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'Catastrophic' Mistake for US to Let Israel Draw It Into War With Hezbollah and Iran

The Israeli government is hoping it can force Washington to help it fight a multi-front war with Hezbollah and Iran while the IDF is “deep in Gaza,” but that’s a fool’s errand, since Israel’s problems are of its own creation and not the problems of the American people, a former CIA officer told Sputnik.

In an article for Al-Mayadeen earlier this week, former US Marine Corps intelligence officer Scott Ritter argued that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Natanyahu is trying to escalate the situation in Lebanon in order to draw the US into a multi-front war against Hezbollah and ultimately Iran. However, Ritter also argued that such a maneuver would not succeed, because Hezbollah won’t be goaded into a conflict that will put it at a disadvantage on the global stage.

Ritter said if Hezbollah takes the initiative and launches a full-scale attack on Israel, "people will stop talking about Palestine. People will stop talking about Israel's aggression, and they will now focus on a new front that will probably include Iran."

"This is again why [Hezbollah leader] Hassan Nasrallah speaks of perseverance. Perseverance means that you have to struggle through the difficult times to ensure that you are not distracted from the strategic vision," Ritter said, adding that "Hamas is winning this fight. Israel cannot prevail. Israel cannot defeat Hamas on the ground. Israel has lost the propaganda battle globally; they have lost in the United States."

John Kiriakou, a former CIA officer and whistleblower about the US torture program, told Radio Sputnik’s “The Critical Hour” on Tuesday that Ritter and Nasrallah are right: the US cannot win a war against Hezbollah and should not get involved in such a fight.

“I think Scott Ritter is right. And, you know, I would remind everybody, too, if you recall a month ago, in the immediate aftermath, just in 24 or 48 hours after the Hamas attack on Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu said - and he said it definitively at the time - that the Iranians were behind it all, that that Iran was supplying weapons to Hamas, that Hamas couldn't have pulled this off by itself, this had to be an Iranian operation. And it wasn't an Iranian operation. But that was very consistent with Netanyahu's thinking over the past two decades,” said Kiriakou, who is also the co-host of “Political Misfits” on Radio Sputnik.

“Netanyahu has asked three successive American presidents to either attack Iran or to join with Israel to attack Iran, and the answer has been ‘no’ three times. And so now he sees this as an opportunity to bring the Americans in, to either help defeat Hezbollah while the Israelis focus on Hamas, or to defeat Iran, while the Israelis focus on Hamas. Because the truth of the matter is: Israel cannot fight a two-front war. It's just not equipped,” Kiriakou said.

“Now, we heard from Netanyahu's office today that the IDF is - their words - ‘deep in the heart of Gaza’. Well, good luck with that. Good luck with miles and miles of tunnels, good luck finding an enemy that is intertwined with the civilian population. Good luck. That doesn't mean that the United States should be dragged into it. We have our own problems now with Ukraine and with

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what seems to be an overwhelming national desire to jump in on the side of the Israelis from a distance - but that doesn't mean that we have to send American troops to help Israel fight its war."

Turning to the question of the "propaganda war," or what the Israeli government calls "hasbara," Kiriakou said the world's conscience was being shocked by the videos coming out of Gaza as well as by the comments by Netanyahu and figures in his government.

"Over the weekend there was a statement by a minor cabinet official, the Israeli minister for heritage affairs, who said on a radio station, he answered a question: would it be appropriate to use a nuclear bomb on Gaza? And he said that is something that should be on the table," Kiriakou recalled.

"Well, first of all, that would be a crime against humanity of epic proportions. And secondly, that's the first time that any Israeli government official, ever, in the history of the country, has ever admitted that Israel has a nuclear weapon. And so, you know, the Israelis just can't seem to get it right, they can't seem to get this information war or propaganda right."

"Look also around the world at what happened this past weekend. We had as many as 300,000 people marching in the streets of Washington calling for a ceasefire - that's after a prediction of 30,000 people showing up for this demonstration. They had ten times the crowd. There was a bigger demonstration in London on the same day, 500,000 people, more than 500,000 in Jakarta. There were equally huge demonstrations in Berlin and in Tokyo. There were demonstrations across the United States, in San Francisco and Denver. They've already lost the information war."

"You know, I had a guest on my own show today, Dan Kovalik, who said that when push comes to shove, the American people usually do the right thing. And the American people - not the American government, the American people - and they will call out outward injustice. And we're only four weeks into this fight and already they're seeing an injustice. Your last guest mentioned that more than half of the deaths so far in Gaza have been women and children. Most of the deaths have been civilians. That is unacceptable, no matter what country you come from, that is unacceptable. And the Israelis don't care about things like that."

"There was a release from WikiLeaks back in 2009 in which an American State Department cable quoting an Israeli government official as saying that the Israeli government goal in Gaza is to allow them just to live, nothing more than just barely eking out a living, and it would never get better. That's an Israeli government policy. So we ask ourselves, you know, what did Hamas think Netanyahu was going to do? And I would say that the question we should be asking is, what did Netanyahu think the Gazans would do?"

"You know, Martin Luther King said that we should never underestimate a man's desire to be free," Kiriakou said, "and I think we're seeing it play out now on a day to day basis."

Kirakou said Nasrallah "asked a very important question" in his speech last Friday.

"He probably meant it rhetorically, but I think it should be taken literally. The United States cannot and should not fight Hezbollah. We don't live in that neighborhood and they know that they can wait us out - just like the Afghans did, just like the Iraqis did, just like the Vietnamese did. We have no business being over there. That is Israel's fight. You remember the last time Israel fought Hezbollah? They went into southern Lebanon, they were there for whatever it was, two years, three years, and they were eventually forced out. They didn't win that war. So why would we want to get involved in something like that? I think it would be a catastrophic foreign

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policy mistake to become involved in a hot war where we really have no real national interests," Kiriakou said.

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Greenland Lost Over One-Third of Floating Ice Shelves in Last 50 Years

Greenland, home to a vast amount of water ice locked away in glaciers and an ice cap, has lost more than one-third of a key part of this icy deposit: its floating glaciers and ice shelves that keep the ocean waters away from most of the ice.

In a study published on Tuesday in Nature Communications, a group of American and Danish scientists described the precipitous drop in their volume.

What they found is that since 1978, roughly 400 billion tons of floating ice around Greenland has disappeared, accounting for 35% of the total floating sea ice around the massive island.

"The implications of these findings are profound, as they reveal a direct connection between ice shelf changes and the dynamics of Greenland's glaciers," Stef Lhermitte, a scientist specializing in satellite observations of glaciers at the Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands who was not involved in the study, told US media.

"The retreat of grounding lines and increased ice discharge are clear signs of a weakening ice shelf system," Lhermitte added.

The massive ice shelves are by themselves capable of triggering a rise in ocean levels of roughly 3.6 feet if they totally melted, which would put in danger hundreds of millions of people who live in coastal cities and regions.

However, the ice shelves play a highly important role in protecting the vast Greenland Ice Cap from ocean waters, which could cause that ice cap to begin melting a lot quicker. The ice cap is nearly a mile thick and covers the whole interior of the island, and if it melted, it could raise sea levels by an astonishing 23 feet.

Before the 1980s, Greenland's ice sheets were considered to be mostly stable, but as human-driven climate change has accelerated, so has the ice sheets' retreat alongside much of the polar sea ice. The sea ice not only stores water in a solid form, it also reflects a lot more sunlight, helping to slow the warming of the planet. Less ice means more heating.

Scientists say the planet must be limited to a global increase of less than 1.5 degrees Celsius by the end of the century to avoid such a catastrophe. However, that could come a lot sooner than expected: a recent study found the average temperature on Earth over the last decade was about 1.1 degrees Celsius higher than pre-industrial temperatures.

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Astronomers Observe Atomic Oxygen on Venus' Harsh Day Side for First Time

Sometimes called "Earth's twin" due to its nearly identical size and its location in the habitable zone of the sun's orbit, Venus is a harsh world with a runaway greenhouse effect. It also spins extremely slowly, with a single day on Venus lasting 243 Earth days - even longer than a Venusian year.

A group of scientists studying the harsh and hostile atmosphere of Venus have, for the first time, detected atomic oxygen on the planet's daytime side.

Because Venus has no magnetic field, solar wind from the sun penetrates deep into its cloudy atmosphere, where it breaks apart molecules into their constituent atoms, including the carbon dioxide that makes up 96% of the atmosphere. Highly ionized, those atoms are then carried by the planet's swift wind currents to the dark side of the planet, where they recombine to form new molecules.

On the night side, oxygen is easily observed in Venus' atmosphere, but on the day side observation is much harder - so hard that a paper publishedin Nature Communications on Tuesday describes how a team of German scientists did it for the first time.

To make their discovery, the scientists went through data gathered by the Stratospheric Observatory for Infrared Astronomy, (SOFIA), a NASA-German joint venture telescope mounted inside a special Boeing 747 jet, with a fine-toothed comb.

The team found the atomic oxygen sandwiched between two layers of the Venus' cloudy atmosphere at an altitude of about 60 miles from the surface. Below, hurricane-force winds whip around the planet in the same direction as it rotates, while above that layer, the winds blow in the opposite direction.

"This detection of atomic oxygen on Venus is direct proof for the action of photochemistry - triggered by solar UV radiation - and for the transport of its products by the winds of Venus' atmosphere," said astrophysicist and study co-author Helmut Wiesemeyer of the Max Planck Institute for Radio Astronomy in Germany.

"On Earth, our life-protecting stratospheric ozone layer represents a well-known example of such photochemistry," Wiesemeyer added.

Officials also found that the oxygen has a cooling effect on the atmosphere when it recombines with other elements, helping to bring down the temperature just a little bit.

While at the surface, Venus is a sweltering 872 degrees Fahrenheit, the air pressure is equivalent to 3,000 feet under the ocean, and the air itself is composed of a caustic, poisonous mix of sulfuric acid and carbon dioxide higher up things begin to change. At the altitude the oxygen was discovered, scientists say the air pressure, temperature, and atmospheric composition are the closest to that seen on Earth of any non-Earth location in the solar system. With a floating base at that altitude, humans could establish a colonythat might feel something like home.

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Fed Chair to Central Bank's Economists: 'Think Outside the Models' With Forecasts

The Federal Reserve previously decided to leave current US interest rates unchanged as the economy appeared to be growing at a strong pace. The move marked a recent first as it saw the central bank leave rates untouched in back-to-back meetings.

Speaking to the Federal Reserve's Board of Governors on Wednesday, Fed Chair Jerome Powell urged the economists not to make predictions about the future of the US economy based on past economic patterns, claiming the US was in essentially new economic territory after the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Regular forecasting also demands a systematic approach and a high degree of intellectual rigor," Powell said, urging that this "has to be combined with flexibility and agility."

"Economic models can do a reasonably good job of capturing the working of the economy over past decades," Powell said. "Of course, even with state-of-the-art models and even in relatively calm times, the economy frequently surprises us."

"But our economy is flexible and dynamic, and subject at times to unpredictable shocks, such as a global financial crisis or a pandemic," he continued. "At those times, forecasters have to think outside the models."

At its most recent meeting last week, the central bank's Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) decided to leave interest rates at the same record-high level they have been at for four months, despite a creeping rise in inflation.

While Powell acknowledged at the time that the Fed's high interest rates were exerting a "downward pressure on economic activity" that had yet to be fully felt, he also noted that "recent indicators suggest that economic activity has been expanding at a strong pace, and well above earlier expectations."

