to help deliver US support for Israel, to deal with the hostage situation, to deal with the humanitarian needs that we know exist. We need an ambassador who at this critical and delicate time can speak with authority and engage diplomatically in the region at the highest level. Secretary Lew's experience, gravitas and political acumen makes him eminently qualified to serve as the US ambassador to Israel," Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chair Senator Ben Cardin said at Lew's nomination hearing on Wednesday.

Lew described himself as a staunch supporter of Israel and the Biden administration's various Middle East policies, arguing that his "reputation as somebody who stands with Israel is beyond question."

While the committee agreed on the urgency of appointing an ambassador to Israel, several senators expressed strong reservations over Lew's appointment because of lingering concerns that his implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2016 gave Iran access to the US financial system. Senator James Risch accused Lew of misleading the Senate back then and "holding hands with Iran under the table."

Lew defended his issuing of a specific license to Bank Muscat in 2016 that allowed the conversion of Iranian assets of 5.7 billion Omani riyals into euros by first exchanging them into US dollars.

"We negotiated with Iran to have them roll back their nuclear program in exchange for which they would get access to their money that we had frozen. All we did was facilitate that transaction. So we did not welcome them back into the US financial system," Lew said.

He added that he was later sanctioned by Iran for not giving the country full access to the world financial system as it had expected.

Cardin asked that questions for the record be submitted by the close of business on Wednesday and said responses would be delivered by the weekend. He added that a business meeting was scheduled next week to vote on Lew's nomination.

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US Lawmakers Advised to Use Underground Tunnels Amid Israel-Hamas War Protest - Greene

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene said on Wednesday that US Capitol police has advised lawmakers to stay inside Congress and use the underground tunnels during a protest against the Israel-Hamas war.

"Last night Cap[itol] Police put up bike racks because of expected pro-Palestinian protest today and intel[ligence] that members of Congress will be targeted. They told us to stay inside and only use the underground tunnels," Greene said on Wednesday.

Greene noted that the Biden administration wants the United States to go to war and emphasized that she stands for peace.

On Tuesday night, the US Capitol police erected a fence around sections of the US Capitol in preparation for the planned protest the following day.

The advocacy group Jewish Voice for Peace said via social media that they expect the protest to start on Wednesday at noon.

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US Targets Already Designated Russian Organizations With New Iran Sanctions - Treasury

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The United States has added several Russian organizations, which have already been designated by Washington, to a new list of Iran-related sanctioned entities, the US Treasury Department said on Wednesday.

The Treasury Department said it has updated the sanctions records with respect to Russia's 924th State Center for UAV Aviation; the command of the Military Transport Aviation; Rosoboroneksport; and Aerospace Forces with the label IRAN-CON-ARMS-EO.

These organizations have also been sanctioned by Executive Order 13949 from September 2020 that provided the US government with additional tools to impose restrictions on those individuals and entities who help Iran support armed groups with weapons and arms materiel.

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US Congressman Jordan's Speakership Bid Set to Fail in Second House Floor Vote

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - Republican US Congressman Jim Jordan's speakership bid is set to fail on the second floor vote to elect a new speaker, as several House Republicans again split from the rest of the party to back alternative candidates on Wednesday.

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Several House Republicans cast votes for candidates including Congressman Kevin McCarthy, whom lawmakers ousted from the leadership role earlier this month. Jordan must receive 217 votes to win the speakership; House Republicans hold a narrow 221-212 majority.

On Tuesday, 20 House Republicans cast votes against Jordan, while House Democrats united behind Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, who won a plurality of votes.

The House of Representatives is unable to conduct normal legislative business until it elects a new speaker or empowers temporary speaker pro tempore Patrick McHenry.

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Nebenzia Says Over 1,000 Russians Held Hostage by Gaza Blockade

UNITED NATIONS, October 18 (Sputnik) - Approximately 1,000 Russian citizens and their family members are being held hostage by the Gaza blockade, Russia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Wednesday.

"De facto the military blockade of Gaza has held hostage 1000 Russian citizens and members of their families," Nebenzia said on Wednesday during the United Nations Security Council briefing.

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Russia Demands an Objective Investigation Into The Attack on Gaza Hospital - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, October 18 (Sputnik) - Russia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia called for an objective investigation into the Gaza hospital attack and the prosecution of those responsible.

