

11/29/23 Wednesday

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Scientists Discover First-Ever Planetary Nursery in Another Galaxy

A new generation of powerful telescopes have allowed humans to see even further away in the universe in even greater detail, revealing just how different other parts of the universe can be from nearby space - and how similar, too.

Astronomers have for the first time spotted a protoplanetary disk, the gaseous region around a [newly formed star](#) in which its planets will form, in a galaxy other than our own.

The infant star and its planet nursery were spotted inside a nearby galaxy, the Large Magellanic Cloud, which is about 163,000 light-years away, using the Atacama Large Millimeter/submillimeter Array (ALMA), a massive radio telescope in northern Chile.

"When I first saw evidence for a rotating structure in the ALMA data, I could not believe that we had detected the first extragalactic accretion disc. It was a special moment," Durham University scientist Anna McLeod, who was the lead author of an [article published in Nature](#) on Wednesday, [said in a statement](#).

"We know discs are vital to forming stars and planets in our galaxy, and here, for the first time, we're seeing direct evidence for this in another galaxy," she added.

McLeod said her and her colleagues made the discovery when the Multi Unit Spectroscopic Explorer (MUSE) instrument on ESO's Very Large Telescope (VLT) spotted a jet shooting out of the star - a telltale sign of "[disk accretion](#)" - that is, a cloud of dense gas around a star that was slowly condensing into planets, moons, asteroids, comets, and of course, adding to the star's own girth, all under the steady influence of gravity.

In this case, the sign was that different parts of the gas cloud were moving at different speeds, which was apparent to the astronomers as a kind of doppler effect, except with light instead of sound.

"The frequency of light changes depending on how fast the gas emitting the light is moving towards or away from us," team member and Liverpool John Moores University research fellow Jonathan Henshaw said. "This is precisely the same phenomenon that occurs when the pitch of an ambulance siren changes as it passes you, and the frequency of the sound goes from higher to lower."

Our own solar system went through a similar process about 4.5 billion years ago, not long after the sun formed, with the protoplanetary disk giving birth to the eight planets, including Earth.

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'Section 702 Has to Go': Proposed Changes to Key Surveillance Law Won't Protect Civil Liberties

Opposition to Section 702 has grown so much since it was first authorized in 2008 that lawmakers are seeking to more than double the surveillance law's reauthorization time, posing a potent threat to Americans' civil liberties, a technologist told Sputnik.

A bipartisan group of lawmakers has united to support a bill sponsored by US Sen. Mark Warner (D-VA), the chair of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, that would incorporate some concerns by civil liberties groups about the Section 702 surveillance program into the program's renewal, which is required by the end of the year if it is to continue.

Warner's bill would ban the FBI from querying the FISA database in so-called "backdoor searches" in pursuit of evidence for its own investigations, unless it is to prevent the loss of life, serious bodily injury, or a cyberattack on critical infrastructure.

"I think that the compromise product that we've got is pretty darn good, and it pushes the administration further than I think they want to go, but that's what they can live with," Warner told a prominent US newspaper. "So we're actually in a pretty decent spot there."

However, for civil liberties groups, it's not enough. Kia Hamadanchy, senior policy counsel at the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), said Warner's proposal "makes mostly cosmetic changes and doesn't actually get at the underlying problems" with Section 702.

In February, the White House [said it "strongly supports"](#) reauthorizing Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA).

The law allows the National Security Administration (NSA) to monitor and collect Americans' communications with foreign nationals and to turn over intercepts to the FBI, without a warrant or probable cause, if the NSA believes it could be "helpful."

Congress passed FISA in 1978 in the wake of the Church Committee and other investigations that had revealed the essentially unchecked behavior of US intelligence services since the 1940s, including especially the CIA. The law was intended to systematize and legalize surveillance processes by forcing them through a secretive Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISC).

Section 702 was created in 2008 as part of a broader expansion of FISA, and allowed the National Security Agency (NSA) to conduct searches of foreigners' communications without a warrant.

It "incidentally" also surveils Americans with whom those foreigners interact, according to US intel agencies.

Abuse of the FISC and of Section 702 has long been exposed by whistleblowers, but so have US intelligence reports themselves. One report by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) [published in April 2022](#) showed extensive evidence of the FBI searching through data acquired under the act without first seeking FISC authorization, which must accompany a search for explicit information.

According to the report, the FBI queried Section 702 data an estimated 3.39 million times between December 1, 2020, and November 30, 2021. It noted the FBI had previously been found to be abusing the FISA process in 2018.

Chris Garaffa, technologist and co-host of the CovertAction Bulletin podcast, told [Radio Sputnik's Political Misfits](#) on Wednesday that the Section 702 program is not salvageable from the point of view of civil liberties, because the checks that exist in the system are themselves routinely abused.

"All of Section 702 is objectionable," they said.

"Part of what is being proposed is that you have to at least get a warrant if you're going to include information about American citizens in these searches. But to me, it's still objectionable that the US is going to spy on people across the world because they say they can, because they have the technological ability and they have the political clout - for now - to be able to do that."

"I think what's going to happen here is, we need to stop this. I mean, 702 has to go overall, but I think what they're going to try to do - this is what's being reported, and I agree with this - is they're slipping this into the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). This is a giant bill, one of what they call the 'must-pass bills', like, 'we can shut off the lights on everyone in the country, but as long as the NDAA passes, then everything's going to be ok'. This is one of those bills and that's what they're trying to do," Garaffa said.

"So I see it as a last-ditch effort. Privacy advocates, civil libertarians have been talking about the renewal of 702 for over a year, knowing that it needed to be renewed this year. And all of a sudden now, other than a couple letters from I think [US Senators] Rand Paul and Ron Wyden, we're seeing these supposedly heroic attempts to come to a compromise - I think it's very weak, what they're trying to do. They're trying to effectively say: 'Hey, we're going to save all or the majority of this 702 program, because it's going to be on this bill, it has to pass', and maybe they weaken one or two provisions of it," they told Sputnik.

"We also know the FISA courts are absolutely rubber stamps. These judges are rubber stamps for the intelligence agencies, so being forced to get a FISA warrant is actually not a challenge, it's just one more piece of paperwork and a walk into a courtroom that is not open to the public, that is not a place where the public can go and observe what their government is doing in their name."

Garaffa said that "702 has to go overall, it's going to be on the NDAA, unfortunately now it is going to pass, but that means that we have some time to rebuild this movement for civil liberties and privacy in order to prevent it again." The technologist noted that "they noticed that there is this movement and now they want to extend the sunset date to 12 years from five."

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UK Home Office 'Loses' 17,000 Asylum Seekers Across Britain - Starmer

The British government of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is under fire for "losing control of the borders" after admitting it had lost track of tens of thousands of asylum-seekers amid a backlog of applications.

The revelation came amid a hearing of the House of Commons' Home Affairs Select Committee concerning the government's scheme to deport asylum-seekers to Rwanda, which the country's [Supreme Court struck down](#) earlier this month.

At a meeting of the home affairs select committee the Conservative MP Tim Loughton asked senior civil servants about the government's plans to clear 91,000 "legacy" asylum claims submitted before June 2022, especially 17,316 claims that had been withdrawn as of September.

"Is this just fortuitous?" he asked.

"I don't think we know where all these people are," replied Simon Ridley, the interim second permanent secretary at the Home Office.

Asylum claims can be withdrawn if the refugee fails to respond to two successive case worker interview requests or questionnaires, officials told the panel.

In 2021, the number refused or withdrawn was just 2,141, although according to UK media, the 17,000 lost applications wasn't the worst on record: in 2004, 24,403 applications were refused or withdrawn.

Amid Rycroft's lack of specifics on the Rwanda deal or several other aspects of immigration policy the panel asked about, Conservative MP and committee member Lee Anderson fumed: "I find this absolutely staggering that the big boss hasn't got a clue, not just on this question, but nearly every other question we've asked today. Why is that?"

"Mr. Ridley is looking for the numbers and we will send them to you," Rycroft replied.

At Prime Minister's questions later on Wednesday, Sunak faced tough criticism from the parliamentary opposition over the contents of the hearing.

Sunak told MPs the "toughest action ever taken to reduce legal migration" were "yet to be felt" after the record-high numbers of 2022, when 750,000 people entered the country. Last week, Sunak's spokesperson said the government was clamping down on dependents of foreign students arriving in the UK, among other efforts.

"But let me be clear: the levels of migration are far too high and I am determined to bring them back down to sustainable levels," Sunak said. "That's why we have asked the Migration Advisory Council to review certain elements of the system. We're reviewing those findings and will bring forward next steps."

Labour leader Keir Starmer blasted the Conservatives for the record-high numbers, accusing Sunak of having the "reverse Midas touch," referring to the mythical Phrygian king whose touch could turn anything to gold.

"In 2019, they all promised the country that they would control immigration, numbers will come down, the British people will be in control," Starmer said. "How's it going?"

After Sunak claimed that if Starmer were prime minister, he would seek to make a "secret backroom deal" with the European Union, which the UK left in 2020, to admit another 100,000 migrants every year, Starmer pointed out that only Conservative PMs have occupied 10 Downing Street since 2010.

"There is only one party that has lost control of the borders and they are sitting right there. This is a Government not just in turmoil, in open revolt," he said.

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Astronomers Spot Rare Six-Planet System That Orbit Star 'In Sync'

For planet-hunting astronomers, finding a star system with six planets is rare enough, but one system recently spotted 100 light-years away has six planets that orbit in lock-step with one another.

The six planets orbit a star designed HD110067, which from the perspective of an Earth observer sits in the constellation Coma Berenices. It was first spotted as a potential planet-possessing star in 2020, when NASA's Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) detected a distinct dip in its brightness - a telltale sign that a planet had passed in front of the star.

Once scientists combined the TESS data with that from the European Space Agency's CHaracterizing ExOPlanet Satellite (Cheops) telescope, they discovered that HD110067 was quite the gem. Their work was [published on Wednesday](#) in Nature.

"This discovery is going to become a benchmark system to study how sub-Neptunes, the most common type of planets outside of the solar system, form, evolve, what are they made of, and if they possess the right conditions to support the existence of liquid water in their surfaces," University of Chicago scientist and study lead author Rafael Luque said in [a news release](#).

"Sub-Neptunes" are planets larger than Earth, the largest rocky world in our solar system, but smaller than Neptune, the smallest gas giant in our solar system. Scientists think such worlds likely have solid cores and gaseous atmospheres. The rocky parallel to sub-Neptunes are ["super-Earths."](#) which have solid crusts and thinner atmospheres.