Ever since the Fed began hiking interest rates in response to record-high inflation in early 2022, economists, bankers, and investors alike have been anticipating a recession and a rise in unemployment - phenomena that have yet to manifest themselves, despite being common effects of raising interest rates. Even Powell long doubted the Fed could manage a "soft landing." While the Fed remained optimistic in the short term, its predictions for the year 2024 and 2025 were similarly dim.

However, by the time of its July meeting - the last time the Fed raised interest rates - its prediction of a recession by the end of the year had been removed.

Still, the number of new jobs created each month has continued to decrease and the number of unemployed persons has continued to slowly increase, and investors remain mostly unconvinced by the Fed's rosier predictions as of late, with the infamous "inverted yield curve"continuing to signal that a recession is expected.

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US Fires 'Self-Defense' Strikes in Syria After Repeat Attacks Against American Troops

The US conducted strikes against Syria in late October as part of its response against multiple attacks that had been carried out against American forces and allied troops stationed in Iraq and Syria.

The US carried out military strikes in Syria in response to repeated attacks against US forces stationed in Iraq and Syria, it was announced late Wednesday.

A release issued by the US Department of Defense detailed the strike "was conducted by two US F-15s against a weapons storage facility."

"This precision self-defense strike is a response to a series of attacks against US personnel in Iraq and Syria by [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps]-Quds Force affiliates," Pentagon Chief Lloyd Austin said in a statement. "The President has no higher priority than the safety of US personnel, and he directed today's action to make clear that the United States will defend itself, its personnel, and its interests."

Austin further warned against "any escalation" in hostilities and indicated that the US was "fully prepared to take further necessary measures to protect out people and our facilities." It was also stated US forces would continued to carry out any counter missions against Daesh* militants in Iraq and Syria.

There have been no reports of injuries or fatalities, and it remains unclear whether any individuals were inside the storage facility at the time.

Shortly after Austin's announcment, Lebanese media reported that the US military base at the Conoco oil and gas field in eastern Syria had come under fire from a combination of missiles and drone warfare.

The latest military response by the US comes nearly two weeks after the Defense Department launched strikes against two other buildings in Syria that it claimed was used by the Iran's IRGC and affiliated groups.

The Pentagon earlier underscored that the initial strikes at the end of October were "intended solely to protect and defend US personnel in Iraq and Syria," and that they were "separate and distinct from the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, and do not constitute a shift in our approach to the Israel-Hamas conflict."

Over the last several weeks, the Pentagon disclosed that multiple American soldiers operating in Syria and Iraq had sustained traumatic brain injuries (TBI) as a result of escalating attacks on US bases in the region.

Some 32 TBI cases were said to have taken place at the al-Tanf base in southern Syria and another 13 at the al-Asad base in Iraq.

With regional tensions at an all-time high, the US recently deployed hundreds of US forces to the Middle East, along with two carrier strike groups.

The strikes also come as the Syrian government has repeatedly called for an end of the illegal American presence in the country, a call that has continued to be flouted by the US and prompted Syria to accuse the US of systematically looting its resources. Similar calls from the Iraqi government have also been ignored by the US.

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Historic World War II-Era Hangar Destroyed by Massive Fire in California

The hangar was not only a historical structure but was also used by filmmakers in Hollywood, appearing in TV shows and movies including "Pearl Harbor" and "Star Trek."

A relentless fire tore through a massive blimp hangar late Tuesday in California that dated back to World War II, officials have detailed.

The hangar is located in the city of Tustin, California, which is about 35 miles southeast of Los Angeles at the Naval Air Station Santa Ana - a base established for blimp operations in 1942. With at least two historic hangars at this site, the one that burned is referred to as the North Hangar.

Orange County Fire Authority first responded to the flames after 1:30 a.m. local time, US media reported. The hangar, which is one of the largest wooden structures ever built in the 20th Century, stands at 17 stories high, and is over 1,000 feet long and 300 feet wide.

After fighting the three-alarm fire, officials allowed the building to collapse due to safety concerns and determined it as being the most “operationally sound method.”

For at least 70 firefighters, efforts were made even more difficult by the lack of water at the scene; the crew had to access hydrants from a nearby street.

Authorities said that no lives were at risk during the blaze, and no injuries nor evacuations were reported.

"We expect the fire will continue to burn for several hours, possibly even several days," said OCFA Fire Chief Brian Fennessy, adding that the cause of the fire was under investigation. "It's a sad day for the city of Tustin and all of Orange County. But we are fortunate that no injuries have been reported and we are in a position to extinguish the blaze."

Fennessy also indicated that authorities had used three helicopters to aid in their efforts to extinguish the blaze, to no avail.

“We can’t get close enough to that building without concerns of it collapsing on our firefighters,” the chief said. “Our use of aircraft on a structure like this, that’s extraordinary.”

Recently, officials in Tustin had been in contact with the US Navy in hopes of collaborating to preserve the hangars, which were added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1975. Besides being a historic structure, the hangars were also used in television and film productions including: JAG, The X-Field, Austin Powers, Pearl Harbor and Star Trek.

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1950s Anxiety Pill May Help Doctors Treat Brain Cancers

The most common and aggressive form of brain cancer carries with it a 6.9%, five-year survival rate, with the most average survival time being just 14.6 months.
A psychiatric medication that was used for treating anxiety in the 1950s may help with treating an aggressive and deadly form of brain cancer, new findings have suggested.
Researchers from the South Australia Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI) and Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia, believe the drug trifluoperazine, in combination with standard glioblastoma (GBM) care, could potentially keep patients alive for longer.
Brain cancers, and especially the aggressive and fast-growing GBM, are particularly resistant to cancer treatments. Brain cancers also kill more children and adults under 40 than any other form of cancer.
Scientists believe that because these cancer cells are exposed to cerebrospinal fluid—a liquid that protects the brain—they change and become more resistant to standard cancer treatments like radiation and temozolomide, a drug used to treat brain cancers.
“Glioblastoma kills so many people who are otherwise fit, healthy and young, within months. This is a horrible disease, and the treatments available are just not effective enough despite serious side effects,” says lead study author Cedric Bardy, assistant professor at SAHMRI and Flinders University, in a media release.
“This study helps us understand the limitations of the current chemotherapies and provides new hope for repurposing a class of drugs that could be added to the standard of care. We are working hard now to try this on patients in a clinical trial.”
But researchers found that the anti-anxiety drug trifluoperazine - presently used to treat mental health conditions such as schizophrenia - could make GBM cells sensitive to cancer treatments, despite them having been exposed to cerebrospinal fluid. The drug would not harm healthy brain cells, either, researchers found.
The study, which focused on tumor cells from 25 GBM patients, was published in the journal Science Advances.

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Hillary Clinton: Joe Biden Still Democrats’ Best Hope to Beat Trump in 2024

The former presidential candidate said a Donald Trump victory next November “would be the end of our country as we know it” in comments on US television.
The politician who suffered a surprising loss to former US President Donald Trump in 2016 remarked on Wednesday that she now knows what it takes to beat him next year.
Former presidential candidate and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said she’s still confident in Democratic President Joe Biden’s ability to defeat Trump in a likely rematch during the looming 2024 election.
“He’s done a really good job as president,” she said of Biden during a televised interview, without specifically noting any of his accomplishments.

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"If you go back and look at comparable points, [former US President] Barack Obama was behind at this point in his reelection, my husband [former US President Bill Clinton] was behind… until the candidates are actually chosen, people are always saying maybe there's somebody better out there… That's natural."

Clinton expressed confidence that voters would again choose Biden when faced with a binary choice between him and Trump.

"Look at the alternative. Look at what we would face as a country… I think that the chaos that comes with him [Trump] is just not attractive to a majority of people anymore." Clinton noted Trump's statements suggesting he would use the Justice Department to exact revenge on political enemies if reelected.

She also referred to recent polling that showed a legal conviction of the former president would convince some of his backers to reconsider their support. Trump is currently facing 91 felony charges across four criminal cases. He has denied any wrongdoing and has called the charges part of a "political witch hunt."

Clinton further interpreted Democrats' state-level victories on Tuesday as a sign Democrats would ultimately have the edge in the 2024 election.

"Women are standing up for themselves and they're voting for their rights and we have enough good men who are coming along with us," said Clinton, referring to liberals' electoral win in Ohio that enshrined the right to abortion into the state's constitution.

The ballot measure in the Buckeye State passed by over 10% during a night that also saw Democrats notch wins in Virginia and Kentucky, and put in a surprisingly strong performance in deep-red Mississippi.

Recent polling shows a generic Democratic Party candidate would easily defeat Trump in the 2024 presidential election. But Biden has struggled in recent polls when pitted against Trump directly, with voters overwhelmingly citing Biden's age as a major concern.

Like Biden, Clinton is typically viewed as hailing from the moderate wing of the Democratic Party. Next year's election could represent a referendum on the president's centrist brand of politics, but polling increasingly shows that young people, a key constituency for the party, often skew to the left on many issues. The dynamic has been demonstrated in recent weeks amidst Israel's ongoing military campaign in Gaza, which many younger Americans view as an issue of racial justice.

Polling shows most younger Americans oppose Israel while Americans as a whole support a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. Biden has so far resisted the demand, although his administration has recently proposed a "humanitarian pause" in the fighting while still advocating for additional lethal aid to Israel.

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Mexican Congress Renews Scrutiny of Alleged Alien Mummies

A group of scientists speaking before the country's legislature allege recently-presented extraterrestrial remains serve as "real" evidence of "non-human beings."

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From E.T. to Alf, alien beings play a prominent role in popular culture and the public imagination. Now, a group of researchers presenting before Mexico's Congress are claiming physical evidence of such creatures has finally been found.

The scientists presented their evidence to a second session of the country's Chamber of Deputies in Mexico City on Tuesday, claiming that alleged mummified remains first revealed in September are the genuine article.

"They're real," Roger Zuniga, an anthropologist from San Luis Gonzaga National University in Peru, told reporters. "There was absolutely no human intervention in the physical and biological formation of these beings."

Zuniga touted a written statement endorsed by 11 researchers from the university who agreed with his position. He added that scientists had been carefully examining five samples over four years that they believed to be similar to the specimens presented before the congressional body.

However, researchers stopped short of concluding the alleged remains were proven evidence of alien lifeforms. That claim was made two months ago by Jaime Maussan, a television personality and self-taught ufologist previously known for drawing attention to similar specimens.

The journalist insisted at the time the samples were remains of "non-human beings that are not part of our terrestrial evolution."

Maussan was disgraced in the past after making similar claims in 2017. Then, he revealed similar "remains" that were shown to be "recently manufactured dolls, which have been covered with a mixture of paper and synthetic glue to simulate the presence of skin." The revelation provoked widespread skepticism online about Maussan's September presentation.

Maussan has insisted his new evidence is the real deal. Dr. Daniel Mendoza, also from San Luis Gonzaga National University, shared photos and X-ray images of the samples. He proceeded to claim the short, three-fingered specimens lacked lungs and ribs, demonstrating a "new species" of "non-human beings."

At least one Mexican legislator was convinced by the findings: Sergio Gutierrez, a member of the country's ruling Morena party, claimed the specimens represented genuine alien life.

"None of the scientists say [the researchers' findings] prove that they are extraterrestrials, but I go further," he said, insisting Mexico should publicly release all information government officials have about UFOs.

In 2020, US officials released long-withheld videos presumed to represent evidence of unidentified flying objects. Amateur researchers were thrilled by the material, but conclusive proof of alien life remains elusive.

The Central Intelligence Agency has previously confessed that US officials lied about evidence of supposed alien spacecraft in the 1950s and 1960s, admitting the alleged sightings were instead observations of secret US spy plane technology.

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Israeli Archaeologists Discover Possible Evidence of Apostle Peter's Ancient Home

A wall was found underneath the site of a Byzantine church that may have formed the dwelling of one of Christianity's most consequential figures.

For Catholic and Orthodox Christians, Saint Peter occupies a place in the upper echelon of important religious figures, perhaps second only to Jesus Christ. Now, archeologists in Israel claim to have found evidenceof the home of the man considered by many to have been the first Pope.

The discovery was made on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee at the el-Araj excavation site, which researchers believe may correspond to the Biblical village of Bethsaida. There, evidence has been found of a Byzantine-era basilica built around a wall dating back to the second or third century.

Byzantine churches were often built around sacred relics that were carefully preserved by the early Christians. Archeologists say this wall is too new to correspond to dwellings from Biblical times. But buried beneath the wall is another, dating back to the first century.

It's this wall researchers believe may have helped form the home of the legendary Biblical figure.

The history of the site demonstrates the rich and complex history of the territory many religious traditions view as a Holy Land. The Byzantines were among the first to establish a presence in the area, but they were followed centuries later by European Crusaders.

Researchers think those Crusaders may have built a sugar factory on the site, unaware of its potential sacred significance. However, the factory may have also been built by Muslim inhabitants.

At any rate, the memory of the location as the potential site of Bethsaida was lost to time. That is, until now, as archeologists try to piece together evidence for what would represent one of the most significant archeological discoveries ever made.

The modern-day country of Israel and its surrounding territories are home to dozens of ancient sites with religious significance, a testament to the area's history as a home for Christians, Muslims, and Jews, among others.

Recently, researchers were dismayed when an Israeli aerial strike hit a church in Gaza believed to be the third-oldest in existence. Preservationists have urged restraint as Israel's military campaign against Hamas militants in the besieged enclave remains ongoing.

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Knives Out in Third GOP Primary Debate as Candidates Attack Each Other, Defend Israel

Republican candidates turned up the heat with strong rhetoric focused on drawing distinctions in a debate that had a particular focus on foreign policy.

Republican candidates for their party's presidential nomination gathered in Miami on Wednesday evening in their third debate of the primary season.

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Once again the party's leading candidate---former President Donald Trump---whom polls have shown with an advantage of as much as 50 points, was absent, leaving the remaining candidates to draw distinctions with the former president.

Those who were present on stage included Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, tech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy, former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley, former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, and South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott. The GOP candidates primarily drew distinctions between themselves however, in a debate featuring numerous personal attacks, especially among the highest polling candidates on stage.

Throwing Elbows

Candidates made efforts to draw distinctions between each other in a debate that saw significant interaction between the nominees.

Vivek Ramaswamy set the tone early on by attacking the "corrupt media establishment," as well as the network hosting the debate, a perennial conservative punching bag.

"Was that real or was that Hillary Clinton made up disinformation?" said Ramaswamy, referring to the so-called "Russiagate" investigation against former President Trump that failed to find evidence of alleged collusion between him and Russia in the 2016 election.

Ramaswamy suggested Tucker Carlson, Joe Rogan, and Elon Musk would've served as better hosts of the debate, drawing cheers from the Republican audience.

Ramaswamy kept up the combative tone throughout the evening, especially in his interactions with Nikki Haley who's currently surging in the polls. Ramaswamy occasionally interrupted Haley during her answers and at one point referenced the former ambassador's daughter, a remark that caused Haley to refer to Ramaswamy as "scum" in perhaps the most heated exchange of the evening.

Meanwhile, Chris Christie continued to differentiate himself by touting his alleged bipartisan appeal as a former governor of a traditionally Democratic state and Tim Scott brought a religious tone to the proceedings. DeSantis reserved much of his ire for pro-Palestine student protesters, having recently banned Students for Justice in Palestine groups from Florida's college campuses.

Israel Front and Center

Israel played heavily into the first hour of the debate amidst the country's month-long military incursion into the besieged Gaza Strip.

Matthew Brooks, CEO of the group Republican Jewish Coalition, asked several questions relating to US-Israeli relations and a reported increase in antisemitism on US college campuses. DeSantis urged Israeli President Benjamin Netanyahu to "finish the job" in their war on the militant group Hamas, while Haley likewise repeated her infamous "finish them" line.

Haley continued to distinguish herself as perhaps the biggest foreign policy hawk in the contest by bringing up the subject of Iran early on in the evening. "There would be no Hamas without Iran," said Haley, referring to the country's alleged funding of armed groups in opposition to Israel. The former UN Ambassador mentioned economic cooperation between Iran, Russia, and China, calling them an "unholy alliance" throughout the evening.

Ramaswamy distinguished himself by suggesting a slight skepticism towards deep involvement in Israel's conflict, saying "Israel has the right and the responsibility to defend themselves." The discussion prompted another dispute between Ramaswamy and Haley, with the businessman calling her a "multimillionaire… military contractor" and "Dick Cheney in three-inch heels."

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“I wear heels, they’re not for a fashion statement, they’re for ammunition,” Haley retorted. Ramaswamy spoke of avoiding the “mistakes of the neocon politicians of the past” in another comment that seemed directly aimed at the former ambassador.

Red Scare

A debate over the social media platform TikTok emerged late in the second half of the debate, with candidates denouncing the platform and claiming China is using the platform to promote harmful and anti-Israel views.

Most of the candidates claimed they would ban the TikTok app in the United States. Ramaswamy distinguished himself by rejecting the idea and claimed Haley is hypocritical given that her daughter uses the platform---the comment thus prompted Haley’s “scum” remark.

“It’s a full spectrum approach to be able to fend China off,” said DeSantis, advocating combatting China’s “role in our culture”.

The growing unpopularity of US funding of Ukrainian military action against Russia was evident throughout the evening, with Ramaswamy taking credit for being the first candidate to oppose continued funding.

Discussion of Venezuela rounded out the foreign policy discussion. DeSantis proclaimed “we should never rely on Venezuela for oil” and promised to “turn the screws” on the “corrupt” Maduro government. He promised he would fully enforce all sanctions on the country.

Conscience of a Conservative

Candidates expressed relatively conventional conservative views on social and economic issues throughout the second half of the debate, with a few minor exceptions.

Nikki Haley---the only woman on the debate stage---attempted to distinguish herself from the other GOP candidates with a more moderate tone on abortion, drawing a lengthy applause from the crowd for her response to the controversial issue.

“This is a personal issue for every woman and every man,” said Haley. “I am unapologetically pro-life,” she claimed, while adding, “I don't judge anyone for being pro-choice and I don't want them to judge me for being pro-life.”

The comments seemed aimed at addressing opposition in the United States to the Supreme Court’s 2022 overturning of Roe v. Wade, which has proven unpopular. Abortion rights activists have prevailed every time the issue has been put to voters in various states since the court’s decision, including in a ballot measure in Ohio on Tuesday.

Scott was the only candidate who advocated for a 15-week federal ban on abortion.

Haley advocated for making contraception more accessible and encouraging adoption in a multi-pronged approach to the issue, opposing attempts to imprison women for receiving an abortion. “We don’t need to divide America over this issue anymore,” she concluded.

Vivek advocated “sexual responsibility for men” in response to a question about the issue, while Chris Christie expanded on the issue by advocating for a more compassionate approach to treating drug addiction and addressing other issues. “Pro life’s not just in the womb… it’s for the whole life,” said the former New Jersey governor.

The candidates’ closing comments reflected widespread dissatisfaction among Americans with the state of the country, with more than three out of four voters claiming the country is “headed in the wrong direction” in recent opinion polling.

Tim Scott spoke of a “cultural and spiritual” crisis in the country, while Ramaswamy spoke of the US being in a “war” with itself which he promised to remedy by shutting down “the deep state.”

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Haley meanwhile turned to issues of foreign policy, claiming “the world is on fire,” and promising to “defeat terrorism and socialism” while offering a new generation of leadership. DeSantis proclaimed “we must reverse our country’s decline” and promised to “lead this country’s revival.” To do that, DeSantis will need to first defeat Donald Trump for the Republican presidential nomination, a tall order given the yawning gap between the former president and all other candidates in all recent opinion polls.
DeSantis and the other candidates on stage may be counting on a criminal conviction for the former president to help clear their way to the nomination, an unprecedented development that could create a crisis of its own. Whatever the outcome of the multiple criminal charges faced by Trump, the controversial figure continues to inexorably influence US politics even when not present on stage.

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US, South Korea Seek to Pressure Russia Against Military Transfers to DPRK – Blinken

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin discussed on Thursday how to intensify pressure on Russia not to transfer military technology to North Korea.
"Today, Minister Park and I spoke about further actions that our countries can take with partners to intensify pressure on Moscow not to transfer military technology to the DPRK, in violation of multiple UN Security Council resolutions," Blinken said at a press briefing in Seoul.
Blinken added that the US was "looking very hard" at Russian support for North Korea, and South Korea joining the UN Security Council next year as a non-permanent member would be "another opportunity to focus on these concerns."
The US also expects China to use its influence to restrain North Korea from "irresponsible and dangerous behavior," the secretary stated.
Russia fully complies with international restrictions on military-technical cooperation with Pyongyang, but also sees opportunities to develop this area in line with the rules, President Vladimir Putin said in September when receiving North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Russia.

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State Dept. Says Russia’s Withdrawal From International Treaties Threatens Engagement

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) – A State Department official warned on Thursday that it would be difficult to engage with Russia if it continues to "undermine the international legal architecture," following Moscow's withdrawal from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe.
"If Russia continues on this path, to continue to try and withdraw, disregard, and undermine our

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international legal architecture, it's going to be extraordinarily harmful to have any ability to continue engaging with them," Mallory Stewart, assistant secretary of state for arms control, verification, and compliance, said at a press briefing.

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Kirby After Airstrike in Syria Says US Does Not Seek Conflict With Iran

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) - The United States does not want an escalation or a conflict with Iran, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Thursday, after the Pentagon struck a facility in eastern Syria allegedly used by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and affiliated groups.

"We don't want to escalate, we're not looking for a conflict with Iran, we want to be able to continue to go after ISIS [the Islamic State terrorist group, banned in Russia] in Iraq and Syria," Kirby told CNN.

The IRGC and affiliated groups have a choice to make, according to Kirby.

"If they want to continue to attack our troops in Iraq and Syria, then they're going to have to face the consequences," Kirby said.

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Pentagon Still Conducting Damage Assessment After Airstrike in Syria - Kirby

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) – The Pentagon is still conducting damage assessment following its latest airstrike in Syria, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Thursday.

"The Pentagon is still doing what we call a battle damage assessment, they're taking a look at the video imagery and other intelligence collection measures to see exactly what happened and if somebody was hit, who they are," Kirby told CNN when asked if the White House believes there were Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) personnel at the site at the warehouse where the US carried out a strike in Syria.

Kirby expressed confidence that people there were not civilians.

"What we believe is, if there were individuals on the site, they were not innocent civilians, they would have either been members of the IRGC or perhaps some members of these militia groups that they're supporting," he said.

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US Hopes China Commits to Stemming Fentanyl Flow During Biden-Xi Summit - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) – The United States is hoping that China commits to stemming the incoming flow of fentanyl when US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping meet next week for the first time in a year, NBC News reported on Thursday, citing two sources.

In return, China expects the US to commit to dissociate itself from Taiwan's push for independence.

Regarding the issue of fentanyl, one possibility for improving cooperation is forming a joint working group, the report said.

In terms of military-to-military communications, the countries are expected to resume the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement, under which they normally discuss safety in Asia-Pacific waters, including the South China Sea, the report added.

It is also possible that US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin will hold talks with his Chinese counterpart. The Pentagon has requested for Austin's meeting with a senior Chinese official at the ASEAN summit next week but has yet to receive a response, according to the report.

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Republican Debate Participants Express Support for Israel's Actions Against Hamas

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) - Five Republican Party Candidates on Wednesday, during the third primary debate, voiced their unwavering support for Israel.

"I'm sick of hearing the media. I'm sick of hearing other people blame Israel just for defending itself. We will stand with Israel," Florida Governor Ron DeSantis said during the debate.

Former Governor of South Carolina Nikki Haley emphasized the importance of supporting Israel and taking action against Palestinian movement Hamas, saying that "the last thing we need to do is to tell Israel what to do," as it is America that needs Israel, rather than the other way around.

"The founding vision of Israel was based on the idea that they don't want to depend on anybody else's sympathy or direction in defending themselves. So what I would tell Bibi [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu] is that Israel has the right and the responsibility to defend itself," Entrepreneur and Presidential Candidate Vivek Ramaswamy said during the debate.

Former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie said the United States is ready to offer support to help Israel, regardless of the circumstances.

South Carolina Senator Tim Scott said his belief that Netanyahu holds both the responsibility and the right "to wipe Hamas off of the map," vowing support and solidarity.

The third Republican presidential primary debate of the 2024 campaign cycle, hosted by NBC News in Miami, Florida, showcased five candidates who met the Republican National Committee's criteria. However, the leading candidate for the 2024 Republican Party, former President Donald Trump, was not in attendance.

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Trump Says Anticipates 15Mln Migrants Will Come Through Southern Border Under Biden

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said Wednesday during a campaign rally in Florida that he expects a total of 15 million migrants will have come through the US southern border under the Biden administration.

"I think the number is gonna be more than 15 million people, which is larger than New York State," Trump told the rally.

Trump said US immigration enforcement is not able to record the significant number of illegal migrants that were not caught crossing over the US southern border.

Trump said he thinks 1.5 million migrants come through the US-Mexico border every two months.

The Biden administration witnessed its third consecutive record of yearly illegal crossings by migrants on the US southern border in fiscal year 2023.

According to the data of US Customs and Border Protection, some 2.4 million illegal migrants were encountered on the US southern border this fiscal year, which is measured from October 2022 to September 2023.

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GOP Candidate Vivek Ramaswamy Calls Zelenskyy 'Comedian in Cargo Pants'

November 9 (Sputnik) - Republican Presidential hopeful Vivek Ramaswamy lambasted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the early moments of the GOP debate on Wednesday, calling him a "comedian in cargo pants," in an apparent attempt to set the energy for the debate.

"[He is] a comedian in cargo pants," said Ramaswamy, referring to Zelenskyy.

The presidential candidate added that he was "absolutely unpersuaded" by Zelenskyy's recent pleas for more financial assistance when asked by moderators if he supported additional funding as requested by President Joe Biden.

"Ukraine is not a paragon of democracy," he said. "This is a country that has banned 11 opposition parties. It has consolidated all media into one state TV media arm. That's not democratic. It has threatened not to hold elections this year unless the U.S. forks over more money."

Ramaswamy has been very vocal about his unwillingness to provide more aid for Ukraine if elected president; at the first Republican debate in August, he was the only candidate who said he would not support providing additional funding for Ukraine.

Five Republican Party Candidates took the stage Wednesday night in Miami, Florida, in a

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debate sanctioned by the Republican National Committee.

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Kennedy Proposes Having Debate With Trump, Biden Next Summer - Statement

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) - Independent presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. on Wednesday night proposed to have a debate together with President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump on one night next summer.

"You know, it may seem like a pipe dream, but I'd like to invoke the possibility of a substantive, long-form debate that isn't about exchanging one-liners, scoring points, and insulting the opponent," Kennedy said in a press release. "President Biden, President Trump – let's prepare for that kind of debate next summer."

Kennedy mentioned that the Republican debates are political theater consisting of grandstanding, yelling, and shouting over each other.

A Biden campaign official told NBC News that their team was mostly watching Trump's rally speech in Florida on Wednesday night instead of the Republican presidential debate, which the former US president skipped out on for a third time this year.

The Biden campaign official reportedly said they are bored with the Republican debate.

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Biden Meets Senators Returning From Israel, Arab Nations to Discuss Gaza War - White House

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden has met with a bipartisan group of senators who had recently returned from a trip to Israel and neighboring Arab countries to discuss developments in the Gaza conflict, the White House said in a statement.

"The President met with Senators who recently traveled to Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt about their trip and the situation in Israel and Gaza," the statement said on Wednesday.

The meeting included Senators Lindsey Graham, Ben Cardin, Richard Blumenthal, Cory Booker, Katie Britt, Susan Collins, Chris Coons, Jack Reed, and Dan Sullivan, the release noted.

The Biden administration recently requested Congress approve $14.3 billion in emergency funding to provide Israel with additional security assistance amid its conflict with Palestinian movement Hamas in Gaza.

The Republican-majority House of Representatives already passed a bill to provide Israel with $14.3 billion, but it is expected to hit a dead end in the Senate.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said senators will work on their own version of a bill that will include funding for Israel and Ukraine as well.

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Hundreds in New York Rally Calling for Gaza Ceasefire

NEW YORK, November 9 (Sputnik) - Hundreds of demonstrators in New York took to the streets, carrying Palestinian flags and passionately calling for a ceasefire in Gaza.

Furthermore, the protesters were chanting slogans "Free Palestine," "Cease Fire Now," and "Stop Genocide," as the activists made their way through the city on Wednesday, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

Also, protesters could be seen carrying signs saying "Netanyahu & Biden War Criminals" and "Israel Is A Terrorist State That Is Openly Committing Genocide."

The protest passed by the United Nations headquarters building and then turned toward downtown Manhattan along 42nd Street. The police accompanied the protesters however, no fights or arrests have been reported.

Over 10,000 have died in Gaza as a result of the Israel-Hamas conflict, according to the United Nations. The conflict was sparked on October 7 when Hamas launched a high profile terrorist attack in Israel that left 1,400 dead.

Israel launched retaliatory strikes and ordered a complete blockade of the Gaza Strip, home to more than 2 million people, cutting off supplies of water, food, and fuel. The blockade was later eased to allow trucks with humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip.

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Pro-Israel Democrat Plans Measure to Condemn US Palestinian Expulsion Bill - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) - Pro-Israel Congressman Greg Landsman is preparing a resolution condemning Republican Representative Ryan Zinke for pushing legislation to expel Palestinians from the United States, Axios reported.

Zinke introduced a bill that, if passed, would mandate the Department of Homeland Security to impose a pause on issuing visas and granting refugee status or asylum to individuals holding a Palestinian Authority passport.

Furthermore, it would entail the revocation of visas, refugee status, and asylum granted to Palestinians after September of the current year.

However, three Muslim members in the Congress, Representatives Andre Carson, Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib, have expressed strong opposition to the bill, characterizing it as "fascism and pure bigotry."

Landsman was one of 22 Democrats who voted with Republicans to censure Tlaib over her criticism of Israel.

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China's Use of AI to Operate Military Satellites 'Real Game Changer' - US Space Tech Chief

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) - China's development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to run space platforms and satellites is going to be "a real game changer" in terms of operating military capabilities in space, US Space Force Chief Technology and Innovation Officer Lisa Costas said.

"This is going to be a real game changer in terms of implementing artificial intelligence in operational space," Costas said in a podcast on Wednesday.

China has spent $14.7 billion on AI this year and that figure is projected to almost double to $26 billion by 2026, Costas said.

"The People's Liberation Army (PLA) argues the need for AI to support and protect China's space assets ...In April they allowed AI to take over one of the cameras on a satellite ... It looked at an area between Japan and China where there were (US) aircraft carriers and between India and China where there had been border skirmishes," Costas said.

China has in recent years put more than 700 satellites into space, by April this year of which more than 160 were intelligence, reconnaissance and surveillance satellites, Costas added.

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West Suggesting to Not Ensure Accountability for Nord Stream Attack 'Striking'-Nebenzia

*UNITED NATIONS, November 9 (Sputnik) - Russia finds it shocking that some Western states in the UN Security Council want to cancel out the language about holding those responsible for the Nord Stream sabotage accountable, the Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said on Wednesday.

“What is even more striking some of the Western colleagues suggested removing the language or the necessity to ensure accountability for the Nord Stream act of terrorism and to hold those responsible accountable,” Nebenzia told the journalists in front of the UN Security Council chamber.

There are also attempts to remove the language suggesting Denmark, Sweden and Germany to cooperate with Russia on the investigation, he added.

Earlier today, the Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov said that Moscow has still received no coherent answer regarding the investigation of the blasts at the Nord Stream pipelines from European countries over a year after the incident.

The Nord Stream pipelines, built to deliver gas under the Baltic Sea from Russia to the European Union, were hit by explosions in September 2022. All three affected pipes were rendered inoperable.

Denmark, Germany and Norway have left Russia out of their investigations into the attacks,

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prompting Moscow to launch its own investigation. Russia designated the attacks as acts of international terrorism. No official results of the investigations have yet been announced.

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US Navy Orders $90Mln Tech Support Contract for Trident II Life Extension - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) - Systems Planning and Analysis has received a more than $90 million US Navy contract to provide technical support services for the Trident II D5 submarine-launched Strategic Weapons System's Life Extension 2 program, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"Systems Planning and Analysis of Alexandria, Virginia, is awarded a $90,802,247... contract for Trident II Strategic Weapons System technical support services supporting the Common Missile Compartment program, D5 Life Extension 2 program, Strategic Systems Program (SSP) Facilities Management, Activation and Assessments, and Missile Systems program," the release said on Wednesday.

The contract also benefits a foreign military sale to the United Kingdom (UK), the Defense Department said.

Work on the program is expected to take five and a half years and is scheduled to be completed by April 14, 2029, the release added.

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US Forces at Biden's Direction Struck Facility in Eastern Syria Used by IRGC - Austin

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The United States undertook strikes at the direction of President Joe Biden targeting a weapons storage facility in eastern Syria and stands prepared to take further action to protects its people and facilities in the country, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin announced in a statement on Wednesday.

"Today, at President Biden’s direction, US military forces conducted a self-defense strike on a facility in eastern Syria used by Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and affiliated groups," Austin said. "This strike was conducted by two US F-15s against a weapons storage facility. The United States is fully prepared to take further necessary measures to protect our people and our facilities."

Austin said the strike came in response to a series of attacks against US personnel in Iraq and Syria by IRGC-Quds Force affiliates. Austin urged against any escalation of the situation and said the United States will continue its operations against the Islamic State terror group (outlawed in Russia).

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US Lawmaker Calls Insignificant Demolition of 9,5K Buildings Out of 260K in Gaza

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) - US congressman Cory Mills called the mainstream media's alleged attempt to portray the destruction of 9,500 buildings in Gaza by the Israeli military as the demolition of the entire enclave “false narrative,” as it represents “only” 3% of the entire area.

“Out of 260,000 structures, about 9,500 have any structural damage, have been actually targeted as a result of IDF utilizing it to go after weapon caches or to focus on terror tunnels, or to look at areas where key Hamas leadership is, and I just want to paint that perspective. That's only about 3% of the entire area, and when you see mainstream media, they try to paint it as if it is an entire demolition of all of Gaza and it's just a false narrative,” Mills said during a House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing on Wednesday.

Earlier this week, the Gaza Health Ministry reported that more than 10,000 civilians have been killed in Gaza, the home of 2.3 million Palestinians, as a result of Israeli bombardments.

On October 7, Palestinian group Hamas launched a surprise attack against Israel from Gaza, killing and abducting people in neighboring Israeli communities. Israel retaliated with missile strikes and a complete blockade of the Gaza Strip, home to more than 2 million. On October 27, Israel launched a large-scale ground incursion into Gaza with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas and rescuing the hostages.

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Some 700 US Citizens, Permanent Residents Waiting to Depart Gaza - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) - About 700 US citizens, legal permanent residents and their family members are awaiting to depart Gaza through the Rafah crossing amid Israel’s ongoing military operation, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Barbara Leaf said in a congressional testimony.

“There are about 700 US citizens, legal permanent residents, and family members in Gaza requesting assistance to depart and we are making every effort to enable their departure,” Leaf told the US House Foreign Affairs Committee on Wednesday.

Leaf added that since October 7, a total of more than 14,000 US citizens and their family members have departed Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, with 1,500 departures directly facilitated by the US government.

Since November 1, more than 400 US citizens, legal permanent residents and their family members have managed to exit Gaza via the Rafah crossing, Leaf said.

Earlier on Wednesday, the Rafah crossing was closed for security reasons of an unclear

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nature, according to the State Department.

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Minnesota Court Rejects Bid to Block Trump From Ballot Over January 6 Involvement - Filing

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) - The Minnesota Supreme Court blocked a bid to remove former US President and 2024 candidate Donald Trump from primary election ballots in the state due to his connection to the January 6 US Capitol riot, according to a court order.

"With respect to the only ripe issue before us at this time, we conclude that… there is no 'error' to correct here as to the presidential primary election if former President Trump's name is included on the presidential primary ballot," the court order, filed Wednesday, said.

The lawsuit attempted to challenge Trump's ability to appear on the primary ballot and the 2024 general election ballot, based on the argument that his involvement in the January 6, 2021 US Capitol riot disqualifies him from holding public office. A similar case is underway in the state of Colorado.

However, the petitioners could still attempt to remove Trump from the general election ballot in the future, the order said.

Trump campaign spokesman Steven Cheung published a statement calling the order "validation" of the campaign's argument that such challenges to Trump's ballot access are unconstitutional. The challenges are strategic attempts to interfere in the 2024 election, the statement said.

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UPDATE - US Defense Official Confirms Houthi Forces Shot Down US Drone Off Yemen Coast

(Updates with changes in attribution, changes throughout)

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) - Houthi rebels recently shot down a US MQ-9 Reaper drone off the coast of Yemen, a US defense official told Sputnik.

"We can confirm that a US military MQ-9 remotely-piloted aircraft was shot down off the coast of Yemen by Houthi forces," the official said on Wednesday.

Media reported that the drone was operating in international airspace over international waters off the coast of Yemen.

US Central Command (CENTCOM) is reportedly assessing the incident.

One MQ-9 Reaper drone costs an estimated $32 million and has a range of about 1,150 miles and an operational altitude of about 50,000 ft.

The US drone can operate for about 42 hours to conduct surveillance or provide support to US forces on the ground.

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NASA Confident of Thursday's Scheduled Space Station Cargo Mission Launch - Officials

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) - NASA officials said thay are confident the 29th SpaceX resupply mission to the International Space Station (ISS) will launch on schedule on Thursday night.

"I forecast a 95% go," Launch Weather Officer Melody Lovin said during a press conference at Kennedy Space Center on Wednesday. ""So far I see ... excellent weather and they're ready to roll."

NASA and SpaceX are targeting 8:28 p.m. ESTon Thursday for take off, the officials said.

Two valves were replaced during preflight preparations and a pre-launch review found no problems at all, NASA officials added.

SpaceX's unmanned Dragon spacecraft will deliver 65,00 pounds of cargo, including new science investigations to study atmospheric gravity waves and test high data rate laser communications from the space station to Earth, NASA said in a press release.

The spacecraft is expected to spend about a month attached to the orbital outpost before it returns to Earth with research and return cargo, splashing down off the coast of Florida, the release said.

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Trump Says Would Consider Tucker Carlson as 2024 US Presidential Election Running Mate

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said in an interview that he would consider picking media personality Tucker Carlson as his running mate in the 2024 US presidential election.

"I like Tucker a lot, I guess I would… because he's got great common sense," Trump said on the Clay Travis and Buck Sexton Show on Wednesday, when asked if he'd consider asking Carlson to run alongside him as vice president.

A video of the interview has since been deleted from YouTube, but remains available on the show's website.

Trump currently leads the pack of Republican presidential hopefuls in primary polling, but again opted to skip the debate scheduled for Wednesday evening. Former US Vice President and Trump running mate Mike Pence dropped his own 2024 bid earlier this year.

"It's possible. Some of them I like a lot," Trump said, when asked if he would consider some of the candidates on the debate stage as running mates.

Trump said that he respects some of the other Republican candidates but has no respect for others.

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During the first Republican primary debate, Trump conducted an interview with Carlson instead of attending the event.

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No Guarantee Hamas Would Release All Hostages if Ceasefire Declared - US Senior Official

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) – There is no guarantee that Hamas would immediately release all hostages in case a ceasefire is declared, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Near East Affairs of the State Department Barbara Leaf said in a congressional testimony.

"No, congressman, there's no guarantee," Leaf told the US House Foreign Affairs Committee on Wednesday when asked whether Hamas would release all hostages "tomorrow" after a ceasefire is declared.

On Tuesday, Axios reported that US President Joe Biden during a phone call with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu urged him to agree to a three-day ceasefire to facilitate the potential release of some hostages held by Hamas in Gaza, but the latter expressed doubts about Hamas' intentions and willingness to engage in negotiations concerning the hostages.

At the same time, the Biden administration, including the President himself, have continued to oppose calls for a ceasefire citing an unwillingness to give Hamas time to regroup and recover from Israel's massive strikes.

On October 7, Hamas launched a surprise large-scale rocket attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip and breached the border, killing and abducting people in neighboring Israeli communities. Israel launched retaliatory strikes and ordered a complete blockade of the Gaza Strip, home to more than 2 million people, cutting off supplies of water, food, and fuel.

On October 27, Israel launched a large-scale ground incursion inside the Gaza Strip with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages.

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US Welcomes German Ban on Hamas Activity, Urges Other States to Take Action - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) - The United States welcomes the decision of Germany to ban all Hamas activities, and wants other states to take similar actions, the State Department said in a statement.

"The United States welcomes Germany's decision to ban activities supporting Hamas, which builds on the EU's designation to fully restrict and criminalize support of the terrorist group," the statement said on Wednesday. "We urge other governments around the world to take action under their own authorities to hold Hamas accountable as it seeks to sustain its terrorist activities."

German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser last week announced Germany will ban the activities of

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Hamas in the country in the wake of the October 7 attack by the militant group that left 1,400 dead in Israel.

The state of Israel vowed to wipe out Hamas as it launched a retaliatory military campaign. The escalation of the conflict has resulted in the deaths of over 10,000 in the Gaza Strip, according to the UN.

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US Defense Official Says 'Huge Escalation' if Russia Gives Hezbollah Air Defenses

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) - It would be a huge escalation to instability in the Middle East if the Russian Wagner Group provides the Lebanese militia group Hezbollah with air defenses, US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for the Middle East Dana Stroul said during a congressional hearing.

According to media reports, the Wagner Group may deliver the surface-to-air SA-22 air defense system to Lebanon from Syria. The system was originally provided by Russia to the Syrian government, the reports said.

"I consider that a huge escalation," Stroul said on Wednesday regarding the possible deployment of the air defense system.

The official noted that the United States has been warning for some time now about the implications for regional security and instability of deepening Russian-Iranian military cooperation across the board.

Whatever Russia might be contemplating providing to Hezbollah is also considered a risk to regional stability, Stroul said.

On Friday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the private military company Wagner Group de facto does not exist so any media reports about alleged actions by the group are groundless.

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Pentagon Confirms US MQ-9 Drone Shot Down in Int'l Airspace Off Yemen Coast - Official

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department has confirmed that its MQ-9 Reaper drone has been shot down in the international airspace off the Yemen coast, the US media reported on Wednesday, citing a senior US defense official.

"We can confirm that a US military MQ-9 remotely-piloted aircraft was shot down while in international airspace over international waters off the coast of Yemen. US Central Command officials are assessing the incident," the official told FoxNews on Wednesday.

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

UPDATE - China 'Gravely Concerned' by Casualties From Ukraine Missile Attack in Donetsk - UN Envoy

(Adds details in headline, lede, para 2)
UNITED NATIONS, November 9 (Sputnik) - China is deeply concerned by Ukraine's recent missile attack in the Donetsk region that resulted in civilian casualties and damage, Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Geng Shuang said at a Security Council meeting.
The Ukrainian shelling of Donetsk on Tuesday injured 55 civilians in the city, the acting health minister of the Donetsk People's Republic, Dmitry Gartsev, said.
"The missile attack on the Donetsk region yesterday, resulted in the damage of municipal and subverting infrastructure, and dozens of civilian casualties. China is gravely concerned about this," Geng Shuang said on Wednesday.
Furthermore, Geng Shuang said that the safeguarding of civilians represents a fundamental principle in international humanitarian law and underscored that civilian infrastructure should never be permitted to transform into military targets, whether concerning Ukraine or other matters.
"China opposes all violence and attacks against the civilians," Geng Shuang added.
Since Russia's military operation began in February 2022, Western countries have been supplying military aid to Ukraine. This assistance has progressed from artillery munitions and training in 2022 to more substantial weapons such as tank, a move that the Kremlin has consistently cautioned against.

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Washington Court Charges Armed Man Arrested Near Capitol With Multiple Felonies - Filings

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) - Prosecutors are charging an armed man arrested near the US Capitol with multiple felony firearms charges, according to court documents filed in the Superior Court for the District of Columbia.
Ahmir Merrell faces charges, including unlawful possession of a firearm, carrying a pistol without a license and felon in possession of a firearm after police arrested him with a gun near the US Capitol earlier this week, the court documents said on Wednesday.
On Tuesday, police arrested Merrell in Lower Senate Park, which is located near the US Capitol and the Senate office buildings. A concerned citizen reported Merrell to the authorities, fearing that he was acting strangely and possibly had a gun, an officer's affidavit said.
The officer observed a pistol in Merrell's hands and ordered him to get away from the firearm - an order with which he did not comply - the affidavit said. Merrell told officers that they would have to kill him to get the gun, the affidavit added.
Officers eventually tasered Merrell after he refused to comply with commands, the affidavit said.

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Merrell told officers that they "should have killed" him, the affidavit said.
The firearm was an "AR-style" pistol with a 30-round magazine and no stock, the affidavit said.
Merrell had a prior felony conviction for cruelty to children, the affidavit said.
A preliminary hearing in Merrell's new case is set for Friday morning, according to court filings.

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China 'Gravely Concerned' by Casualties From Missile Attack in Donetsk - UN Envoy

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"The missile attack on the Donetsk region yesterday, resulted in the damage of municipal and subverting infrastructure, and dozens of civilian casualties. China is gravely concerned about this," Geng Shuang said on Wednesday.
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Since Russia's military operation began in February 2022, Western countries have been supplying military aid to Ukraine. This assistance has progressed from artillery munitions and training in 2022 to more substantial weapons such as tank, a move that the Kremlin has consistently cautioned against.

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Oil Prices Crash, Sending Global Crude Benchmark Brent Below $80 On Demand Concerns

NEW YORK, November 9 (Sputnik) - Oil prices crashed with global crude benchmark Brent settling below the key $80 per barrel mark the first time since July, as demand worries gripped the market despite supply cuts and assurances of producers that all was well on the consumption front.
The selloff came after weak economic data out of top oil importer China, the loss of any war premium risk from the Israel-Hamas conflict and a stronger dollar - the currency that oil trades on.
Also weighing on crude prices was the absence of weekly US inventory numbers from the Energy Information Administration, or EIA. The agency delayed distribution of its Weekly Petroleum Status Report due to a reworking of its data gathering methodology.
The delay raised questions on how well demand could have fared for the week ended Nov 3,

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especially after the American Petroleum Institute, or API, suggested in its own data that US crude inventories surged almost 12 million barrels last week, versus trade expectations for a draw of 300,000 barrels.

New York-traded West Texas Intermediate, or WTI, crude for December delivery, settled at $75.33 per barrel Wednesday, down $2.04, or 2.6% on the day, adding to Tuesday's 4.3% drop. It was oil's lowest settlement in a day since July 11.

The US crude benchmark has fallen nearly 7% since the start of November, adding to October's torrid 11% loss.

UK-origin Brent crude's most-active January contract settled at $79.54, down $2.07, or 2.5%. Brent's session low was $79.22, its first below the $80 mark since July 20.

For Brent, this month's drop of about 6% comes on top of October's 11% plunge.

"Trade data from China on Tuesday further soured the mood and contributed to yesterday's sharp falls," said Craig Erlam, analyst at online trading platform OANDA. "The focus is clearly shifting from undersupply to weak demand and central banks insisting that rates must remain high could further exacerbate that."

"And frequent reminders that Saudi Arabia and Russia will maintain cuts until the end of the year aren't doing anything to offset this as it was never assumed they would change their minds. Especially now prices are falling."

Data released on Tuesday showed that China's exports shrank more than expected in October, while the country's trade surplus was at its worst level in 17 months.

Imports unexpectedly grew during the month, highlighting some improvement in local demand as Beijing rolled out more stimulus measures, but the prolonged weakness in exports could stymie growth in the country and dent oil demand.

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Saudi-Israel Normalization Talks Paused, Expected to Resume After Gaza War - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) - The US-led Saudi-Israel normalization negotiations are on pause given the ongoing crisis in the Middle East, but they are expected to resume after the crisis ends, US Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Near East Affairs Barbara Leaf said during a congressional hearing.

"[Saudi-Israel normalizations talks] They're on pause at this point given the crisis in the region... We were deep into discussions on a number of fronts," Leaf said on Wednesday. "Ironically, we were just on the cusp of beginning of the discussions about what we call the Palestinian component to that normalization agreement and it's something that I would expect to be able to resume on the other side of this crisis."

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US Bases in Iraq, Syria Attacked 41 Times Since October 17 - Defense Official

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) - The number of attacks on US bases in Iraq and Syria since October 17 has grown to 41, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for the Middle East Dana Stroul said in a congressional testimony.

"Since October 17, US bases and facilities in Iraq and Syria have been attacked 41 times," Stroul told the US House Foreign Affairs Committee on Wednesday. "We will not hesitate to take further necessary measures to protect our people in response to a pattern of Iranian and Iran-backed attacks against US personnel and facilities in Iraq and Syria."

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State Dept. Says Palestinian Input Vital in Post-War Gaza Plan, Want to Start Talks Soon

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) - The United States believes Palestinians have an important role in determining governance plans for Gaza after the Israel-Hamas conflict and there's an urgency to begin talks on this matter soon, US Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Near East Affairs Barbara Leaf said during a congressional hearing.

"We do believe that ultimately, Palestinian voices and aspirations have to be at the centerpiece of post conflict governance and security and Gaza," Leaf said on Wednesday. "We are looking at all of these questions right now. We are, we would like to begin those discussions sooner rather than later."

Leaf said US consultations with key partners over the past several weeks has revealed a great urgency to begin negotiations after the conflict that may include Palestinian statehood, negotiating between the parties along the 1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps, and something that will give the Palestinian people self-governance.

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Russia Condemns Ukraine Shelling of Donetsk as Violation of International Law - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, November 9 (Sputnik) - Moscow considers the Ukrainian shelling of Donetsk as a clear breach of international humanitarian law and a deliberate attempt to harm the civilian population in Donbas, Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said at a Security Council meeting.

"We convene this emergency meeting in relation to the latest glaring violation by the Kiev regime of the norms of international humanitarian law and further evidence of its intentional actions to destroy the civilian population in Donbas, namely the mass shelling by the Ukrainian Armed Forces of densely populated areas of Donetsk on the seventh of November," Nebenzia said on Wednesday.

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Furthermore, Nebenzia said that these acts constituted deliberate and cynical crimes without a statute of limitations. He emphasized that the senior political leadership of the Kiev regime and those executing their criminal orders would bear responsibility for these actions.

"And also the Western countries that flood Ukraine with their weapons who, as we well know, also agree on the target of those strikes, calling such tragedies... collateral damage," Nebenzia added.

Since Russia's military operation began in February 2022, Western countries have been supplying military aid to Ukraine. This assistance has progressed from artillery munitions and training in 2022 to more substantial weapons such as tank, a move that the Kremlin has consistently cautioned against.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) –

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* NATO will continue supporting Ukraine despite Slovakia blocking the provision of a military assistance package to Kiev, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said on Wednesday.

* The US State Department said that it was important to approve supplemental funding to Ukraine in order to “stay in the game” and prevent Chinese contractors like Huawei from being involved in the country’s reconstruction.

* The Ukrainian military lost up to 235 soldiers as killed or injured in the Donetsk direction in the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

* The government of Slovakia blocked the proposal of their predecessors to send military aid to Ukraine worth 40.3 million euros ($42.9 million), according to documents considered by the cabinet.

* The United States has already burned through nearly 96% of funds allocated for Ukraine since the beginning of the conflict and more than 90% of security assistance replenishment funds, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said.

ISRAELI-PALESTINIANS WAR

* At least 19 people were killed in an airstrike on a residential building in the Jabalia refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip, the enclave's Interior Ministry said on Wednesday.

* Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov on Wednesday discussed with Egyptian Ambassador to Russia Nazih el Nagari the safe evacuation of Russians from the Gaza Strip amid the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

* Palestinian movement Hamas is not preventing foreign nationals from leaving the Gaza Strip, but the lists of these foreigners are being compiled by Israel and the United States, the movement's spokesperson, Basem Naim, told Sputnik.

* As many as 92 employees of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) have been killed in the Gaza Strip since October 7, Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini said.

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GLOBAL ENERGY

* Global oil prices are decreasing by about 2% on Wednesday, with Brent crude decreasing to under $80 per barrel for the first time since July 21, according to the latest trading data.

* The United States intends to kill Russia's Arctic LNG 2 project through sanctions coordinated with the Group of Seven (G7) partners and others, US Assistant Secretary of State for Energy Resources Geoffrey Pyatt said.

* Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed a decree allowing Gazprom International Limited to receive 100% of shares of Gazprom Zarubezhneftegaz JSC.

BIDEN-XI MEETING

* The United States and China are working on plans to hold a constructive meeting between US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping, with the two sides agreeing on importance to maintain leader level contacts, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday.

* Biden and Xi Jinping will announce the resumption of the military-to-military dialogue between the countries on the sidelines of the APEC summit next week in San Francisco, Axios reported citing people in the know.

* The White House has not confirmed the potential meeting between Biden and Xi Jinping during next week's APEC Summit in San Francisco, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said.

WESTERN SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

* The European union may propose a new package of sanctions, which will include a ban on Russian diamonds, to the foreign ministers of the member states on November 13, foreign policy chief Josep Borrell has said.

* The European Union and the United States are steadily working towards the seizure of Russian assets, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, adding that this is illegal and will be disputed.

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RPT: PREVIEW - Republican Candidates for US President Hold 3rd Debate, Trump Again Set to Skip Event

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) - Five Republican presidential hopefuls will take the stage on Wednesday for the third primary debate of the 2024 US election cycle, although former US President Donald Trump is again set to skip the event amid his lead in the polls.

The handful of remaining candidates — Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, businessman Vivek Ramaswamy, former US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley, US Sen. Tim Scott and former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie — will attend the debate in Miami.

Thresholds required to make the debate stage increased from the previous debates, cutting out candidates with poor fundraising and poll performances.

However, Trump declined to attend the debate despite leading in primary polls. Trump maintains 55.8% support, DeSantis 13.8%, Haley 8.8%, Ramaswamy 4.9%, Christie 3% and

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Scott 2%, according to FiveThirtyEight primary poll averages released Tuesday.
Trump leads incumbent US President Joe Biden in five out of six so-called "battleground" states, a Siena College Research Institute poll released earlier this week said.
Trump has dismissed the previous debates as wastes of time due to purportedly poor viewership.
Trump faces lawsuits in the states of Colorado and Minnesota that seek to prevent him from appearing on election ballots due to his alleged role in the January 6, 2021 US Capitol riot. Trump is also involved in several other criminal and civil court cases.

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Ukraine Has Shelled Donetsk Republic Over 25,000 Times Since February 2022 - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, November 8 (Sputnik) - Ukrainian forces have shelled the Donetsk people's republic more than 25,000 times since February 2022, and over 145,000 shells have landed in Donetsk, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Wednesday.
"Since February 2022, on the territory of the DPR alone, artillery and rocket strikes by the Ukrainian armed forces have been carried out more than 25,000 times. On the territory of Donetsk more than 145,000 shells have dropped," Nebenzia told a UN Security Council meeting.

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US OKs Wind-Down Transactions With Certain Russian Entities Through January 31 – Treasury

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) – The US Treasury Department on Wednesday issued a general license authorizing wind-down transactions with several Russian entities that were sanctioned earlier in the month through January 31.
"All transactions prohibited by Executive Order 14024 that are ordinarily incident and necessary to the wind down of any transaction involving one or more of the following blocked entities are authorized through 12:01 a.m. eastern standard time, January 31, 2024, provided that any payment to a Blocked Entity is made into a blocked account in accordance with the Russian Harmful Foreign Activities Sanctions Regulations," the text of the license read.
The list of the entities includes Sistema Public Joint Stock Financial Corporation, Public Joint Stock Company Saint Petersburg Exchange, Limited Liability Company Arctic LNG 2, and any entity in which one or more of the above persons own, directly or indirectly, individually or in the aggregate, a 50% or greater interest, the license said.
Earlier this month, the United States sanctioned dozens of Russian entities, including the Arctic LNG 2, which is the second-largest liquefied natural gas production project and is owned by the Russian energy company Novatek.

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Earlier on Wednesday, US Assistant Secretary of State for Energy Resources Geoffrey Pyatt said that the United States intends to "kill" Russia's Arctic LNG 2 project through sanctions coordinated with the Group of Seven partners and others.

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US 'Absolutely' Believes Ukraine Can Get Back Its Territory – White House

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) – The United States "absolutely" believes that Ukraine can get back its territory, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said

"Absolutely, we believe they can win back their territory," Kirby told reporters.

He expressed confidence that the Ukrainian side was underestimated since the beginning of the conflict and can reach its goals.

"They are capable, they are strong, they are brave, they have got good commander control, and there is no doubt in our mind that they can continue to succeed," he said.

Kirby declined to describe Kiev's military operation but pointed out that the entire front remains active. He also stressed the necessity for the US to provide security assistance so that Ukraine could act timely.

On November 1, Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Valerii Zaluzhnyi said in an interview with the Economist that the conflict with Russia has reached a "stalemate," adding that, according to NATO's "textbooks" and the plans for the counter-offensive, "four months should have been enough time for us to have reached Crimea, to have fought in Crimea, to return from Crimea and to have gone back in and out again," and that there will likely be "no deep and beautiful breakthrough."

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Three Arrested for Running US Brothels Linked to Politicians, Officers - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - Three individuals have been arrested for their involvement in operating upscale brothels in greater Boston and Virginia whose clients included politicians and military officers, the US Attorney's Office for the District of Massachusetts announced in a statement on Wednesday.

"Three individuals have been arrested in connection with operating sophisticated high-end brothels in greater Boston and eastern Virginia," the statement said. "Commercial sex buyers allegedly included elected officials, high tech and pharmaceutical executives, doctors, military officers, government contractors that possess security clearances, professors, attorneys, scientists and accountants, among others."

The defendants, Han Lee, James Lee and Junmyung Lee, are alleged to have operated an interstate prostitution network with several brothels located in Cambridge and Watertown,

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Massachusetts, but also in Fairfax and Tysons, Virginia, starting from at least July 2020, the statement said.

The defendants are also alleged to have arranged accommodations and airline travel for women, while advertising their services through websites that falsely posed as professional photography studios, regularly updating listings with explicit content and profiles of women, the statement said.

In an attempt to hide the prostitution proceeds, the defendants are alleged to have deposited cash into personal bank accounts, using peer-to-peer transfers and purchasing small money orders to evade reporting requirements, later using them for brothel expenses in Massachusetts and Virginia, the statement added.

The inquiry concerning the engagement of sex buyers remains active and ongoing, according to the statement.

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US House Oversight Panel Subpoenas Hunter Biden, Others to Appear for Deposition

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The US House Oversight Committee said in a release on Wednesday that Chairman James Comer issued subpoenas for Hunter Biden, James Biden, Rob Walker and others to appear for interviews as part of the investigation into the Biden family's business dealings.

"House Committee on Oversight and Accountability Chairman James Comer (R-Ky.) today issued subpoenas to President Joe Biden’s son, Hunter Biden, brother, James Biden, and Biden family associate, Rob Walker, to appear for depositions," the release said.

Comer also requested additional members of the Biden family and their associates appear for transcribed interviews, including Joe Biden's daughter-in-law Hallie Biden and sister-in-law Sara Biden, the release said.

Comer plans to send additional subpoenas and transcribed interview requests later this week, the release added.

In September, Comer issued subpoenas for Hunter Biden and his brother James Biden seeking to obtain their personal and business records.

The Oversight Committee has disclosed since January that the Bidens and their associates had established more than 20 shell companies, amassing more than $24 million from sources in China and other countries.

Earlier this week, Comer said that Joe Biden received a personal check for $40,000 in allegedly laundered money from China involving Hunter Biden’s companies.

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US Not Ready to Confirm Biden-Xi Meeting at APEC Summit - White House

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The White House has not confirmed the potential meeting between President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping during next week's APEC Summit in San Francisco, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Wednesday during a press briefing.

"No," Kirby said when asked if he could confirm Japanese media's reporting that November 15 is the date of the Biden-Xi meeting and provide any details.

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Pro-Palestine Protesters Disrupt US House Panel Hearing on College Free Speech - Broadcast

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - Pro-Palestine protesters repeatedly disrupted a US House Judiciary Committee hearing on free speech on college campuses, per a broadcast of the hearing on Wednesday.

The protesters interrupted the House panel hearing, which included discussion on a rise in anti-Semitism on US college campuses, by shouting and holding up pro-Palestine signs.

"Pro-Palestine does not equal anti-Semitism," one sign said, with another reading "Congress Silences Palestinians."

The protesters were taken out of the hearing room by law enforcement. US law prohibits obstructing or attempting to obstruct official proceedings — a criminal charge which prosecutors have brought against people who entered the US Capitol during protests on January 6, 2021.

The demonstrations come amid a conflict between Israel and Palestinian Hamas militants, sparked by a surprise attack on Israel by Hamas last month. The Biden administration and numerous US lawmakers have since pledged to support Israel, including through military aid.

The conflict and related protests have also resulted in accusations of anti-Semitism against people who express pro-Palestine opinions. On Tuesday, the US House of Representatives censured Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib for her pro-Palestine statements on the conflict.

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Senior US Official to Visit Paris, Cairo for Humanitarian Talks on Gaza - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - Senior US diplomat Uzra Zeya will travel to France and Egypt over the coming days for talks related to humanitarian efforts to aid civilians in the Gaza Strip, the State Department said on Wednesday.

"Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights Uzra Zeya will travel to Paris, France; Cairo, Egypt; and Madrid, Spain from November 8-17, 2023," the State Department said in a press release.

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While in Paris on November 9, Zeya will represent the United States at a French government-hosted international humanitarian conference to review the humanitarian response in Gaza and rally greater international support to meet urgent needs, the release said.

In Egypt, Zeya will join US Special Envoy for Middle East Humanitarian Issues David Satterfield and others to meet with Egyptian and United Nations officials to discuss efforts to sustain the flow of assistance into Gaza, the release said.

Earlier this week, the Gaza Health Ministry reported that more than 10,000 civilians have been killed in Gaza, the home of 2.3 million Palestinians, as a result of Israeli bombardments.

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Rafah Crossing Remains Closed for Civilian Passage for Security Reasons - US State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt has been closed for the passage of civilians and humanitarian aid due to security reasons, the US State Department deputy principal spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Wednesday.

"[G]iven a security circumstance the Rafah border crossing remains closed today, but this is something that we are continuing to work with, in partnership with the government of Egypt and the government of Israel towards safe passage for more US citizens, eligible family members and lawful permanent residents to be able to exit [Gaza]," Patel said during a press briefing.

The crossing is expected to reopen and return to normal operations "at regular intervals" after the security situation is resolved, Patel said.

The Rafah checkpoint is the only road to and from Gaza for the civilian population there, as well as the main artery for the supply of humanitarian aid to the Palestinian enclave, which remains under constant Israeli shelling following the Hamas attacks on October 7.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), about 650 trucks with humanitarian aid have entered Gaza since October 21 through the Rafah crossing.

From: Pavel Zakovorotnyy - p.zakovorotnyy@sputniknews.com

Subject:

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US Has Gone Through 96% of Funds Allocated for Ukraine - White House

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The United States has already burned through nearly 96% of funds allocated for Ukraine since the beginning of the conflict and more than 90% of security assistance replenishment funds, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Wednesday.

"We've gone through about 96% of what's left and greater than 90% of of security assistance

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replenishment funds," said Kirby.

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Kirby Says Cannot Confirm Biden, Netanyahu Discussed 3-Day Humanitarian Pause in Gaza

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The White House cannot confirm reports on alleged discussions between President Joe Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu regarding a potential 3-day humanitarian pause in Gaza, Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Wednesday.

"No, I can't confirm those reports. I can confirm that in almost every conversation that we're having with the Israelis right now we're talking about the benefit of humanitarian pauses and again you saw the G7 foreign ministers also unite around that idea," Kirby said during a press briefing.

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US Justice Dept. Starts Probe Into Police Abuse in Mississippi - Asst. Attorney General

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The US Justice Department is launching a federal probe into widespread reports of civil rights abuses by the police force of Lexington, Mississippi, Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Kristen Clarke told a press conference on Wednesday.

"The allegations were credible and provided justification for launching the investigation that we are announcing today. The allegations are serious," Clarke said. "A thorough investigation of the Lexington police department is necessary."

Lexington has a population of 1,600 residents, 80% of whom are black and its police force has less than ten officers.

Clarke said the allegations include ones of excessive force, discrimination and violating rights to free speech.

"We will follow the facts and the law wherever they lead," Clarke said.

The assistant attorney general acknowledged that the Lexington police force is one of the smallest that the Justice Department has investigated.

The probe will seek to establish whether there has been a pattern of conduct by its police officers that violated constitutional rights, Clarke added.

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Zelenskyy Doesn't Want Free Elections in Ukraine, Knows His Support is Collapsing - Expert

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is resisting US pressure to hold new elections because he doubts he can win them and recognizes that his domestic support is collapsing, University of Rhode Island Professor of International Politics Nicolai Petro told Sputnik.

In a recorded address published on Telegram on Monday, Zelenskyy expressed his belief that it was not the right time for any elections in the country.

"It is... not in his interests to do so, since he is far from assured of victory," Petro said. "The latest Ukrainian survey by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology shows that trust in the president has fallen by 15% in the last year-and-a-half."

Petro also said it is hard to imagine a fair process with eleven political parties banned including the largest opposition party.

"Besides banning the political opposition, Zelenskyy also has at his disposal the 'United News UARAZOM' telethon, where all national TV channels must broadcast a single version of the news," Petro said. "This has made serious political debate impossible, and may explain why 70% of Ukrainians now turn to alternative sources for information," Petro said.

Given how much they benefit from the current state of affairs, neither the Rada or Zelenskyy would wish to submit themselves and their decisions to the will of the people, Petro added.

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FedEx Plane Carrying Pandas Leaves US to Return Bears to China - Sputnik Correspondent

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - A FedEx aircraft carrying a family of giant pandas has taken off from the Dulles International Airport near Washington DC to return the bears to their homeland, China, a Sputnik correspondent reported on Wednesday from the airport's grounds.

A FedEx official said the pandas would be traveling "first class" and would be able to play with their toys and eat bamboo while on the plane.

Before the departure, media representatives could witness how the white and black animals were loaded onto the aircraft.

Besides multiple media representatives, Chinese diplomats and representatives of the Smithsonian’s National Zoo and Conservative Biology Institute came to see the pandas off.

The event drew a lot of media attention. Some reporters attending the sendoff even dressed up as panda bears for their live broadcasts, while the organizers wore vests that said "FedEx Panda Team."

The pandas will have enough bamboo, apples and pears with them on the plane.

They are due to touch down in their homeland on Thursday morning. Some media outlets have even provided links to the flight tracker to follow the plane’s route.

On Wednesday morning, the three giant pandas — Mei Xiang, Tian Tian and Xiao Qi Ji — left what is now their former home at the Smithsonian’s National Zoo in Washington and were transferred by three FedEx trucks to the airport.

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Residents with children as well as guests from other states and towns came hours before the scheduled departure to say goodbye to the beloved pandas.

Some were holding panda toys, some were crying.

The Smithsonian's National Zoo in Washington and China's Wildlife and Conservation Society had a three-year agreement to keep the three panda bears in the US capital through 2023. The agreement is set to expire in December.

Chinese Embassy in Washington spokesperson Liu Pengyu told Sputnik in October that the China Wildlife Conservation Association and the National Zoo in Washington had announced that the three giant pandas — Mei Xiang, Tian Tian and Xiao Qi Ji — would return to China at the end of the year as previously scheduled.

Liu also said that US and Chinese technical cooperation units are communicating on future collaboration on giant panda research and conservation.

The giant panda is an unofficial symbol of China. In July 2021, the Chinese authorities announced that giant pandas are no longer an endangered species in the country, as their population has grown to more than 1,800 individuals in the wild over the past decade.

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Biden, Xi to Announced Resumption of Military Communications During APEC Summit – Reports

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping will announce the resumption of the military-to-military dialogue between the countries on the sidelines of the APEC summit next week in San Francisco, Axios reported on Wednesday citing people in the know.

The military dialogue between Washington and Beijing was effectively halted following the visit of then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan in 2022.

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is a trade and economic forum of 21 member economies in the Asia-Pacific region. This year's summit will take place from November 11-17.

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Canada’s Bloc Quebecois Calls for Urgent Ceasefire in Gaza, Deployment of Peace Force

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The leader of Canada’s Bloc Quebecois Yves Francois Blanchet called for an urgent and immediate ceasefire as well as the creation of an international force for the maintenance of peace in Gaza.

Blanchet had previously and on several instances supported Israel and its right to self-defense in light of Hamas’ attacks on its territory, as long as it was in accordance with the respect of international law.

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However, without retracting his condemnation of Hamas and its attacks on Israel, Blanchet in an apparent change of tone called the Israeli government the “Netanyahu Regime” and rebuked it for acting indifferently over the loss of Palestinian lives.

“US Secretary of State [Antony] Blinken repeatedly requested Mr. Netanyahu to exercise restraint and good judgement. This was only met with refusals. Today we even observe, contrary to what was said by everyone that it wouldn’t happen, that Mr. Netanyahu has permanent occupation fantasies over the territory of Gaza. Therefore, the Bloc Quebecois aligns itself, at the request of many, behind a ceasefire, pure and simple and urgent,” Blanchet said during a press conference from Ottawa.

The ceasefire must involve all parties and should be accompanied by a call to calm in the West Bank, Blanchet said, where the most “inelegant” elements of those supporting the colonization by Israel, are happily targeting Palestinian families.

However, Blanchet said there was a high probability for a ceasefire failure, broken by either parties unless an international peace force was deployed in the Gaza Strip. The faction leader invited Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Minister of Foreign Affairs Melanie Joly to think about said proposal.

“On the ground, it will be the best way to ensure the protection of civilians in Gaza, the neutralization of Hamas, of protecting both Israeli civilians and favoring the liberation of hostages,” Blanchet continued.

When questioned on his change of stance, Blanchet said he had initially thought the international community would be able to reason with Israel and ensure it acted with restraint. “I might’ve had a naive hope," he added.

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Guterres Says 'Something Clearly Wrong' as Civilian Casualties Mount in Gaza

UNITED NATIONS, November 8 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday that "something is clearly wrong" in the Israeli-Palestinian war given that civilian casualties are increasing as a result of military operations.

"But when we look at the number of civilians that were killed with the military operations, there is something that is clearly wrong," Guterres said.

The UN chief said there are tremendous challenges of managing United Nations operations in the field, with 92 colleagues having already lost their lives.

"This is, I must tell you, very difficult," Guterres added.

The Gaza Health Ministry has said that more than 10,000 Palestinians have been killed during Israel's bombardments and invasion of the Gaza Strip, the home of 2.3 million people, while supplies of water, food, medicines, fuel and electricity are cut off. Some 1,300 Israelis, soldiers and civilians, have been killed in the attacks by Hamas since October 7.

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US Sources Fifth of Fuel for Nuclear Fleet from Russia – State Department

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) – The US sources about a fifth of the fuel for operating its nuclear fleet from Russia, a State Department official said Wednesday.

"About 20% of the fuel that operates our nuclear fleet here in the United States still comes from Russia," Geoffrey Pyatt, assistant secretary of energy resources at the Department of State, said at a Senate foreign relations committee hearing.

Pyatt noted that US President Biden had included about $2.2 billion in the latest supplemental funding request to help rebuild domestic nuclear enrichment capacity. He added that the administration was also supportive of a ban on the import of Russian nuclear fuel.

Senator Risch noted that the committee was working on the ban, while conceding that it was impossible to implement with America's current dependence on Russian fuel.

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Mayorkas Says Not Aware of Hamas Members Entering US Via Southern Border

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - US Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said on Wednesday that he is not aware members of the Palestinian group Hamas are crossing into the United States via the southern border with Mexico.

"I am not aware of a member of Hamas being encountered at our southern border," Mayorkas said during a US Senate Appropriation Committee hearing.

Mayorkas made the comment in response to a question about how many Hamas fighters have attempted or successfully entered the United States since President Joe Biden assumed office.

Mayorkas tried to reassure the senators that law enforcement is screening all individuals whom they consider suspicious.

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Texas Authorities Issue 'Shelter in Place' Warning Due to Chemical Plant Explosion

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) – Local authorities are responding to an industrial fire after a large explosion at a chemical plant in Shepherd in the US state of Texas and advise all residents in the area to shelter in place, Livingston Police Department said on Wednesday.

"Due to a chemical plant fire in the Shepherd, Texas area all Livingston area residents and businesses are being advised to SHELTER IN PLACE until further notice. It is further advised to turn your HVAC (Air Conditioning) systems off," the police department said in a Facebook (banned in Russia) post.

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San Jacinto County Sheriff's Office also posted on its Facebook page that evacuations from the affected are currently in progress while many witnesses are posting videos of a huge column of smoke, several thousand feet high, coming from the explosion site.

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Guterres Says Talk of Peacekeeping Force for Israeli-Palestinian Conflict 'Premature'

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Wednesday said that any discussion of a UN peacekeeping force for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is premature at this stage.

"I think it's premature to have any discussion of the sort," Guterres said in response to a question regarding a UN peacekeeping force sent to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during a Reuters event.

Furthermore, Guterres said the UN was engaged in intense negotiations with Israel, the United States, and Egypt to ensure the provision of effective humanitarian aid to Gaza, highlighting that until that point, "it has been too little too late."

On October 7, Hamas launched a surprise large-scale rocket attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip and breached the border, killing and abducting people in neighbouring Israeli communities.

Israel launched retaliatory strikes and ordered a complete blockade of the Gaza Strip, home to more than 2 million people, cutting off supplies of water, food, and fuel. The blockade was later eased to allow trucks with humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip. The escalation of the conflict has resulted in thousands of people killed and injured on both sides.

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US Says Important to Keep Ukraine Aid to Stop China Involvement in Ukraine Reconstruction

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) – The US State Department said on Wednesday that it was important to approve supplemental funding to Ukraine in order to "stay in the game" and prevent Chinese contractors like Huawei from being involved in the country's reconstruction.

"It's so important to have the supplemental so that we remain in the game and can set the conditions that make it impossible for opaque, illegitimate contractors like the Chinese to enter," said James O'Brien, assistant secretary of European and Eurasian Affairs at the Department of State, at a Senate foreign relations committee hearing about the necessity of supplemental funding for Ukraine.

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US Intends to 'Kill' Russia's Arctic LNG 2 Project - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The United States intends to kill Russia's Arctic LNG 2 project through sanctions coordinated with the Group of Seven (G7) partners and others, US Assistant Secretary of State for Energy Resources Geoffrey Pyatt said on Wednesday.

"Our objective is to kill that project, and we are doing that through our sanctions, working with our partners in the Group of Seven and beyond," Pyatt said during a US Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing.

Earlier this month, the United States sanctioned the Arctic LNG 2, which is the second-largest liquified natural gas production project and is owned by the Russian energy company Novatek.

However, Japanese Economy Minister Yasutoshi Nishimura said on Tuesday that the US sanctions on the project could impact business in Japan and that Tokyo would work with the G7 to maintain stable energy supplies.

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US Will Reduce Budgetary Support for Ukraine as Country's Economy Recovers - USAID

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The United States will reduce direct budgetary support for the Ukrainian government as Ukraine's economy recovers from its conflict with Russia, US Agency for International Development (USAID) Assistant Administrator for Europe and Eurasia Erin McKee said on Wednesday.

"Correct," McKee said during a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing, when asked if US budgetary support to Ukraine will reduce as its economy recovers.

The US has run out of direct budgetary support for Ukraine due to a lack of appropriations by the US Congress, McKee said earlier in the hearing.

Ukraine will need to use emergency measures, such as printing currency or withholding salaries, without further budgetary support, McKee added.

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US Sen. Cardin Says Congress 'Less and Less Likely' to Pass Aid Bill by November 17

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The chances of the US Congress passing a supplemental aid request for Ukraine before the November 17 government funding deadline are becoming less and less likely, US Sen. Ben Cardin said on Wednesday.

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"We're now looking at November 17, and it's becoming less and less likely we'll complete the supplemental by that date," Cardin said during a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing.
The US Congress must pass measures to fund the federal government before November 17 or face a government shutdown.
Last month, the Biden administration sent a $106 billion supplemental aid request to provide assistance to Ukraine, Israel and other initiatives.

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USAID Warns No Funding Left for Direct Budget Support in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The US Agency for International Development (USAID) warned on Wednesday that there is no funding left for direct budget support to Ukraine, making further US appropriations critical to avoid Ukraine's government using emergency measures to keep its economy afloat.
"At this time, there is no funding left for direct budget support. Without further appropriations, the government of Ukraine would need to use emergency measures, such as printing money or not paying critical salaries, which could lead to hyperinflation and severely damage the war effort," USAID Assistant Administrator for Europe and Eurasia Erin McKee said.
McKee made the comment during a US Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing about the necessity of supplemental funding for Ukraine.

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US Companies Exploring Future 'Energy Opportunities' in Ukraine - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - US energy companies are exploring future commercial opportunities in Ukraine as part of efforts to drive the country's economic recovery, Assistant US Secretary of State for Energy Resources Geoffrey Pyatt said on Wednesday.
Ukraine's economic future depends on private investment and developing the energy sector for industrial recovery, Pyatt said during a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing.
"American energy companies like Halliburton, GE and EQT have been active partners in this effort, providing vital equipment to Ukraine and actively exploring future commercial opportunities," Pyatt said.
Russia is targeting Ukraine's energy sector as part of its conflict strategy, Pyatt said.
Ukraine may experience a difficult winter due their current energy situation, Pyatt added.

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US Condemns Police Violence Against Protesters in Bangladesh - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The United States condemns police violence against workers in Bangladesh protesting to raise the minimum wage, the US State Department said in a press release on Wednesday.

"The United States condemns recent violence against workers in Bangladesh protesting over the minimum wage, as well as the criminalization of legitimate worker and trade union activities," the release said.

The State Department called on the government of Bangladesh to protect workers' right to peacefully protest and to investigate allegations of false criminal charges against workers and labor leaders.

The States Department also encouraged using a tripartite process to ensure a reasonable minimum wage in Bangladesh.

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Trudeau to Attend APEC Summit in San Francisco – Office

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) – Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau will attend the APEC summit in San Francisco next week, his office said on Wednesday.

APEC is a trade and economic forum of 21 member economies in the Asia-Pacific region. This year's summit will take place from November 11-17.

"The Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, today announced that he will travel to San Francisco, United States of America, from November 15 to 17, 2023, and participate in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders' Meeting," his office said in a statement.

During the visit, Trudeau is set to advance cooperation between APEC members in creating more jobs, growing competitive economies, and fighting climate change, the statement said.

The prime minister will also showcase "Canadian leadership" in food production and supply chain innovation, the statement added.

The prime minister will advocate for trade and investment and address opportunities for the digital economy, sustainable growth, as well as food and energy security.

Trudeau will reaffirm the country's commitment to open economic cooperation and removal of trade obstacles to the benefit of people on both sides of the Pacific, according to the statement.

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