"We [The Russian Federation] are calling for an objective investigation to be carried out and for the perpetrators to be prosecuted. Mr. President, colleagues, this is the price of the inertia of members of the council many of whom have procrastinated over the past 11 days," Nebenzia said on Wednesday during the United Nations Security Council briefing.

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Russia Demands 10th Emergency UNGA Session on Palestinian Civilian Protection - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, October 18 (Sputnik) - Russia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Vasily Nebenzia has called for the resumption of the 10th Emergency Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) to address the pressing issue of civilian

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protection in Palestine.
"Assuming the UN Security Council is not able to come up with an appropriate response to these challenges, we will initiate... the resumed 10th Emergency special session of the UNGA on the protection of civilians in Palestine, in order to have a comprehensive discussion of the situation regarding the Palestinian Israeli conflict and ways to settle it," Nebenzia said on Wednesday during the United Nations Security Council briefing.

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US Announces New Sanctions on Iran - Treasury Department

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) – The United States has imposed sanctions on ten individuals and eight entities related to Iran, the Treasury said on Wednesday.
The sanctions were imposed against persons from Iran and China, the Treasury said in a notice. The US also designated companies from Iran and Hong Kong, it added.

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France Regrets UN Security Council Resolution on Israel-Hamas War 'Rejected' - Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, October 18 (Sputnik) - France regrets that the United States vetoed the UN Security Council resolution on the Israel-Hamas war, French Ambassador to the United Nations Nicolas de Riviere said on Wednesday.
" We deeply regret that the text has been rejected," de Riviere said.

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Danger of Israel-Gaza Conflict Expansion Very Real, Extremely Dangerous - Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, October 18 (Sputnik) - The Israel-Gaza conflict is in a great danger of getting worse and very dangerous, the Special Coordinator For the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland said on Wednesday.
“The risk of an expansion of this conflict is real, very real, and extremely dangerous,” Wennesland told the Security Council members during an emergency meeting on Israel and Palestine.
Myself and the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres have been in ‘constant communication’ with other stakeholders, he added.
On October 7, Palestinian group Hamas launched a surprise large-scale rocket attack against

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Israel from the Gaza Strip, prompting Israel to declare a state of war the following day and launch retaliatory strikes. On October 9, Israel ordered a complete blockade of the Gaza Strip, home to more than 2 million people, cutting off supplies of water, food and fuel. The escalation of the conflict has resulted in thousands of people being killed and injured.

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Jim Jordan May Receive Less Support in Second Vote for US House Speaker - Congressman

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Jim Jordan will likely receive less support during a second floor vote on his speakership bid than he did on the first, Congressman Scott Perry said on Wednesday.

"Just so there's no surprises: Jordan will likely have fewer voters today than yesterday," Perry, said in a statement via the social media platform X. "Stay strong and keep praying."

On Tuesday, the House of Representatives held its first floor vote to elect a new speaker after ousting Congressman Kevin McCarthy from the leadership role earlier this month. However, neither Jordan nor Democratic Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries managed to garner the 217 votes needed to become speaker.

Twenty House Republicans split from the rest of the conference to vote for alternative candidates, including McCarthy. House Republicans hold a slim 221-212 majority.

The House of Representatives is unable to resume normal legislative business until they elect a new speaker or empower temporary speaker pro tempore Patrick McHenry.

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US Blasts No Mention of Israel's Self-Defense Right After Vetoing Brazil's UNSC Resolution

UNITED NATIONS, October 18 (Sputnik) - The United States is disappointed that the Brazilian-drafted resolution on the Israel-Gaza conflict made no mention of Israel's right to self-defense, US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said on Wednesday, after vetoing the resolution.

"The United States is disappointed this resolution made no mention of Israel's rights of self defense. Like every nation in the world, Israel has the inherent right of self defense, as reflected in article 51 of the UN Charter," Thomas-Greenfield said during a UN Security Council meeting.

"Following previous terrorist attacks by groups such as Al Qaeda and ISIS" (both terrorist groups are banned in Russia), the council reaffirmed that right for self-defense, she added.

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

White House Says Israel Not Liable for Gaza Hospital Attack Based on Initial Data Analysis

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has assessed that Israel is not responsible for the missile attack on the hospital in Gaza that claimed the lives of hundreds of people, National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson said on Wednesday.
"While we continue to collect information, our current assessment, based on analysis of overhead imagery, intercepts, and open source information, is that Israel is not responsible for the explosion at the hospital in Gaza yesterday," Watson said via X (formerly known as Twitter).
On Tuesday, a missile hit the Al-Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City, causing a massive blast in which more than 500 people were killed, according to the Health Ministry of Gaza. Hamas blamed the explosion on an Israeli strike. The Israel Defense Forces said that the hospital was hit by a failed rocket launch by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement.

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US Blasts No Mention of Israel's Self-Defense Right After Vetoing Brazil's UNSC Resolution

UNITED NATIONS, October 18 (Sputnik) -The United States is disappointed that the Brazilian-drafted resolution on the Israel-Gaza conflict made no mention of Israel's right to self-defense, US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said on Wednesday, after vetoing the resolution.
"The United States is disappointed this resolution made no mention of Israel's rights of self defense. Like every nation in the world, Israel has the inherent right of self defense, as reflected in article 51 of the UN Charter," Thomas-Greenfield said during a UN Security Council meeting.
"Following previous terrorist attacks by groups such as Al Qaeda and ISIS" (both terrorist groups are banned in Russia), the council reaffirmed that right for self-defense, she added.

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UNSC States Opposing Russian Amendments Stand Against Israel-Hamas Ceasefire - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, October 18 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council members who rejected the Russia-drafted amendments to the resolution on a ceasefire in Gaza are in effect against the cessation of hostilities there, Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Vasily Nebenzia said on Wednesday.
“The vote on an immediate ceasefire and on an unequivocal condemnation of the indiscriminate act did not get past those delegations, who either abstained or voted against,

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essentially were against the cessation of a bloodshed in the Middle East," Nebenzia said during a meeting of the UN Security Council.

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China Shocked at UNSC Failure to Adopt Brazilian Draft Resolution on Israel-Gaza Conflict

UNITED NATIONS, October 18 (Sputnik) - China is shocked and disappointed that the UN Security Council failed to adopt a Brazilian-drafted resolution pertaining to the Israel-Gaza conflict, Ambassador to the United Nations Zhang Jun said on Wednesday.

Earlier in the day, the United State vetoed the draft resolution that would call for humanitarian pauses and urge Israel to rescind its evacuation order for Gazans. Russia and the United Kingdom abstained. Russia sought to amend the draft resolution, but the amendments were rejected.

"The fact that the draft resolution failed to be adopted and our reaction is that of shock and disappointment," Zhang said at a UN Security Council meeting.

China is also "very disappointed" that Russia's amendments were rejected, the ambassador added.

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Russia Says 'Masks Are Off' After US Vetoes UNSC Resolution on Israel-Hamas Ceasefire

UNITED NATIONS, October 18 (Sputnik) - The United States showed its true intentions when it vetoed the UN Security Council resolution seeking a humanitarian pause in the Israel-Hamas war, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Wednesday.

"The masks are off. No matter how hard the Americans tried to appear as peacekeepers, they ultimately failed. A huge foreign policy failure for Washington," Polyanskiy said.

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Prosecutors Will Not Pursue Sexual Assault Case Against UFC Star Conor McGregor - Attorney

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - Prosecutors in the United States will not pursue a criminal case against Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) fighter Conor McGregor based on allegations of sexual assault at a basketball game earlier this year, McGregor attorney Barbara Llanes said on Wednesday.

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"After a thorough investigation, including a review of videos and interviews with eyewitnesses, the authorities have concluded that there is no case to pursue against my client, Conor McGregor," Llanes said in a statement.

The decision not to pursue charges against McGregor confirms his own account of the situation, the statement said.

In June, a women sought a settlement deal with McGregor after accusing him of hitting and raping her in a bathroom at a National Basketball Association (NBA) finals game in Miami. McGregor denied the allegations.

Prosecutors found insufficient evidence to prove the accusations beyond a reasonable doubt, according to a closeout memo reported by TMZ. Prosecutors reviewed security camera footage that shows McGregor and the woman enter a restroom together and leave minutes later, after which point they continued to interact at the game, the memo said.

An attendant who was in the restroom at the time confirmed that the two entered a stall together but noted that he heard no signs of distress that would indicate a non-consensual encounter, the memo said.

McGregor is set to reenter mixed martial arts competition in the UFC sometime next year, after taking time away from the sport due to a leg injury.

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Attack On Gaza Hospital Seems To Be Result Of Errant Rocket Fired By Terrorist Group-Biden

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) -US President Joe Biden stated on Wednesday that according to the data they have seen, the deadly attack on the hospital in the Gaza Strip appears to be a result of the rocket fired by a terrorist group.

"Based on the information we've seen to date, it appears the result of an errant rocket fired by a terrorist group in Gaza," Biden said.

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US Vetoes Brazilian-Drafted UNSC Resolution Seeking to Rescind Evacuation Order for Gazans

UNITED NATIONS, October 18 (Sputnik) - The United States on Wednesday vetoed a Brazilian-drafted UN Security Council resolution that calls on Israel to rescind its evacuation order for Gazans.

Russia and the United Kingdom abstained.

Russia sought to amend the draft resolution to include a condemnation of "indiscriminate attacks" against civilians in Gaza, "in particular heinous strike against Al Ahli hospital," and also to include a call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. The UN Security Council rejected

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both proposed amendments.
On Monday, the UN Security Council rejected a Russian-drafted resolution calling for a humanitarian ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war.

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Biden Announces $100 Mln in Humanitarian Assistance to Gaza, West Bank

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) – US President Biden announced on Wednesday $100 million in new funding for humanitarian assistance to Gaza and the West Bank.
"I'm also announcing $100 million of new US funding for humanitarian assistance in both Gaza and the West Bank," Biden said at a press briefing in Israel.

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Biden Says Will Ask Congress This Week for 'Unprecedented Support Package' for Israel

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden on Wednesday announced that later this week he will request from Congress an unprecedented defense aid package for Israel.
"Later this week, I'm going to ask the United States Congress for unprecedented support package for Israel's defense," Biden said.

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Majority of Canadians Say 'Lasting Peace' Between Israel, Palestine Not Achievable - Poll

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - Slightly more than half of all Canadians believe that a lasting peace between Israel and Palestine cannot be achieved, a new Leger poll revealed on Wednesday.
"Half of Canadians (51%) believe that achieving lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians in the future is not possible," a release on the poll said.
Less than a fifth of respondents (19%) expressed optimism that lasting peace is achievable while 30% of respondents said they were unsure, the release said.
Slightly less than half of respondents (49%) said they believe to have a good understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the release said.
Among those, two thirds were optimistic that a lasting peace could be reached sometime in the future, the release also said.
In addition, 71% of respondents agreed with the decision of the Canadian government to airlift

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Canadian citizens out of Israel, the release added.
The poll was conducted between October 13-15 on a random sample of 1,548 adult Canadians with a margin of error between plus-minus 2.49%, according to the release.

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China to Back Russia's Amendments to Brazilian-Drafted UNSC Resolution on Mideast - Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, October 18 (Sputnik) - China will support Russia's amendments to a Brazilian-drafted resolution on the Israel-Gaza conflict, Ambassador to the United Nations Zhang Jun said on Wednesday.
Later in the day, the UN Security Council will vote on a Brazilian-drafted resolution that condemns Hamas attacks on Israel. Russia considers the document unbalanced and proposes two amendments – one condemning attacks on civilians in Gaza and the other calling for an immediate ceasefire.
"We will," Zhang told reporters, when asked if China will support Russia's amendments.

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Canada to Invest $741Mln in RADARSAT for High Quality Observation – Space Agency

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) – Canada's Space Agency (CSA) said on Wednesday that Ottawa would invest C$1,012 billion (US$ 741 million) over the next 15 years into RADARSAT+ to ensure high quality observation of the country.
"Today, the Honourable François-Philippe Champagne, Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry and Minister responsible for the Canadian Space Agency, announced an investment of $1.012 billion over the next 15 years for RADARSAT+, an initiative aimed at ensuring continuous, efficient, and sustainable access to critical and high-quality Earth observation (EO) data for Canada," CSA's statement said.
Through this investment, CSA aims at maintaining its "globally recognized" leadership in the domain which began with the first RADARSAT+ satellite launch in 1995, the statement said.
The funds will allow for the development of existing RADARSAT+ initiatives such as the design, assembly and launch of replacement satellites for its Constellation Mission (RCM), and a project to create a fourth-generation national sovereign satellite system to succeed the RCM, the statement added.
Satellite data is important when it comes to making "science-based" decisions in several areas, the statement said, such as climate change adaptation, and building resilience in Canada's northernmost communities.

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US Sanctions 9 Individuals, 1 Company Linked to Hamas - Treasury

(Adds quote in para 2, details in paras 3-4)
WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) – The United States has imposed sanctions on nine individuals and a Gaza-based virtual currency exchange over their links to Hamas, the Treasury said on Wednesday.
"Today, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) imposed sanctions on ten key Hamas terrorist group members, operatives, and financial facilitators in Gaza and elsewhere including Sudan, Türkiye, Algeria, and Qatar," the statement said.
The sanctions target six individuals associated with Hamas' secret investment portfolio and two senior Hamas officials. The US also designated Gaza-based virtual currency exchange Buy Cash Money and Money Transfer Company and its operator.
The designation comes amid the escalating war between Israel and Hamas. The US remains committed to take all steps necessary to deny Hamas the ability to raise and use funds against Israel, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen was quoted as saying in the statement.

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Biden Says Pentagon Data Shows Israel Not Behind Gaza Hospital Explosion

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said Wednesday that he believed Israel was not behind the deadly explosion at Al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza based on data he received from the Pentagon.
"The data I was shown by my defense department," Biden said in response to a reporter's question regarding why he was sure Israel was not behind the explosion on Tuesday.

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US Shoots Down Two Drones in Attack on US, Coalition Forces in Iraq - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) – The United States shot down two drones on Wednesday that attempted to attack US and coalition forces in Iraq, according to the Pentagon.
"An attempted attack against US and Coalition forces in Iraq was disrupted in the early morning of Oct 18. Two one-way drones were shot down in the attack. There were no injuries to any forces during the attempted attack," a US defense official said in a statement to Sputnik.

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US Sanctions 9 Individuals, 1 Company Linked to Hamas - Treasury

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) – The United States has imposed sanctions on nine individuals and a Gaza-based virtual currency exchange over their links to Hamas, the Treasury said on Wednesday.

"The following individuals have been added to OFAC's [Office of Foreign Assets Control] SDN [Specially Designated Nationals] List," the Treasury said in a notice.

The sanctions target individuals from Qatar, Gaza, Turkey, Jordan, and Sudan. The US also designated Buy Cash Money and Money Transfer Company from Gaza, according to the notice.

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Blinken Extends Condolences to Abbas Over Explosion at Gaza Hospital - State Dept

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in a call with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas extended condolences in connection with the deadly explosion at a hospital in Gaza City, the State Department said on Wednesday.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas yesterday evening to express profound condolences for the civilian lives lost in the explosion at the Al Ahli Anglican hospital in Gaza City," the State Department said in a readout.

Blinked also expressed "continuing" US support for the Palestinian people, reiterating that Hamas does not represent Palestinians, the readout said.

The secretary highlighted the US's commitment to upholding the law of war, to include important protections for civilians, according to the readout.

The two also discussed efforts to provide urgent life-saving humanitarian assistance to civilians in Gaza amid the war between Israel and Hamas.

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Biden in Tel Aviv Says US Stands With Israel 'Today, Tomorrow and Always'

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The United States will continue to have Israel's back "today, tomorrow and always," President Joe Biden said on Wednesday during his trip to Israel upended by the deadly strike on a Gaza hospital.

"Seventy-five years ago your founders declared that this nation will be one based on freedom, justice and peace. The United States stands with you in defense of that freedom and in pursuit

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of that justice and in support of that peace today, tomorrow and always. I promise you," Biden said at a meeting with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other Israeli officials.

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US Will Continue to Work With Israel to Prevent More Tragedy for Civilians - Biden

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The United States will continue to work with Israel and partners in the region to prevent more tragedy for innocent civilians, President Joe Biden said on Wednesday during his trip to Israel upended by the Gaza hospital strike.
"We'll continue to work with you and partners across the region to prevent more tragedy for innocent civilians," Biden said at a meeting with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other Israeli officials.

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