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11/14/23 Tuesday

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Trumpholm Syndrome - Cartoon

Newly elected Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Mike Johnson (R-LA), announced his endorsement of former US President Donald Trump's 2024 presidential bid.
The announcement came shortly before US media unearthed Facebook posts by Johnson which criticized then-candidate Trump in 2015, saying that he "lacks the character and the moral center we desperately need again in the White House."
When asked what changed in the nearly eight years since, Johnson said that Trump's performance changed his mind.
"During his 2016 campaign, President Trump quickly won me and millions of my fellow Republicans over," stated Johnson.
Former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) was one of Trump's staunchest supporters and even received his endorsement when he was elected to the post in January. But he later angered Trump by saying he might not be the "strongest" candidate for the GOP nomination and compromising with Democrats on some issues.
Trump currently leads all of his primary opponents by wide margins.
Johnson will likely have to perform a similar tight-rope dance not to anger the likely Republican nomination for President. He, like his predecessor, will have to balance the desires of the powerful House Freedom Caucus which is largely allied with Trump, the more mainstream members of the Republican party and Trump all while trying to keep the government open during seemingly endless funding debates.
It really appears that Johnson had no choice but to endorse the most popular politician among Republicans.

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Thousands Rally In Washington DC, Supporting Israel, Demanding 'No Ceasefire'

Tens of thousands of demonstrators gathered in DC to voice support for Israel and demand that no ceasefire be called in its war with Hamas. Speakers at the protest praised Israeli President Benjamin Netanyahu's actions in Gaza and US President Joe Biden's support of the campaign. Dubbed the "March for Israel" the event was organized by the Jewish Federations for North America, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, and other Jewish groups. They described the event as standing in "solidarity with the Israeli people while demanding the immediate release of the remaining hostages and to condemn the rise in antisemitism."

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The event was also in response to protests nationwide that have called for a ceasefire in Gaza and condemning the indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas. On November 4, a protest in support of a ceasefire gathered between 100,000 and 300,000 people in Washington. More than 3,700 demonstration in solidarity with Palestinians took place between October 7 and 27.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY), Speaker of the House of Representatives Rep. Mike Johnson (R-LA), House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY), Senator Joni Ernst (R-IA) and Rep. Ritchie Torres (D-NY) spoke at the event, which also featured leaders of Jewish organizations, celebrities and Christian televangelist John Hagee, who founded Christians United for Israel.

Hagee's invitation drew criticism from some Jewish groups because he claimed during a 1999 sermon that "God sent Adolf Hitler to help Jews reach the promised land." The evangelical Christian would eventually apologize for the comment nearly a decade later. In 2006, he said Hurricane Katrina, which killed 2,000 people, was God's punishment for a gay pride parade.

After he was added to the speaker's list, Amy Spitalnick, the CEO of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs tweeted the organization's opposition. "We can build broad coalitions against antisemitism and in support of the Israeli people without platforming bigots like Pastor Hagee — who promotes an apocalyptic, antisemitic worldview rooted in hate against LGBTQ, Muslim, and other communities," the tweet read.

Hagee told the crowd that "Israel is not just a state… Israel is the apple of God's eye," and said the conflict is the greatest threat Israel has faced "since it returned 75 years ago."

American political commentator Van Jones called for the crowd to "take a stand against anti-Jewish bigotry, let's take a stand against Muslims, let's take a stand against hatred."

Protesters carried signs with pictures of hostages taken by Hamas, as well as pleas to "bring them home." Other signs were more aggressive, calling to "Let Israel finish the job" and "Many Gazan civilians are Hamas or in training." One sign on social media stated "From the sea to the river, Israel is forever" a play on the Palestinian slogan "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" a statement that the Anti-Defamation League contends is an antisemitic slogan.

Torres was the event's first featured speaker, taking the stage to say that he was there "as an American, to defend one of our greatest American values: the US-Israel relationship," adding that it's a value "encoded in our DNA."

The speakers were unified in their calls for Hamas to release the hostages. On Monday, it was reported that Hamas was willing to release 70 of the women and children hostages if Israel agreed to a five-day ceasefire and released some of its female and child prisoners.

Speaker Johnson told the crowd that "the calls for a ceasefire are outrageous," prompting a loud "no ceasefire" chant from the crowd.

Schumer, Johnson, Jeffries and Ernst joined each other on stage, holding hands and proclaiming "We stand with Israel," and Israeli President Issac Herzog addressed the crowd by video, saying that there was "no greater cause than this."

Organizers claimed that 290,000 people attended the event, though the crowd looked much smaller than protest events which were estimated at much lower. The aforementioned Palestine protest in DC was estimated to have been attended by 300,000 supporters according to its organizers, but images and videos of the event appeared to show a crowd multiple times larger than the pro-Israel event.

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The Israel on Campus Coalition, a Jewish advocacy group, was offering “microgrants” to reimburse Israeli students who attended the event. It claims on its website that it “successfully allocated funding to help thousands of students attend the event.” According to a Jewish site blog post from before the event, the Israel on Campus Coalition was offering $250 for students to attend the event.

What looked to be a few hundred counter protesters gathered across the street from pro-Israel rally, both sides stayed peaceful during the event, according to reports.

Early in November, UN experts warned that “time is running out to prevent genocide and humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza.” Since that time, the conflict has only escalated, with Israel launching a ground invasion of the Gaza Strip and increasing involvement of Hezbollah in Lebanon.

According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, roughly 11,400 Palestinians, more than one out of every 200 residents in Gaza, have been killed by Israeli strikes since October 7, including more than 4,100 children. More are suspected dead, with their bodies uncounted under the rubble.

According to official numbers, roughly 1,200 Israelis died during Hamas’ October 7 attack.

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US House Clears Stopgap Funding Measure to Avert Partial Government Shutdown

The stopgap funding bill needed a two-thirds vote to pass in the House. Typically, the House votes on a "rule" that will pave the way for the bill to pass with a simple majority, but Republicans instead decided to bring the measure to the floor "under the suspension of the rules," which requires the bill be passed with a two-thirds majority.

Lawmakers in the US House of Representatives cleared a stopgap measure on Tuesday to avert a partial government shutdown after two-thirds of the lower congressional chamber backed the initiative.

The measure cleared the US House with a 336-95 vote, and will now head to the US Senate. US President Joe Biden would need to sign the measure by Friday night in order to avert the looming shutdown.

Ninety-three Republicans voted against the bill, more than the number of Republicans who opposed the last continuing resolution (CR) passed in August and contributed to the ousting of then-House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA). Two Democrats also voted against the bill, Reps. Jake Auchincloss (D-MA) and Mike Quigley (D-IL). Quigley was the only Democrat to vote against the CR in September.

The powerful House Freedom Caucus in the Republican party opposed the bill because it lacked spending cuts and failed to address the border.

"The House Freedom Caucus opposes the proposed 'clean' Continuing Resolution as it contains no spending reductions, no border security, and not a single meaningful win for the American People," the group said in a release.

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The lack of funding cuts was a feature for the Democratic party, with Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) saying that the proposal "will avert a shutdown and it will do so without making any terrible hard right cuts that the MAGA right-wing demand."

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) also signaled his support, suggesting the bill will pass the Senate easily.

The CR differed from previous stopgap bills in that it features a two-tiered scheme, which funds certain programs until January 19, while the Pentagon and other national security programs are funded until February 2.

House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) describes it as a "laddered CR" and argues it will "stop the absurd holiday-season omnibus tradition of massive, loaded up spending bills introduced right before the Christmas recess."

The staggered funding dates are designed to add urgency to pass a more comprehensive bill which Republicans hope will include funding cuts, funding for Israel and increased border security.

Rep. Chip Roy (R-TX) who voted against the bill, complained it didn't include any of the House Freedom Caucus' priorities. "I can in no way sell that to a single one of my constituents," he said.

The bill does not include US President Joe Biden's funding requests for Ukraine and Israel. When asked if he would veto a stopgap measure without funding those conflicts, Biden was noncommittal, saying he would have to "wait to see what they come up with."

But with the bill receiving large bipartisan support in the House and a similar result possible in the Senate, significant pressure will be on Biden to sign the bill. The government has until Friday to pass a funding bill and avoid a partial government shutdown on Saturday.

After the CR's passage in the House, Schumer said the White House agreed "it'll be a good thing" if they avoid a shutdown. The lawmaker did criticize the laddered funding of the CR, calling it "goofy" but still praised the bill.

Johnson's decision to acquiesce to the demands of Democrats mirrored actions McCarthy took to pass the CR in September. While that move angered members of the House Freedom Caucus, it does not appear they have turned against him completely just yet.

“There’s always that tension, but I don’t see that happening anytime in the near future,” Rep. Morgan Griffith (R-VA), a House Freedom Caucus member, said. “I think most people are willing to give him some time, but we need to see something different.”

One of the contributing factors to McCarthy's ousting, besides his willingness to work with Democrats, was that many members simply did not like him and accused him of lying to them.

"Speaker McCarthy was ousted because there’s an immature man child that happened to be elected to Congress from Florida. That’s why he was ousted. Let’s just be frank," Rep. Derrick Van Orden (R-WI) said.

The bill will now head to the Senate. Schumer has already pushed back his funding bill in anticipation of passing the House version.

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Video: Sanders Turns Into Referee as US Senator Tries to Fight Teamster Boss During Hearing

The Senate committee was intended to discuss issues facing the American workforce, but instead descended into name calling and threats of violence after tensions hit a boiling point.
A Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions on Tuesday descended into sheer madness after US Sen. Markwayne Mullin (R-OK) stood up with the apparent intention to fight Teamster President Sean O'Brien on the committee floor in front of cameras, observers and his fellow senators.
The potential fight, however, was shuttered within moments by US Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT), who slammed his gavel and reminded Mullin of his position. "Sit down. Look at you, you're a United States senator," the lawmaker underscored.
The rivalry between Mullin and O'Brien has been ongoing on social media, with both individuals taking jabs at each other. In June, Mullin challenged O'Brien to an MMA fight for charity.
During his time to question O'Brien about labor issues, Mullin quickly changed the subject to his previous challenge, quoting an online post from O'Brien that said "any place, any time, cowboy" in response to Mullin.
"Sir, this is a time, this is a place. You want to run your mouth? We can be two consenting adults," the 46-year-old junior senator said. "We can finish it here."
And just like that, the pair descended into heated exchange of "stand your butt up" commands as Sanders, who serves as the panel's chairman, chimed in as part of a larger effort to regain control of the Senate committee.
"Hold on, stop it! Hold on. No, no, sit down. Sit down. Look at you. You're a United States senator," Sanders demanded. "The American people have enough contempt for Congress, let's not make it worse."
Both men sat down and Sanders allowed Mullin to continue his statement, but he immediately brought up the subject of a potential fight with O'Brien. "Then let's do this. Because I did challenge you, and I accepted your challenge and you went quiet," Mullin claimed.
O'Brien, speaking over Sanders who again was attempting to calm the situation, replied that he didn't go quiet. "You challenged me to a cage match, acting like a 12-year-old schoolyard bully."
In further exchanges, the two accused each other of being thugs and said neither had respect for the other. Despite Sanders' attempts to steer the conversation back towards economic issues, Mullin continued to press the issue of a charity fight between himself and O'Brien.
"You said any time, any place. In April there is a charity," O'Brien began before being interrupted by Sanders. Despite the committee chairman's best efforts, Mullin continued. "This is about charity. For a union charity, for firefighters."
"Grow up," O'Brien shot back. "You're an embarrassment."
Later, Mullin set a date and time for the proposed fight. "April 30… Smoke & Guns in Tulsa Oklahoma."
In April of this year, the Bank of Oklahoma Center held a Smoke & Guns event that included boxing and MMA fights between firefighters and police officers, according to the event's social media pages.
O'Brien did not accept the challenge during the committee hearing, suggesting coffee instead.

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“You’re [one of] 100 of what should be the most influential people in this country … You’re focused on debate that’s not even relevant? … You’re an embarrassment to the state of Oklahoma.”
Sanders finally ended Mullin’s time, passing the floor to Sen. Maggie Hassan (D-NH). “This hearing is about the condition of the working class in America. I don’t know why you [referring to Mullin] are doing what you are doing.”
Mullin has continued to express his desire to fight O’Brien, writing on social media that the fracas wasn't "personal."
The outburst was one of a string of heated incidents in Congress on Tuesday. US Rep. Tim Burchett (R-TN) accused former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) of elbowing him in the kidney after a House Conference meeting. US Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-FL), who led the ousting of McCarthy, called for a House Ethics Committee probe into the incident.
Also on Tuesday, House Oversight Committee Chairman James Comer got into a heated exchange with Rep. Jared Moskowitz (D-FL) in which he called Moskowitz a “liar” and a “smurf.”
Current House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) called the US House a “pressure cooker” while Senate Minority leader Mitch McConnell admitted to reporters during a news conference that “it’s very difficult to control the behavior of everyone who’s in the building. I don’t view that as my responsibility.”

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FBI Director Wray Highlights Ongoing Threat of Fentanyl in US

WASHINGTON, November 15 (Sputnik) - FBI Director Christopher Wray on Wednesday highlighted the ongoing threat of fentanyl in the United States, with the amount seized by law enforcement in the last two years enough to kill the majority of the population.
"Over the past two years alone, we've seized enough fentanyl to kill 270 million Americans - that's more than 80% of all Americans," Wray said in a testimony before the US House Homeland Security Committee.
Noting that the drug cartels' deadly reach, Wray said the FBI Boston bureau conducted one of the largest single seizures in New England history this month, seizing nearly 8 million doses of fentanyl and methamphetamine-laced pills and powder.
Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas also testified that he expected fentanyl to remain the leading cause of narcotics-related deaths in the United States, given the trend of drug traffickers using various additives and mixing fentanyl into counterfeit prescription pills.

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UNSC to Vote Today on Draft Resolution on Gaza - Malta's Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, November 15 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council will vote today on a Malta-drafted resolution focusing on the protection of children in Gaza, Malta's Ambassador to the United Nations Vanessa Frazier said on Wednesday.

"We haven't decided on time. But (the vote will be) today," Frazier told journalists.

The draft resolution calls for urgent and extended humanitarian pauses and corridors throughout the Gaza Strip for a sufficient number of days to enable aid delivery to civilians. It also urges the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages held by Hamas, especially children.

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Central Bank Digital Currencies Can Replace Physical Cash - IMF Managing Director

WASHINGTON, November 15 (Sputnik) - International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Wednesday that there is a good chance central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) would replace physical cash in the future.

"CBDCs can replace cash, which is costly to distribute in island economies. They can offer resilience in more advanced economies. And they can improve financial inclusion where few hold bank accounts," Georgieva said at the Singapore Fintech Festival.

Georgieva acknowledged that the global adoption of CBDCs is not a short-term perspective despite the fact that about 60% of countries at present are exploring their use in some form.

The IMF chief pointed out that the benefits of CBDCs will stem from many aspects, including how many countries will adopt them and what policy decisions will be adopted.

"Country authorities wishing to introduce CBDCs may need to think a little more like entrepreneurs. Communication strategies, and incentives for distribution, integration and adoption, are as important as design considerations," Georgirva said.

Countries to continue exploring the idea of implementing CBDCs, Georgieva also said.

The IMF has launched a CBDC Handbook, an online tool intended to collect and share relevant information for policymakers worldwide, to help governments make the right decision, Georgieva added.

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Russia Has Increased Oil Shipments to India, China, Turkey, UAE - IMF

WASHINGTON, November 15 (Sputnik) - Russia has increased oil shipments to India, China, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates amid sanctions related to the Ukraine conflict, International Monetary Fund advisor Serkan Arslanalp said, citing data from a new online

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platform launched by the IMF and the University of Oxford.

"There is a big pick up in terms of shipments to several countries including India, China, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates," Arslanalp told reporters presenting PortWatch, an online program that helps assess the impact of trade disruptions and other issues on the economy.

At the time, Russian oil shipments to Western Europe and the United States have dwindled due to sanctions imposed over the Ukraine conflict, he added.

The IMF said in a press release that PortWatch is a new online portal to monitor and simulate trade disruptions due to climate extremes and other shocks. The platform, which uses satellite-based vessel data and big data analytics, also helps make estimates about the potential indirect spillover effects of port disruptions to other countries, according to the IMF.

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IMF Says New Online Platform PortWatch to Allow Public to Assess Trade Disruptions Impact

WASHINGTON, November 15 (Sputnik) - The new online platform PortWatch, launched by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the University of Oxford, will allow policymakers, analysts and members of the public to assess the impact of potential and actual trade disruptions, IMF adviser Serkan Arslanalp said.

"PortWatch aims to have policymakers, analysts and the public assess the impact of actual and potential trade disruptions, including spillover effects on trading partners," Arslanalp said while presenting the platform.

The platform seeks to provide actionable insights related to the global supply chain as well as climate risks, Arslanalp said.

The online tool would also be used to establish international dialogue among policymakers on vulnerabilities of the maritime trade infrastructure from climate risks, he said.

Arslanalp pointed out that the platform will allow specialists to study fragmentation, geoeconomic risks and ongoing changes in trade patterns.

The IMF issued a separate press release saying that PortWatch would use satellite-based vessel data and big data analytics to help policymakers, analysts and other public stakeholders assess the impact of disruptions to maritime trade.

The platform would also allow users to make estimates about the potential indirect spillover effects of port disruptions to other countries, the release added.

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Lawmaker Says Concerned US Fails to Admit Nazi Units Still Fighting in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, November 15 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Paul Gosar in a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken this week said he is concerned the State Department fails to

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acknowledge that the neo-Nazi Azov group (banned as an extremist group in Russia) is still present in Ukraine's armed forces but circumvents US violations after changing its name to the Special Purpose Azov Regiment under the National Guard of Ukraine.

According to Gosar, last month the State Department responded to his inquiry from September requesting information about whether US aid was benefitting neo-Nazi Azov's in Ukraine.

"Of major concern is the part of the State Department letter that alleges the Azov Battalion disbanded but was later established as the Special Purpose Azov Regiment under the National Guard of Ukraine," Gosar said in the letter obtained by Sputnik. "Just because the Azov Battalion morphed into the Azov Special Purposes Regiment and became part of the NGU does not mean that the group is no longer a neo-Nazi organization."

Although the Azov Battalion went through a name change in 2015, evidence remains clear that Azov is still a "vicious" neo-Nazi group, according to Gosar.

"The US should not provide any assistance to Azov, anything less than this is morally reprehensible," Gosar said in the letter to Blinken. "The US should also not make a fool of itself and allow neo-Nazis to circumvent the law through name changes and incorporation under the authoritarian Kiev regime's armed forces."

Gosar said he found it more concerning that the State Department, in its response to his inquiry on the Azov, claimed it sees no evidence that the Azov Regiment, Ukraine's National Guard, or any Ukrainian armed forces systemically promote neo-Nazi ideology or use Nazi symbology.

"Because there is overwhelming evidence to the contrary, this statement at best reflects poorly on the competency of the State Department and its ethics," Gosar said.

Gosar called on Blinken and his team to be replaced if they are unaware about Nazi affiliations in Ukraine.

Gosar wants the State Department, after reading his response, to clarify whether it still determines there are no Nazis affiliations in Ukraine and to clarify whether any US aid has gone to Azov groups.

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UN Proposes 10-Point Plan to Rein in Gaza 'Carnage' - Griffiths

UNITED NATIONS, November 15 (Sputnik) - The United Nations proposes a 10-point plan to rein in the carnage in Gaza amid the ongoing Israel-Hamas war, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths said on Wednesday.

"As the carnage in Gaza reaches new levels of horror every day, the world continues to watch in shock as hospitals come under fire, premature babies die, and an entire population is deprived of the basic means of survival. This cannot be allowed to continue," Griffiths said in a statement.

He urged all parties to implement a plan that consists of 10 points, including a humanitarian ceasefire; facilitating a continuous flow of aid convoys; opening additional crossing points for aid and commercial trucks to enter, including Kerem Shalom; improving a humanitarian notification mechanism to help spare civilians and civilian infrastructure from hostilities; and funding the

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humanitarian response, now amounting to $1.2 billion.
"The plan is comprehensive, and we are determined to push for every step, but we need broad international support. The world must act before it is too late," Griffiths stated.

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American Public's Support for Israel War Drops From 41% to 32% - Poll

WASHINGTON, November 15 (Sputnik) - The share of Americans who believe the US should back Israel in its war with Gaza declined by nine percentage points within a month, with a majority also backing a ceasefire, according to a Reuters/Ipsos poll released Wednesday.
Asked about their view of the US role in the war, 32% of respondents said "the US should support Israel" – a drop from 41% measured in a poll conducted October 12-13. The latest poll was conducted on November 13-14.
The percentage of Americans who believe "the US should be a neutral mediator" also rose from 27% to 39% in the latest poll. At the same time, only 4% of Americans said the US should support Palestinians – similar to last month's result.
Additionally, 68% of respondents agreed that "Israel should call a ceasefire and try to negotiate" – a group that included about 75% of Democrats and 50% of Republicans.

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US to Resume Food Assistance to Ethiopia Next Month – USAID

WASHINGTON, November 15 (Sputnik) – USAID has committed to a one-year trial of resuming food assistance across Ethiopia starting next month, according to a release.

In June, the US suspended food aid to Ethiopia over an alleged massive corruption scheme by local officials to steal donated products.

"USAID is committing to a one-year trial period of the nationwide resumption, during which we will continuously monitor and evaluate the efficacy of the reforms put in place by USAID, implementing partners, and the Government of Ethiopia," USAID said in the release on Tuesday.

USAID said the decision followed "widespread and significant" structural reforms made by the government and humanitarian partners. The reforms would enable enhanced oversight and beneficiary selection to ensure the food assistance would reach the most vulnerable populations targeted.

Ethiopia's government had also agreed to make operational changes in its work with humanitarian partners in order to improve the identification of beneficiaries based on vulnerability criteria and to provide USAID and third-party monitors with unimpeded access to review a wide range of sites across the country.

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RPT: PREVIEW - Biden Will Meet With Xi in Effort to Mend Ties, Restore Mil-to-Mil Contacts

WASHINGTON, November 15 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping are set to meet face-to-face for the first time in a year on Wednesday as Washington hopes to improve poor bilateral relations and communication between the two countries, according to US officials.

Biden and Xi will meet in San Francisco on the margins of the APEC Leaders' Summit to discuss a range of bilateral issues, including regional and global matters.

"Our goal will be to try to take steps that indeed stabilize the relationship between the United States and China, remove some areas of misunderstanding, and open up new lines of communication - that's going to be our goal and objective," an official told reporters.

One of the top items on the US agenda is restoring high-level communication between the US and Chinese militaries, US officials said, adding that Biden is expected to assertively press Xi on the issue.

Biden is not expected to get into details about Trump-era section 301 tariffs imposed on China during a meeting with Xi, but the two leaders will have broader discussions on bilateral trade.

Xi, who is traveling to the United States for the first time since 2017, is expected to have dinner

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on Wednesday with dozens of American corporate leaders paying up to $2,000 to attend the dinner reception hosted jointly by the National Committee on US-China Relations and the US-China Business Council, according to media reports.

Earlier this week, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said he cannot confirm reports that Biden and Xi will reportedly agree to a ban on the use of artificial intelligence on autonomous weapons.

The potential agreement between the United States and China will seek to limit the use of artificial intelligence on drones and in nuclear weapon control systems, media reported.

Moreover, according to Sullivan, threats allegedly posed by Iran, including its nuclear program, will be on the agenda of the Biden-Xi meeting.

Biden will also discuss matters related to the Gaza conflict and Ukraine, including US pressure on Beijing to crack down on private Chinese companies allegedly providing materiel to Russia's defense sector amid the special operation in Ukraine, a US official said.

Biden will reaffirm to Xi the US One China policy and that the United States does not support Taiwan's independence. Biden is also set to raise significant concerns regarding potential Chinese "interference" in the upcoming Taiwan election.

In addition, Biden will reiterate to Xi the US readiness to resume diplomatic efforts with North Korea on the issue of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, a senior administration official told reporters.

US officials said they hope to have more to announce out of the meeting after the two leaders meet.

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January 6 'Shaman' Says No Investigation Opened Into Ukrainian Spy at US Capitol Riot

WASHINGTON, November 15 (Sputnik), Lenka White - There have been no investigations or arrests in connection with Ukrainian spy Serhiy Dybynyn who infiltrated the pro-Trump crowd at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021 alongside multiple other individuals in a clear "setup" aimed at the former US president, Jacob "Shaman" Chansley told Sputnik.

"Ukrainian spy Sergei Dybynyn... was there on that day with 1+1 media, a media organization tied to Ukrainian oligarch Ihor Kolomoisky, who largely was responsible for the rise of [Volodymyr] Zelenskyy ... And there's no investigation into that. There's no arrests being made there," Chansley said.

Chansley said that various factions, including Antifa and Black Lives Matter, infiltrated the pro-Trump group to create the illusion that Trump supporters were violent.

In addition, the Trump supporter said senior US politicians and intelligence leaders wanted to see chaos on January 6, including figures such as then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, FBI chief Christopher Wray and Joint chiefs chairman Mark Milley.

"They wanted the violence - they wanted to create a very, very bad look for Trump and his supporters," Chansley said.

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Chansley said the January 6 Capitol breach is "not a black and white issue."

"It is a gray issue. Yes, there was violence and chaos on that day. Was it a violent insurrection? No, it was not," Chansley said.

Moreover, if the tapes from the US Capitol Hill rally get released, they will expose many lies, he added.

"There are, I believe in many cases, federal agents or confidential informants, or even prosecutors that have lied about their case or about their testimony while under oath. And the release of that footage would open the government up to those lies being exposed," Chansley said.

An FBI spokesperson, when asked about Chansley's allegations, told Sputnik the agency has "no comment."

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Biden, Netanyahu Discuss Efforts to Release Hostages Held by Hamas - White House

WASHINGTON, November 15 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during a phone call discussed the latest events in Gaza and efforts to free hostages, the White House said in a press release.

"President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. spoke this afternoon with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel regarding the latest developments in Israel and Gaza. The President and the Prime Minister discussed at length ongoing efforts to secure the release of hostages held by Hamas, including many children and a number of Americans," the release said on Tuesday.

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January 6 'Shaman' Endorses Trump, Says He’s Not Part of Corrupt Political Apparatus

WASHINGTON, November 15 (Sputnik), Lenka White - Jacob "Shaman" Chansley told Sputnik he is supporting former President Donald Trump's 2024 election campaign because the former president is not a career politician who is part of the political apparatus.

"The only candidate that I have chosen to back or endorse is Donald Trump," Chansley said. " Trump is not a part of that apparatus, really, because he hasn't been in politics."

The Trump supporter said Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, another Republican candidate, runs his state like a "fascist" and has sold out to international entities, "whether they be foreign nations or corporations."

Chansley became the most recognized participant in the January 6 Capitol breach due to the extravagant outfit he wore that day, which included a bull-horned fur headdress, and face painted red, white and blue.

Chansley, sentenced in November 2021 to 41 months in prison after pleading guilty to

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obstructing official proceedings, was released to a halfway house in Arizona in March. He was permitted to leave the halfway house two months later.

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January 6 'Shaman' Says Tried to Calm Protesters Before US Capitol Breached

WASHINGTON, November 15 (Sputnik), Lenka White - Jacob Chansley, the "shaman" of the Trump movement, told Sputnik he tried to calm people down around the US Capitol Hill barriers on January 6 but no one listened to him.

"I tried before the barriers were breached to calm people down but I mean, who's gonna listen to the guy with horns and face paint telling people to calm down," Chansley said.

Chansley also said that if he knew what was going to happen on that day, he would have "done everything to stop it from taking place."

Chansley became the most recognized participant in the January 6 Capitol breach due to the extravagant outfit he wore that day, which included a bull-horned fur headdress, and face painted red, white and blue. Chansley, sentenced in November 2021 to 41 months in prison after pleading guilty to obstructing official proceedings, was released to a halfway house in Arizona in March. He was permitted to leave the halfway house two months later.

On January 6, Trump supporters stormed Capitol Hill in a bid to prevent Congress from certifying President Joe Biden's victory. More than 1,200 defendants have been charged and over 700 sentenced in connection with the Capitol breach.

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US Senate Blocks Motion to Consider House-Passed Bill to Provide Israel $14.3Bln in Aid

WASHINGTON, November 15 (Sputnik) - The US Senate blocked a motion to consider House-passed legislation that would provide Israel an additional $14.3 billion in security assistance.

The Senate voted along party lines, 51-48, on Tuesday to block consideration of the bill.

Senate Democrats stopped the effort by Republicans to begin debate on the Israel security aid only bill because it included IRS funding cuts.

Following the vote, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said the upper chamber will be busy this week working to pass the House-passed short-term spending measure to avert a government shutdown on Friday.

The short-term spending bill does not include additional aid for Israel or Ukraine, however, President Joe Biden is prepared to sign the legislation if it is approved by the Senate.

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January 6 'Shaman' Chansley Confirms Mulling Run for US Political Office

WASHINGTON, November 15 (Sputnik), Lenka White - Jacob Chansley, also known as the "shaman" of the Trump movement, told Sputnik he is considering running for US political office.

Chansley became the most recognized participant in the January 6, 2021 Capitol breach due to the extravagant outfit he wore that day, which included a bull-horned fur headdress, and face painted red, white and blue. Chansley, sentenced in November 2021 to 41 months in prison after pleading guilty to obstructing official proceedings, was released to a halfway house in Arizona in March. He was permitted to leave the halfway house two months later.

"If anything, what I will consider is running for office," Chansley said.

Online paperwork filed last week indicates Chansley wants to run as a Libertarian candidate in next year's election for Arizona's 8th Congressional District seat.

Chansley said for now it would be a good idea for him to stay away from political rallies, although he does support them.

"I do advocate for getting people together of a common mind like rallies. I think that it's more important for us to come together in ways that are different than what the status quo would prefer. I think that the real crisis is one of education and information. And that's part of why I have such an issue with some of these people that are running for president," he said.

On January 6, Trump supporters stormed Capitol Hill in a bid to prevent Congress from certifying President Joe Biden's victory. More than 1,200 defendants have been charged and over 700 sentenced in connection with the Capitol breach.

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Lawmaker Says Concerned US Fails to Admit Nazi Units Still Fighting in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, November 15 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Paul Gosar in a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken this week said he is concerned the State Department fails to acknowledge that the neo-Nazi Azov group (banned as an extremist group in Russia) is still present in Ukraine's armed forces but circumvents US violations after changing its name to the Special Purpose Azov Regiment under the National Guard of Ukraine.

According to Gosar, last month the State Department responded to his inquiry from September requesting information about whether US aid was benefitting neo-Nazi Azov's in Ukraine.

"Of major concern is the part of the State Department letter that alleges the Azov Battalion disbanded but was later established as the Special Purpose Azov Regiment under the National Guard of Ukraine," Gosar said in the letter obtained by Sputnik. "Just because the Azov Battalion morphed into the Azov Special Purposes Regiment and became part of the NGU does not mean that the group is no longer a neo-Nazi organization."

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Although the Azov Battalion went through a name change in 2015, evidence remains clear that Azov is still a "vicious" neo-Nazi group, according to Gosar.

"The US should not provide any assistance to Azov, anything less than this is morally reprehensible," Gosar said in the letter to Blinken. "The US should also not make a fool of itself and allow neo-Nazis to circumvent the law through name changes and incorporation under the authoritarian Kiev regime's armed forces."

Gosar said he found it more concerning that the State Department, in its response to his inquiry on the Azov, claimed it sees no evidence that the Azov Regiment, Ukraine's National Guard, or any Ukrainian armed forces systemically promote neo-Nazi ideology or use Nazi symbology.

"Because there is overwhelming evidence to the contrary, this statement at best reflects poorly on the competency of the State Department and its ethics," Gosar said.

Gosar called on Blinken and his team to be replaced if they are unaware about Nazi affiliations in Ukraine.

Gosar wants the State Department, after reading his response, to clarify whether it still determines there are no Nazis affiliations in Ukraine and to clarify whether any US aid has gone to Azov groups.

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UNICEF Condemns Reported Deadly Attack Near Congo-Uganda Border - Statement

WASHINGTON, November 15 (Sputnik) - The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said in a statement that it condemns the deadly attack on the border between the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Uganda.

"UNICEF condemns an attack reported to have been carried out on Sunday in the northeast of Beni near the border of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) with Uganda," the statement said on Tuesday.

Initial reports have put the death toll at 29, including eight children between four and 15 years of age, the statement said.

UNICEF emphasized that cases of killing, maiming, and abducting children have increased dramatically this year.

"As a result, the DRC is on track to have record levels of verified grave violations against children for a third consecutive year," the statement said.

The latest data shows a 41% increase in the number of verified grave violations against children in the first half of 2023 compared to the same period a year ago.

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US House Passes 2-Step Government Funding Bill to Avert Impending Shutdown

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WASHINGTON, November 15 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives passed legislation to temporarily fund the federal government through two separate dates and avoid a government shutdown, sending the bill to the Senate for consideration.

House lawmakers passed the legislation on Tuesday evening under suspension of the rules in a vote of 336 in favor and 95 against, with two-thirds support required for passage.

Dozens of Republicans and two Democrats voted against the proposal, which was championed by House Speaker Mike Johnson.

The so-called "laddered" continuing resolution would fund separate portions of the government through two separate dates, January 19 and February 2, in order to avoid the need for an omnibus spending bill during the holiday season.

US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said that they will support the legislation and move to pass it as quickly as possible through the upper chamber of Congress.

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Judge in US State of Michigan Halts Effort to Remove Trump From Primary Ballot - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 15 (Sputnik) - A judge in the US state of Michigan halted an effort to block former US President Donald Trump from appearing on Republican Party primary election ballots, The New York Times reported.

The judge denied an attempt to block Trump from the primary ballots, but did not restrict the plaintiffs from attempting to block him from the general election ballot in the future, the report said on Tuesday.

The ruling comes following similar efforts to keep Trump off ballots in the states of Colorado and Minnesota due to his alleged culpability for the events at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021.

Last week, the Minnesota Supreme Court likewise halted an effort to remove Trump from primary ballots but left the door open to challenge his appearance on general election ballots.

Trump campaign spokesman Steven Cheung called the Minnesota decision "validation" of the campaign's argument that such attempts to block Trump's ballot access are unconstitutional.

Trump currently leads the pack of Republican presidential hopefuls in 2024 primary polling.

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Trudeau Urges Israel to Exercise Maximum Restraint in Gaza

WASHINGTON, November 15 (Sputnik) - Israeli military forces have to act with maximum restraint in Gaza and avoid attacking innocent civilians there, Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told reporters.

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"I urge the government of Israel to exercise maximum restraint," Trudeau said on Tuesday.
The prime minister called on Hamas to stop using civilians as human shields. He stressed the necessity of immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.
"The price of justice can not be the continued suffering of all Palestinian civilians," Trudeau said, adding that all lives, Palestinians and Israelis, are equal.
Trudeau confirmed that over 350 Canadians were able to leave Gaza. He promised to continue efforts to secure the departure of the remaining citizens.
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, 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. The conflict has resulted in the deaths of around 1,200 people in Israel and over 11,000 in the Gaza Strip.

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White House to Host Tribal Nations Summit in Washington December 6-7 - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, November 15 (Sputnik) - The next White House Tribal Nations Summit will take place in Washington during the first week of December, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre announced.
"The President will host the next White House Tribal Nations Summit on December 6 and 7 in Washington," Jean-Pierre said in a statement on Tuesday.
The summit represents the US president's commitment to honor the nation-to-nation relationships that the United States has with tribal nations, the statement said.
Jean-Pierre emphasized that the summit allows tribal nation leaders and top Biden administration officials to address the most important issues facing the tribal communities.
The Biden administration's actions in support of tribal communities will be announced during the summit, jean-Pierre said.

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US Trade Chief at APEC Says Region Must Overcome Fragile Supply Chains, Insecurity

SAN FRANCISCO, November 14 (Sputnik) - US Trade Representative Katherine Tai at the APEC summit on Tuesday said current supply chain and security challenges facing the region represent both threats and opportunities.
"These hurdles in our midst, do pose a threat, but they also present an opportunity to assess where we are," Tai said during the the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Ministerial

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Meeting Opening Plenary Session. "I'm optimistic that we will once again emerge stronger as a region, even as we meet at a time of great uncertainty and challenges, fragile supply chains, growing inequality and growing economic insecurity., a worsening climate crisis, increasing geopolitical tensions."

Furthermore, Tai reflected on the collective resilience of economies amidst various crises, both human-made and natural, expressing optimism about emerging stronger despite uncertainties.

APEC is a trade and economic forum of 21 countries in the Asia-Pacific region. This year's summit in San Francisco is taking place from November 11-17.

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

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White House Says Sorry to See 3 Pandas Go But Respects China's Decision to Bring Them Home

WASHINGTON, November 15 (Sputnik) - The United States is sorry to see the panda bears loaned to it by China leave, but respects Beijing's decision to bring them home, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"We're sorry to see the pandas go, but obviously that was a sovereign decision by the PRC [People's Republic of China] and we have to respect that," Kirby said.

Last week, the three loaned panda bears were flown back to China after temporarily residing at the Smithsonian Institution's National Zoo in Washington.

China and the United States have been cooperating in research and conservation of panda bears since 1996.

The Smithsonian's National Zoo and China's Wildlife and Conservation Society had reached a three-year agreement to keep the three panda bears - Mei Xiang, Tian Tian and Xiao Qi Ji - in Washington through 2023.

The pandas' return to China comes amid preparations for a high-level meeting between US President Joe Biden and Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in San Francisco.

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US Joins International Probe of Thousands Forged Aircraft Engine Parts - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 15 (Sputnik) - The US Justice Department decided to join the ongoing investigation into forged aircraft engine parts that found their way to planes around the world, Bloomberg reported.

The United States is now part of an international group of agencies probing how thousands of undocumented jet engine parts ended up in commercial aircraft across the world, the report said

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on Tuesday.

To date, at least one non-US authority has shared information with a number of enforcement agencies indicating that they are interested in pursuing the case across national borders, the report said.

The US Justice Department has requested information from at least one commercial airline that removed questionable parts produced by AOG Technics Ltd. from London, the report said.

Several aviation regulators accused AOG Technics of falsifying paperwork and supplying unauthorized components for widely-used CFM56 turbines, found among others in Boeing and Airbus aircraft, but it remains unclear if any law enforcement agencies have been involved in the probe, the report said.

The UK Civil Aviation Authority, the European Union Aviation Safety Agency, and the US Federal Aviation Administration have already warned airlines of forged parts coming from AOG Technics, the report added.

An engine-making joint venture of General Electric Co. and France's Safran SA said in October that they found 145 engines around the globe with parts linked to AOG Technics, according to the report.

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Sullivan Discussed Support For Ukraine With Quad, Yermak - White House

WASHINGTON, November 15 (Sputnik) - US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan during his meeting with Quad and Ukrainian counterparts has discussed support for Ukraine, the White House said in a readout on Tuesday.

"The partners reaffirmed their continued commitment to provide security assistance as Ukraine continues its fight against Russian aggression, as well as to invest in our joint defense industrial bases to support Ukraine's long term security," the readout said. "They also discussed their sustained support for Ukraine's economic and energy resilience, as well as its reconstruction."

The meeting took place on Monday with French Diplomatic Counselor to the President Emmanuel Bonne, German Chancellery Foreign and Security Policy Advisor Jens Ploetner, British National Security Advisor Tim Barrow, and Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine Andriy Yermak, according to the White House.

During the meeting, the White House added, Yermak provided an update on Ukraine's counteroffensive.

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Biden Says US Ready to Take Further Actions to Address Threats to Is Bases In Middle East

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WASHINGTON, November 15 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that the United States is ready to take further actions to protect its military bases in the Middle East from attacks.

"The United States stands ready to take further action, as necessary and appropriate, to address further threats or attacks," Biden said in a letter to US Congress leadership.

He accused groups affiliated with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) of attacking US personnel and facilities in Iraq and Syria. These attacks have placed under grave threat the lives of United States personnel and Coalition forces, he added.

Biden pointed out that US forces bombarded two facilities used by the IRGC and related groups on November 12. "I directed the strikes in order to protect and defend our personnel, to degrade and disrupt the ongoing series of attacks against the United States and our partners, and to deter Iran and Iran backed militia groups from conducting or supporting further attacks on United States personnel and facilities," he said.

The number of attacks on US airbases claimed by the Shia armed groups, which operate in Iraq, has significantly grown over the past weeks. Between October 17 and November 6, militia attacked US bases in Syria and Iraq 38 times, resulting in a total of 46 troops injured, according to the Pentagon.

The US military currently controls parts of the provinces of Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor and Al-Hasakah, where Syria's largest oil and gas fields are located. The Syrian government considers the presence of the US military on its territory as occupation and state piracy.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, November 15 (Sputnik) -

ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

* Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Tuesday that he had instructed the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) to prepare for any scenario in the event of an escalation of the conflict with the Lebanese movement Hezbollah.
* The IDF said that it had established operational control over the Al-Shati refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip.
* All the remaining hospitals in the Gaza Strip that still provide services may stop working if fuel is not delivered within two days, Palestinian Health Minister Mai al-Kaila said.

US-CHINA RELATIONS

* A report to Congress prepared by the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission warns that the rivalry between the two countries is increasing as top-level contacts have so far resulted in more talk than concrete action.
* Biden said that he would consider his upcoming meeting with Xi successful if they could resume normal communications, including military-to-military communications.

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CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* The Russian military has repelled five Ukrainian attacks in the Donetsk direction in the past 24 hours, where Kiev lost up to 300 soldiers and six pieces of military equipment, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Tuesday.

* The European Union's decision to send a mission to Kiev next month to discuss military aid and security guarantees for Ukraine will only increase global tensions, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Galuzin told reporters.

WESTERN SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

* Proposals for the European Union's 12th package of sanctions against Russia do not contain restrictions against nuclear energy, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto said on Tuesday.

* The Finnish Interior Ministry said it will soon develop a proposal to the government, suggesting the closure of border crossing points with Russia due to the uncontrolled arrival of refugees from Somalia, Yemen, Syria and other countries.

IEA ENEGRY REPORT

* OECD reserves of commercial oil and oil products have increased by 1.8 million barrels in September, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said in its report on Tuesday.

* The IEA said that it expects the global oil demand in 2023 to reach 102 million barrels per day.

* The IEA has upgraded its forecast for the global oil production in 2023, expecting an increase by 1.7 million barrels per day to the record 101.8 million barrels per day, according to its report.

* Russian increased its oil production in October by 30,000 barrels per day compared to the previous month to 9.53 million barrels per day, the report said.

RUSSIA-EGYPT TALKS

* Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Sisi discussed with Russian President Vladimir Putin the situation in the Gaza Strip and agreed to intensify international efforts to reach a ceasefire, Egyptian presidential spokesman Ahmed Fahmy said on Tuesday.

* Putin expressed deep concern about the unprecedented death toll in the Gaza Strip, the Kremlin said.

* Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov discussed with Egyptian Ambassador to Russia Nazih el Nagari the catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

APEC SUMMIT

* State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday that he is unaware of any contacts planned between US and Russian delegations during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in San Francisco.

* The United States has an obligation to conduct diplomacy as a host nation of the APEC summit, Miller said in response to a question about Russian officials sanctioned by the European Union attending the event.

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PREVIEW - Biden Will Meet With Xi in Effort to Mend Ties, Restore Mil-to-Mil Contacts

WASHINGTON, November 15 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping are set to meet face-to-face for the first time in a year on Wednesday as Washington hopes to improve poor bilateral relations and communication between the two countries, according to US officials.

Biden and Xi will meet in San Francisco on the margins of the APEC Leaders' Summit to discuss a range of bilateral issues, including regional and global matters.

"Our goal will be to try to take steps that indeed stabilize the relationship between the United States and China, remove some areas of misunderstanding, and open up new lines of communication - that's going to be our goal and objective," an official told reporters.

One of the top items on the US agenda is restoring high-level communication between the US and Chinese militaries, US officials said, adding that Biden is expected to assertively press Xi on the issue.

Biden is not expected to get into details about Trump-era section 301 tariffs imposed on China during a meeting with Xi, but the two leaders will have broader discussions on bilateral trade.

Xi, who is traveling to the United States for the first time since 2017, is expected to have dinner on Wednesday with dozens of American corporate leaders paying up to $2,000 to attend the dinner reception hosted jointly by the National Committee on US-China Relations and the US-China Business Council, according to media reports.

Earlier this week, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said he cannot confirm reports that Biden and Xi will reportedly agree to a ban on the use of artificial intelligence on autonomous weapons.

The potential agreement between the United States and China will seek to limit the use of artificial intelligence on drones and in nuclear weapon control systems, media reported.

Moreover, according to Sullivan, threats allegedly posed by Iran, including its nuclear program, will be on the agenda of the Biden-Xi meeting.

Biden will also discuss matters related to the Gaza conflict and Ukraine, including US pressure on Beijing to crack down on private Chinese companies allegedly providing materiel to Russia's defense sector amid the special operation in Ukraine, a US official said.

Biden will reaffirm to Xi the US One China policy and that the United States does not support Taiwan's independence. Biden is also set to raise significant concerns regarding potential Chinese "interference" in the upcoming Taiwan election.

In addition, Biden will reiterate to Xi the US readiness to resume diplomatic efforts with North Korea on the issue of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, a senior administration official told reporters.

US officials said they hope to have more to announce out of the meeting after the two leaders meet.

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San Francisco's Fairmont Hotel Bolsters Security for Biden's Arrival at APEC Summit

SAN FRANCISO November 14 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden is scheduled to arrive at Fairmont Hotel on Tuesday for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit, prompting heightened security measures with intelligence officers, police, and K-9 units in place, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

Furthermore, enhanced security measures, including a two-meter fence, mandatory security checks, metal detectors, and thorough searches of guests' belongings, were implemented at the Fairmont Hotel on Tuesday, contrasting the situation from the previous day.

Heightened security measures are set to persist until November 17, coinciding with Biden's last day in San Francisco for the APEC summit, according to hotel officials.

According to the White House schedule, Biden's arrival in San Francisco is expected at 1:40 p.m local time. The president afterwards has no events scheduled for four hours until his evening campaign appearance.

For more than a century, Fairmont San Francisco has been a venue for kings, diplomats, and global leaders, establishing its renowned status since its inaugural launch in 1907 as the inaugural Fairmont hotel, consistently upholding a tradition of providing guests with distinctly memorable experiences.

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is a trade and economic forum that includes 21 economies in the Asia-Pacific region. This year's summit takes place from November 11 to 17 in San Francisco, California.

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US House Panel Advances Set of Bills to Sanction Iran Amid Tensions in Middle East

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - The US House Financial Services Committee advanced a series of bills to sanction Iran amid its alleged support for destabilizing activities in the Middle East region.

“Recent attacks in Israel are just one manifestation of Iran's financial support for terrorist organizations worldwide. The bills at today's markup not only address Iran's role in Hamas' unjustified attack on Israel, but also block financing its proxies around the globe,” the Financial Services Committee said in a statement via social media platform X.

The House panel considered several pieces of legislation, including measures to prevent the International Monetary Fund from providing financial assistance to Iran, restrict Chinese financial institutions from conducting transactions related to the sale of Iranian petroleum products, and require the US Treasury Secretary to report on financial institutions’ involvement with Iranian government officials.

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The committee also considered bills to modify the availability of certain sanctions waivers related to the Iranian financial sector, disrupt financing to Hamas and block the release of $6 billion in Iranian funds that the Biden administration intended to unfreeze as part of a prisoner swap deal earlier this year.

The panel moved the legislation forward amid an increase in attacks on US forces in Iraq and Syria by Iranian proxy groups, according to the Pentagon. The bills also come following accusations of Iranian involvement in Hamas' surprise attack on Israel, although the Biden administration has said it lacks direct evidence linking Iran to the attack.

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US Says Has No 'Accurate' Gaza Death Toll, But Far Too Many Innocent Palestinians Killed

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - The United States is unable to provide any accurate assessment of the death toll from the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, but admits that too many innocent Palestinians have been killed, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.

"We don't have an accurate assessment or an assessment that we know to be accurate about the number of Palestinians who have been killed. But as the secretary said last week, we know that far too many innocent Palestinian civilians have been killed," Miller told a briefing.

The death toll from Israeli strikes on the Gaza Strip has reached 11,240, including 4,630 children, Gaza's media office said on Tuesday.

The United Nations previously said the figures provided by the Palestinian Health Ministry in Gaza have proven consistently credible in the past, and it sees no reason to challenge them.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said last week that the number of civilians killed indicates that "something is clearly wrong" with Israel's military operations.

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US Approves Potential $650mln Sale of Standard Missile 6 Block I, Equipment to ROK

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) – The United States approved a potential $650mln sale of Standard Missile 6 Block I and related equipment to South Korea, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Tuesday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Republic of Korea of Standard Missile 6 Block I (SM-6 Blk I) and related equipment for an estimated cost of $650 million," the statement said.

The DSCA delivered the required certification notifying Congress of this possible sale, it added.

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UPDATE Trans Mountain Says Canada Regulator Allowed it to Resume Pipeline Expansion Work

(Modifies headline, changes attribution, adds details in para 2, background in para 6)
WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) – The Canada Energy Regulator (CER) has allowed Trans Mountain to resume its oil pipeline expansion work in Abbotsford, British Columbia after being ordered to halt it over instances of environmental non-compliance, the company said on Tuesday.
In early November, the CER ordered Trans Mountain to halt work in a wetland area near Abbotsford, British Columbia after inspections detected several non-compliance related to the environment and safety. Among them, insufficient fencing to protect amphibians and unapproved vegetation clearing.
CER said it would continue to follow up with Trans Mountain to ensure their compliance with the order and verify their diligent mitigation of environmental hazards related to the expansion project.
"Trans Mountain has received a notice to resume work from the Canada Energy Regulator in reference to the approximately 800 meters in Abbotsford that received a stop work order. Trans Mountain corrected all non-compliances in the region and is conducting safety inspections of all active sites to prevent any reoccurrence," the company confirmed in an email to Sputnik.
In 2018, the Canadian government bought the pipeline to ensure its expansion would go ahead. The cost has since grown fourfold to C$30.9 billion ($22.5 billion) notably due to the project's construction delays.
After experiencing several delays over the years, the pipeline is scheduled to enter in service at the beginning of 2024.

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White House Says Has Intel Confirming Al-Shifa Gaza Hospital Used By Hamas For Operations

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - The United States has intelligence assessing that the al-Shifa hospital in Gaza is used by the Hamas Palestinian movement for its war operations against Israel, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Tuesday.
"I can confirm for you that we have information that Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad use some hospitals in the Gaza Strip, including Al Shifa, and tunnels underneath them to conceal and to support their military operations, and to hold hostages," Kirby told reporters.
Kirby wasn't able to discuss details of the US intelligence assessment in order to protect sources and methods, but he emphasized that it comes from a variety of the United States' own

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intelligence methods.

Hamas and other Palestinian Islamic Jihad members operate a command and control node from the al-Shifa hospital in Gaza City, which is also used to store weapons, Kirby said, adding that they're prepared to respond to an Israeli military operation against the facility.

The United States does not support striking a hospital from the air and does not want to see a firefight in the hospital, all hospitals and patients must be protected, Kirby said.

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UN 'Paying Attention' to Biden-Xi Meeting at APEC Summit - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, November 14 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is paying much attention to the meeting between US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday.

"As everyone, we are … paying attention to the meeting between President Biden and President Xi, which, frankly, is of critical importance," Dujarric said during a press briefing.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres also believes that good relations between the United States and China are essential, Dujarric added.

Earlier on Tuesday, Biden said that he would consider his upcoming meeting with Xi successful if they could resume normal communications, including military-to-military communications.

Biden is scheduled to hold talks with Xi in San Francisco on Wednesday.

US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said that Biden expects to discuss the Israel-Hamas war and the Ukraine conflict during the meeting with Xi.

Biden will also raise the issue of the alleged threat posed by Iran, including its nuclear program and activities in the Middle East, Sullivan added.

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McConnell Says Not His Job to Control Behavior at US Capitol After Lawmaker Proposes Fight

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - US Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said on Tuesday that it is not his job to control the behavior of every person at the US Capitol, following a spree of heated incidents involving lawmakers earlier in the day.

"It's very difficult to control the behavior of everyone who's in the building. I don't view that as my responsibility," McConnell said during a press conference, when asked about the incident.

The US Capitol Police ought to handle such situations, McConnell added.

Earlier on Tuesday, US Senator Markwayne Mullin proposed a fight with Teamster official Sean O'Brien during a hearing at which the labor leader was serving as a witness. Mullin cited a previous statement by O'Brien challenging the lawmaker to a fight "any place, any time" and

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attempted to initiate a brawl before fellow lawmakers deescalated the situation.

US Congressman Tim Burchett also accused former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy of elbowing him in the kidney after a House Republican conference meeting on Tuesday. The altercation prompted Congressman Matt Gaetz to request an official probe by the House Ethics Committee into the alleged assault.

Moreover, US House Oversight Committee Chairman James Comer got into a verbal altercation with Congressman Jared Moskowitz, whom Comer said looks like a “Smurf” and called a liar.

US House Speaker Mike Johnson on Tuesday characterized the US Congress as a “pressure cooker” and said that he hopes lawmakers will have the chance to “cool off” by spending the Thanksgiving holiday with their families.

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Austin OKs Request for 30 National Guard Troops to Support Police at DC March for Israel

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin approved a request from DC Homeland Security to provide 30 National Guard personnel to support local police during the March for Israel, Pentagon spokesperson Sabrina Singh said on Tuesday.

"Today, Secretary Austin approved a request from the DC Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency to provide 30 DC National Guard personnel to support the DC Police Department during the March for Israel on the National Mall," Singh told reporters.

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At Least 59 US Soldiers Sustain Non-Serious Injuries in Attacks on Bases in Middle East

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - At least 59 US military personnel have sustained not serious injuries during recent attacks on military bases in the Middle East, Defense Department spokesperson Sabrina Singh said on Tuesday.

"We are also tracking 59 US personnel who have received injuries in the TBI [traumatic brain injury] or non-serious categories since these attacks began," Singh said during a press briefing.

Singh explained that 27 individuals have been evaluated for traumatic brain injury and 32 for other non-serious injuries.

"As of today, all 59 have returned to duty," Singh added.

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Trump's Georgia Election Case Likely to Last Till Winter 2024, Early 2025 - Prosecutor

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump's trial in Georgia on charges related to alleged election interference could last until early 2025, District Attorney Fani Willis said on Tuesday.

"I believe in that case there will be a trial, I believe the trial will take many months, and I don't expect that we will conclude until the winter [of next year] or the very early part of 2025," Willis said in remarks at the Global Women's Summit

She added that she expects the case to be on appeals for years to come.

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White House Says China Has Lines of Communication in Mideast That US Does Not

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - The Middle East will undoubtedly be a topic of discussion between US President Joe Biden and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping given that China has lines of communication in the region that the United States does not, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"I have no doubt ... that the situation in the Middle East will come up in the context of the bilateral discussion with President Xi. President Biden will be eager to hear President Xi's perspectives on this. They have lines of communication in the region in some ways that we don't," Kirby said during a press briefing.

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Lockheed Martin Expands Missile Defense Production Capabilities With New Plant in Alabama

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - Lockheed Martin has opened a new engineering plant in Huntsville, Alabama, to expand its capabilities for producing missile defense systems, the company announced in a press release on Tuesday.

"Lockheed Martin today opened a $16.5 million engineering facility at its Huntsville campus, introducing more capabilities for missile defense innovation in North Alabama," the release said.

The new Missile System Integration Lab (MSIL) is where Lockheed Martin plans to conduct development, testing, and system integration for the nation's next long range ballistic missile defense interceptor, the release also said.

"The MSIL will also house a digital engineering center and key infrastructure to create and maintain a digital thread throughout the integration process," the release added.

Lockheed Martin is also planning to break ground this year on two new facilities in Courtland, Alabama, which will add missile production space and a payload manufacturing center,

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according to the release.

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State Dept Says Has No Comment on Possibility of Lowering Diplomatic Ties With Russia

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - The United States does not comment on the possibility of lowering the diplomatic relations with Russia , Matthew Miller, Spokesperson for the United States Department of State said in a press briefing on Tuesday.

"I don't want to speak I don't want to speak to that," Miller said.

Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov said earlier in November that Russia does not seek to "push" relations with the United States into the abyss, but admits that Washington may lower the level of diplomatic relations with Moscow or sever them.

Ryabkov also said that Russia and the United States recently held a face-to-face round of consultations "on irritants in bilateral relations," there has been little progress in resolving problems,

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US Has No Military Assets, Boots on Ground in Gaza Strip - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - The United States has neither military assets nor troops on the ground in the Gaza Strip amid the ongoing hostilities, Defense Department deputy spokesperson Sabrina Singh said on Tuesday.

"[We have] no assets or boots on the ground in Gaza," Singh said during a press briefing.

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Canada Regulator Allows Trans Mountain Resume Pipeline Expansion Work – Reports

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) – Trans Mountain has been allowed to resume its oil pipeline expansion work in Abbotsford, British Columbia after being ordered to halt it by Canada Energy Regulator (CER) over instances of environmental non-compliance, Globe and Mail reported on Tuesday.

In early November, the CER ordered Trans Mountain to halt work in a wetland area near Abbotsford, British Columbia after inspections detected several non-compliance related to the environment and safety.

CER said it would continue to follow up with Trans Mountain to ensure their compliance with the

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order and verify their diligent mitigation of environmental hazards related to the expansion project.

Trans Mountain was given the greenlight to resume work after it corrected all the non-compliances in the Abbotsford area, the report said citing an email by the regulator. The company is also conducting safety inspections in all its active working sites to prevent such instances from happening again, the report continued.

In 2018, the Canadian government bought the pipeline to ensure its expansion would go ahead. The cost has since grown fourfold to C$30.9 billion ($22.5 billion) notably due to the project's construction delays.

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US Says Has Obligation to Conduct Diplomacy as Russian Officials Take Part in APEC Summit

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - The United States has an obligation to conduct diplomacy as a host nation of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit, Department of State spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.

The comment came in response to a question about Russian officials sanctioned by the European Union attending the APEC summit.

"I will say we have an obligation as the host. One of the things about diplomacy is you tend to a lot of meetings with people whose policies you object to, and sometimes you object to things that they've done, but we have a responsibility to conduct diplomacy on behalf of the United States," Miller said.

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State Dept Says Unaware of Any Meetings Planned With Russian Delegation at APEC

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday he is unaware of any contacts planned between US and Russian delegations during the APEC summit in San Francisco.

"I'm not aware of any meetings scheduled between us and the Russian government at APEC," Miller told a briefing.

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UN Stands Against Use of Landmines Everywhere - Spokesperson

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UNITED NATIONS, November 14 (Sputnik) - The United Nations stands against the use of landmines, the UN Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday.

"What I can tell you is that we stand against the use of of landmines everywhere," Dujarric told a briefing.

We have no comment on landmine reports on Donetsk in particular, he added.

Earlier today a UN Staff member made a presentation and warned about the landmines in the Donetsk region in Ukraine.

Earlier, a joint program was launched by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) to clear agricultural land from mines and help farmers resume production in Ukraine.

The Swiss Foundation for Mine Action is involved in the program, which is estimated at $100 million but is still facing a $90 million funding gap. The project was supported by the Ukraine Humanitarian Fund and a UN pooled fund, as well as private donors, according to the statement.

The program had already started in the Kharkiv Region and will later expand to the Mykolaiv and Kherson regions, the statement said.

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UN Off-Loading Humanitarian Aid in Gaza in 'Complicated Circumstances' - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, November 14 (Sputnik) - The United Nations has started offloading trucks with humanitarian aid items for the residents of the Gaza Strip in very "complicated circumstances," UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday.

"They [the trucks] were offloaded," Dujarric said during a press briefing. "The situation is still unclear. I mean, we are trying to do our best in very complicated circumstances."

Dujarric said the United Nations will try to obtain more information and provide an update later on Tuesday.

"We are trying to contact our colleagues to get the full picture," Dujarric added.

On Monday, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory said the United Nations team on the ground does not have the fuel necessary for trucks and forklifts to unload and distribute humanitarian aid in Gaza.

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Thousands of People Gather in Washington to Express Support for Israel

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - Tens of thousands of people are gathering at the National Mall in Washington to express their support for Israel in its ongoing war in the Gaza Strip, a Sputnik correspondent reported from the scene.

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The demonstrators, many holding Israeli flags, said they urge the return of hostages held by the Palestinian movement Hamas.

Significant security measures have been undertaken by the Washington authorities to secure the rally. Such measures were not undertaken during similar and bigger rallies held in the past several weeks in support of the rights of Palestinians.

Many streets near the US Capitol are closed and the police have used trucks and military vehicles to block the area to traffic. The area has also been fenced off and the police are inspecting people before entering.

The organizers said they expect about 60,000 participants to attend the rally.

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US Would Support Independent Third Party Conducting Evacuations From Gaza - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - The United States would support an independent third party evacuating civilians from the Gaza Strip, including from hospitals, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.

"We would support an independent third party or respected third party to conduct those evacuations. We know the government of Israel would support such a step as well," Miller told a press briefing. "The question is will Hamas allow patients to be evacuated from hospitals or will they continue to use them as human shields? We think an appropriate step would be to support those evacuations so babies and other vulnerable populations are not in harm's way."

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US Calls on Hamas to Allow Evacuations From Centers Under Hospitals - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - The United States is calling on Hamas to allow for evacuations, State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller aid in a press briefing on Tuesday.

"But absent that, if they refuse to remove their command centers from hospitals, as they seem likely to do - they've been burying their command centers under hospitals for years - the step that we think would be appropriate for them to take would be to allow evacuation and yes we would very much encourage them to do," Miller stated.

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Israel's Military Pauses Should Be Longer, US Will Continue to Engage on That - State Dept

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - The United States believes that humanitarian pauses in Israel's military operations in the Gaza Strip should be longer than four hours per day and will continue to engage with Israel on the issue, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.

"We've said before we think pauses ought to be longer. We will continue to engage in conversations about that with the government of Israel," Miller told a briefing.

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US Inflation Flat in October, Moderates Interest Rate Hike Forecasts

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - US inflation was flat in October, moderating interest rate hike forecasts, as unchanged price growth during the last month prompted investors to bet that the Federal Reserve would be less inclined to tighten monetary policy before the year end.

It was the first unchanged reading in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) in more than a year and came after a 0.4% increase in September.

Economists on Wall Street had initially bet on the CPI to rise 0.1% for October.

In the 12 months through October, the CPI gained 3.2% after rising 3.7% in September. Economists forecast a 3.3% increase year-on-year.

Inflation hit a four-decade high of 9.1% in the 12 months to June 2022.

To fight inflation, the Fed hiked interest rates 11 times between March 2022 and August 2023, raising them by 5.25% from a base rate of 0.25%.

The central bank is scheduled to decide on interest rates again at a policy meeting in December. Until a week ago, Fed Chairman Jerome Powell had appeared to be leaning towards an interest rate hike.

But the flat CPI reading for October seemed to change this.

"The odds of a December hike have been completely erased," economist Adam Button wrote on the ForexLive forum.

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CENTCOM Says Can't Confirm 7 People Killed in Strikes in Syria Sunday, Assessment Ongoing

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - A US Central Command (CENTCOM) spokesperson told Sputnik on Tuesday they cannot confirm seven people were killed in US airstrikes conducted in eastern Syria on Sunday because the battle damage assessment is still ongoing.

"Our battle damage assessment is still on going, and I have not seen any indications that the below number is accurate at this time," the spokesperson said.

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Earlier in the day, media reported that a post-strike assessment had concluded that up to seven people were killed in the airstrikes.

On Sunday, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said US military forces conducted precision strikes on facilities in eastern Syria allegedly used by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Iran-affiliated groups.

The strikes targeted a training facility and a safe house near the cities of Abu Kamal and Mayadin, according to Austin.

The US strikes, Austin said, were in response to continued attacks against US forces in Iraq and Syria.

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US Senator Says Will Take '100 Years' to Determine Whether Aid for Ukraine Worthwhile

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - It will take a century to ultimately determine whether the United States' support for Ukraine was a worthwhile endeavor, US Senator Roger Marshall said on Tuesday.

"I don't know who's wrong and right when it comes to Ukraine funding. I think it's going to take 100 years and history to judge who's right on the Ukraine funding," Marshall said during a press conference.

Marshall and several other Republican senators spoke in favor of holding separate votes on US aid for Israel and Ukraine, following a $106 billion supplemental funding request from the Biden administration that includes assistance for both countries.

The US House of Representatives passed a standalone Israel aid package, which the White House and Senate Democrats have opposed.

Marshall said he is certain in his support for Israel funding even though he is unsure whether he is correct on Ukraine funding.

US Senator J.D. Vance said Senate Democrats are avoiding holding a separate debate on US support for Ukraine. Democrats do not want the Biden administration to have to answer "tough questions" about its approach to Ukraine, Vance added.

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Czech TV Journalists Robbed at Gunpoint While Filming in San Francisco - Police

SAN FRANCISCO, November 14 (Sputnik) - A team of Czech TV journalists fell victim to an armed robbery in San Francisco, as three unidentified suspects, armed with firearms, forcibly took their camera and production equipment, Spokesperson for the San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) Allison Maxie told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"On November 12, 2023, at approximately 4:56 p.m., San Francisco Police officers responded

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to the area of Broadway and Columbus Avenue on a report of an armed robbery," Maxie said.
Maxie said, according to the victims, when a vehicle halted on the street, they observed three unidentified suspects, all armed with firearms, exiting the vehicle and approaching, demanding their production equipment, to which the victims acquiesced before the suspects entered their vehicle and fled from the scene.
"Once we understood the situation, we reached out to the reporters to ensure they are safe, and we offered our support during their stay. Mayor Breed met with them this morning; they had a good conversation." Spokesperson for San Francisco's Mayor London Breed said.
Furthermore, the mayor's spokesperson said that they have collaborated with local media partners to provide assistance "and happy to report they will have equipment on loan to use for the duration of their stay."

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Biden Says Success in Meeting With Xi Means Resuming Normal Communications
(Updates with more details in paras 4-6)
WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - US President Biden said Tuesday that he would consider his upcoming meeting with Chinese President Xi successful if they could resume normal communications, including military-to-military communications.
"Get back on a normal course of corresponding, being able to pick up the phone and talk to one another in a crisis, being able to make sure our militaries still have contact with one another," Biden said in remarks at the White House, when asked how he would define a successful meeting.
Biden said the United States was not trying to decouple from China, but he was "not going to continue to sustain the support for positions where if one invests in China, we have to turn over all our trade secrets."
Biden is expected to hold talks with Xi in San Francisco on Wednesday, on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Summit (APEC) summit.
On Monday, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said that Biden expects to discuss the Israel-Hamas war and the Ukraine conflict during the meeting with Xi.
Biden will also raise the issue of alleged threats posed by Iran, including its nuclear program and its activities that threaten Middle East stability, Sullivan added.

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China's Space Weapons Pose US Deterrence Challenge - US Congress Report

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - China's aggressive pursuit of space-based nuclear weapons and the potential development of low-yield warheads poses a severe threat to US deterrence strategies, Congress said in a report released on Tuesday.

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"China is already a world leader in missile and space technologies, and tighter US export controls are unlikely to have an effect on future Chinese innovation in these areas. China's huge inventory of conventional ballistic, cruise, and hypersonic missiles already limits the United States' ability to operate freely within the second island chain. Beijing's pursuit of spacebased nuclear weapons and potential development of low-yield warheads could also complicate US deterrence by offering the PLA greater flexibility to threaten or engage in limited nuclear use against U.S. forces in the region," the US Congress report said.

Furthermore, the report said that China had made significant strides in submarine technology "over time and is heavily investing in anti-submarine warfare capabilities" to undermine the longstanding US advantage in undersea warfare.

Current limitations China faces in undersea warfare technologies include quieting technologies for nuclear submarines and propulsion systems for small undersea vehicles, according to the report.

Russian technological assistance could, however, decisively affect how quickly China catches up to the United States in this area, report added.

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Biden Believes Release of US Hostages in Gaza 'Going to Happen'

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden said Tuesday he believed that US hostages held in Gaza would be released, although he did not offer any specificity.

"I've been talking with people involved every single day. I believe it's going to happen but I don't want to get into any detail," he said in response to a question at a press briefing.

When asked if he had a message for families of the hostages, Biden replied, "Hang in there, we're coming."

The US said on Sunday that there remain nine American citizens unaccounted for since Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel. Hamas released two Americans, Judith and Natalie Ranaan, last month.

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UN Expert Says Concerned About 'Pervasive Nests' of Racism in US

UNITED NATIONS, November 14 (Sputnik) - Pervasive nests of racism and racial discrimination in the United States continue to be an issue of deep concern despite initiatives undertaken to address them, Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance Ashwini K.P. said.

"I welcome these initiatives, but I'm deeply concerned by the persistent and pervasive nests of racism and racial discrimination in America at such a critical junction," Ashwini said during a

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press briefing on Tuesday.
The special rapporteur made the statement upon concluding her mission to the United States earlier in the day.
"I am also worried how systemic racism is ingrained in the institutional form of racism," she added.

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Schumer Says Will Work With McConnell to Pass Government Funding Bill Through US Senate

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said on Tuesday that he will work with Minority Leader Mitch McConnell to pass a government funding measure proposed by the House of Representatives as soon as possible after it clears the lower chamber of Congress.
"We'll see over the course of how the House moves today whether it comes forward. When it comes here – if the House should pass it, and I hope they do – Senate Leader McConnell and I will figure out the best way to get this done quickly," Schumer said during a press conference.
Schumer said that he is heartened that the proposal avoids a government shutdown without including spending cuts or other conservative policy measures.
The White House has also expressed openness to approving the House's government funding proposal in order to avoid a shutdown, Schumer said. The House proposal extends different portions of government funding through two different dates, January 19 and February 2, in an effort to avoid passing a rushed omnibus before the holiday season.
The House of Representatives is set to consider the legislation later on Tuesday, although it has received pushback from the House Freedom Caucus.

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Biden's NSC Coordinator To Visit Israel For Talks On Humanitarian Aid To Gaza -White House

(Updates with additional, background info in paras 3-6)
WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - US Deputy Assistant to the President and Coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa, Brett McGurk is traveling to Israel and the West Bank to address the matter of humanitarian assistance to the Gaza Strip and freeing the Hamas-held hostages, NSC Spokesperson Adrienne Watson announced in a statement on Tuesday.
"Deputy Assistant to the President and Coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa, Brett McGurk, departed last night for visits to Belgium, Israel, the West Bank, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, and Jordan," Watson said. "He will be in Brussels, Belgium today briefing NATO Allies and European Union partners on a coordinated approach to the current

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situation in the Middle East, with a focus on significantly expanding humanitarian assistance to Gaza, economic pressure on Hamas and other terrorist groups, and demands to immediately release hostages of multiple nationalities still being held by Hamas."

While in Israel, McGurk will discuss its security needs, the imperative of protecting civilians during military operations, the efforts to release the hostages, as well as the need to halt violent extremist settlers in the West Bank, Watson shared.

"In the West Bank, Mr. McGurk will discuss the Biden Administration's support for the Palestinian Authority and its essential role as the representative of the Palestinian people, as well as the need for reforms to promote long-term stability in both the West Bank and Gaza, and the aspirations of Palestinians to live with equal measures of freedom, security, and dignity in a state of their own," she explained.

During the trip to the Gulf region, Watson continued to say, McGurk will discuss efforts to contain the conflict against Hamas, and deterrence against any state or non-state group seeking its expansion.

On October 7, Palestinian group 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, 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. The conflict has resulted in the deaths of around 1,200 people in Israel and over 11,000 in the Gaza Strip.

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Global Uncertainties to Influence Dynamics of US-China Ties in 2024 - Report to Congress

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - Global uncertainties are set to influence the dynamics of US-China relations in the coming year leading to continued strategic competition and increasing systemic rivalries, according to the Annual Report to Congress published on Tuesday.

The report, prepared by the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, was released one day before the planned meeting between US President Joe Biden and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in San Francisco.

"US-China ties could be influenced next year by changing developments inside China, including the possibility that the Chinese economy could experience a deep slump. Amid these uncertainties and the continuing talk of 'tensions' and 'thaws' between the United States and China, the prospects for 2024 are for continuing strategic competition and an intensifying systemic rivalry between the two countries," the report said.

In addition, other factors expected to influence the US-China dynamics include the US elections, Taiwan elections next year and the course of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the report said.

Any improvement in relations is unlikely unless and until China changes course from its

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"aggressive" policies, the report added.

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Biden's NSC Coordinator To Visit Israel For Talks On Humanitarian Aid To Gaza -White House

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"Deputy Assistant to the President and Coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa, Brett McGurk, departed last night for visits to Belgium, Israel, the West Bank, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, and Jordan," Watson said. "He will be in Brussels, Belgium today briefing NATO Allies and European Union partners on a coordinated approach to the current situation in the Middle East, with a focus on significantly expanding humanitarian assistance to Gaza, economic pressure on Hamas and other terrorist groups, and demands to immediately release hostages of multiple nationalities still being held by Hamas."

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URGENT: Biden Says Success in Xi Meeting Means Resuming Normal Communications

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) – US President Biden said Tuesday that he would consider his upcoming meeting with Chinese President Xi successful if they could resume normal communications, including military-to-military communications.
"Get back on a normal course of corresponding, being able to pick up the phone and talk to one another in a crisis, being able to make sure our militaries still have contact with one another," Biden said in remarks at the White House, when asked how he would define a successful meeting.
He added that the US was not trying to decouple from China, but he was "not going to continue to sustain the support for positions where if one invests in China, we have to turn over all our trade secrets."

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US Announces More Than $6Bln to Strengthen Climate Resilience – White House

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WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) – The White House announced more than $6 billion in funding on Tuesday to strengthen national climate resilience, according to a release.

"President Biden is today announcing more than $6 billion in investments to make communities across the country more resilient to the impacts of climate change, including by strengthening America's aging electric grid infrastructure, reducing flood risk to communities, supporting conservation efforts, and advancing environmental justice," the release stated.

The White House also released the Fifth National Climate Assessment (NCA5), which found that extreme weather events related to climate change pose a rapidly intensifying threat that costs the country at least $150 billion each year and disproportionately affects underserved and overburdened communities.

The more than $6 billion in funding includes $3.9 billion administered by the Department of Energy to strengthen and modernize the electric grid; $2 billion through the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Environmental and Climate Justice Community Change Grants program; $200 million administered by the EPA for technical assistance and capacity building; $300 million through the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Swift Current Initiative; $100 million through the Department of the Interior for water infrastructure upgrades, as well as the launch of the Kapapahuliau Climate Resilience Program and $20 million for Native Hawaiian communities.

The Department of the Interior will also administer $166 million for critical ecosystem resilience, restoration, and environmental planning needs for the National Park Service over the next nine years. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and public and private sector partners will also offer $140 million in land conservation grants through the America the Beautiful Challenge.

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China Stands by Russia Despite Diplomatic Costs - Report to US Congress

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - China has decided to stand by Russia despite the diplomatic costs it has incurred for its support, a US-China Economic and Security Review Commission report to Congress said on Tuesday.

"China's support for Russia has had diplomatic costs, especially in Europe. But the CCP regime appears already to have factored these negative reactions into its calculations and has decided to stand by Russia regardless," the report said.

The report comes ahead of President Joe Biden's upcoming meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping on Wednesday.

Russia's special military operation in Ukraine is one of the topics the two officials are expected to discuss, in addition to Israel's invasion of the Gaza Strip.

Xi is scheduled to visit the United States from November 14-17 to participate in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in San Francisco.

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UPDATE- US Sanctions Additional Hamas-Linked Individuals, Entities Over October 7 Attack on Israel
(Updates: complete rewrite)
WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) – The US released a third batch of sanctions on Tuesday targeting various individuals and entities affiliated with Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, according to a treasury release.
"This action designates key Hamas officials and the mechanisms by which Iran provides support to Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). Today's designations are coordinated with action by the UK and are aimed at protecting the international financial system from abuse by Hamas and their enablers," the release stated.
The treasury sanctions target seven individuals and two entities The treasury alleged that Iranian support to Hamas and PIJ has included the transfer of hundreds of millions of dollars and the furnishing of both weapons and operational training, primarily through its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).
The sanctions target Nasser Abu Sharif, the PIJ representative to Iran, and Jamil Yusuf Ahmad 'Aliyan, a PIJ political official who has overseen PIJ finances and leads the Muhjat AlQuds Foundation in Gaza. The foundation, which provides financial support to the families of PIJ fighters and prisoners, is also being sanctioned.
Lebanon-based money exchange company Nabil Chouman & Co, which Hamas uses to transfer money from Iran to Gaza, is being sanctioned, along with its owner and founder Nabil Khaled Halil Chouman and his son Khaled Chouman. Another Lebanon-based money exchanger, Reda Ali Khamis, is also being sanctioned for facilitating financial transfers from the IRGC's Quds Force to Hamas and PIJ in Gaza.
Hamas co-founder Mahmoud Khaled Zahhar is also being sanctioned, in additional to Mu'ad Ibrahim Muhammed Rashid al-Atili, who acted for Hamas.
The Department of State is concurrently sanctioning Akram al-Ajouri, the Damascus-based deputy secretary general of PIJ and leader of PIJ's military wing Al-Quds Brigades.

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Report to US Congress Ahead of Biden-Xi Meeting Warns Bilateral Rivalry 'Intensifying'

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - A report prepared by the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission and released one day before the planned meeting between US President Joe Biden and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping warns that the rivalry between the two countries is increasing as top-level contacts have so far resulted in more talk than concrete action.
"The underlying reality was that, amid these ups and downs, the rivalry between the United States and China was intensifying," the report said. "While the top-level contacts reflected a general desire, at least by the United States, to improve the relationship with Beijing and create

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an air of normalcy, the new normal is one of continuing, long-term strategic and systemic competition."

The report also said there is no indication that China would alter its policies either at home or abroad and continues to reject cooperation with the United States on fundamental matters of national security, economics and trade.

"None of the flurry of visits and other diplomacy over the past year has resulted in any significant change of course by the regime," the report said. "The result of high-level meetings between the United States and China has been merely the promise of further meetings - that is, of more talk, rather than concrete actions."

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Sen. Schumer Says 'Heartened Cautiously' by Speaker Johnson's Proposal to Avoid Shutdown

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) – Democratic Senator Chuck Schumer said on Tuesday that he was "heartened cautiously" to see House Speaker Mike Johnson's continuing resolution proposal to avoid a looming government shutdown this week.

"I am heartened cautiously so that speaker Johnson is moving forward with his CR [continuing resolution] that omits precisely the sort of hard right cuts that would have been non-starters for Democrats," Schumer said in his remarks on the Senate floor.

According to Schumer, Johnson's resolution will avert a shutdown and at the same time will not include any drastic cuts that right-wing Republicans are proposing.

The US House of Representatives is headed for a vote on Tuesday on Johnson's so-called "laddered" CR to fund the federal government, as just three days remain ahead of a government shutdown deadline. Congressional Democrats have shown openness to the two-step approach due to its lack of spending cuts.

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US House Will Consider Bill to Block Biden's Billions to Iran on Thursday - Scalise

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives will vote on a bill to block the Biden administration from unfreezing $6 billion in Iranian assets that were set to be released as part of a prisoner swap deal, House Majority Leader Steve Scalise said on Tuesday.

"We're bringing a bill to the floor this Thursday that will freeze the $6 billion that Joe Biden wants to give to Iran," Scalise said during a press conference.

The legislation, dubbed the No Funds for Iranian Terrorism Act, re-freezes funds that the Biden administration intended to release to Iran as part of prisoner swap deal with Iran earlier this year. However, the Biden administration suspended the release of the Iranian funds following an escalation of tensions in the Middle East.

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Iran would use the money to fund proxy and terrorist groups such as Hamas, Scalise said. The Biden administration has said that the money could only be used for authorized humanitarian purposes.

The legislation comes amid allegations of Iranian support for Hamas' October 7 surprise attack on Israel, although the Biden administration said that it lacks direct evidence of Iranian involvement. The bill also comes following numerous attacks on US forces in Iraq and Syria by Iranian proxy groups.

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US House Speaker Says Would Like to Cut Spending, But Avoiding Shutdown More Important

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Tuesday that he would like to cut spending and include other policy riders to a government funding bill, but that averting a shutdown is more important.

"I want to cut spending right now, and I would like to put policy riders on this, but when you have a three-vote majority as we do right now, we don't have the votes to be able to advance that right now," Johnson said during a press conference. "What we need to do is avoid the government shutdown."

A government shutdown would "unduly harm" the American people, Johnson added.

Johnson proposed a two-step continuing resolution (CR), which would extend separate portions of government funding through two different dates, January 18 and February 2. The so-called "laddered" CR is an innovation that will change the way lawmakers have approached the appropriations process, Johnson said.

House Republicans are committed to keeping the appropriations process "on-time" next year and avoiding short-term CRs, Johnson also said.

The House of Representatives is set to consider Johnson's CR later on Tuesday, although the House Freedom Caucus has expressed opposition to the proposal. However, congressional Democrats including Chuck Schumer have shown openness to the two-step approach due to its lack of spending cuts.

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US Using Yemen Sanctions to Promote Mercantile Aims Not Achieving Peace - Polyanskiy

UNITED NATIONS, November 14 (Sputnik) - The US attempts to use the sanctions against Yemen to promote its mercantile aims are cynical because the effect if far from achieving peace in that country, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Tuesday.

"The actions of the US are particularly cynical, in particular Washington's attempt to use the

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current international sanctions against Yemen to promote narrow mercantile arms that are far from achieving peace in this long suffering country," Polyanskiy said during a meeting at the UN Security Council.

Earlier on Tuesday, the UN Security Council adopted a technical rollover resolution on securing peace in Yemen.

Ansar Allah (Houthi) movement spokesperson Yahya Saria has earlier in November that the movement will continue to conduct strikes against Israel until it ends the aggression against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

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UNSC Unanimously Adopted Rollover Resolution on Situation in Yemen - UNSC President

UNITED NATIONS, November 14 (Sputnik) - The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) draft resolution on Yemen was adopted unanimously by the members, the UNSC President Zhang Jun said on Tuesday.

“The resolution has been adopted unanimously,” Jun told the UNSC members.

“The decision for technical rollover of the respective restrictions for 12 months is in our view the best to preserve the necessary momentum to find a peaceful solution to the Yemeni crisis in the context of an unprecedented regional escalation,” Russian Deputy Ambassador to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy told the UNSC members.

Early November, Houthi spokesperson Yahya Saria has said that Yemen's rebel Ansar Allah movement, also known as the Houthis, will continue to conduct strikes against Israel until the country stops its "aggression" in the Gaza Strip.

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Saudi Relief Center Provides $15Mln for UNRWA Emergency Appeal for Gaza - Statement

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - Saudi Arabia’s King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSrelief) has allocated $15 million in support of the first phase of the United Nations emergency appeal for the Gaza Strip, KSrelief announced in a statement provided to Sputnik on Tuesday.

"The King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre is providing US$15 million to support the first phase of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) Emergency Appeal for Gaza," the statement said.

The contribution will cover assistance for food, shelter, non-food items, emergency and health sectors, the statement said.

UNRWA is at present the only international humanitarian organization capable of providing support on the ground inside the Palestinian enclave, the statement said.

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The plan will be implemented immediately through the existing partnership between KSrelief and UNRWA and will address the critical humanitarian conditions and challenges inside Gaza, including the severely restricted humanitarian access into the area, the statement said.

"Targeted programs will be implemented to ensure that emergency aid and services are provided to affected groups as quickly as possible," the statement said.

KSrelief emphasizing that Saudi Arabia stands with the Palestinian people and is committed to providing comprehensive humanitarian relief and support to Gaza through the work of its global humanitarian aid representative - KSrelief.

On Thursday, UNRWA launched an appeal for $481 million in emergency funding before the end of this year to assist Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank amid Israel's ground invasion and comprehensive blockade.

Last week, the United Nations and its partner organizations announced a $1.2 billion fund-raising effort to help 2.7 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

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US Announces Initiatives to Combat Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia at Schools – White House

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) – The US announced on Tuesday a series of initiatives to address the rise of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia at schools and universities, according to a White House release.

"The Biden-Harris Administration is today announcing new actions and resources to address the alarming rise of reported Antisemitic and Islamophobic incidents at schools and on college campuses since the October 7th Hamas terrorist attacks in Israel. These actions will help protect students, engage school and university leaders, and foster safe and supportive learning environment," the release stated.

The Department of Education is releasing specialized guidelines for educators, holding listening sessions with P-12 school leaders and university leaders, and launching a webinar series. It has also reminded schools of their legal obligations under Title VI and recently released an updated complaint form for Title VI discrimination.

The Departments of Homeland Security (DHS) and Justice have hosted calls with campus law enforcement. DHS's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency is leveraging its 10 regional field offices to conduct outreach and provide security resources to K-12 and higher education institutions

The Justice Department has published an updated hate crimes threat response guide from the FBI. On October 30, it announced over $38 million in grants to support the investigation and prosecution of hate crimes, increase hate crimes reporting, expand victim services, and improve community awareness.

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US House Freedom Caucus Says Johnson's CR Has No Spending Reduction, Security Measures

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) – The US House Freedom Caucus expressed its opposition on Tuesday against the Continued Resolution (CR) proposed by House Speaker Mike Johnson, saying that the document provides no spending reduction and border security measures.

"The House Freedom Caucus opposes the proposed "clean" Continuing Resolution as it contains no spending reduction, no border security, and not a single meaningful win for the American people," the caucus said in a statement.

The caucus called on Republicans to stop adopting bills that cannot pass through the Senate.

At the same time, the caucus expressed commitment to working with Johnson on finding an appropriate resolution. "We need bold change," the statement added.

The US House of Representatives is headed for a vote on Tuesday on Johnson's so-called "laddered" CR to fund the federal government, as just three days remain ahead of a government shutdown deadline.

Biden said on Monday that he will "wait and see" how lawmakers handle the proposal, when asked whether he would veto the laddered continual resolution.

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US Allocates $1Mln to Investigate Alleged Russian Crimes in Ukraine - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 14 (Sputnik) - The United States will provide $1 million for an international investigation of alleged crimes committed by Russia in Ukraine, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.

"As part of our unwavering commitment to Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty, and to promoting comprehensive justice and accountability for international crimes against Ukraine and its people, the U.S. Department of State will provide $1 million to the International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression Against Ukraine (ICPA), which was established in The Hague at Eurojust with the support of the European Commission," Miller said in a statement.

The ICPA will intensify its probe into Russia's special military operation by providing a forum in which Ukraine and other partner countries can cooperate in building "the strongest possible cases for future prosecution," according to the statement.

The State Department encourages others to support the ICPA and contribute to international efforts to "ensure accountability" for Russia, the statement added.

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