The six planets orbit in resonance with one another: the planet closest to the star makes three orbits for every two made by the next closest planet, a 3/2 resonance. That pattern holds true for each of the four closest planets. For the outer two, they follow a 4/3 resonance pattern - that is, the fifth planet makes three orbits for every four orbits the fourth planet makes, and the outermost planet makes three orbits for every four orbits the fifth planet makes.

According to the scientists, these planets have maintained this pattern for billions of years, and likely settled into it as they were still forming. That means that unlike our solar system, there probably weren't any "rogue planets" or major events to perturb their orbits after they formed.

"We think only about one percent of all systems stay in resonance, and even fewer show a chain of planets in such configuration," said Luque, who added that was why HD110067 merits further study. "It shows us the pristine configuration of a planetary system that has survived untouched."

Some moons in our solar system have also been found to have orbital resonances around their host planets, such as [Jupiter's moons Io](#), Europa and Ganymede. Neptune and the [dwarf planet Pluto](#) also orbit the Sun in a 2/3 resonance.

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Deadly Storm Dumps Over 40 Inches of Snow Across US Northeast

At least two people are dead after treacherous winter weather blanketed the interior US Northeast with dozens of inches of snow. The heaviest snowfall was recorded in Constableville, New York, where at least 42.7 inches of snow fell.

The US Northeast was blanketed by some [40 inches](#) of lake effect snow this week as a concerning system prompted hazardous weather conditions and forced temporary shutdowns in the region.

The [lake effect snow](#) warnings expired by 7 a.m. local time, however, some flurries and light snow showers also continued to occur across northwest Pennsylvania, western New York and across the Great Lakes on Wednesday afternoon. Forecasters have warned that an additional 1 to 2 inches of snow is still possible.

While New York was dumped with as much as 42.7 inches of snow, Greene Township, Pennsylvania, received about 15.5 inches.

The storm also brought with it the coldest temperatures seen by this season thus far, with the Empire State recording temperatures within the 20-degrees Fahrenheit range early Wednesday. The chilly temperatures were similar for much of the Northeast, including states in New England: Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, which all experienced temperatures in the teens to lower 20s on Wednesday morning, according to the [National Weather Service](#) (NWS). However, temperatures are expected to rise as the week comes to a close.

The winter storm wreaked havoc on roads and caused dozens of schools in the Canadian province of Newfoundland and the New York city of Buffalo to close. The NWS in Buffalo, New York, also warned commuters that visibility would be reduced throughout Wednesday.

On Tuesday afternoon a 71-year-old man in Killington, Vermont, died in a car accident when his vehicle and a transit bus collided, according to one [report](#). Two others were injured in the crash. Another driver was [killed](#) in Pennsylvania after a truck lost control while transiting Interstate 80. Researchers are suggesting that a warming climate will result in an increase in the amount of lake-effect snow that these regions see over the coming years.

Lake effect snow occurs when cold air from Canada moves over the Great Lakes, creating clouds that can produce 2 to 3 inches of snow per hour.

The intensity of that snow is also dependent on how ice-free and warm the lakes are, as well as “the difference in temperature between the lake and the air blowing over it,” according to research from the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#) (NOAA).

Even as temperatures across the globe continue to warm, “not only will lake temperatures increase, but the lakes will remain ice-free for longer periods of time,” and “as long as there is enough cold air to blow over the lakes, it could mean an increase in lake effect snows even in a world where temperatures are increasing.”

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US Suicide Rates Reached Record Levels Last Year According to New CDC Report

The recent suicide rate data is the highest in the US since 1941, according to the report. The United State's suicide rate reached its highest levels in over 80 years, according to new [federal data](#) released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). According to the data, almost 50,000 Americans ended their lives last year, which was a 3% increase from 2021. However, this is from provisional data from the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics, and that number is likely to grow once the data is finalized, as pending causes of deaths for some death certificates may be ruled as suicides.

"Reporting of suicides in particular can be delayed due to investigations regarding the cause and circumstances surrounding the death," the authors of the report explained.

The rise in suicide rates is significantly smaller than the 4% spike which occurred from 2020 to 2021, however the growing rate is still a significant issue. And while rates did decrease significantly among younger people, they increased among older age groups.

Suicide rates decreased by 18% among those aged 10 to 14, 9% among those 15 to 24, and 2% among those aged 25 to 34. However, suicide rates increased by 3% among those aged 35 to 44, 5% among those 45 to 54, 9% among those aged 55 to 64, 3% for those aged 65 to 74, and increased by 5% for those aged 75 and older.

Men, who make up the majority of suicides each year, saw a 2% increase in suicides while women saw a 4% rise, but women's suicide rate remained roughly the same as it has been for decades while men had the highest suicide rate in more than [50 years](#).

Men aged 75 and older also continued to take their own lives at the highest rate, (43.7% per 100,000).

According to the data, the suicide rates were highest among men who were American Indian and Alaska Native (roughly 40% per 100,000 deaths), and second-highest among white men (28%). American Indian and Alaska Native women, as well as white women, also had the highest rates of suicide for their gender. However, Black women had significantly lower rates of suicide (a little over 3%) than Black men (nearly 15%). Asians had the lowest rates of suicide among men (about 10%), while Hispanics had the lowest suicide rates among women (3%). However, the suicide rates among American Indians and Alaska Natives was 5% lower in 2022 compared to 2021, and was the only racial group to experience a decline in rates. Yet this decrease was not seen as statistically significant, according to the CDC's report.

While suicide rates among Americans have been steadily increasing since 2001, US Surgeon General Vivek Murthy issued a call to action in 2021 on a national strategy for suicide prevention. The year 2021 saw nearly a quarter of US high-schoolers considering suicide—a mental health fallout due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"This is a hopeful sign, and a reminder that we must continue to implement interventions that we know can help people," [Christine Yu Moutier](#), chief medical officer for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, said of the decrease in suicide rates among young people.

This most recent data shows that suicide rates in the US have reached their highest levels since 1941, the year that Japan bombed Pearl Harbor and the US declared war on Japan, officially entering World War II.

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Fed's Preferred Inflation Indicator Up 3% During Year to October, Nearer to 2% Target

WASHINGTON, November 30 (Sputnik) - An inflation indicator closely followed by the Federal Reserve grew at an annual rate of 3% for October, nearing the central bank's 2% target as it slowed from September's 3.4% expansion, data showed Thursday.

The so-called Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) Index was also flat on the month at 0.0%, down from an uptick of 0.4% in the prior month. Economists expected readings of 3.0% year-on-year and 0.1% month-on-month for the two measures.

The inflation data could help determine how Fed officials will calibrate interest rates in an upcoming policy decision on December 20, as well as in coming months.

The central bank is widely tipped to leave rates at a range of 5.25% to 5.50% at next month's decision, although some policymakers say a hike might be needed to bring the Fed closer to its inflation target. Others, meanwhile, are clamoring for a rate cut instead.

The possibility of the US economy averting a recession has been one of the most keenly debated issues over the past two years as the Fed carried out some of the most aggressive interest rate hikes in its history to tame runaway inflation in the aftermath of the 2020 coronavirus outbreak.

Since March 2022, the Fed has boosted rates 11 times, increasing its benchmark rate from a mere 0.25% to 5.5% per annum — the highest level in 22 years.

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US Treasury Sanctions Chief Warns Turkey Against Facilitating Hamas – Reports

WASHINGTON, November 30 (Sputnik) – The US Treasury's top sanctions official has warned Turkish officials against helping finance or otherwise facilitating Hamas' activities, The Wall Street Journal reported on Thursday, without citing a source.

"It would be very bad if any future attack by Hamas was connected to fundraising or facilitation that occurred in Turkey," Brian Nelson, Treasury undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, said to Turkish officials on the sidelines of his meetings in Ankara on Wednesday, as quoted by The Wall Street Journal.

Unlike the United States, Turkey does not designate Hamas as a terrorist organization and distinguishes between its military and political units.

Nelson also reportedly warned Turkish officials against facilitating Russia's conflict with Ukraine, with Turkish companies and individuals risking sanctions for evading Western controls to supply Russia with war-related goods and services.

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New York Rep. George Santos Threatens Motion to Expel Rep. Jamaal Bowman

WASHINGTON, November 30 (Sputnik) – Ahead of a House vote on whether to expel him, New York Rep. George Santos threatened on Thursday to introduce a motion to expel his fellow state congressman Jamaal Bowman.

"Today at noon, I'm going to be introducing a privileged motion for expulsion of convicted and guilty-pleaded [sic] Congressman Jamaal Bowman...I think that that's consistency," Santos said at a press conference.

Santos is facing an imminent House vote on his own expulsion following an explosive report by the Ethics Committee that found he had violated federal criminal laws on 23 counts, among other offenses.

Bowman pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor last month for pulling a fire alarm in a House building before a key vote on funding. He claimed he had done so by accident while rushing to the chamber before the vote closed. The DC attorney general agreed to withdraw the charge if Bowman wrote an apology to the Capitol police and paid a \$1,000 fine.

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Blinken Tells Israel Settlers Must Be Held Accountable for Violence Against Palestinians

WASHINGTON, November 30 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken during his meetings with Israeli President Isaac Herzog and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Tel Aviv on Thursday urged immediate steps to hold settler extremists to account for attacks on Palestinians, spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Thursday.

"Secretary Blinken stressed the need to de-escalate tensions in the West Bank, including by Israel taking immediate steps to hold settler extremists accountable for violence against Palestinian civilians," Miller said in a statement regarding Blinken's meeting with Herzog.

The secretary made the same call during his talks with Netanyahu.

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Pope Francis Reprimanded Israeli President for 'Terror' Response – Reports

WASHINGTON, November 30 (Sputnik) - Pope Francis reprimanded Israeli President Isaac Herzog over a phone call in late October for responding "to terror with terror," The Washington Post reported on Thursday, citing a senior Israeli official.

It is "forbidden to respond to terror with terror," Pope Francis said in the call, rebutting Herzog's claim of self-defense and stating that the October 7 attackers should be held responsible for their actions, not Palestinian civilians.

The official also said that the exchange was considered too damaging to be made public and also led Israeli officials to read the pope's November 22 public statement that the war had "gone beyond war. This is terrorism" as an echo of his private reprimand.

The Vatican also confirmed to The Washington Post that the call took place, although it did not confirm its contents and whether the pope publicly or privately views Israel's war on Gaza as terrorism.

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Китай никогда не забудет Киссинджера, его уход – потеря для всего мира - посольство в США

ВАШИНГТОН, 30 ноя - РИА Новости. Китайский народ никогда не забудет экс-госсекретаря США Генри Киссинджера, его смерть стала огромной потерей для всего мира, заявил РИА Новости пресс-секретарь посольства Китая в Вашингтоне Лю Пэнъюй.

В американском штате Коннектикут в возрасте 100 лет ушел из жизни бывший государственный секретарь США Генри Киссинджер, один из самых заметных американских политиков, который оставил значительный след в истории дипломатии.

Киссинджер стоял у истоков нормализации отношений США и Китая, благодаря его усилиям в 1972 году состоялся первый визит американского президента Ричарда Никсона в Китай.

"Мы были глубоко шокированы и опечалены, узнав о смерти Генри Киссинджера. Мы выражаем наши глубокие и искренние соболезнования его семье. Кончина Киссинджера – это огромная потеря как для наших стран, так и для всего мира", - сказал Лю Пэнъюй.

Он подчеркнул, что Китайский народ никогда не забудет Киссинджера, который являлся "старым другом Китая", а также его исторический вклад в развитие отношений и укрепление дружбы между двумя народами.

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US Secretary Kissinger Was Old Friend of China, His Death Loss for World - Chinese Embassy

WASHINGTON, November 30 (Sputnik) - Former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger is an old friend of China, and his death is a tremendous loss for the world, Liu Pengyu, the spokesperson for the Chinese Embassy in the United States, said in a statement to Sputnik.

Kissinger, known for his contributions to contemporary political discourse and the field of international relations, died on Wednesday at his home in the US state of Connecticut. He was

100 years old.

"We were deeply shocked and saddened to learn of Dr. Henry Kissinger's passing," Liu said Wednesday night. "Dr. Kissinger's passing is a tremendous loss for both our countries and the world. The Chinese people value friendship and will never forget Dr. Kissinger, an old friend of China."

Kissinger made historic contributions to promoting the growth of China-US relations and enhancing the friendship between the Chinese and American people, Liu added.

Former US Secretary of State James Baker said in a statement to Sputnik earlier in the day that Kissinger had a giant intellect and keen geo-political instincts, adding that the former top US diplomat is credited with developing the policy of detente with the then-Soviet Union, opening US relations with the People's Republic of China and ending the Yom Kipper War through his shuttle diplomacy.

According to the international geopolitical consulting firm Kissinger Associates, Kissinger will be interred at a private family service. At a later date, there will be a memorial service in New York City.

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US Lost 'Iconic Diplomat' With Death of Henry Kissinger - Ex-Secretary of State Baker

WASHINGTON, November 30 (Sputnik) - The United States has lost an iconic diplomat with the death of former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, ex-US Secretary of State James Baker said in a statement to Sputnik.

"America has lost an iconic diplomat with the death of Henry Kissinger," Baker said Wednesday night. "During his time as Secretary of State and National Security Advisor, Henry played a key role in virtually every important aspect of American diplomacy from 1969 to 1977."

Kissinger had a giant intellect and keen geo-political instincts, Baker said, adding that the former top US diplomat is credited with developing the policy of "detente" with the then-Soviet Union, opening US relations with China and ending the Yom Kipper War through his "shuttle diplomacy."

Baker said he and his wife Susan will greatly miss Kissinger's bright mind and warm sense of humor.

Kissinger, known for his contributions to contemporary political discourse and the field of international relations, died on Wednesday at his home in the US state of Connecticut. He was 100 years old. According to the international geopolitical consulting firm, Kissinger Associates, Inc., Kissinger will be interred at a private family service. At a later date, there will be a memorial service in New York City.

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CRL Technologies Gets \$247Mln Contract to Maintain US Navy Aircraft Systems - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, November 30 (Sputnik) - CRL Technologies has received an almost \$250 million contract for engineering work on US Navy aircraft systems, the Defense Department said.

"CRL Technologies [of] Alexandria, Virginia is awarded a \$247,671,680 ... contract [for] lead systems integrator support, including engineering, technical, prototyping, and project management, for a wide variety of Navy programs and platforms," the Defense Department said in a press release on Wednesday.

The work will also cover new systems and upgrade existing systems within the manned and unmanned aircraft inventory, in support of the Naval Air Warfare Center AIRWorks Office, the release said.

Work will be performed in Patuxent River, Maryland over the next five years and is expected to be completed in December 2028, the release added.

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Musk Says Concerned OpenAI Discovered 'Some Dangerous Element'

UNITED NATIONS, November 30 (Sputnik) - Billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk said that he is worried OpenAI has discovered something dangerous and this was the real reason for firing OpenAI CEO Sam Altman.

"I'm quite concerned that there is some dangerous element of AI that they've discovered," Musk told the audience at NYT DealBook Summit.

Larry Page actually has a strong moral compass and he really sweated over questions of what is right and if he felt strongly enough to fire Sam Altman, we should know why, he added.

Musk followed up by saying that he was unable to find out the reason for the layoff.

Last week, OpenAI, the developer of the ChatGPT artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot, said it had reached an agreement with Sam Altman regarding his return as the company's CEO.

US media reported that OpenAI was also negotiating with Altman to allow him to rejoin the board, while Altman said he was looking forward to returning to the company.

On November 18, the OpenAI board sacked Altman following a deliberate review concluding that he had not been consistently candid with the board, and appointed chief technology officer Mira Murati as an interim replacement.

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Pratt and Whitney Receives \$701Mln Contract to Keep F-35 Engines Running - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, November 30 (Sputnik) - Pratt and Whitney Military Engines has received a more than \$701 million US Navy modification contract to continue maintenance work on the propulsion systems for the US armed forces' fleets of F35 Joint Strike Fighters, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"Raytheon Technologies Corporation, Pratt and Whitney Military Engines [of] East Hartford, Connecticut is awarded a ...\$701,923,926 ...modification contract ...to provide continued recurring sustainment [and] program management," the release said on Wednesday.

The contract will also cover continued propulsion integration, engineering, material management, configuration management, software sustainment, security management, equipment management and spare replenishments, the Defense Department said.

Work on the program will be performed in East Hartford, Connecticut (40%); Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (21%); Indianapolis, Indiana (12%); West Palm Beach, Florida (6%); Windsor Locks, Connecticut (6%); Brekstad, Norway (4%); Leeuwarden, Netherlands (3%); Iwakuni, Japan (3%); Williamtown, Australia (2%); Cameri, Italy (1%); Marham, United King and other locations in the United States and around the world, the release said.

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Musk Says Would Not Vote for Biden in US Presidential Election

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) - Billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk said during an interview with The New York Times that he would not vote for US President Joe Biden in an election.

"I think I would not vote for Biden," Musk said on Wednesday.

Musk said that he was insulted by Biden not inviting Tesla to attend an electric vehicle summit at the White House, despite the company manufacturing more electric vehicles than other attendees.

Musk said that he has not yet endorsed anyone for the 2024 US presidential election, noting that his lack of support for Biden is not indicative of support for Donald Trump.

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Musk Says Doesn't Care if Companies Stop Ads on X After He Endorsed Antisemitic Statement

WASHINGTON, November 30 (Sputnik) - Billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk said during an interview that he does not care if key US corporations stop advertising on his social media platform X in light of his endorsement of an antisemitic statement recently.

"If somebody's gonna try to blackmail me with advertising, blackmail me with money - go f*** yourself," Musk said during a discussion at The New York Times DealBook Summit on Wednesday.

Earlier in November, the US entrepreneur came under fire for endorsing a social media post that claimed Jewish communities were pushing hatred against White people, saying it was "the actual truth."

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

Musk said the general public will determine whether X will succeed in the long-run or if an advertisement boycott will lead to the downfall of the social media platform.

On Monday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Musk visited the southern Israeli kibbutz of Kfar Aza to see firsthand the aftermath of attacks carried out by Palestinian movement Hamas last month.

Musk during the discussion with The New York Times said he does apologize if his endorsement of the antisemitic statement encouraged antisemites.

Musk said that in hindsight he should not have replied to that particular post, but he mentioned that his recent trip to Israel was "not an apology tour."

Last week, Musk said that the network would donate all its proceeds from the content related to the conflict in the Gaza Strip to Israeli hospitals and an international humanitarian organization providing medical assistance to Palestinians.

Responding to an Hamas invitation, Musk in a post on Tuesday said it is a bit too dangerous to visit Gaza, but believes a long-term prosperous Gaza is good for all sides.

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Musk Says Visit to Israel Not 'Apology Tour' After Endorsing Antisemitic Statement

WASHINGTON, November 30 (Sputnik) - Billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk said during an interview that his recent visit to Israel was not an apology tour for endorsing a statement that was viewed as antisemitic on his social media platform X.

"Not an apology tour," Musk said about his trip during a discussion at the New York Times DealBook Summit on Wednesday.

Earlier in November, Musk came under fire for endorsing a social media post that claimed Jewish communities were pushing hatred against White people, saying it was "the actual truth." Film companies Warner Bros., Sony Pictures, Paramount and Lionsgate suspended advertising on Musk's social media network X for what they termed were antisemitic comments. Walt Disney and technology giants IBM and Apple soon followed suit.

On Monday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Musk visited the southern Israeli kibbutz of Kfar Aza to see firsthand the aftermath of attacks carried out by Palestinian movement Hamas last month.

Musk said during the discussion with the New York Times that he apologizes if his endorsement of the alleged antisemitic statement encouraged antisemites.

Musk also said that in hindsight he should not have replied to that particular post.

Last week, Musk said that the network would donate all its proceeds from the content related to

the conflict in the Gaza Strip to Israeli hospitals and an international humanitarian organization providing medical assistance to Palestinians.

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US Central Command Says American Destroyer Shot Down Drone Launched Toward Ship From Yemen

WASHINGTON, November 30 (Sputnik) - A US destroyer in the Red Sea shot down a drone launched toward the vessel from Yemen, Central Command said in a statement to Sputnik.

"At approximately 1100 (Sanaa time), while in the South Red Sea, the Arleigh-Burke Class Guided Missile Destroyer USS Carney (DDG 64) shot down an Iranian-produced KAS-04 unmanned aerial vehicle launched from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen. Although its intentions are not known, the UAV was heading toward the warship," the statement said on Wednesday.

The USS Carney was escorting a combat supply ship and another US-flagged ship at the time of the incident, the statement said.

There were no injuries to US personnel or damage to US vessels, the statement said.

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FBI Agent Robbed at Gunpoint, Car Stolen in US Capital on Wednesday - Police

WASHINGTON, November 30 (Sputnik) - An FBI agent was robbed at gunpoint and had their car stolen in the US capital on Wednesday afternoon, a Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) spokesperson told Sputnik.

"At approximately 3:45 p.m., MPD officers responded to the 100 block of 12th St NE for the report of an armed carjacking," police said in a statement on Wednesday. "The victim, a federal agent, reported two suspects took their vehicle."

The vehicle was recovered several hours later in Washington, the statement added.

Republican Congressman Troy Nehls in a statement about the carjacking said "you're not even safe in Democrat-run Washington, D.C."

The FBI did not immediately respond to Sputnik's request for comment on the matter.

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Kamala Harris to Attend Climate Change Conference COP28 in Dubai December 1-2 - Statement

WASHINGTON, November 30 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Kamala Harris will attend the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Dubai from December 1-2, Harris' spokesperson Kirsten Allen said.

"Vice President Kamala Harris will travel to Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, from December 1 to December 2 to attend the 28th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28)," Allen said in a statement on Wednesday.

Harris will be joined by dozens of senior US officials representing more than 20 departments and agencies, the statement said.

The vice president will emphasize the success of the Biden-Harris administration in implementing the most ambitious climate agenda in history, both domestically and internationally, the statement said.

"The Biden-Harris Administration appreciates the work of the UAE and President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed in organizing this critical global event," the statement added.

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Biden Must Back US Border Security for Ukraine Aid Funding to Be Approved - Senator

WASHINGTON, November 30 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration must back Republican efforts in Congress to address the border crisis on the US-Mexico border if it wants to garner enough Republican support to approve additional assistance for Ukraine, US Senator Ron Johnson said during a press conference.

"The administration wants funding for Ukraine, we need to use that leverage point, and we need to make any funds that go to Ukraine contingent on the administration actually reducing the number of migrants that are being dispersed in America," Johnson said on Wednesday.

At least 6 million migrants have entered the United States through the US southern border with Mexico since President Joe Biden took office, Johnson noted.

Johnson emphasized that Republicans in the Senate must hold firm and deny cloture on any bill that does not include a meaningful solution to address the border crisis.

On Tuesday, Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell said he told Biden last week that in order to get enough Republican support in the Senate to approve additional funding for Ukraine or Israel, there would have to be a credible effort to address the crisis on the US southern border.

Punchbowl News reported that Senate Democrats are concerned about efforts from their Republican colleagues to change the US asylum system in exchange for support to approve additional funding for Ukraine and Israel.

The US House of Representatives passed an Israel aid bill earlier this month, separating the assistance from a broader request from the Biden administration, which also included aid for Ukraine. However, Biden and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer rejected the proposal,

instead favoring the joint aid request.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, November 30 (Sputnik) -

GAZA CEASEFIRE

* China calls for an end to the blockade of Gaza to ensure the unhindered flow of much needed humanitarian aid to the Palestinian enclave to meet the basic needs of the residents, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said on Wednesday.

* Qatar is optimistic about an extension of the Hamas-Israeli ceasefire and hopes that it will be announced in a few hours, Qatari Foreign Ministry spokesman Majed Mohammed Al-Ansari said on Wednesday.

* Russia would like to see that a collective diplomatic mechanism is established to achieve a two-state solution between Israelis and Palestinians and that UN military observers are deployed in the Gaza Strip, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said.

* The World Health Organization (WHO) is not engaged in negotiations on securing access to hostages held in the Gaza Strip, as only the International Committee of the Red Cross is dealing with this issue, WHO spokesman Tarik Jasarevic told Sputnik.

* Two Russian women, freed by Hamas from the Gaza Strip, crossed the Rafah border checkpoint and entered Egypt, the Al Qahera News reported.

UKRAINE CONFLICT

* US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has met with his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba on the margins of the NATO Foreign Ministers Meeting in Brussels, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Wednesday.

* Several explosions occurred near the Khmelnytsky nuclear power plant in the early hours of Wednesday, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said.

* One of the problems with President Joe Biden's supplemental funding request is his administration's failure to outline what a "plan of success" for Ukraine should look like, US Congressman Michael Turner, chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, said.

* The US states of Pennsylvania and Arizona have been among the main beneficiaries of the record flow of funds from the Biden administration to arm Ukraine, receiving almost \$2.5 billion each, US media reported.

* US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene said on Wednesday that a conference meeting between House and Senate lawmakers on the National Defense Authorization Act is controlled by members of the leadership who seek to put Ukraine first.

CANADA-GOOGLE DEAL

* The federal government and Google have reached an agreement to end their dispute over C-18 - a measure passed to compensate Canadian media outlets for using their content on social media, Canadian media reported on Wednesday.

* Canadian Minister of Heritage Pascale St-Onge confirmed that a deal has been reached between the Canadian government and Google settling the dispute over the implications of the Online News Act (C-18).

* Under the agreement, Google will pay \$73.6 million in financial support every year, indexed to inflation, for the news of several media outlets nationwide, St-Onge said.

ARTICLES OF IMPEACHMENT AGAINST DHS CHIEF MAYORKAS

* US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene said on Wednesday that she is again introducing articles of impeachment against Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas for his mishandling of the situation on the United States' borders.

RUSSIAN ECONOMY

* Russia's GDP has increased by 3.2% year-on-year over the past ten months, according to the estimate of the Economic Development Ministry released on Wednesday.

SCYTHIAN GOLD

* Russia can turn to the European Court of Justice regarding the ownership dispute around a museum collection known as Scythian Gold, although the country's interaction with international courts has recently been hindered, the Russian presidential envoy for international cultural cooperation, Mikhail Shvydkoy, said on Wednesday.

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US Senator Paul Confirms Will Force Vote on Resolution to Remove US Forces From Syria

WASHINGTON, November 30 (Sputnik) - US Senator Rand Paul will force a vote on a resolution to remove US troops stationed in Syria, the lawmaker confirmed in a statement to social media platform X.

"There is no greater question that is ever brought before Congress than the issue of whether to go to war," Paul said on Wednesday, linking to reports that he will force a vote on his resolution as soon as next week.

Earlier this month, Paul introduced a resolution that would require US President Joe Biden to remove US forces from hostilities in or affecting Syria within 30 days, unless a declaration of war or specific authorization for use of force is enacted by Congress.

There are 900 US troops deployed in Syria despite Congress never having declared war against Syria or any group inside the country, according to the resolution. Congress has the sole power to declare war per the US Constitution, the resolution notes.

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US House Committee Advances Bill to Sanction Supporters of Russia-North Korea Cooperation

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) - The US House Foreign Affairs Committee on Wednesday advanced legislation to impose sanctions on persons and entities that support North Korea's alleged provision of assistance to Russia for use in Ukraine.

The panel advanced the legislation, dubbed the Russia-North Korea Cooperation Sanctions Act, in a vote of 40-0.

The bill imposes sanctions on any foreign person responsible for the transfer of arms or material support from North Korea to Russia for use in its special military operation in Ukraine. The sanctions cover the transfer of goods, services and technologies that could be used by Russia or its "proxies" as well, according to the bill text.

The bill also imposes sanctions on foreign financial institutions or logistical networks that facilitate such transfers.

The legislation includes exceptions protecting organizations engaged in the transfer of humanitarian assistance.

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Whelan's Family Says Wants Help From Russian Rights Group After Attack by Inmate

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) – The family of US Marine Paul Whelan told Sputnik they would like to see the Public Monitoring Commission (PMC), a Russian human rights watchdog group with access to prisons, step up and provide some assistance to Whelan after he was attacked by an inmate.

Earlier in the day, the Russian Federal Penitentiary Service for Mordovia, where Whelan is serving his sentence for espionage, said that another convict hit him in the left side of the face during a row on November 28. Following the brawl, Whelan was taken to a medical unit of the prison where he was diagnosed with an abrasion under the eye.

"We had hoped to file a request with the public monitoring commission, but they have deactivated their website and their email address ... So despite the PMC deputy coming out and saying Paul hasn't requested their assistance, we would like it and would ask for it if we were able," Paul Whelan's brother, David, said in a statement to Sputnik.

Paul Whelan believes that the prison administration is taking the attack on him seriously, David added.

Paul Whelan was arrested in Moscow in December 2018 and subsequently sentenced to 16 years in prison on charges of espionage. Whelan, who is also a citizen of Canada, Ireland, and the United Kingdom, has maintained his innocence, insisting that he came to Russia to attend a

friend's wedding.

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New Book Says McCarthy Visited Trump After January 6 Riot Because He 'Wasn't Eating'

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) - Former US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy explained his 2021 visit to Donald Trump by saying that the ex-president was "depressed" and "not eating" after leaving the White House, according to excerpts of a forthcoming book published by CNN on Wednesday.

The book, "Oath of Honor," by former Congresswoman Liz Cheney, one of Trump's most outspoken critics, is due to be published on December 5, but CNN obtained an advance copy before its publication.

Cheney says in the book that she and other Republicans were "angry and disgusted" when they first saw the Jan. 28, 2021, photo of McCarthy and Trump at Mar-a-Lago.

When she confronted McCarthy about his decision to meet Trump in the wake of the January 6 riot at the Capitol, the then-speaker explained that he visited at the request of Trump's staff, who had told him that they were worried about the former president because he was "really depressed" and "not eating."

On January 6, 2021, after Trump's election defeat, a mob of his supporters breached the US Capitol in an attempt to halt Congress's Electoral College vote count.

Cheney, the daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney, was one of only 10 House Republicans who voted to impeach Trump after the capitol attack, and later went on to become vice chair of the congressional January 6 Committee that investigated the riot.

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Ramaswamy Political Campaign Director Leaving for Trump Campaign - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) - A former top aid for Republican presidential hopeful Vivek Ramaswamy is leaving his campaign this week to work for Donald Trump's election campaign, The Messenger reported on Wednesday.

The national political director for Ramaswamy's campaign, Brian Swenson, will take a new position working with senior Trump campaign advisor Susie Wiles, according to the report, which cited Swensen.

The report added that Swensen and Wiles had worked together previously during Rick Scott's 2010 gubernatorial campaign. Starting Friday, Swensen will be working as a campaign advisor for the Trump campaign, the report added.

The move comes as Ramaswamy's early campaign trail success has started to wane as the Republican Primary nears, with Ramaswamy polling around 5% compared to Donald Trump at

60%, the report said.

Swensen's duties will be allocated to Ramaswamy senior advisor Mike Biundo, the report said, citing campaign officials.

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UNGA President Says Small Countries Have Potential To Make Large Contributions

UNITED NATIONS, November 29 (Sputnik) - The President of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), Dennis Francis, said that the small countries possess the potential to make substantial and disproportionate contributions to international relations, the United Nations, and multilateral diplomacy.

"The point I'm making is that small countries, and there are many, many of them, have made and continue to...Have the potential to make large contributions, disproportionately large in terms of their size, to international relations, to the United Nations and to multilateral diplomacy," Francis said on Wednesday during a UN Press Conference.

"Trinidad and Tobago also, you may or may not be aware, was one of the key players that created, along with others, the International Criminal Court. So multilateral diplomacy and the UN system, contrary to what many people believe, is not a forum for the big and powerful only," Francis said.

Furthermore, he added that small countries need to be supported because there is a possibility that a groundbreaking invention, capable of altering the course of human history, may originate from one of the Pacific islands.

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Lack of Plan for Ukraine Part of Problem With Biden's Funding Request - House Panel

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) - One of the problems with President Joe Biden's supplemental funding request is his administration's failure to outline what a "plan of success" for Ukraine should look like, Rep. Michael Turner, chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, said on Wednesday.

"The problem with the Ukraine funding is ... it's part of the issues that we've been discussing here and that is the failure of the Administration to articulate a plan of success," Turner said. "In Congress people are debating what are we going to do, how do we achieve goals, objectives. What are our goals and objectives?"

Turner said he had discussed with Volodymyr Zelenskyy that the Biden administration in its latest funding request overloaded funding on the humanitarian side that does not even go to Ukraine.

"So, Zelenskyy is settled with this perception of the American people, of billions of dollars that

have never even gone to Ukraine and actually were used by the Administration to go around the world," he added.

Turner stressed that aside Ukraine, the latest request also includes Israel, Asia and the southern border.

"The real sticking point is that the administration is unwilling to accept the failure of its southern border policy, and really do policy negotiations with Congress," Turner said. "This is not an issue of just funding for the southern border, you have to change policy issues, and that's going to be the holdup."

In October, the White House announced that the funds approved by the US Congress for further military assistance to Kiev were almost exhausted, which is why the volume of aid packages has been consistently reduced recently. Biden submitted a \$106 billion supplemental request to Congress that includes \$61 billion for Ukraine along with aid for Israel.

Earlier in November, the US House of Representatives passed an Israel aid bill, separating the assistance from the broader request from the Biden administration, which also included aid for Ukraine. Biden and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer rejected the proposal, instead favoring the joint aid request.

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US Congresswoman Greene Says Reintroducing Impeachment Articles Against DHS Chief Mayorkas

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) - US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene said on Wednesday that she is again introducing articles of impeachment against Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas for his mishandling of the situation on the United States' borders. "Today, I reintroduced my articles of impeachment against Secretary Mayorkas because impeachment is exactly what the founders intended for the House to do when a member of the executive branch intentionally violates the laws written by the legislative branch," Greene said in a statement via social media platform X.

Greene alleges that Mayorkas violated his oath of office by willfully failing to secure the country's borders.

Earlier this month, eight House Republicans joined Democrats to block an initial impeachment effort by Greene.

However, a majority of likely voters in the US supports efforts to impeach Mayorkas, according to a Rasmussen Reports poll released Tuesday.

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Canada's Heritage Minister Lauds Deal With Google, Says Will Benefit Canadians News Sector

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) - Canadian Minister of Heritage Pascale St-Onge on Wednesday confirmed that a deal has been reached between the Canadian government and Google settling the dispute over the implications of the Online News Act (C-18).

Earlier in the day, media reported that the federal government and Google had reached an agreement to end their dispute over C-18 - a measure passed to compensate Canadian media outlets for using their content on social media.

“Following weeks of productive discussions, I am happy to announce that we have found a path forward with Google for the implementation of the Online News Act,” St-Onge said in a statement. “This will benefit the news sector and allow Google to continue to play an important role in giving Canadians access to reliable news content.”

St-Onge said that under the agreement, Google will pay C\$100 million (\$73.6 million) in financial support every year, indexed to inflation, for the news of several media outlets nationwide, among them independent, Indigenous-led and official-minority language ones.

The minister also said Google would work with a single collective to distribute its financial assistance to interested and eligible businesses based on the number of full-time journalists working for them.

On August 1, Meta (banned in Russia as an extremist organization) announced it would end Canadian news availability on its Facebook and Instagram platforms. However, Google left the door open for negotiations to address its specific concerns about the act's content, emphasizing that it would end Canadian news availability unless a compromise was found.

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Pennsylvania, Arizona Have Netted Almost \$5Bln From Aid to Ukraine - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) – The US states of Pennsylvania and Arizona have been among the main beneficiaries of the record flow of funds from the Biden administration to arm Ukraine in its conflict with Russia, receiving almost \$2.5 billion each, Politico reported on Wednesday.

The Biden administration has recently circulated a graphic in Congress to promote its new narrative that the generous aid for Ukraine actually benefits the United States itself, the report said.

Pennsylvania received \$2.364 billion, more than any other state, to produce munitions and tactical vehicles for Ukraine, while Arizona with \$2.259 billion is in second place, according to the report. The US states of Texas, Arkansas, and Florida received \$1.449 billion, \$1.478 billion, and \$1.011 billion, respectively.

In total, US states have received as much as \$27 billion in funding to supply Ukraine with weapons and munitions, the report said.

In October, the Biden administration sent a \$106 billion supplemental funding request to Congress that includes \$61.4 billion in aid for Ukraine and \$14.3 billion for Israel, as well as money for US border security.

Having faced Republican resistance to more funds for Ukraine and a decline in public support

for additional aid, the White House began urging Republicans and Democrats to defend and sell the continuation of the US aid for Ukraine as beneficial for the domestic economy, Politico reported.

Nevertheless, the US House of Representatives passed an Israel aid bill earlier in November, separating the assistance from the broader request from the Biden administration, which also included aid for Ukraine. President Joe Biden and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer rejected the proposal, instead favoring the joint aid request.

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China Calls for Lifting Gaza Blockade to Allow Unhindered Flow of Aid – Wang Yi

UNITED NATIONS, November 29 (Sputnik) – China calls for an end to the blockade of Gaza to ensure the unhindered flow of humanitarian aid to the enclave to meet basic needs of civilians, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told reporters on Wednesday.

"We call for the removal of the blockade of Gaza to ensure unhindered international corridors as a guarantee for the basic needs of civilians in Gaza," Wang said after a UN Security Council meeting,

Wang also said that China's humanitarian aid for Gaza has arrived at the Rafah crossing but has been unable to get to the enclave because of the "hindered and not very smooth access" through the crossing.

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Teenager Sentenced to 10 Years for Setting Fire to Synagogue in Texas - US Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) - A US federal court has sentenced nineteen-year-old Texas man to ten years in prison for setting fire to a synagogue, the Justice Department said on Wednesday.

"A Texas man was sentenced today to ten years in prison and three years of supervised release, and ordered to pay \$470,000 in restitution for a hate crime and arson in which he set fire to the Congregation Beth Israel Synagogue in Austin, Texas, on Oct. 31, 2021," the Justice Department said in a press release.

Franklin Sechriest pleaded guilty to the hate crime and arson charges on April 7, the release said.

Sechriest admitted that he targeted the synagogue because of his hatred of Jews, the release said.

Journals recovered from Sechriest contained antisemitic statements and views, the release added.

Sechriest also possessed several decals and stickers expressing antisemitic messages,

according to the release.

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Democratic US Senators Say Will Continue to Support Aid to Israel But Not 'Blank Check'

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) - A group of Democratic US Senators said on Wednesday that they will continue to support more US aid to Israel, but such assistance will not be a "blank check."

"We continue to support additional assistance to Israel in the aftermath of the brutal Hamas attacks - but we are all in agreement that this assistance must be consistent with our interests and values... US assistance has never come in the form of a blank check - regardless of the recipient," the lawmakers said in a statement.

The statement was issued by Senators Chris Van Hollen, Brian Schatz and Jack Reed.

The statement comes after a meeting on Tuesday between the Democratic lawmakers and White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan.

US aid to Israel must be consistent with its interests and values, US law, international law and the law of armed conflict, the statement said.

The United States must help Israel find a better path toward achieving its military and security objectives, the statement said.

The US Congress is considering a \$106 billion supplemental aid request by the Biden administration, which includes aid for both Israel and Ukraine. The House of Representatives passed a standalone Israel aid bill, but the Senate and White House rejected the legislation.

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Canada to Invest \$294Mln in Dows Net-Zero Petrochemical Facility in Alberta – Freeland

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) – The Canadian government will invest C\$400 million (\$294 million) in Dow Chemical C\$11.5 billion (\$8.5 billion) project to build the worlds first net-zero emissions petrochemical facility in the province of Alberta, Minister of Finance Chrystia Freeland said on Wednesday.

"Our investment tax credit for carbon capture, storage and utilization, as well as our investment tax credit for clean hydrogen will provide up to C\$400 million in support of this project," Freeland said from Alberta's Fort Saskatchewan.

Dow Chemicals and several partner companies will jointly invest over \$8.5 billion to expand and retrofit their Fort Saskatchewan facility to become the worlds first net-zero emissions ethylene cracker and derivatives site, Canada's Department of Finance said in a news release.

With the investment, the facility will be able to significantly reduce Scope 1 and 2 greenhouse gas emission generated by its operations, the statement said. Moreover, 8000 jobs will be

created during the expansion and retrofitting phase of the project, and between 400-500 permanent positions will open once completed.

Through the investment, Dow will use carbon capture, utilization, and storage technology to limit its environmental print by reducing both current and future emissions resulting from production expansion capacity, the statement said.

"Dow will also enhance its operations to produce clean hydrogen, which will be used as a clean fuel supply for the site's furnaces," the statement said, adding that the new technologies will allow the facility to reduce its emissions by approximately 1 million metric tons per annum.

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Russia Calls for Collective Diplomatic Mechanism for 2-State Solution, UN Observers in Gaza

NITED NATIONS, November 29 (Sputnik) - Russia would like to see that a collective diplomatic mechanism is established to achieve a two-state solution between Israelis and Palestinians and that UN military observers are deployed in the Gaza Strip, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Wednesday.

"In order to move toward this goal [two-state solution] alongside the efforts made to address the aforementioned acute humanitarian issues, a collective diplomatic mechanism will also need to be established," Nebenzia said during a meeting of the UN Security Council.

The Russian ambassador said one of the options to proceed could be by expanding the mandate of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO).

"This mission has more than 200 military observers, the numbers of which could be increased and which could be deployed provided that the necessary additional resources are provided. We certainly call upon the UN Secretary General to work on this option or to propose an alternative," Nebenzia said.

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Canada, Google Reach Agreement Settling Dispute Over Online News Act - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government and Google have reached an agreement settling their months-long dispute over the implications of the Online News Act (C-18), CBC News reported on Wednesday.

Under the agreement, Google platforms would continue to share Canadian news in exchange for annual payments worth up to C\$100 million (US\$73.5 million) to media companies, the report said, citing a source familiar with the negotiations.

The regulatory framework for the deal was agreed upon earlier this week, the report said.

Ottawa had estimated that yearly compensations from Google would be C\$172 million (US\$126.5 million), but the company contested the amount and the sum was eventually placed

at US\$73.5 million.

On June 22, Bill C-18 received royal ascent. The measure was passed to compensate Canadian media news organizations for using their content on social media, most notably on Google and Meta (banned in Russia as an extremist organization).

However, the two companies rejected the request to pay and threatened to block access to content from news outlets in Canada, including news publishers and broadcasters.

On August 1, Meta announced it would end Canadian news availability on its Facebook and Instagram platforms. However, Google left the door open for negotiation to address its specific concerns about the act's content, emphasizing that it would end Canadian news availability unless a compromise was found.

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Nebenzia Says West Sees Palestinians as Second Class Citizens

UNITED NATIONS, November 29 (Sputnik) - The West considers Palestinians second class citizens and has no interest in helping them, Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said on Wednesday.

"One, extremely unseemly fact has become clear: for the West, Palestinians are second class people, defending the interests of which they simply have no interest in doing," Nebenzia told the Security Council members.

Lack of interest from the West has been one of the biggest hurdles in moving forward in the UN, he added.

On Monday, Qatar announced that an agreement had been reached between Israel and Hamas on a two-day extension of the humanitarian truce in the Gaza Strip on the same terms as the previous one. Last week, Qatar mediated a deal between Israel and Hamas on a four-day truce and the exchange of some of the prisoners and hostages, as well as the delivery of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip.

On October 7, Hamas launched a large-scale rocket attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip and breached the border, killing some 1,200 people and abducting over 200 others. Israel launched retaliatory strikes, ordered a complete blockade of Gaza, and launched a large-scale ground incursion into the Gaza Strip. The conflict has so far resulted in the deaths of over 16,000 people in the Gaza Strip.

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Senate Democrats Concerned About Republicans Seeking to Change US Asylum System - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) - Senate Democrats are concerned about efforts from their Republican colleagues to change the US asylum system in exchange for support to approve additional funding to Ukraine and Israel, Punchbowl News reported on Wednesday.

The report, citing a joint statement obtained from Senate Democrats, said that Republican senators want to make it more difficult for migrants to seek asylum in the United States as a means to deter record-level mass migration on the US-Mexico border.

According to Republican Sen. Thom Tillis, the report said, Republicans also want to restrict the US immigration parole system, which allows illegal migrants to enter the United States for a temporary period.

On Tuesday, Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell said that he told President Joe Biden last week that in order to get enough Republican support in the Senate to approve additional funding for Ukraine or Israel, there would have to be a credible effort to address the crisis on the US southern border.

The US House of Representatives passed an Israel aid bill earlier this month, separating the assistance from a broader request from the Biden administration, which also included aid for Ukraine. However, Biden and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer rejected the proposal, instead favoring the joint aid request.

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Blinken Meets With Ukrainian Counterpart Kuleba on Margins of NATO Ministerial - Statement

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has met with his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba on the margins of the NATO Foreign Ministers Meeting in Brussels, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Wednesday.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken met with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba today in Brussels on the margins of the NATO Foreign Ministers Meeting," Miller said in a statement.

The two officials discussed the recent developments on the battlefield in Ukraine, including the opening of shipping routes in the Black Sea, the statement said.

"They also discussed the December 6-7 Defense Industrial Base Conference in Washington, DC, where US and Ukrainian companies will promote the co-production of military supplies to aid Ukraine's fight for freedom and security, and create new opportunities for US businesses," the statement said.

Blinken congratulated Kuleba for the recent strides the Ukrainian government had made in its anti-corruption reforms, emphasizing that the fight against corruption plays a crucial role in Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration process, the statement said.

Blinken also reiterated the United States' enduring support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, the statement added.

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

Six Planets Found in Resonance Orbits Around Star 100 Light Years Away - Scientists

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) - Six planets that orbit in resonance with each other have been discovered circling a star only 100 light years from earth, the British scientific journal Nature reported on Wednesday.

"Here we present the observations of six transiting planets around the bright nearby star HD 110067," the authors of the study wrote. "We find that the planets follow a chain of resonant orbits."

A dynamical study of the innermost planet triplet allowed the prediction and later confirmation of the orbits of the rest of the planets in the system, Nature said.

"The six planets are found to be sub-Neptunes with radii ranging from 1.94 radius compared to Earth to 2.85 radius compared to Earth," the study said.

Three of the planets have measured masses, yielding low bulk densities that suggest the presence of large hydrogen-dominated atmospheres, nature wrote.

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Sullivan, Red Cross Chief Discuss Humanitarian Efforts to Help Gaza Citizens - White House

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) - US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Red Cross President Mirjana Egger discussed ongoing efforts to provide humanitarian relief to the residents of Gaza displaced by Israel's military operation, the White House said on Wednesday.

"On Tuesday, November 28, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan spoke with International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) President Mirjana Spoljaric Egger," the White House said in a press release. "The two discussed ongoing efforts to sustain and expand the flow of humanitarian assistance and restoration of basic services in Gaza, and to bolster civilian protections and humanitarian access throughout Gaza."

Sullivan reiterated the call for the immediate release of all hostages in the conflict, and stressed the need for the Red Cross to be able to provide medical assistance to those hostages, the release said.

On Tuesday, the United States delivered more than 54,000 pounds of UN humanitarian supplies to Egypt to provide needed medical supplies and food and nutrition assistance to the people of Gaza.

According to the White House, the United States is expected to make additional deliveries in the coming days.

On Monday, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said the United States has warned Israel that if it further displaces Gaza residents as its military operations move further south of the enclave, it will be too much for any humanitarian network to handle.

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US Speaker's Bid to Tie Aid to Israel to Tax Cuts Wrong, Dangerous - Democrat Caucus Head

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Mike Johnson is wrong to make the US emergency aid package to Israel conditional on also passing massive tax cuts to aid the wealthy and worsen the federal deficit, head of the Democratic Caucus, Congressman Pete Aguilar, told reporters on Wednesday.

"This is bad for national security... It is a bad precedent to set. It costs resources," Aguilar said. "We have never conditioned emergency aid like we have done under Speaker Johnson this week. This is wrong. This is wrong for Israelis. It is wrong for the region. ...It is wrong and it is dangerous. The Democratic Caucus will not support that."

Aguilar said he expected the aid package to Israel would eventually be passed in the form of a bipartisan supplemental funding proposal crafted by the Senate.

Aguilar also warned that the US government was running out of funding in only two weeks and he expressed skepticism over Johnson's proposed interim solution of a "laddered" Continuing Resolution (CR) to extend financial credit for the federal government saying it was not grounded in reality.

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Taiwan President Says Flagship Semiconductor Manufacturer's US Plant 'Good Move'

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) – Taiwan's outgoing president Tsai Ing-wen said Wednesday that the plan by the island's flagship semiconductor manufacturer to build a plant in the United States was "a good move."

"I think this move to the US in terms of our chip manufacturing capabilities, as far as we're concerned for the moment, it's a good move in the sense that we are helping our allies and our friends in terms of building the supply chain resilience... but at the same time we'll be able to use resources available in the United States, especially human resources," Tsai said in an interview at The New York Times' DealBook Summit.

Tsai also added that Taiwan was "pretty confident" that the US plant was unlikely to erode its global competitive advantage in advanced semiconductor manufacturing, as its "semiconductors clusters...for production cannot be...rebuilt or replaced...elsewhere."

In 2020, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, the world's largest contract chip maker, announced plans to build a facility in Arizona. The \$40 billion project is currently slated to open in 2025.

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US House Lawmakers Urge Leadership Not to Renew FISA Section 702 in NDAA - Letter

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) - A bipartisan group of 54 US House lawmakers on Wednesday sent a letter to the congressional leadership, urging them not to include a reauthorization of Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

“We write to express our opposition to attaching any short-term reauthorization of Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act in the National Defense Reauthorization [sic] Act (NDAA) or other ‘must-pass’ vehicle,” the letter said.

Section 702 of FISA permits the US government to conduct targeted surveillance of foreign persons located outside the United States. However, lawmakers have been considering reforms to the authority, following hundreds of thousands of abuses of the surveillance database by government agencies, including the FBI.

If Congress passes a short-term authorization, lawmakers will forfeit the chance to enact privacy safeguards and accountability procedures, the letter said. Reauthorization of Section 702 must proceed as standalone legislation, subject to open debate and amendment, the letter said.

Earlier this month, the House Intelligence Committee’s Majority FISA Working Group proposed 45 reforms to the act, including Section 702 authorities, to enact prior to reauthorization.

Reauthorization of the Section 702 through a larger bill would be viewed as a circumvention of the democratic process, undermining the credibility of the legislation, the letter said.

Among the lawmakers who signed the letter are Warren Davidson, Zoe Lofgren, Paul Gosar, Jamie Raskin and Marjorie Taylor Greene.

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UPDATE - Canada to Replace CP-140 Aurora Fleet in Multibillion Dollar Deal With Boeing - Reports

(Updates with background in paras 5, 6)

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government has decided to move forward with a multibillion-dollar deal with Boeing to replace its aging CP-140 Aurora surveillance plane fleet, Radio Canada reported on Wednesday.

In late March, Canada submitted a request via the US foreign military sales program to acquire up to sixteen P-8A Poseidon surveillance aircraft in replacement of its aging fleet of CP-140 airplanes, scheduled to be retired in 2030.

On June 27, the US State Department notified Congress of its decision to approve a potential sale to Canada of up to 16 P-8A patrol aircraft and related equipment in a contract worth \$5.9 billion.

Ottawa has decided to award the contract to Boeing despite repeated calls to launch an open and fair competition, the report said, citing two sources familiar with the matter.

On Tuesday, Unifor and the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers alongside Bloc Quebecois lawmaker Simon-Pierre Savard spoke from Parliament Hill asking the government to launch a proper contract-awarding process.

Their calls were echoed by Arevig Afarian, spokesperson for Quebec's aircraft manufacturer Bombardier, who said that Bombardier was continuing its efforts to achieve a fair procurement process for the replacement of Canada's aging surveillance plane fleet.

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Saudi Foreign Minister Says Arab World Won't Encourage Palestinians Out of Their Lands

UNITED NATIONS, November 29 (Sputnik) – The Arab world will neither encourage Palestinians to leave their lands, nor will it work with anyone whose agenda includes their departure, Saudi Arabia Minister of Foreign Affairs Faisal bin Farhan said on Wednesday.

“We are not going to encourage them [Palestinians], or force them to leave their land, and we're not going to work with anyone who has that agenda,” bin Farhan said during media stakeout from the UN.

Palestinians have a right to their own land, and to live in safety, security and dignity in Palestine, the Saudi Minister said. That is what the Arab world will push for and work towards achieving, he added.

The comments were made in regard to the issue of Palestinian refugees, and criticism coming from some parts directed at Arab countries for not properly addressing the plight of Palestine by refusing to take refugees.

“The weight has to be lifted, but it is not to be lifted by the Arab world.” Bin Farhan said, adding that it could be achieved by stopping the killing, ending the blockade and by allowing enough humanitarian assistance to enter Gaza.

The Minister further said that Arab states expected more than just humanitarian pauses between Israel and Hamas, but a ceasefire and a lasting peace that allows for both Palestinians and Israelis to live side by side in two countries.

On October 7, Hamas launched a surprise large-scale rocket attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip and breached the border, killing and abducting people. Israel launched retaliatory strikes and ordered a complete blockade of Gaza, cutting off supplies of water, food, and fuel. On October 27, Israel launched a large-scale ground incursion into the Gaza Strip. The conflict has killed an estimated 1,200 people in Israel and over 16,000 in the Gaza Strip.

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US Congresswoman Greene Says NDAA Conference Controlled by 'Ukraine First' Leaders

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) - US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene said on Wednesday that a conference meeting between House and Senate lawmakers on the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) is being controlled by members of the leadership who seek to put Ukraine first.

"I just left the NDAA conference with the Senate... It's a sham of a conference because it's really being controlled by the four corners, who want to continue putting Ukraine first and our military last," Greene said in a statement via the social media platform X.

On Wednesday, a conference committee met to begin to reconcile differences between House and Senate variations of the NDAA, an annual defense policy bill.

Lawmakers reportedly seek to finalize a version of the NDAA as soon as this week, placing the legislation on track for a vote as soon as next week.

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US Industry Has To Block Digital Assets From Falling Into Crooks' Hands - Adeyemo

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) - US industry should design new tools and ways to prevent digital assets within the nation from falling into the hands of transnational criminal organizations, terrorists and rogue states, Treasury Deputy Secretary Wally Adeyemo said Wednesday.

"The last time we pursued major reforms to this architecture was after the terrorist attacks on 9/11," Adeyemo said in remarks prepared for delivery at the 2023 Blockchain Association Policy Summit. "The threat actors and tools at their disposal have changed, but their goals remain the same. As terrorists and criminals innovate their approach to illicit finance, we need tools to be able to keep up with them."

Citing examples of government initiatives on this front, Adeyemo referred to the sanctioning of Sinbad.io —a virtual currency mixer that serves as a key money-laundering tool for a cyber hacking group sponsored by North Korea. "Sinbad processed millions of dollars' worth of virtual currency from cyber hacks and enabled cybercriminals to mask illicit transactions," he added.

The American Bankers Association is, meanwhile, working to design, develop and pilot a new information sharing exchange that it will manage to combat fraud, money laundering and terrorist financing, the deputy treasury secretary said.

"This type of collaboration and proactive effort amongst industry participants both large and small is commendable and demonstrates the collective commitment that is necessary to stay ahead of bad actors," Adeyemo said. "We need those in the digital asset industry to do the same. You have the capacity to build new tools that help prevent money laundering while continuing to provide legitimate protections to individuals. You also have the capacity to cut off firms from your ecosystem that are failing to take steps to prevent illicit finance."

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US Imposes New Sanctions Related to Iran's Financial Networks – Treasury

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) – The US Treasury imposed new sanctions on five individuals and 16 entities on Wednesday for their involvement in facilitating financial networks used by Iran's government, according to a release.

“Today, the Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned over 20 individuals and entities for their involvement in financial facilitation networks for the benefit of Iran's Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics (MODAFL) and Iranian Armed Forces General Staff (AFGS), and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF),” the release stated.

It alleged that these units used “intricate networks of foreign-based front companies and brokers to enable [their] illicit commercial activities and exploit the international financial system.”

It added that Iran sold commodities, including oil, to generate the equivalent of billions of US dollars to fund its activities, including supporting regional affiliates like Hamas and Hezbollah.

Within Iran, sanctions were imposed on Sepehr Energy Jahan Nama Pars Company and its deputy chairman, principal board member, and managing director Majid A'zami and employee Elyas Niroomand Toomaj. They were also imposed on Pishro Tejarat Sana Company and its chair of the board of directors, Seyyed Abdoljavad Alavi.

Sanctions were also imposed on foreign entities based in Hong Kong and the United Arab Emirates that help Sepehr Energy sell commodities in Europe and East Asia. These included Hong Kong-based Puyuan Trade Co. Limited and HK Sihang Haochen Trading Limited; Dubai-based Unique Performance General Trading LLC, OPG Global General Trading Co. LLC, JEP Petrochemical Trading LLC, Future Energy Trading LLC, and A Three Energy FZE; and Sharjah-based Tetis Global FZE and Royal Shell Goods Wholesalers LLC.

Finally, the sanctions targeted UAE-based Transmart DMCC and its owner and CEO Zabi Vahap, as well as Adelina Kuliyeve, who holds power of attorney for Transmart and the previously sanctioned entity CGN Trade.

Mehboob Thachankandy Palikandy and three companies he owned were also sanctioned, including Singapore-based MSE Overseas PTE. Ltd and Sealink Overseas PTE. Ltd. and UAE-based Solise Energy (FZE). Palikandy was also the manager and chief executive of CGN Trade and is an employee of Transmart, whose business operations were transferred over from CGN Trade after its liquidation.

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Husband of US Journalist Detained in Russia Wants US to Designate Her Wrongfully Detained

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) -Husband of detained American journalist in Russia Alsu Kurmasheva, Pavel Butorin, said he would like the US government to designate her as wrongfully detained, saying that such a move would elevate her case and commit the US to securing her release.

"I would very much like the United States government to designate Alsu as a wrongfully detained person, I think this designation would elevate her case to the necessary level and will...commit the United States to securing a release," Pavel Butorin said on Wednesday during a Hudson Institute event.

The remarks were in response to moderator Jeremy Hunt's question about Pavel Butorin's message to the United States government.

On October 18, Kurmasheva was detained and charged with failure to register as a foreign agent in Russia, which carries a maximum sentence of five years' imprisonment.

However, Kremlin said it is completely unaware of Kurmasheva's case and is not monitoring it.

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Second Reading Shows US GDP Up 5.2% in Third Quarter - Commerce Dept. Report

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) - The US economy grew 5.2% in the third quarter of 2023, according to a second reading of the GDP on Wednesday that came in higher than the previously-published 4.9% for the quarter.

"Real gross domestic product increased at an annual rate of 5.2 percent in the third quarter of 2023, according to the 'second' estimate," the Bureau of Economic Analysis, a unit within the US Commerce Department, said in a statement.

The Bureau of Economic Analysis issues three GDP readings for each quarter. The second reading for the third quarter also came in higher than the 5% estimated by Wall Street economists tracked by US media.

GDP growth contracted by 8.9% in the second quarter of 2020, after the outbreak of the COVID-19 in the first quarter of that year and the subsequent pandemic measures. Final GDP growth for all of 2020 was minus 2.8%.

By 2021 though, the economy had rebounded strongly from the pandemic, registering a 5.9% growth. GDP expansion moderated by the end of last year but remained positive, with a 2.1% growth.

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Canada to Replace CP-140 Aurora Fleet in Multibillion Dollar Deal With Boeing - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government has decided to move forward with a multibillion-dollar deal with Boeing to replace its aging CP-140 Aurora

surveillance plane fleet, Radio Canada reported on Wednesday.

In late March, Canada submitted a request via the US foreign military sales program to acquire up to sixteen P-8A Poseidon surveillance aircraft in replacement of its aging fleet of CP-140 airplanes, scheduled to be retired in 2030.

On June 27, the US State Department notified Congress of its decision to approve a potential sale to Canada of up to 16 P-8A patrol aircraft and related equipment in a contract worth \$5.9 billion.

Ottawa has decided to award the contract to Boeing despite repeated calls to launch an open and fair competition, the report said, citing two sources familiar with the matter.

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Johnson Says Has Reservations About Expelling Santos From US House of Representatives

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Wednesday that he has personal reservations about expelling Congressman George Santos from the House of Representatives, although he will allow lawmakers to vote on the matter based on their own opinions.

"What we've said as the leadership team is we're going to allow people to vote their conscience," Johnson said during a press conference. "I personally have real reservations about doing this. I'm concerned about a precedent that may be set for that."

The Republican leadership will not "whip the vote" one way or another, Johnson said.

Lawmakers have made good-faith arguments in favor and against expelling Santos and some say they believe Santos should be formally convicted prior to expulsion, while others believe that the conclusions of a House Ethics Committee provide sufficient reason to expel him, Johnson added.

On Tuesday, US Congressman Robert Garcia called up legislation to expel Santos as a privileged resolution, setting up expedited consideration of the expulsion effort.

The House Ethics Committee determined that Santos engaged in conduct that discredits the House of Representatives and warrants public condemnation. Santos also faces criminal charges related to his alleged conduct.

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US Charges Indian National With Plotting to Assassinate US Advocate of Separate Sikh State

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) - US federal authorities have charged an international drug trafficker with plotting to murder a US citizen of Indian origin who has publicly championed the creation of an independent Sikh state and was allegedly directed by an Indian government employee, the Department of Justice said on Wednesday.

"[US officials] announced the filing of murder-for-hire charges against Indian national Nikhil Gupta in connection with his participation in a foiled plot to assassinate a US citizen in New York City," the press release said.

Czech authorities arrested Gupta on June 30, pursuant to the bilateral extradition treaty with the United States, the Justice Department said.

Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Administrator Anne Milgram said that "a foreign government employee allegedly committed the brazen act of recruiting an international narcotics trafficker to murder a US citizen on US soil," according to the release.

The Indian government agency employee has described himself as a "Senior Field Officer" with responsibilities in "Security Management" and "Intelligence" and also referenced previously serving in India's Central Reserve Police Force, the release said.

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Wang in Meeting With Guterres Calls for Two-State Solution in Mideast – Foreign Ministry

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) – China's foreign minister during his meeting with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in New York on Wednesday reiterated his call for a comprehensive ceasefire in Israel and Gaza and restarting two-state solution talks, according to a Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs release.

"Wang Yi said that UN Resolution 2712 is a first step toward a ceasefire and a good start to resolving the Israel-Palestine conflict through political means ... the Chinese position is very clear: first, the war simply must not be restarted, a comprehensive ceasefire should be implemented to avoid an even greater humanitarian catastrophe, and detained people should be released," the release said.

Second, Wang said humanitarian aid should enter Gaza unobstructed, with more entry points and an effective supervision mechanism established.

Third, Wang called for talks for a two-state solution to be restarted as soon as possible. He called for convening a more authoritative, larger-scale, and effective international peace conference as soon as possible to formulate a roadmap and timetable, with the UN playing a leading role.

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China Hopes Pause in Gaza Will Not Be Hiatus Before Renewed Israeli Offensive - Wang

UNITED NATIONS, November 29 (Sputnik) - China hopes that the last days of the current ceasefire in Gaza will not be a hiatus before a renewed Israeli offensive, but will lay the groundwork for diplomatic efforts for a comprehensive ceasefire, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said on Wednesday.

“China strongly hopes that the past days of pause will not be a hiatus before a new round of offensive but rather the beginning of further diplomatic efforts for a comprehensive and lasting ceasefire. China appeals to the international community to take a comprehensive and lasting ceasefire as an overriding priority,” Wang said during a meeting of the UN Security Council.

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US House Will Hold Deposition, Hearing With Hunter Biden in Impeachment Probe - Jordan

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) - US House lawmakers will hold both a deposition and a public hearing with Hunter Biden as part of an impeachment probe into President Joe Biden, House of Representatives Judiciary Committee Chairman Jim Jordan said on Wednesday.

"We will have Hunter Biden in a deposition, and frankly I think in an open hearing," Jordan said during a press conference.

The Judiciary Committee and other House panels are investigating the Biden family for alleged criminal activity, including foreign bribery and influence peddling.

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

On Tuesday, an attorney representing Hunter Biden notified the House Oversight Committee that Biden would be willing to participate in a public hearing on December 13. Biden insists on a public hearing in order to prevent selective leaks or other one-sided coverage, the attorney said.

House Republicans will unveil an impeachment inquiry website this week, which will feature updates on the probe and details on the allegations, House Republican Conference Chairwoman Elise Stefanik said.

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China Calls for Facilitating Direct Talks Between Israel, Palestine - Wang Yi

UNITED NATIONS, November 29 (Sputnik) - The international community should step up diplomatic efforts and facilitate direct talks between Israel and Palestine, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said on Wednesday.

"China calls for ramping up international and regional diplomatic efforts, reshaping credible multilateral processes, revitalizing the political prospects of the two state solution and restarting direct negotiations between Palestine and Israel," Wang told a UN Security Council members in New York.

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China to Provide Gaza With Another Batch of Humanitarian Supplies - Foreign Minister

UNITED NATIONS, November 29 (Sputnik) - China will soon send additional humanitarian aid to Gaza, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi announced during a meeting of the United Nations Security Council on Wednesday.

"I'd like to announce that the Chinese government will provide to Gaza another batch of emergency humanitarian supplies," Yi told the council's members in New York.

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Canada Homicide Rate Rose 8% in 2022 Marking 4th Consecutive Year of Increase - Report

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) - The homicide rate in 2022 in Canada rose by 8% from the previous year, marking a fourth consecutive year of increase, Statistics Canada said in its Homicide Trends report on Wednesday.

"In 2022, police services across Canada reported 874 homicides, 78 more than in the previous year. The national homicide rate rose by 8% to 2.25 homicides per 100,000 population, representing a fourth consecutive yearly increase," the report said.

However, homicides in Canada still are considered rare events as they account for less than 0.2% of violent crimes reported to law enforcement in 2022, the report said.

The province of Manitoba led the nationwide increase in homicides with an additional 40% recorded incidents, going from 4.45 murder per 100,000 individuals in 2021, to 6.24 in 2022, the report said.

Gang-related incidents continue to be the source for a quarter of all homicides in Canada - 202 out of the 874 murders - marking an increase of eighteen murders compared to 2021, the report added.

Five police officers were killed in 2022, the highest number since 1985, according to the report.

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Chinese Foreign Minister Urges Efforts Toward Lasting, Comprehensive Ceasefire in Gaza

UNITED NATIONS, November 29 (Sputnik) – Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi called on the UN Security Council to work toward a lasting and comprehensive ceasefire in Gaza with the "greatest urgency" amid ongoing hostilities.

"We should work for a comprehensive and lasting ceasefire with the greatest urgency. There is

no safe area under gunfire and letting the fighting drag on would only bring more deaths and damage," Wang said during a UN Security Council meeting. "There is no firewall in Gaza either, and resumed fighting would only most likely turn into a calamity."

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Guterres Says 111 UN Personnel Killed in Gaza Since Start of War

UNITED NATIONS, November 29 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday that 111 UN personnel have been killed in the Gaza Strip since the war started between Israel and Hamas in October.

"Since the beginning of the hostilities, 111 members of our UN family have been killed in Gaza," Guterres said during a UN Security Council meeting. "This represents the largest loss of personnel in the history of our organization."

On October 7, Hamas launched a surprise large-scale rocket attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip and breached the border, killing and abducting people. Israel launched retaliatory strikes and ordered a complete blockade of Gaza, cutting off supplies of water, food, and fuel. On October 27, Israel launched a large-scale ground incursion into the Gaza Strip. The conflict has killed an estimated 1,200 people in Israel and over 16,000 in the Gaza Strip.

Last week, Qatar mediated a deal between Israel and Hamas on a four-day truce and an exchange of some of the prisoners and hostages, as well as the delivery of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip. On Monday, Israel and Hamas reached an agreement on a two-day extension of the truce.

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Palestine Foreign Minister Calls for Int'l. Protection, Action to End Israeli Impunity

UNITED NATIONS, November 29 (Sputnik) - Palestinian Foreign Affairs Minister Riyad Al-Maliki called for international protection of Palestinians and for undertaking action to end Israeli impunity as well as prevent future war crimes and crimes against humanity that are taking place daily amid Israel's invasion of the Gaza Strip.

"We need international protection and international action to end impunity, so as to prevent the recurrence of these crimes that occur daily, and in broad daylight," Al-Maliki said during a UN Security Council meeting.

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US Imposes New Sanctions Related to Iran, North Korea – Treasury

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) – The US Treasury imposed new sanctions on Wednesday related to Iran and North Korea, according to its website.

The sanctions were imposed on five individuals, three of Iranian nationality, and 16 entities, mostly based in the United Arab Emirates.

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UN Chief Says Conflict Has Forced Over 80% of Gazans Out of Homes

UNITED NATIONS, November 29 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday that over 80% of Gaza residents have been forced to leave their homes amid the Israel-Hamas conflict.

"Beyond the many civilians killed and wounded, that I have spoken of, 80% of Gaza's people have now been forced from their homes," Guterres told a UN Security Council meeting on Palestine.

The growing number of people has been pushed out to the southern part of Gaza but nowhere is safe, he added.

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Humanitarian Aid, Fuel Delivered to Gaza Strip 'Utterly Insufficient' - Guterres

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) - The level of humanitarian assistance and fuel that is being delivered to the Gaza Strip is "utterly insufficient" to meet the needs of the 2.3 million Palestinian residents, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday.

"The level of aid to Palestinians in Gaza remains completely inadequate to meet the huge needs of more than two million people," Guterres said during a UN Security Council meeting. "Although the total volume of fuel allowed into Gaza has also increased, it remains utterly insufficient to sustain basic operations."

Last week, Qatar mediated a deal between Israel and the Palestinian movement Hamas for a four-day ceasefire and an exchange of Israeli hostages and imprisoned Palestinians, as well as for the delivery of much-needed humanitarian aid in Gaza.

Qatar announced on Monday that an agreement had also been reached to extend the ceasefire for two days.

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Royal Canadian Navy in 'Critical State,' May Not Meet Commitments in 2024 - Top Admiral

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) – The Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) is currently in a "critical state" due to major personnel shortages and may fail to meet its force posture commitments next year and beyond, commander Vice Adm. Angus Topshee said.

In a video posted Monday on the RCN's YouTube channel, Topshee said that the Canadian navy was in critical conditions due to the Canadian Forces Recruiting Group's failure to deliver on the personnel intake over the past 10 years.

"The RCN faces some serious challenges right now that could mean we fail to meet our force posture and readiness commitments for 2024 and beyond. The situation is serious, but our problems are not unique. I know that the air force and the army are faced with similar challenges," Topshee said in the video. "The RCN is in a critical state. Many occupations are experiencing shortages at 20% and higher."

The vice-admiral said that although the RCN's overall attrition is "good," a marine technician leaves every two days, something notably affecting Canada's west coast fleet, where major shortages are observed in the area, which in turn limits the ability to maintain and operate ships.

The Canadian military has been facing several challenges over the past years, including in its recruitment objectives, a problem that was exacerbated by COVID-19 and the vaccine mandate.

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Three in Four Canadians Say Increase in Immigrants Exacerbating Housing Crisis - Poll

WASHINGTON, November 29 (Sputnik) – Three-quarters of Canadians believe that the current increase in the number of immigrants admitted into Canada is contributing to the housing crisis, a Leger poll revealed on Wednesday.

According to the findings, 76% of those polled agree that immigration is a significant contribution to Canada's cultural diversity, and 75% percent believe that it contributes to the housing crisis.

Seventy-three percent think the number of immigrants admitted into Canada is putting pressure on its healthcare system, and 63% say it is an additional burden on education sector. A total of 58% believe that the increase in immigrants contributes to the affordability crisis.

As the federal government plans to admit 485,000 immigrants in 2024 and half a million in 2025, over half (53%) said it is "too many" immigrants, while 28% feel it is the "right number." Another 4% said it is not enough and 14% were unable to give a definitive answer.

The poll also asked Canadians about whether they would like to see Canada accept more, the same number, or fewer immigrants. