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11/21/23 Tuesday

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'All In' for Trump House Speaker Johnson Pays Visit to Mar-a-Lago

On Monday, US House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) made the pilgrimage to Mar-a-Lago, the estate of former US President Donald Trump, who is leading the polls among Republicans in the 2024 race for the presidency.

According to US media reports, Johnson attended a fundraiser hosted by Trump for US Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-FL) who, like Johnson, is a close supporter of Trump. It was reportedly the first time Johnson and Trump have spoken since the Louisiana lawmaker became House Speaker a month ago.

The previous Speaker, Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-CA), had a troubled relationship with the former president, and it was ultimately a strongly pro-Trump faction of the House GOP Caucus that caused McCarthy's eviction from the Speaker's seat in early October. In the fracas of selecting a new Speaker, Trump endorsed Rep. Jim Jordan (R-OH) instead of Johnson and even floated the idea of him becoming Speaker himself for a time, since the Constitution doesn't require that the Speaker be a sitting member of Congress.

However, Trump did eventually urge Republican lawmakers to rally behind Johnson because he was the leading candidate and the lower Congressional chamber had been without leadership for three weeks. After Johnson was elected Speaker, Trump praised him for being an underdog. "At this time yesterday, nobody was thinking of Mike," Trump said. "And then we put out the word, and now he's the Speaker of the House. So I want to just thank all of the supporters that I have, and I want to thank all the supporters that Mike has, and again, he'll be a great Speaker. I think you're going to be very proud."

Johnson has remained loyal to Trump, too. Johnson and Bilirakis were both signatories of an amicus brief to the US Supreme Court in late 2020 that supported Trump's claim that the November 2020 election had been marred by fraud, invalidating his loss to Joe Biden. While those claims have been widely discredited in the years since, including by many who were part of Trump's cabinet at the time, Johnson is one figure who has maintained that the 2020 election was "stolen" from Trump.

Last week, Johnson told reporters he was "all in" on Trump's 2024 election bid.

"I have endorsed him wholeheartedly," Johnson said. "He had a phenomenal first term. His first two years, as you all know, we brought about the greatest economic numbers in the history of the world, not just the country, because his policies work. And I'm all in for President Trump."

Trump has not yet won the Republican National Committee's endorsement as their presidential candidate, but has led the pack of candidates since announcing his intention to run. The latest poll by Morning Consult found two-thirds of GOP voters ready to pull the lever for Trump in November 2024; however another poll by Harvard CAPS-Harris found that 60% of likely Trump voters said there is "at least some chance" they would support a different candidate. Behind

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Trump, the Morning Consult poll found just 13% of GOP voters support Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and 9% support former UN ambassador Nikki Haley.
However, Trump is also facing down several criminal cases that have levied a wide array of federal offense accusations at him, including related to the January 6, 2021, insurrection by his supporters at the US Capitol and the classified documents found at Mar-a-Lago during an FBI raid in August 2022. Some of the charges could bar him from running for public office if he is found guilty.

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Photo: Japanese Firm Unveils Micro-Rover for Second Lunar Landing Attempt

A Japanese company that previously attempted to land a spacecraft on the moon has announced it will make a second attempt that will include a tiny rover about the size of a microwave oven.
Tokyo-based ispace announced recently it had selected the final design for a micro rover intended to be included on its next lunar mission, scheduled for “no earlier than winter 2024.”
In a news release, ispace included a computer-generated image of the rover, which has four pedaled, waterwheel-like wheels, a vertical antenna, and a set of solar panels that seem to be mounted on a hinge that lifts up from the top of the rover.
The rover’s dimensions are miniscule: 0.24 inches (26 centimeters) tall, 12.4 inches (31.5 cm) wide and 21.26 inches (54 cm) long, and it will weigh about 11 pounds (5 kilograms).
By comparison, NASA’s Perseverance rover on Mars is about the size of a sport utility vehicle and weighs 2,260 pounds (1,025 kilograms), and China’s Yutu-2 rover on the moon is about the size of a small golf cart (1 meter by 1 meter by 1.5 meters) and weighs 310 pounds (40 kilograms).
The micro-rover will carry a forward-mounted HD camera for taking photos of moon dirt that it will scoop up with a shovel.
“Mission 2, part of the HAKUTO-R lunar exploration program, will serve as the company’s second technological demonstration, based on lessons learned from Mission 1, with the objective of further validating the lander’s design and technology, as well as ispace’s business model to provide reliable lunar transportation and data services,” the company said.
Mission 1, of course, didn’t go so well: as the spacecraft began its final descent to the lunar surface this past April, it misjudged its altitude and crashed into the moon. The spacecraft was remotely operated from Earth, so nobody was harmed in the crash.
“During Mission 2, ispace will conduct initial resource exploration activities, primarily with its micro rover, which is being designed, manufactured, and assembled by engineers in its ispace EUROPE office. The exploration activities will be an important advancement in achieving ispace’s goal and vision of establishing the cislunar economy,” ispace added.
After Mission 2, ispace is also working on Mission 3, scheduled for 2026.

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The missions come amid a flurry of moon missions after years of humans largely neglecting the lunar surface in favor of missions to Mars or other planets. Another Japanese lander, the Smart Lander for Investigation Moon (SLIM), build by the state-backed Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA), made its first close flyby of the moon last month ahead of a future landing date. In August, India successfully touched down its Chandrayaan-3 lander on the lunar south pole, and the latest of China's moon landers, Chang'e-6, is set for launch in May 2024. Russia's Luna-25 mission attempted to land on the moon in August as well, but failed after incorrectly measuring its velocity and crashed, Roscosmos said.

At 238,000 miles away, establishing a permanent human presence on the moon is seen as a necessary first step for further manned missions across the solar system, including to Mars and Venus, the closest planets to Earth.

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Photo: Webb Telescope Snaps Stunning Image of 'Chaotic' Galactic Center

Sace agency NASA has published a new image from the James Webb Space Telescope showing a region near the center of the Milky Way galaxy near a supermassive black hole.

The region is called Sagittarius C (Sgr C) because it sits within the constellation Sagittarius in Earth's sky, but in reality it is about 25,000 light-years from Earth. The JWST's image is the first time this region of space has been looked at using an infrared lens, which can detect wavelengths of light in a spectrum beyond what's visible to humans.

Called a region of "chaotic space," the area captured contains several as-yet-unidentified structures, as well as some familiar places such as a protostar cluster and a vast portion of ionized hydrogen gas.

The image contains an estimated 500,000 stars, according to NASA. The whole region is about 300 light-years away from Sagittarius A*, the supermassive black hole that sits at the center of our galaxy.

"The galactic center is a crowded, tumultuous place. There are turbulent, magnetized gas clouds that are forming stars, which then impact the surrounding gas with their outflowing winds, jets, and radiation," explained co-investigator Rubén Fedriani, a postdoctoral research fellow at the Instituto Astrofísica de Andalucía in Spain, in a statement.

"Webb has provided us with a ton of data on this extreme environment, and we are just starting to dig into it."

Alongside the raw image, NASA released a helpful guide to some of the strange phenomena it contains.

Officials note several objects of interest, including "needle-like structures" in the ionized gas that seem to have no uniform direction, and for which they have no explanation.

"Webb reveals an incredible amount of detail, allowing us to study star formation in this sort of environment in a way that wasn't possible previously," said Samuel Crowe, the principal investigator and an undergraduate student at the University of Virginia.

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"The image from Webb is stunning, and the science we will get from it is even better," Crowe said. "Massive stars are factories that produce heavy elements in their nuclear cores, so understanding them better is like learning the origin story of much of the universe."
The space observatory was launched to distant Earth orbit in 2021, where it is afforded incredible views of the universe far from the intrusive lights of human civilization. It specializes in the infrared spectrum and is the most powerful telescope ever built, able to see back to within hundreds of millions of years after the Big Bang.

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Musk Sues Media Watchdog for 'Maliciously Manufactured' Report Showing Ads Next to Neo-Nazi Posts

Elon Musk's social media company X, formerly known as Twitter, has struggled to balance the books for years, and after the billionaire bought the company last fall, he announced a series of sweeping policy changes designed to increase revenue. However, they've brought in new criticisms, too.
X has filed a lawsuit against media watchdog group Media Matters and one of its writers after the group published a report highlighting instances of major advertisers' ads appearing next to pro-Nazi posts on the site, causing several of them to pull their promotions from the site.
The lawsuit, filed on Monday for unknown reasons in the US District Court for the Northwestern District of Texas, alleges that the Washington, DC-based Media Matters "knowingly and maliciously manufactured" images of ads next to pro-Nazi posts "to drive advertisers from the platform and destroy X Corp," which is based in San Francisco, California.
While X admits that the ads did, in fact, appear next to the posts in question, it alleges in the suit that Media Matters "resorted to endlessly scrolling and refreshing its unrepresentative, hand-selected feed" of "a small subset of users consisting entirely of accounts in one of two categories: those known to produce extreme, fringe content, and accounts owned by X's big-name advertisers."
This, the company said, generated 13 to 15 more advertisements per hour than the average user, eventually resulting in the side-by-side screenshots published in Media Matters' November 16 report.
In that report, Media Matters showed ads from companies like Xfinity, Apple, IBM, and Oracle, appearing in feeds before or after posts that glorified the Nazi party, ideology or Nazi leader Adolf Hitler. The organization drew a connection between this serendipity, Musk's recent endorsement of an antisemitic conspiracy theory on his personal X account, and X's reinstatement of several antisemitic pages.
On X's "Ads Help Center" page, the company explains that "your activity on X, the information you provide to X, and our relationships with ad partners all help make promoted content more relevant for you." Meaning that some, but not all, of the ads users see on the platform are targeted for them.

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In the days after Media Matters' report was published, IBM and Apple both announced they were "pausing" or "suspending" their ad campaigns on X.
In response to the suit, Media Matters President and CEO Angelo Carusone said on X that it was "a frivolous lawsuit meant to bully X's critics into silence. Media Matters stands behind its reporting and look[s] forward to winning in court."
Media Matters has criticized X for years, but that criticism became much more pronounced after Musk bought the platform in October 2022 and reversed the banning of many accounts belonging to right-wing figures, including white supremacists like Nick Fuentes.
The organization has also blasted X for relaxing its rules against hate speech, particularly against trans people and Jews, which have skyrocketed in the last year. Musk has claimed such posts are down-rated so nobody sees them.
When Musk bought the company, it was deeply in the red, and he has made several changes designed to increase revenues, from pressuring users to opt for paid "Twitter Blue" accounts to attempting to attract new advertisers to the platform. However, amid the numerous controversies since Musk took over, many companies have either temporarily or permanently pulled their ads from X.

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Secretive US Program Gives Law Enforcement Access to Trillions of Domestic Phone Records

The program was first revealed in 2013, but has since changed its name and funding source, allowing it to skirt oversight from the US Congress and privacy advocates.
US law enforcement agencies are continuing to use a dragnet surveillance program that utilizes a database of trillions of records of domestic phone calls as far back as 1987, new findings have revealed.
According to a letter sent by Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR) which asks for permission to share information about the program with the public, the program previously named "Hemisphere" is devoid of congressional oversight and is often used by law enforcement with a warrant or other form of judicial review.
The Hemisphere program was first revealed in 2013 after a citizen activist discovered the program through routine public records requests which he shared with media outlets. That disclosure also revealed that nearly 4 billion records are added to the database every day.
The size and extent of the database utilized by the Hemisphere program is said to far exceed even the National Security Agency's spying program under the Patriot Act that was revealed by Edward Snowden in 2013.
Described in internal law enforcement communications as "AT&T's Super Search Engine" the program allows law enforcement to query the records of phone calls of any call that utilizes AT&T's nationwide infrastructure, including customers of other phone carriers.
The program not only targets suspects and people they communicate with, but it also tracks anyone who communicates with those individuals, the vast majority of whom are not suspected of committing any crime.

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Law enforcement can query the database maintained by AT&T with an administrative subpoena, which does not require a judge's signature in most states. The program was quietly launched in 2009 and defunded after it was revealed to the public in 2013.

Former US President Donald Trump resumed funding the program, which was again paused in the first year of US President Joe Biden's administration but was resumed again in 2022.

In his letter, Wyden asks for permission to share information that he says would "justifiably outrage many Americans and other members of Congress" and questions the legality of the program.

Hemisphere was renamed to the more innocuous Data Analytical Services (DAS) after its reveal in 2013 and has since been funded by a grant program from the National Drug Control Policy's High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) program, but the program was not exclusively used in drug cases.

As Wyden notes in his letter, if the program were funded directly from a department, then it would have been subject to greater scrutiny, including the Department of Justice's Office of Privacy and Civil Liberties, with its findings made public.

Since the program is essentially run by the White House, it is also not subject to Freedom of Information Act requests.

AT&T declined to comment when reached by US media, only noting it is obligated to comply with legal subpoenas, but there is no law that requires telecom providers to store records for that long or extensively, and the database utilized by Hemisphere is far more extensive than those stored by other companies. The government has also paid AT&T millions of dollars over the past decade to continue the project.

A wide range of law enforcement agencies have utilized the program, including the California Highway Patrol, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the US Postal Service and the National Guard.

However, the true extent it was utilized may never be fully understood. One slide included in training materials for the program titled "Protecting the Program" instructed officers to "never refer to Hemisphere in any official documents" and instructed them to claim information found using the program "as information obtained from an AT&T subpoena."

The tactic, called "parallel subpoenaing" or "parallel construction" means that police would use the program to find information and then issue a second subpoena requesting the same information using traditional methods. This conceals the process used to obtain information in a court case from judges, defendants and their lawyers as well as the public.

Wyden and other lawmakers introduced a bill earlier this month called the Government Surveillance Reform Act, which would close many of the legal loopholes that allow the DSA to operate without oversight and would effectively make it illegal in its current form.

If passed, the bill will also reform the spying program run by the NSA under Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, which enabled the mass surveillance of Americans and the storage of their electronic communications by the US Government.

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Biden's Broken Brain - Cartoon

The ceremony of pardoning turkeys before Thanksgiving by a US President was formalized by George H. W. Bush and has been carried on by every subsequent president. The US Department of Agriculture estimates that more than 46 million turkeys will be consumed in the US on Thanksgiving.
US President Joe Biden, 81, appeared to mix up pop stars Taylor Swift and Britney Spears on Monday while attempting to make a joke during the turkey "pardoning" tradition ahead of the American holiday Thanksgiving.
"You could say, even, this is harder than getting a ticket to the Renaissance tour or, or, or Britney's tour," Biden said. "She's down in, it's kinda warm in Brazil right now."
Taylor Swift, one of the biggest pop star in the world right now, is currently in Brazil where a heatwave has delayed some shows and resulted in the death of one fan. Britney Spears, who released her first album in 1999, while she has received renewed attention due to a legal battle over a protracted conservatorship and a recently released tell-all book, is not currently touring. Swift's current run of shows has been named the "Eras Tour." Beyoncé concluded her Renaissance tour last month, likely adding to the geriatric president's confusion.
Another massive pop star, Cardi B, revealed in a social media post that she will not support Joe Biden's reelection campaign, complaining about the administration's support of Ukraine and Israel while domestic issues persist. Cardi B vocally supported Biden's 2020 campaign.
Biden's age and visible physical frailty have concerned many voters, with recent polling showing that the majority of Americans think he is too old to serve another term as president. Another recent poll showed that Biden's approval rating has shrunk to 40%, the lowest of his presidency. The largest drop was among 18-34-year-olds, with the vast majority of them –70%– disapproving of the administration's support for Israel.

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X CEO Asks Staff To Be 'Fiscally Responsible' Amid Ad Revenue Drop

Elon Musk bought X, then Twitter, in October 2022. He promised to bring free speech back to the platform, but has been beset with accusations of promoting hateful content.
X CEO Linda Yaccarino asked staffers to be "as fiscally responsible as possible" in order to offset revenue losses caused by major advertisers leaving the platform.
According to US media citing unnamed X employees, the comment came during an all-hands meeting about the loss in advertising revenue. Yaccarino reportedly said it in response to a question from an employee, asking what they could do to help.
"If you deal with contracts, if you're negotiating with anyone, just know that the pauses cause a more specific discipline and diligence as it relates to any type of spending at the company," Yaccarino reportedly replied.
"And by all means, put your heads together to bring new revenue into the company," the CEO added.

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Over the course of the past week, multiple major advertisers including IBM, Apple, NBCUniversal and Comcast among others announced that they were pausing or outright ending advertising on the platform formerly known as Twitter. The recent exodus was brought on by a report from Media Matters that ads were running next to pro-Nazi and white supremacy content. Yaccarino previously worked as NBCUniversal's chairman of global advertising and partnerships.

X has filed a lawsuit against Media Matters for defamation and fraud, claiming that it gamed their algorithm in order to make the ads appear next to those posts. According to X, Media Matters created sock puppet accounts and used them to follow both major brands and accounts that posted pro-Nazi content. That, the company says, resulted in those accounts receiving 13 to 15 times the amount of ads a typical account experiences, refreshing the page until they saw ads next to hateful content.

“Not a single authentic user of the X platform saw IBM’s, Comcast’s, or Oracle’s ads next to that content, which Media Matters achieved only through its manipulation of X’s algorithms as described above” the lawsuit reads. “And in Apple’s case, only two out of more than 500 million active users saw its ad appear alongside the fringe content cited in the article—at least one of which was Media Matters.”

Media Matters is a leftist advocacy group founded by David Brock, who switched to the Democratic side in the late 1990s, aligning himself with his former targets, Bill and Hillary Clinton.

Media Matters is also being investigated by Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton for alleged fraud.

The accusations of antisemitism grew louder when Musk replied that a user had “said the actual truth” when he accused Jewish communities of pushing “dialectical hatred against whites.” Musk then followed up that post by saying that the Anti-Defamation League attacks “the majority of the West” because it cannot criticize “minority groups who are their primary threat.”

X has struggled with advertisers since Musk took over the platform last year. In July, Musk confirmed that the company was still in the red, noting that it saw a 50% drop in advertising revenue.

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US Warned India Against Alleged Involvement in Plot to Kill Sikh Separatist - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) – The United States warned India of concerns that its government was involved in a plot to assassinate a Sikh separatist leader on US soil, the Financial Times reported Wednesday, citing multiple unnamed sources.

The sources said that it was unclear whether the plot to kill Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, a US and Canadian citizen, was ultimately thwarted because of the US's diplomatic warning to India, made after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s state visit to Washington in June, or the FBI's direct intervention.

Sources also said that US federal prosecutors filed an indictment in a New York district court

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against at least one person allegedly involved in the Pannun assassination plot. The US Department of Justice is debating whether to wait until the Canadian government completes its investigation into the murder in Vancouver of another Sikh separatist before unsealing the indictment.

The US aired its concerns with allies over the Pannun case after Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau publicly criticized India over its alleged involvement in Hardeep Singh Nijjar's killing in June.

Pannun is the general counsel of Sikhs for Justice, which is part of the movement advocating for an independent Sikh state of Khalistan in India.

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Austin Says Defense Contact Group Has Committed $80Bln in Ukraine Aid Since February 2022

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin praised members of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group on Wednesday for committing more than $80 billion in security assistance to Ukraine since the start of the conflict.

"I'm proud that this history-making contact group has committed more than $80 billion in security assistance to Ukraine since the Kremlin launched its indefensible invasion," Austin said at the 17th meeting of the group.

Austin stated that the unity of the group, which consists of about 50 countries, demonstrated to Russia that it could not outlast or prevail in the conflict.

Austin reiterated the US's commitment to support Ukraine as it entered another winter season of fighting and urged the contact group's members to focus now on helping Ukraine build its air defense capabilities.

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Austin Urges Partners to Provide Ukraine With Air Defense Capabilities Ahead of Winter

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) – US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Wednesday urged partners from the Ukraine Defense Contact Group to provide Kiev with air defense capabilities ahead of winter months.

"As Ukraine faces another winter of war, I urge this group to provide Ukraine with air defense capabilities to protect its people," Austin said at a virtual meeting of the group.

He said that the group will also discuss the progress achieved since the last meeting in developing a new capability on ground-based air defense.

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UN Secretary-General Calls Israel-Hamas Agreement 'Important Step'

UNITED NATIONS, November 22 (Sputnik) – UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday that the temporary ceasefire and hostage exchange agreement reached between Israel and Hamas was an "important step" while "much more needs to be done."

"I welcome the agreement reached by Israel & Hamas. It's an important step in the right direction, but much more needs to be done. The UN will mobilize all its capacities to support the implementation & maximize positive impact on the humanitarian situation in Gaza," Guterres posted on social media.

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Young Americans Stand for Palestine, Critics of Israel Reveal Generational Divide - Sachs

UNITED NATIONS, November 22 (Sputnik), Lenka White - The growing number of American youths being critical of Israel and calling for securing the rights and freedom of the Palestinian people reveals a generational divide in the United States, renowned economist and Columbia University Center for Sustainable Development Director Jeffrey Sachs told Sputnik.

"Now there's a big generational divide [in the United States], where younger people are saying 'no,' we see with our own eyes that Palestine doesn't have rights, it needs rights,' and so there's a very anti-Israel feeling among younger people in the United States right now," Sachs said.

Sachs emphasized that he would like to see Russia, China and the United States work together to find a way to end the war in the Gaza Strip.

Student protests have taken place at university campuses across the United States calling on Israel to stop its siege of Gaza, cease killing civilians and end the occupation of Palestine.

A recent demonstration earlier in November took place at the University of San Francisco, where they carried signs such as "Free Palestine" and "Stop the Occupation" and demanded a ceasefire in Gaza as part of the "Shut It Down for Palestine" movement.

On October 7, the Palestinian group Hamas launched a surprise attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip. Israel declared war on Hamas and launched massive bombardments and a full blockade of Gaza, cutting off water, food, medicines, electricity and fuel.

Israel's indiscriminate bombardments and the subsequent invasion of Gaza has so far resulted in the deaths of more than 14,100 civilians and the wounding of at least 30,000 others.

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US Needs More Consistent Approach to China as Congress Destabilizes Relations - Sachs

UNITED NATIONS, November 22 (Sputnik), Lenka White - The United States needs to find a more consistent approach to China amid the anti-China sentiment in Congress that destabilizes bilateral relations, because this is much more important than spewing inflammatory rhetoric, renowned economist and Columbia University Center for Sustainable Development Director Jeffrey Sachs told Sputnik.

"What is a problem is getting consistency in US policy vis-a-vis China because there's a lot of anti-China sentiment in Congress that is really destabilizing," Sachs said.

Last week, President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping held extensive talks on a wide range of diplomatic and security matters. Biden said progress was made during the talks, but nevertheless referred to Xi as a dictator during remarks to reporters.

"It was not the finest moment of this president, that's for sure, just a terribly dumb thing to do. One of the first rules of diplomacy with China is be polite, this is obvious," Sachs said.

A steady leadership in the United States is necessary to improve bilateral relations as there is no fundamental reason for a clash between Washington and Beijing, Sachs added.

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US Foreign Policy Moves Toward Venezuela Some of 'Stupidest' Yet - Jeffrey Sachs

UNITED NATIONS, November 22 (Sputnik), Lenka White - The United States' political moves toward Venezuela are some of the most absurd ever, renowned economist and Columbia University Center for Sustainable Development Director Jeffrey Sachs told Sputnik.

"When it comes to Venezuela, it's quite extraordinary what happened and it's really worth looking at because it was one of the stupidest US foreign policy moves that I know of," Sachs said.

Sachs noted that the United States during the Trump administration decided to oust Nicolas Maduro by declaring him an illegitimate president of Venezuela and named a non-elected person, Juan Guaido, as president.

Guaido was deemed by the United States to be far more amenable to promoting the United States' interests in Venezuela, Sachs said.

The United States later admitted that Guaido is not actually the president, but many countries went along with the US decision to name him president, Sachs added.

In January 2019, Venezuela plunged into a political crisis when Guaido, the former head of the opposition-controlled National Assembly, proclaimed himself to be "interim president" in a bid to oust re-elected President Maduro from power.

The United States and most Western countries endorsed Guaido and imposed crippling sanctions on Venezuela, while Russia, China, Turkey and other nations expressed support for Maduro as Venezuela's sole legitimate president.

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US Hegemony Over But US Political Class Refuses to Admit It - Jeffrey Sachs

UNITED NATIONS, November 22 (Sputnik), Lenka White - The United States hegemony over the world has already ended and it continues to exist only in the imagination of the country's ruling political class, renowned economist and Columbia University Center for Sustainable Development Director Jeffrey Sachs told Sputnik.

"The US hegemony, in a broad political sense or economic sense, is already over. The United States is not a hegemonic power except in the imagination of the US political class," Sachs said.

The United States has ceased to be the most powerful country and there are now many other strong players in the world, including China, Russia and India, Sachs said.

"That is why the US world hegemony is over," Sachs said.

While the US dollar remains the main currency of the international financial system, its role has already diminished tremendously, Sachs also said.

This trend will continue because of the decreasing share of the US economy; the shift by

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countries in using digital means for settlements rather than traditional banks; and the increased abuse of the dollar by the United States in pursuing its political goals, Sachs added.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly said that the de-dollarization process among BRICS member states is irreversible and the share of the dollar in world trade is decreasing.

The United States had an edge over the rest of the world due to the fact that it was not significantly impacted during the two world wars. However, the geopolitical structure has been shifting toward regional powers who want to use their own currencies as they trade and develop their economies.

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UN Chief Condemns North Korea for Launching Another Military Satellite - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, November 22 (Sputnik) - The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemns North Korea for launching yet another military satellite using ballistic missile technology, UN Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday.

"The Secretary-General strongly condemns the launch of yet another military satellite using ballistic missile technology by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," the statement said.

Any launch by North Korea using ballistic missile technology is contrary to the relevant UN Security Council resolutions, it added.

The South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCG) said Tuesday that North Korea has carried out the previously announced launch of "a military reconnaissance satellite" in the southern direction. The JCG said Monday that North Korea had informed it of plans to launch a satellite between November 22 and December 30.

Following the launch, the White House also condemned North Korea's latest missile launch and urged Pyongyang to cease this activity.

The launch was condemned by South Korean authorities as well, prompting Seoul to suspend part of a 2018 inter-Korean military tension reduction agreement in response to the launch, which allows South Korea to immediately restore reconnaissance and surveillance activities around the border with North Korea in the area around the Military Demarcation Line separating the two countries, South Korean media reported.

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Israel-Hamas Hostage Deal Includes Multi-Day Ceasefire, Possible Extension - US Official

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - An agreement between Israel and Hamas to release hostages includes a multi-day pause in fighting to facilitate the process, a senior Biden administration official told reporters.

"The hostage deal, as it is structured, includes a humanitarian pause over a number of days -

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four to five days at least - and there is the potential, with additional releases, for that to be extended," the official said on Tuesday.

The pause in hostilities will help enable a surge in humanitarian assistance to the area, the official said.

The United States hopes that the potential agreement will lead to a pause in hostilities along the Israel-Lebanon border as well, the official added.

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Implementing Israel-Hamas Hostage Deal to Begin 24 Hours After Reaching One - US Official

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - Implementing an agreement between Israel and Palestinian movement Hamas on the release of hostages will start a day after the deal is reached and the United States anticipates the freeing of additional hostages, a senior Biden administration official said during a press briefing.

"Even if we get an agreement tonight or tomorrow morning, the implementation would not start until 24 hours after that," the official said on Tuesday evening. "If we had an agreement tonight, the implementation would probably be Thursday morning Israel time."

The official said the agreement that is now being structured is for women and children to be released in the first phase, but "with the expectation for additional releases and the clear aim to bring all hostages home to their families."

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Biden Engaged ‘Hour-by-Hour’ in Reaching Deal on Gaza Hostages - Senior US Official

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden has been directly and personally involved "hour-by-hour" in the process of reaching a deal to release the hostages held by Hamas, a senior Biden administration official said.

"The president has been directly and personally engaged in this process throughout, almost hour-by-hour," the official said during a press briefing on Tuesday.

The official pointed out that Biden has had 14 engagements with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, three calls with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and two calls with Qatari Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani since the beginning of the Gaza crisis.

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US Habit of Taking Others' Money Forces States to Establish Non-Dollar Systems - Sachs

UNITED NATIONS, November 22 (Sputnik), Lenka White - The United States' inclination to take other people's money has accelerated the shift toward other countries establishing non-US dollar monetary settlements systems, renowned economist and director of the Columbia University Center for Sustainable Development Jeffrey Sachs told Sputnik.

"The United States has a bad habit of taking other people's money, and I think it's a very bad idea," Sachs said. "This is accelerating the shift out of dollar-based systems and this is the decision of the BRICS to find non-dollar settlement systems."

Moreover, Sachs said he believes it is perfectly feasible to move away from dollar-based systems, and if Russia and China, or Russia and Brazil, abandon the dollar as a means for settlement, then this will further speed up the exit from dollar payment systems and diminish that currency's role as the main instrument of payment.

Sachs noted that he keeps telling US officials not to continue with the established practice of claiming others' money and assets because the world's appetite to use the US dollar will continue to decrease and lead to its destruction.

Sachs pointed out that Washington's political behavior regarding the weaponization of the US dollar is not the only reason why its role has been diminishing.

The other two causes are the shrinking US economy compared to emerging economies and the insistence of using bank accounts for transactions the old-fashioned way at a time when just about everything is becoming digital, Sachs said.

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US Conducts Strikes Against 2 Facilities in Iraq in Response to Recent Attacks - CENTCOM

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The United States has carried out two precision strikes against two facilities in Iraq in response to recent attacks against US forces in the Middle East, US Central Command (CENTCOM) said Tuesday.

"On the morning of November 22 in Iraq, US Central Command (USCENTCOM) forces conducted discrete, precision strikes against two facilities in Iraq," CENTRCOM said in a statement. "The strikes were in direct response to the attacks against US and Coalition forces by Iran and Iran-backed groups, including the one in Iraq on November 21, which involved use of close-range ballistic missiles."

Earlier in the day, CENTCOM said "Iran-backed" militias used a close-range ballistic missile against US and Coalition forces at Al-Asad Airbase in Iraq, which resulted in eight injuries and some minor damage to infrastructure. The US retaliated with an airstrike from an AC-130 gunship that killed several militants allegedly involved in the attack.

US forces have been attacked 66 times in the Middle East since the uptick in violence began in mid-October, according to the Pentagon.

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US Politicians, Public Differ in Views on Aid for Ukraine Amid Bad Economy - Sachs

UNITED NATIONS, November 22 (Sputnik), Lenka White - US politicians continue to support sending security and other aid to Ukraine but the public does not back this cause amid a worsening economic situation in the United States and a growing budget deficit, renowned economist and Columbia University Center for Sustainable Development Director Jeffrey Sachs told Sputnik.

"It's a little hard to know because there still is a lot of push in the right-wing circles in the United States, including the White House, to give more money to Ukraine," Sachs said on Tuesday regarding the possibility that the US political class would provide more funds to Kiev.

Sachs pointed out that the United States has a huge budget deficit and providing additional tens of billions of dollars to Ukraine in such a situation does not go down well with the US public.

"The money to Ukraine is not so big compared to the US economy, but the image that there's a big deficit, a big funding crisis, and the money is being sent to this useless war - that doesn't play very well with the American people," Sachs said.

The funding is probably going to stop because it lacks the underlying support of the US public and is also not creating any solutions to the Ukrainian crisis, Sachs said.

On Monday, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin announced another $100 million in US aid for Ukraine that included air defense munitions and anti-tank weapons.

Many of the presidential hopefuls in the 2024 presidential race are increasingly vocal against sending any US aid to Ukraine.

The latest request by the Biden administration to send $61.4 billion in aid for Ukraine has not been approved yet.

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US Shares Aid Group Locations With Israel, Strikes Continue - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has been disclosing to Israel the GPS coordinates of medical facilities and aid groups movements in the Gaza Strip in an effort to prevent them from being hit during military operations, however, Israel's attacks on these sites persist, Politico reported.

Three individuals familiar with the US-Israel communications revealed that the US government has provided such information for at least a month, the report said.

Israel has been conducting operations against Hamas in or around hospitals and humanitarian aid sites, resulting in the destruction of such structures as well as in the obstruction of essential supplies such as food and fuel, the report added.

On October 7, Palestinian group Hamas launched a surprise attack against Israel from the

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Gaza Strip. Israel declared war on Hamas, cutting of Gaza from any supplies of water, food, medicines, electricity and fuel as well as launching massive retaliatory strikes.

On October 27, Israel launched a ground invasion of Gaza with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas.

The indiscriminate bombardment and invasion of Gaza has resulted in the deaths of at least 14,100 residents and the wounding of well over 30,000 others.

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Blinken to Visit Israel Next Week to Talk On War In Gaza- Reports

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - Secretary of State Antony Blinken is to travel to Israel next week, engaging in discussions with both Israeli and Palestinian authorities to address the escalating conflict in Gaza, Axios reported on Tuesday.

According to the report, Blinken's visit is expected to take place after Thanksgiving and before his participation in the NATO foreign ministers summit in Brussels next Tuesday.

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News About Russia's Wagner Seeking to Send Air Defenses to Hezbollah 'Fake' - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, November 22 (Sputnik) - The alleged news that Russia's Wagner group wanted to provide its air defense systems to Hezbollah is fake, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia told reporters.

"This is a complete fake if you are referring to the article in the Washington Post," Nebenzia said on Tuesday in response to a request for additional information about an article in the Wall Street Journal on the Wagner group allegedly wanting to supply air defense systems to Hezbollah.

Nebenzia characterized the article as a disgrace to the journalistic profession.

The allegation was reported in the US newspaper at the beginning of November.

Nebenzia was also asked whether he has any information on reports on alleged talks between Russia and Iran about Tehran providing Moscow with ballistic missiles for use in Ukraine.

The Russian ambassador said he has "no news on such talks."

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House Judiciary Committee Subpoenas Asst. Attorney Wolf as Part of Hunter Biden's Probe

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WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) – Congressman and chairman of the House Judiciary Committee Jim Jordan subpoenaed Assistant US attorney Lesley Wolf amid an ongoing criminal probe into Hunter Biden's business dealings.

"[T]he Committee has determined that it requires your testimony because you have first-hand knowledge of the Department's criminal inquiry of Hunter Biden. In light of the Department's refusal to make you available for a voluntary transcribed interview, we have no choice but to compel your testimony at a deposition," Jordan said in a letter to Wolf on Tuesday.

Jordan believes that Wolf possesses "specialized and unique" information about Attorney's Office for the District of Delaware's investigation of Hunter Biden, which was not conducted as usual and deviated from standard legal procedures, according to the letter.

It is alleged by Jordan that Wolf prohibited investigators from asking witnesses on the case about "dad" or "the big guy" referring to US President Joe Biden, and also ordered them to remove from a search warrant any reference to President Biden, the letter said.

Earlier in November, US House Oversight Committee Chairman James Comer announced a number of subpoenas as part of the panel's probe into the Biden family, including against Hunter Biden and Joe Biden's brother, James Biden.

In September, then-House Speaker Kevin McCarthy launched an impeachment inquiry into Biden, following probes into alleged criminal activity by the president and his son, Hunter Biden. The Biden family is alleged to have enriched themselves through foreign bribery and influence peddling.

Biden has dismissed the accusations against him, claiming to have never discussed foreign business deals with his son.

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Xi Talks With Biden Just For Show as 'Real' Business Conducted Elsewhere at APEC - Experts

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The discussions between Chinese President Xi Jinping and President Joe Biden on the sidelines of the APEC summit, from Beijing's perspective, were simply for show as real business was conducted elsewhere including in meetings with heads of American industry and other political leaders, experts told Sputnik.

Biden and Xi held extensive bilateral talks on the margins of the APEC Summit in San Francisco last week, during which the leaders agreed to improve communications and resume direct military-to-military contacts. Xi then delivered a speech on investing in China at a high-profile dinner attended by top American CEOs and other business and political leaders.

"The format of the [bilateral] meeting required Biden's presence, so his presence was tolerated - with real communications and sharing of ideas occurring elsewhere and with those sincerely interested in understanding and doing business with China now and in the future," former Pentagon analyst Karen Kwiatkowski told Sputnik.

Xi is leading a country that - unlike the United States - consistently communicates strategic goals that are aligned with China's projected finances, economic engine, and military capability, she added.

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"In some ways, the obsequity with which the United States played host to China reveals much more than the language used or even any agreements that may have been made," Kwiatkowski said. "For this reason, I think that for Xi this meeting accomplished as much as China expected - which was not a lot - and certainly sent the right message, from China's perspective, to the rest of the world."

In contrast to Biden, the political and business leaders of San Francisco and the state of California took the opportunity to negotiate with Chinese figures very seriously, Kwiatkowski said.

"The business dinner was apparently well-attended and delightful. These aspects of the meeting seem peaceful and forward looking," she observed.

The larger part of the problem, she added, is that US leaders in both political parties believe they can plan and act as if the United States is not a politically divided, nearly bankrupt country, she added.

Former hedge fund manager and political analyst Charles Ortel told Sputnik Biden's poor performance and inability to "read cue cards" opened opportunities for China to prey on American weakness.

"The San Francisco summit was a disgraceful display of bumbling weakness on home turf brought to ruin, and temporarily swept clean, by economically illiterate and arrogant, blue state simpletons," Ortel said.

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Canada Nearly Doubles Funds for NATO Mission From 2024 to 2025 - Economic Statement

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government is nearly doubling spending on its overseas NATO mission, according to a Fall Economic Statement from Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland.

Canada will spend C$417 million on Operation REASSURANCE in 2023-2024, then raise spending on the mission to C$802 million in 2024-2025, the statement said on Tuesday.

Canada will then raise spending on the operation to C$872 million in 2025-2026, before dropping spending to C$178 for the following three years, the statement said.

Operation REASSURANCE is Canada’s largest overseas mission, through which it contributes to NATO activities in Central and Eastern Europe.

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Russia Will Hold UNSC Arria Formula Meeting on Ukraine on December 8 - Nebenzia

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - Russia will hold an Arria-formula meeting on the situation in Ukraine in the beginning of next month, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations

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Vassily Nebenzia said.
"We will provide an opportunity to hear about this in detail... during the special meeting of the Council under Arria-Formula meeting which we'll hold December 8 ," Nebenzia said during a meeting of the UN Security Council on Tuesday, noting that the participants of the event will have an opportunity to hear about the events that have led to the Maidan protests and the current conflict.
Moscow launched a military operation in Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Russia and Ukraine accused each other of committing war crimes during the hostilities. The Russian and Ukrainian delegations have engaged in several rounds of peace talks since then, but discussions ultimately reached an impasse.

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Canada Fiscal Update Allocates C$816Mln in Ukraine Military Assistance in 2023-2024

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) – The Canadian government will have provided C$816 million in military assistance to Ukraine in 2023-2024, an amount that is set to decrease and reach C$197 million in 2025-2026, the Fall Economic Statement said.
Under Policy Actions Taken Since Budget 2023 – Canada in the World – Military assistance for Ukraine is set to reach C$816 million in 2023-2024, while consequently diminishing to C$318 million in the 2024-2025 period and finally C$197 million by 2025-2026.
Since January 2022, the Canadian government has provided over C$9 billion ($6.6 billion) in financial, humanitarian, development, immigration, and other assistance to Kiev, including C$2.4 billion in military support.

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Austin, Gallant Discuss Israel's Operations Against Hamas – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and his Israeli counterpart Yoav Gallant held a phone conversation to discuss Israeli operations against Hamas, Pentagon spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.
"Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III and Israeli Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant spoke today to discuss Israel's operations against Hamas," Ryder said in a statement.
Austin confirmed US commitment to supporting Israel and stressed the necessity of preventing regional escalation, Ryder added.
The Pentagon chief also discussed with his counterpart the necessity of increasing and sustaining humanitarian aid and protecting civilians in Gaza, according to the statement.
On October 7, Palestinian movement Hamas launched a surprise large-scale rocket attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip and breached the border, killing some 1,200 people and

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kidnapping hundreds of others in neighboring Israeli communities. Israel retaliated by launching missile strikes at the Gaza Strip followed by a ground incursion. The hostilities have claimed the lives of more than 14,100 people in Gaza, nearly half of them children.

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US Launches Visa Restriction Policy Targeting Charter Flights for Migrants - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The United States is launching a new visa restriction policy aimed at people running charter flights into Nicaragua to facilitate irregular migration, US State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a statement.

"The State Department today launched a new visa restriction policy targeting individuals running charter flights into Nicaragua designed primarily for irregular migrants," Miller said on Tuesday. "In a growing trend, charter flight companies have been offering flights — and charging extortion-level prices — that put migrants onto a dangerous overland path north to the U.S. border."

Many of the migrants waste significant personal resources and put their families at risk in the process, lacking a legal basis for entering or staying in the US, the statement said.

The new policy imposes visa restrictions on owners, executives and senior officials of companies providing charter flights into Nicaragua for purposes of irregular migration, the statement said.

The US is also working with the private sector and governments in the region to crack down on the practice, the statement said.

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Action Against Binance Shows US Prepared to Do All to Combat Illicit Finance - Yellen

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - The United States' actions against the cryptocurrency exchange Binance represent a message to the cryptocurrency industry and shows the US Treasury Department is prepared to use all available tools to combat illicit finance, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Tuesday.

"We are also sending a message to the virtual currency industry more broadly, today and for the future," Yellen said. "If virtual currency exchanges and financial technology firms wish to realize the tremendous benefits of being part of the US financial system and serving U.S. customers, they must play by the rules. And if they do not, the US government will take action."

Yellen emphasized that today's announcement that guilty pleas have been secured from Binance and its founder shows that the Treasury Department is prepared to use all of its tools to combat illicit finance and protect the US financial system.

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"This will make all of us safer," Yellen said.

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US Existing Home Sales at 13-Year Lows as High Prices and Low Supply Roil Market

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - Sales of existing homes in the United States have hit 2010 lows, thanks to spiraling lending rates, record house prices and a shortage of available units, the country's realtors said on Tuesday.

Existing home sales fell 4.1% last month to 3.79 million units, the lowest in 13 years, with the decline accelerating after the expiry of a government tax credit for homebuyers.

The median price of a home in the United States was at $413,874 last month, the the highest for any October, the National Association of Realtors said in its report.

"Prospective home buyers experienced another difficult month due to the persistent lack of housing inventory and the highest mortgage rates in a generation," Lawrence Yun, chief economist for the realtors' association, said. "Multiple offers, however, are still occurring, especially on starter and mid-priced homes, even as price concessions are happening in the upper end of the market."

Records suggest that unless there's a rebound in the upcoming sales numbers for November and December, the realty industry will be on track to its worst performance since 1992.

Home resales are counted at the closing of a purchasing contract. October's sales likely reflected contracts concluded between August and September, when the average rate on the most popular housing loan — the 30-year fixed-rate mortgage rate — hit highs not seen since 2000.

The rate on the 30-year fixed-rate mortgage averaged 7.31% at the close of September, before reaching just shy of 7.8% in late October, the highest since November 2000, national mortgage finance agency Freddie Mac said. For this month so far, the rate has averaged 7.44%.

Housing and real estate play important roles in the US economy, with roughly 65% of occupied housing units being owner-occupied. That makes homes a substantial source of household wealth and home construction a key provider of employment.

In the 2008/09 financial crisis, a crash of the housing market precipitated what later came to be known as the era of the Great Recession. Since then, the US property market has rapidly recovered on the back of economic recovery as well as demand from buyers. Even the 2020/22 coronavirus pandemic only had a fleeting impact on home buying in the United States.

But while supply of homes, both existing and new, has been way below demand the past two years, rising interest rates and record home prices have kept buyers away.

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Binance Enabled $900Mln in Transactions Between US and Crimea, Iran, Syria - Garland

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - The cryptocurrency exchange Binance enabled nearly $900 million in transactions between users in the United States and users in Iran, Syria, Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk, US Attorney General Merrick Garland said on Tuesday.
"Binance enabled nearly $900 million in transactions between US and Iranian users, and facilitated millions of dollars in transactions between US users and users in Syria, and in the Russian-occupied Ukrainian regions of Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk," Garland said during a press conference.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) -

ISRAEL INVASION OF GAZA
* The death toll in the Gaza Strip surpassed 14,100 and 5,900 of the killed residents are children, the enclave's authorities said on Tuesday.
* The Contact Group on Gaza seeks to cooperate with Russia and all partners to end military violations in the Gaza Strip, Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan said.
* The European Union will cancel several projects in Gaza given that their implementation became impossible due to the destruction caused by Israel, a senior EU official said.

LEBANON-ISRAEL TENSIONS
* The Beirut-based Al Mayadeen channel said on Tuesday that two of its journalists were killed by Israeli shelling in the south of Lebanon.
* Israel launched interceptors toward aerial targets that crossed from Lebanon, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said.

NORTH KOREAN SATELLITE LAUNCH
* North Korea said on Tuesday that it successfully launched a military spy satellite on a new rocket, the South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported.
* North Korea carried out the previously announced launch of a military reconnaissance satellite, the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said.
* The United States condemns North Korea's latest missile launch and urges Pyongyang to cease such activities, White House National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson said.

CSTO MEETINGS
* Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan has informed his Belarusian counterpart Sergei Aleinik that he will not participate in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)

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meetings in Minsk, the Armenian Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday.
* Armenian Defense Minister Suren Papikyan will not participate in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) meetings in Minsk, Defense Ministry spokesman Aram Torosyan told Sputnik.

BRICS SUMMIT ON GAZA
* The BRICS countries have called for a humanitarian truce between Israel and the Gaza Strip leading to a cessation of hostilities during an extraordinary summit on Tuesday.
* The BRICS leaders also called for an immediate and safe release of hostages from the Gaza Strip, according to a joint statement.
* China believes that a ceasefire and release of civilian hostages should be a priority in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Chinese President Xi Jinping said.
* Proper humanitarian pauses are required to ensure the safe release of hostages from the Gaza Strip, Russian President Vladimir Putin said.

RUSSIA-TAJIKISTAN RELATIONS
* Tajik President Emomali Rahmon said on Tuesday that he invited Russian President Vladimir Putin to visit Tajikistan.
* Tajikistan has potential to host energy-intensive industries and is ready to develop cooperation with Russia in the area, Rahmon said.
* Russia interested in working together with Tajikistan on uranium and lithium exploration projects, Putin said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE
* All attempts by the Ukrainian armed forces to conduct a landing operation in the Kherson direction have been unsuccessful, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said on Tuesday.
* Ukraine has lost more than 13,700 soldiers and about 1,800 units of various weapons and military equipment since the beginning of November, Shoigu said.
* Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov called the Maidan protests that broke out in Ukraine on November 21, 2013 - "a forceful coup" sponsored from abroad.

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Fall Economic Statement Won't Include Budget Balancing, Carbon Tax Cuts – Trudeau

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) – Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau seemed to acknowledge that the governments Fall Economic Statement would not include balancing the budget or new carbon tax cuts.
Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland will present the Fall Economic Statement on Tuesday at 4:00 p.m. (ET), which is a mini budget that updates the federal finances and outlines new measures based on current government priorities.
Trudeau said earlier on Tuesday that the budget update would mainly be focusing on housing,

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groceries, and green industrial development and the creation of related jobs.

"Mr. Speaker, we've seen this movie before. The conservative politician's [Poilievre] approach to facing challenges is always cuts and austerity. He recognizes like we all do, that Canadians are facing difficult times, and his solution is for the federal government to do less, to invest less in Canadians, to be there less to support Canadians," Trudeau said at the House of Commons. "That is no what we're going to do."

Trudeau's remarks answered to a question of the Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre on whether he would outline in his Fall Economic Statement a plan to balance Ottawa's budget, and to bring down mortgages rates.

Poilievre further pressed Trudeau on the issue of housing rent and of carbon tax cuts, asking whether he had finally gotten a "little bit of common sense" and planed on canceling the expected quadrupling of the tax, and cap its planned increases until the next election.

"Mr. Speaker, our solution to Canadians who are having trouble affording housing is to build more housing, is to invest in working with municipalities to unlock more homes built, to bring down rents. These are the investments we're making," Trudeau said, while avoiding any mention of the tax.

On Monday, media reported that the government is expected to announce C$15 billion (US$10.9 billion) in low-interest loans to build some 30,000 new housing units nationwide over the next ten years.

Other expected measures include a new C$1 billion (US$730 million) affordability housing fund to support the construction of additional housing.

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Justice Department Requires Binance to Pay $4.3Bln in Fines - Attorney General

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The US Justice Department will require cryptocurrency exchange Binance to pay $4.3 billion in fines in connection to criminal charges it agreed to plead guilty to for violating US law, US Attorney General Merrick Garland said on Tuesday.

"Binance has agreed to plead guilty to willfully violating the Bank Secrecy Act, knowingly failing to register as a money transmitting business and willfully violating the international Emergency Economic Powers Act," Garland said during a press conference. "The Justice Department is requiring Binance to pay $4.3 billion in penalties and forfeitures."

The Justice Department also filed a felony charge against and secured a guilty plea from Binance founder and CEO Changpeng Zhao for willfully violating the Bank Secrecy Act, Garland added.

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US Attorney General Says Justice Dept. Secured Felony Guilty Pleas From Binance, CEO

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - The US Justice Department has secured felony guilty pleas from the cryptocurrency exchange Binance and its CEO Changpeng Zhao, US Attorney General Merrick Garland said on Tuesday.

"We are here today to announce that the Justice Department has secured felony guilty pleas from the world's largest cryptocurrency exchange Binance and from its founder and CEO Changpeng Zhao," Garland said during a press conference.

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Egypt Treating 28 Premature Babies Evacuated From Gaza Hospital - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - Hospitals in Egypt are treating 28 premature babies who were evacuated from Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza, CNN reported on Tuesday.

Two Egyptian hospitals are treating the premature babies, most of whom are suffering from low blood oxygen levels, the report said, citing an Egyptian government source.

The Palestinian Red Crescent Society and other organizations coordinated the evacuation of 31 babies from Al-Shifa Hospital in northern Gaza to the southern city of Rafah over the weekend, the report said. Two of the babies stayed at Emirati Hospital in Rafah, and another has not been transferred to Egypt because their parents are still in northern Gaza, the report said.

Earlier this month, Israeli forces began an operation at Al-Shifa Hospital, where they claim to have discovered Hamas infrastructure. The Israeli Defense Forces allowed an evacuation from the hospital but denied having ordered one.

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US Not Ready to Stop Supplying Israel With Weapons - State Dept. on Saudi Arabia's Call

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) – The United States is not ready to stop sending security assistance to Israel amid Tel Aviv's ongoing military operation in Gaza, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.

"No, that is not a step we are ready to take. In fact, we have a supplemental request pending before Congress that we hope Congress will act on expeditiously which provides additional assistance to Israel as well as additional assistance to Ukraine," Miller said during a press

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briefing.

While speaking to the BRICS earlier in the day, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman called on all countries in the world to stop supplying weapons to Israel and underscored that Riyadh opposes the forcible eviction of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip.

From the very beginning of the attack on Israel by Hamas forces, the United States declared its full unwavering support for Israel and its readiness to provide its closest ally in the Middle East with everything it needs to protect itself.

According to the Pentagon, US ships weapons and munition to Israel almost on a daily basis, but the United States has still not disclosed the amount of military assistance to its closest ally in the Middle East.

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Federal Reserve Says US Inflation Unacceptably High After 2 Years of Monetary Tightening

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - US inflation remains unacceptably high after nearly two years of monetary tightening, minutes from the Federal Reserve's latest policy meeting said on Tuesday.

"The participants [in the meeting] stressed that current inflation remained unacceptably high while acknowledging that it had moderated somewhat over the past year," the Fed said, referring to its Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC).

The US central bank also suggested it could resume monetary tightening after holding rates unchanged in three straight meetings of the FOMC in July, September and November.

While Wall Street is clamoring for interest rate cuts to begin in 2024, the Fed did not address the matter.

However, the Fed emphasized that economic data showing a significant retreat in inflationary pressure would be all important for it to change course on interest rates.

"All participants judged that it would be appropriate for policy to remain at a restrictive stance for some time until inflation is clearly moving down sustainably toward the Committee's objective," the minutes from the FOMC meeting said. "Participants stressed the need to see more data indicating inflation pressures were abating to be more confident of price increases returning to 2%."

Inflation measured by the so-called Consumer Price Index (CPI) hit a four-decade high of 9.1% during the year to June 2022.

By October this year though, the CPI had moderated to just 3.2%. Yet, that number remains well beyond the central bank's 2% per year inflation target.

"Participants continued to view a period of below-trend growth in real GDP and some softening in labor market conditions as likely to be needed to bring aggregate demand and aggregate supply into better balance and reduce inflation pressures sufficiently to return inflation to 2% over time," the minutes added.

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Musk Says X Corp to Donate War-Related Revenue to Hospitals in Israel, Red Cross in Gaza

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - X Corp. owner Elon Musk said on Tuesday that the tech company will donate all proceeds from advertising and subscriptions linked to the war in Gaza to hospitals in Israel and the Red Cross/Crescent in Gaza.

"X Corp will be donating all revenue from advertising & subscriptions associated with the war in Gaza to hospitals in Israel and the Red Cross/Crescent in Gaza," Musk said in a social media post.

Last week, film companies Warner Bros., Sony Pictures, Paramount, and Lionsgate suspended advertising on social network X due to Musk's "anti-Semitic" comments. A similar decision was made by Walt Disney, as well as technology companies IBM and Apple.

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 killed about 1,200 people in Israel and over 14,000 in the Gaza Strip.

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US Forces Attacked 66 Times in Middle East Since Recent Uptick in Violence - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - US forces have been attacked 66 times in the Middle East since the uptick in violence that began in mid-October, Defense Department deputy spokesperson Sabrina Singh said on Tuesday.

"US forces have been attacked approximately 66 times since October 17. Thirty-two separate times in Iraq and 34 separate times in Syria," Singh said during a press briefing.

US personnel have sustained approximately 62 injuries in these attacks, Singh said.

However, the number of injuries does not include those sustained during the Monday night attack because they are still being evaluated, Singh added.

According to the US Central Command, militias allegedly backed by Iran used a close-range ballistic missile against US and coalition forces at the Al-Asad airbase in Iraq.

The attack resulted in eight injuries and minor damage to infrastructure at the airbase. The United States retaliated with an airstrike that killed several militants allegedly involved in the attack.

US forces in Iraq and Syria have seen a significant increase in the number of attacks since the

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breakout of the Israel-Hamas war in early October.

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US Assesses Hamas May Not Have Control of All Hostages – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) – The United States assesses that Hamas may not be in control of all hostages following its attack on Israel in October amid reports that Tel Aviv and Hamas are nearing a deal to release hostages, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.

"It has been our assessment that Hamas may not have control of all of these hostages," Miller said during a press briefing.

Miller added that the same time that he was speaking at the briefing, the Israeli cabinet was having a meeting to discuss a potential deal between Israel and Hamas to release hostages.

Earlier in the day, the head of the political bureau of Hamas, Ismail Haniyeh, said that a ceasefire agreement was close to being concluded, as the movement handed over its response to Qatar and other mediators in negotiations with Israel. After that, Israel's Channel 12 reported, citing an unnamed high-ranking official, that the deal would include the release of dozens of hostages in exchange for a temporary ceasefire.

Also on Tuesday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that progress had been made in the negotiations on the release of hostages from the Gaza Strip, expressing hope that soon there will be "good news" on the matter.

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Pentagon Says US Concerned Iran Could Give Russia Missiles, Has Not Seen Transfer Yet

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - The United States is concerned that Iran could provide ballistic missiles to Russia but has not yet observed any such transfer, Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said on Tuesday.

"We continue to be concerned that Iran could provide ballistic missiles to Russia for use within Ukraine," Singh said during a press briefing. "We haven't seen it happen yet."

The US is confident in the air defense capabilities that it has provided Ukraine, Singh added.

Earlier on Tuesday, White House National Security Council Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said that Iran may be considering providing ballistic missiles to Russia.

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Militants Used Ballistic Missile on US Forces for First Time Since Attacks Rose - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - The close-range ballistic missile used by militants against al-Asad Airbase in Iraq was the first time this type of weapon was used on US forces since the recent spike in attacks in the Middle East, Pentagon Deputy Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said on Tuesday.

"Yes, this is the first time since October 17 when these attacks started on US forces, this is the first time that this type of munition was used against US forces," Singh said during a press briefing.

According to US Central Command, last night "Iran-backed" militias used a close-range ballistic missile against US and Coalition forces at Al-Asad Airbase, which resulted in eight injuries and some minor damage to infrastructure. The United States retaliated with an airstrike that killed several militants allegedly involved in the attack.

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Austin to Host Virtual Meeting of Ukraine Defense Contact Group on Wednesday – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) – US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin will host a meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group on November 22, Pentagon spokesperson Sabrina Singh said on Tuesday.

"[Secretary Austin] will virtually host the 17th meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group for reinforcing our commitment to Ukraine along with our more than 50 allies," Singh told a briefing.

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US Prosecutors Unseal Case Against Binance, Firm Faces 3 Charges - Court Records

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - US federal prosecutors on Tuesday unsealed a criminal case against Binance Holdings Ltd., which revealed the company faces three charges.

"Starting at least as early as August 2017 and continuing until at least October 2022, Defendant, led by its founder, owner, and chief executive officer, Changpeng Zhao, and certain of its officers, directors, employees, and agents knowingly failed to register as a money services business, willfully violated the Bank Secrecy Act by failing to implement and maintain an effective anti-money laundering program, and willfully caused violations of US economic sanctions issued pursuant to the International Emergency Economic Powers Act," the court documents stated.

The three criminal charges against Binance include conspiracy to conduct an unlicensed money transmitting business and to fail to maintain an effective money laundering program; conducting an unlicensed money transmitting business; and violation of the International

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Emergency Economic Powers Act, according to the court documents.

Federal prosecutors, according to media reports, said Binance agrees that the appropriate criminal fine is nearly $1.81 billion and that it will pay it within 15 months of being sentenced.

US media reported on Thursday that Binance had become increasingly isolated from the traditional financial system. On June 5, the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) brought 13 charges against Binance and Zhao for violating securities laws. On June 7, a US district court approved the SEC's motion to freeze the assets of Binance's US subsidiaries, BAM Management and BAM Trading.

Binance is the world's leading blockchain ecosystem and cryptocurrency infrastructure provider with a range of financial products including the largest digital asset trading exchange globally.

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US Kills Multiple Militants in Iraq After New Attack on Al-Asad Airbase - CENTCOM

(Updates with changes in attribution in headline, lede; details in paras 2,4)

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - The United States conducted an airstrike in Iraq last night that killed multiple militants in response to a recent attack on Al-Asad Airbase, a US Central Command (CENTCOM) spokesperson told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"A US military AC-130 aircraft in the area conducted a self-defense strike against an Iranian-backed militia vehicle and a number of Iranian-backed militia personnel involved in this [Monday night] attack. This self-defense strike resulted in several enemy casualties," the spokesperson said.

Media reported, citing a US defense official, that five to eight militants were killed in the airstrike.

According to CENTCOM, last night "Iran-backed" militias used a close-range ballistic missile against US and Coalition forces at Al-Asad Airbase, which resulted in eight injuries and some minor damage to infrastructure.

US forces in Iraq and Syria have seen a rise in attacks since the breakout of the Israel-Hamas war in early October.

This week's airstrike is the fourth time the United States has carried out strikes against militants in the Middle East since October.

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Air Force Base Warns Airmen to Avoid Rally With Pro-Trump Speakers - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - Service members at an Air Force base in North Dakota received a text message from their superiors warning them of the dangers of being near a rally featuring speakers from pro-Trump organizations, Fox News reported on Tuesday.

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Minot Air Force Base personnel received a text warning them to "exercise caution if downtown" over the weekend and were asked to "be careful" and reach out for any concerns, the report said.

The text messages came ahead of an event on November 17 at the state fairgrounds called the "Dakota Patriot Rally," and service members were warned that rally participants could be confrontational with members of the military, according to the report.

The event was slated to feature Tyler Bowyer, the chief operating officer for Turning Point USA, which has a history of supporting Donald Trump and has attracted controversy for questioning the results of the 2020 election, the report said.

The report added that service members were warned that affiliation with groups like Turning Point Action could put their continued service in the US military at risk, a message that the group's spokesperson told Fox was "absolutely appalling."

"How dare they dissuade servicemen and women from affiliating with conservative groups and leaders," the spokesperson told Fox News. "This should set off alarm bells throughout North Dakota and DC, that something is terribly wrong at the Minot Air Force base. This also warrants an immediate congressional hearing and investigation, and whoever is responsible should be held accountable. It's exactly this type of poison that has caused the Air Force to miss its recruiting goal for the first time in decades."

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White House Says No Indication Hamas Diverting Humanitarian Aid

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - The US has not seen any signs that Hamas has accessed humanitarian aid that is being delivered in Gaza, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"As far as I know... It remains the case," Kirby said during a press briefing.

The remarks were in response to a reporters question on if the US has seen any indication that Hamas has gotten their hands on any of the humanitarian aid that has entered Gaza.

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 1,400 people in Israel and over 13,000 in the Gaza Strip, according to local health authorities.

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G7, Partners Discuss Accelerating Support for Ukraine's Energy Sector Needs - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his counterparts from the Group of Seven (G7) discussed accelerating support for Ukraine's energy sector needs including for the purposes of defense, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said.

"Partners committed to supporting and accelerating Ukraine's additional critical energy sector needs, including defense of existing infrastructure and humanitarian demining assistance to facilitate repairs," Miller said in a press release on Tuesday.

Blinken co-hosted with Japanese Foreign Affairs Minister Iwao Horii the fourth Foreign Ministers meeting of the G7 and other key partners to discuss their collective support for the repair and defense of Ukraine's energy sector amid Russia's special military operation.

Miller said the group reviewed deliveries of critical equipment, including high-voltage autotransformers and emergency backup power systems, which Ukraine needs to stabilize its power grid.

Miller also said the participants highlighted that Ukraine passed the Regulation on Wholesale Energy Market Integrity and Transparency as well as anti-monopoly legislation.

The measures will attract significant private sector investments needed to transform Ukraine into a "clean energy hub, part of the global energy supply chain and a future member of the European Union," Miller added.

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White House Says Iran May Consider Providing Russia With Ballistic Missiles

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Tuesday that Iran may be considering providing Russia with ballistic missiles for use in the Ukraine conflict.

"We've seen increased military cooperation between Russia and Iran," Kirby said at a briefing.

He reiterated allegations that Iran has been providing Russia with significant numbers of UAVs and artillery ammunition.

"Iran may be preparing to go a step further in its support for Russia ... Therefore, we are concerned that Iran is considering providing Russia with ballistic missiles now for use in Ukraine," Kirby added.

Western countries have repeatedly accused Iran of supplying combat drones to Russia for use in Ukraine. Moscow and Tehran reject the allegations.

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Israeli Cabinet Discussing Hostage Deal Right Now, US in Close Contact – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - The Israeli cabinet is meeting right now to discuss a deal to release hostages held by Hamas in Gaza, and the United States is in close contact with them, State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.

"The Israeli cabinet is meeting to discuss this matter right now. We are in close conversation with them, as we are with the Government of Qatar, who has been helping facilitate discussions since the early days of the crisis," Miller said during a press briefing.

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US to Press Israel on Holding Settlers Accountable for Violent Acts - White House

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration will continue to speak to Israel about holding extremist settlers accountable for violence against Palestinians, White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"The President [Joe Biden] still believes that lasting peace is possible through a two state solution, but this does not help in that regard. So we're going to continue to speak with our Israeli counterparts about the need to increase stability there and to hold extremist settlers accountable for violent acts," Kirby said during a press briefing.

Furthermore, Kirby said that he wouldn't speculate about what accountability would look like for any potential American passport holders in the extremist ranks.

"We're certainly considering the possibility of visa bans for extremists as well," Kirby added.

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.

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Binance Crypto Exchange CEO to Step Down, Company to Pay $4.3Bln in Fines - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - Binance cryptocurrency exchange platform CEO Changpen Zhao will step down and plead guilty to violating US anti-money laundering requirements, while also paying $4.3 billion in fines, The Wall Street Journal said on Tuesday.

Zhao, the CEO of the world's largest crypto exchange is set to step down from his position and plead guilty to violating US anti-money laundering requirements, in a deal that would reportedly preserve Binances' ability to continue its operations, the report said citing people familiar with

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the subject.

The CEO will appear before the Seattle federal court on Tuesday to enter his plea agreement, the report said. Moreover, Binance will also plead guilty to a criminal charge and will pay $4.3 billion worth of fines, including the sum agreed to settle civil allegations made by regulators, the report added.

Under the deal, Zhao would be allowed to keep his majority stake in Binance but will be deprived of occupying any executive role in the company.

However, the reported deal does not include settlements with the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) who brought 13 charges against Binance and Zhao for violating securities laws, in early June.

Binance is the world's leading blockchain ecosystem and cryptocurrency infrastructure provider with a range of financial products including the largest digital asset trading exchange globally.

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White House Says Gaza Hostage Release Could Take Hours, Days After Deal Reached

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Tuesday that the United States should prepare for the Biden administration to take hours or days to rescue US hostages from Gaza once a deal is reached on their release.

"I think we all need to be prepared for the fact that it could take hours, if not days, to complete their release," Kirby said during a press briefing.

The safety of the released hostages will be paramount, Kirby said. However, the US remains focused on securing a deal on their release before detailing execution of any agreement, Kirby added.

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IOC Says Heard Reason Behind Abstentions to UN Olympic Truce Resolution, Pushes Back

UNITED NATIONS, November 21 (Sputnik) - The International Olympic Committee (IOC) heard the reason behind Russia's and Syria's abstentions during the UN General Assembly vote on a resolution to recognize an Olympic truce ahead of the 2024 Paris Olympic Games, IOC President Thomas Bach said on Tuesday.

"We have heard the explanation of the abstentions, and I think that the two member states abstaining will have to realize, during the debate, that here it is by no means about the discrimination of any athletes," Bach said during remarks to reporters. "What it is about is abiding by the rules of the Olympic Charter."

Earlier on Tuesday, the UN General Assembly agreed to a resolution supporting recognition of an Olympic truce. The resolution received 118 votes in favor, while Russia and Syria abstained

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from voting.
Russia said it abstained due to the exclusion of any statement in the resolution on equal, depoliticized access to sports.
The IOC is violating basic human rights by upholding double standards and the segregation of athletes, Russian deputy envoy to the United Nations UN Maria Zabolotskaya said.

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IOC Says 'Premature' to Discuss Potential Consequences of Russia's Friendship Games

UNITED NATIONS, November 21 (Sputnik) - It is premature for the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to discuss potential consequences for participation in Russia's World Friendship Games, IOC President Thomas Bach said on Tuesday.
"We heard about the plans for organizing this Friendship Games… The IOC, as well as the World Anti-Doping Agency, has made their position very clear," Bach said during remarks to reporters. "It would be premature to discuss any consequences — there all the options are open."
Sports events must be organized by sports organizations, Bach added.
Russia is set to hold the World Friendship Games in Moscow and Yekaterinburg in September 2024. The event comes following the IOC's suspension of the Russian Olympic Committee.
Earlier this month, the head of National Olympics Committees Relations, James Macleod, warned national committees to exercise caution with regard to the World Friendship Games. Participation in the games would go against the IOC Executive Board's recommendation, Macleod said.

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UPDATE: UNGA Resolution on Olympic Truce is 'More Relevant Than Ever' - IOC Media

UNITED NATIONS, November 21 (Sputnik) - The International Olympic Committee (IOC) believes that the newly adopted resolution in the United Nations General Assembly calling for an Olympic truce is more relevant now than ever, the ICO Media account posted on X on Tuesday.
"In this fragile world, this Olympic Truce Resolution is more relevant than ever. In these difficult times, this resolution is our opportunity to send an unequivocal signal to the world – yes, we can come together, even in times of wars and crises. Yes, we can join hands and work together for a better future." IOC President Bach said earlier today at the UN General Assembly meeting.
A total of 118 countries voted in favor of and none voted against the resolution, which calls for "a truce during the Olympic Games to encourage a peaceful environment and ensure safe passage, access and participation for athletes and relevant persons at the Games, thereby

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mobilizing the youth of the world to the cause of peace."

Russia and Syria abstained from voting. Deputy Permanent Representative of Russia to the UN Maria Zabolotskaya ahead of the vote said that Russia would abstain from voting on the resolution due to the exclusion of any statement on depoliticized access to sports.

The resolution says the request is based on an ancient tradition called "ekecheiria" to cease hostilities seven days before and after the Olympic Games, which served to replace the cycle of conflict with a friendly athletic competition every four years.

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IOC President Says in Contact With Israel, Palestine About Safety of Olympic Athletes

UNITED NATIONS, November 21 (Sputnik) - International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach said on Thursday that the IOC has been in contact with both the Israeli and Palestinian national Olympic committees to discuss the safety of athletes and potential impacts of the conflict on events.

"We are in contact with both of the national Olympic committees and undertaking all the efforts to protect the athletes of both national Olympic committees and to protect the Olympic communities," Bach said during a press conference at the UN General Assembly.

Earlier on Tuesday, the UN General Assembly agreed to a resolution supporting recognition of an Olympic Truce ahead of the 2024 Paris games.

The IOC is monitoring the potential impact of the conflict between Israel and Palestinian Hamas militants with regard to relocation or postponement of events for security reasons, Bach said.

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UN Concerned About Potential of Further Escalation Between Israel, Lebanon - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is concerned about the potential of further escalation between Israel and Lebanon, UN spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Tuesday.

"We are very concerned about the potential of further escalation," Haq told reporters.

The UN, he added, is investing its own efforts to avoid the rise of tensions along the demarcation line between Lebanon and Israel, known as the Blue Line.

"To that extent, we are worried about some of the recent exchanges of fire that have happened across the Blue Line," Haq added.

In recent weeks, the Israel Defense Forces and the Lebanese movement Hezbollah have been regularly exchanging cross-border fire.

Beirut-based Al Mayadeen channel said earlier on Tuesday that two journalists working with the broadcaster were killed as a result of Israel shelling the south of Lebanon.

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On October 7, the Palestinian movement Hamas launched a surprise large-scale rocket attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip and breached the border, killing some 1,200 people and kidnapping hundreds of others in neighboring Israeli communities. Israel retaliated by launching missile strikes at the Gaza Strip followed by a ground incursion.

The hostilities have claimed the lives of more than 13,300 people in Gaza, nearly half of them children, according to local health authorities.

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Notion 'Two Michaels' Spied for Canada Against China Perpetuates False Narrative - Joly

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - The notion that Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig spied on behalf of Canada against China perpetuates the false narrative under which Beijing detained them, Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Melanie Joly said on Tuesday.

"Their arbitrary detention was completely unjust and unacceptable, and the notion that the two Michaels would have been involved in espionage activities only perpetuates the false narrative under which they were detained by China," Joly said.

In December 2018, the Chinese government detained Spavor and Kovrig for being involved in espionage. Their detention came shortly after Canada arrested Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou.

The two were released in September 2021 following the return of Meng to China. Canada has maintained their innocence and repeatedly denied allegations about their involvement in intelligence gathering.

However, the Globe and Mail reported that Spavor is now accusing Kovrig of deceiving him into providing information on North Korea, which the latter relayed to Canadian and allied intelligence agencies. Spavor is now seeking a multi-million dollar settlement from Ottawa.

Spavor has said Kovrig transferred the information to Canadian and allied intelligence services without his knowledge and consent.

Spavor is among a few Westerners who had personal interactions with North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un.

The Chinese Embassy in Canada issued a statement over the weekend reiterating that Spavor and Kovrig were detained for endangering the country's national security and their files were handled in accordance with the law.

"The recent reports of Canadian media have once again proven that these facts cannot be denied. Canada's hyping up of the so-called 'arbitrary detention' by China is purely a thief crying 'stop the thief,'" the statement said.

Canada should reflect on its mistakes rather than further push its Chinese smearing campaign that deceives and misleads the Canadian public, the statement added.

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US Working With Partners to Expand Sanctions Over Iran's Cooperation With Russia - Kirby

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - The United States is intensifying its collaboration with the European Union and other partners to broaden the reach of sanctions in response to Iran's alleged support for Russia's military operation in Ukraine, Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"In response to Iran's support for Russia's war in Ukraine, we've already taken a range of steps, implementing numerous US sanctions designations and working with partners like the European Union to expand the scope of their sanctions authorities, and their designations," Kirby said during a press briefing.

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UN Trying to Get Ready to Deliver Aid Into Gaza if Fighting Pauses - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, November 21 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is trying to make itself ready in case there is a truce announcement to deliver humanitarian aid fast, UN Spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Tuesday.

"What we are doing is trying to make sure that we are ready. So if there is any pause in fighting, which is what we've been asking for, we would be able to deliver humanitarian aid more effectively," Haq told a briefing.

So we are putting in place arrangements, he added.

Earlier today, the Palestinian enclave's authorities said that the death toll in the Gaza Strip has surpassed 14,100 since the Israel-Hamas conflict began on October 7, and nearly 5,900 children are among the dead.

On October 7, Palestinian movement Hamas launched a surprise large-scale rocket attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip and breached the border, killing some 1,200 people and kidnapping hundreds of others in neighboring Israeli communities. Israel retaliated by launching missile strikes at the Gaza Strip followed by a ground incursion. The hostilities have claimed the lives of more than 14, 100 people in Gaza, nearly half of them children.

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Russian Film Wins US Festival Because of Superiority, Shows Another Russia - Organizer

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - Russian documentary "The Holy Archipelago" won a film festival in the United States because it was of superior quality and offered a different view of Russia, Executive Director of the Great Lakes Christian Film Festival in Buffalo, Shawn Patrick Greene, told Sputnik.

"The film itself was just superior, and all of its production value, presentation, and subject

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matter are well put together," Greene said.

The festival was held from November 4-5 and featured about 200 documentaries from more than 20 countries. The Holy Archipelago, a film about Russia's famous Solovetsky Monastery directed by Sergey Debizhev, won several nominations, including Best Documentary Feature, Best Cinematography, and Best Music.

Greene said that the documentary "surpassed all expectations in just about every category."

When asked what the American audience could learn about Russia from the film, Greene expressed confidence that people familiar with Orthodox Christianity already would have an understanding of certain things, but others would be exposed to a perspective not covered by American mainstream media.

"I would say that a lot of people who have seen this documentary understand there is a different perspective. Intelligent people are more in tuned with what is going on and are not spoon-fed or allowing the mainstream media to spoon-feed them information," he said.

The Holy Archipelago film crew was not able to attend the festival.

Greene did not rule out inviting other Russian documentaries to take part in the festival. Many films from Russia have participated in the festival in its nine-year history, he added.

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White House Condemns N. Korean Missile Launch, Says 'Provocative' Actions Must Stop

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - The United States condemns North Korea's latest missile launch and urges Pyongyang to cease this activity, White House National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson said on Tuesday.

"The United States strongly condemns the DPRK for its launch of a space launch vehicle (SLV) using ballistic missile technology," Watson said in a press release. "The door has not closed on diplomacy but Pyongyang must immediately cease its provocative actions and instead choose engagement."

Watson further said President Joe Biden and his national security team are assessing the situation in close coordination with US allies and partners.

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Humanitarian Pauses in Gaza Could Eventually Lead to Ceasefire - Joly

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - Canada’s objective is for humanitarian pauses to be allowed in the war in the Gaza Strip because they can potentially lead to a ceasefire, Foreign Affairs Minister Melanie Joly told reporters on Tuesday.

Joly’s comment came in response to a question on whether Canada supported a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas amid reports that a deal on the release of hostages between the two

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warring parties could be reached shortly.

"Our objective right now is that finally humanitarian pauses are allowed to happen, and we think that this potential deal could lead to a form of eventually ceasefire, but first it needs to happen," Joly said.

Canada has been calling for such pauses for weeks now and has not seen any, Joly said.

July acknowledged that the situation in Gaza is critical and emphasized that Ottawa wants to see the nearly 200 remaining Canadians evacuate the Palestinian enclave in addition to the release of all hostages.

"That's why we're looking forward to see how this potential deal could be implemented by both parties," Joly said.

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UNGA Adopts Resolution for Member States to Observe Olympic Truce

UNITED NATIONS, November 21 (Sputnik) - The UN General Assembly on Tuesday adopted a resolution that calls on members states to observe a truce during Olympic Games and encourage a peaceful environment as well as allow the participation of athletes and other relevant persons.

A total of 118 countries voted in favor of and none voted against the resolution, which calls for "a truce during the Olympic Games to encourage a peaceful environment and ensure safe passage, access and participation for athletes and relevant persons at the Games, thereby mobilizing the youth of the world to the cause of peace."

Russia and Syria abstained from voting. Deputy Permanent Representative of Russia to the UN Maria Zabolotskaya ahead of the vote said Russia would abstain from voting on the resolution due to the exclusion of any statement on depoliticized access to sports.

The resolution says the request is based on an ancient tradition called "ekecheiria" to cease hostilities seven days before and after the Olympic Games, which served to replace the cycle of conflict with a friendly athletic competition every four years.

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Russia Will Abstain on UNGA Olympic Truce Vote Due to Politicization - Zabolotskaya

UNITED NATIONS, November 21 (Sputnik) - Russia will abstain from voting on a UN General Assembly resolution that urges countries to recognize an Olympic Truce during the 2024 games in Paris due to the exclusion of any statement on depoliticized access to sports, Deputy Permanent Representative of Russia to the UN Maria Zabolotskaya said on Tuesday.

"[French facilitators] toed the line of a group of western states and today presented a draft resolution that does not incorporate the principles of equal, depoliticized access to sports or the

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prohibition of discrimination," Zabolotskaya said during remarks to the UN General Assembly. "We do not find such an approach to be acceptable … and we are going to abstain on it."

Russia is open to sports interaction based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination, Zabolotskaya said.

The International Olympic Committee has violated basic human rights by upholding segregation of athletes and double standards based on nationality, Zabolotskaya said.

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US Kills Multiple Militants in Iraq After New Attack on Al-Asad Airbase - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - The United States conducted an airstrike in Iraq last night that killed multiple militants in response to a recent attack on Al-Asad Airbase, Fox News reported on Tuesday citing US defense officials.

The report said five to eight militants were killed with an airstrike carried out by an AC-130 gunship.

Al-Asad Airbase was attacked by Iran-backed proxy forces on Monday, according to the report.

US forces in Iraq and Syria have seen a rise in attacks since the breakout of the Israel-Hamas war in early October.

This week's airstrike is the fourth time the United States has carried out strikes against militants in the Middle East since October.

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China Upholds Political Neutrality, Rejects Politicization During Olympics - UN Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, November 21 (Sputnik) - China is against using sports in politics and argues for neutrality during Olympic games, the Chinese Deputy Permanent Representative Dai Bing said on Tuesday.

"We also call for upholding the political neutrality of the Olympic movement. We reject any politicization of owning big events and sports at large," Bing told the UN General Assembly hall.

China has actively participated in the Olympic movement to enable sports in advancing peace, he added.

During Tuesday's General Assembly session, France has proposed a resolution on calling for truce during the Olympic Games. It remains to be seen whether it will get adopted.

France will host the 2024 Summer Olympics from July 26 to August 11.

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Polarization Hinders Hope for 2-State Solution to Israeli-Palestinian Conflict - Trudeau

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - The increasing polarization worldwide regarding the war in Gaza and the overall Israeli-Palestinian conflict is dimming hopes for implementing a two-state solution, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told reporters on Tuesday.

Trudeau made the comment in response to a question regarding the suspension of internships at several universities because students had expressed support for a free Palestine.

"The reality is, the polarization we're seeing in Canada, has replicated around the world," Trudeau said during a press conference. "At the same time, the rise of anti-Semitism and islamophobia is really scary, not just for who we are as Canadians, but for any hope of seeing over the coming days weeks, months a move toward a two-state solution, where a free, independent safe Palestinian state is thriving alongside a free, independent, safe Jewish state of Israel."

Trudeau also said that Canada was going through the challenges emanating from grief, anger and pain amid the war in Gaza, which in turn has made some forget that freedom of expression and conscience exist even in times of strong disagreement.

Trudeau emphasized that it was imperative for Canadians to differentiate between expressing support for the Palestinian people and being anti-Semitic as well as expressing grief over Israeli hostages and not supporting the murder of innocent Palestinian civilians.

"We have to remember that waving a Palestinian flag is not automatically anti-Semitism and someone expressing grief for hostages taken is not an endorsement of dead civilians," Trudeau said.

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Biden Says Optimistic About Israel-Hamas Hostage Release Deal But Cautious About Details

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden on Tuesday expressed optimism regarding the Israel-Hamas hostage deal but refrained from delving into any specifics.

"Things are looking good at the moment," Biden said. "But I don't want to get into the details, because nothing is done."

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US-Bound Palestinian Poet Released After Israeli Detainment – Lawyer

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WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) – Palestinian poet Mosab Abu Toha has been released after being detained by Israeli forces while fleeing Northern Gaza with his family for the US, according to one of his advocates.

"Update on Mosab Abu Toha: he has been released by the Israeli army. Israeli soldiers beat him and he [is] getting medical treatment now and with his family," Palestinian-Canadian lawyer Diana Buttu posted on social media.

She added that he "was taken to an Israeli prison in the Naqab where he was interrogated and beaten along with more than 200 others."

Abu Toha had been advised by the US embassy that he and his family could leave Gaza because one of his sons is a US citizen. While en route south to the Rafah crossing into Egypt on Monday, Abu Toha was detained at an Israeli checkpoint and taken away with hundreds of other Palestinian men.

Abu Toha's poetry was widely published in the US. His 2022 debut collection won an American Book Award this year, as well as being a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and the Derek Walcott Prize for Poetry.

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Deal to Release Hostages Held in Gaza Could Be Struck Today - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - An agreement to release hostages held by Hamas in Gaza in exchange for a temporary halt in Israel's military operations could be struck as soon as today, CNN reported on Tuesday, citing sources.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is set to convene the war cabinet, the security cabinet, and the Government later this evening "in light of developments on the issue of the release of our hostages," his office wrote on social media.

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Canada's Fall Economic Statement to Focus on Housing, Groceries - Trudeau

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Tuesday the Fall Economic Statement that will be presented later in the day will focus on housing, groceries and green development.

Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland will present the Fall Economic Statement, which is a mini-budget that updates the federal finances and outlines new measures based on current government priorities.

"This afternoon, we're going to be presenting our fall economic statement and it's focused on the fact that Canadians are having a tough time right now. So, we're stepping up massively on housing that is going to help people, both buyers and renters, right across the country in the

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coming years as we build more supply," Trudeau said.

The prime minister said the government will move toward heightened competition measures in a bid to keep the prices of groceries low.

The Prime Minister further added that he intended to create more jobs and careers in the green industrial sector.

"We're also moving forward on jobs and careers with a green industrial strategy that's going to help Canadians for decades to come," Trudeau said.

On Monday, media reported that the government is expected to announce C$15 billion (US$10.9 billion) in low-interest loans to build some 30,000 new housing units nationwide over the next ten years.

Other expected measures include a new C$1 billion (US$730 million) affordability housing fund to support the construction of additional housing.

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US Navy P-8A Poseidon Aircraft Overshoots Runway, Ends Up in Hawaiian Waters - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) – A US Navy P-8A Poseidon reconnaissance aircraft overshot a runway and ended up in shallow water just off Hawaii's coast, the United States Third Fleet said.

"At approximately 2 p.m. local (Hawaii), a U.S. Navy P-8 Poseidon overshot the runway on landing at Marine Corps Air Station, Kaneohe Bay, and ended up in nearby water," the United States Third Fleet said in a statement, as quoted by USNI News on Monday.

All nine personnel aboard evacuated the plane safely with no immediate injuries reported, the report said, citing Marine Corps Base Hawaii spokesperson 1st Lt. Hailey Harms.

The crew are still being medically assessed.

An investigation will be launched in connection with the incident, and it is unclear what the next step will be to recover the aircraft, Harms said.

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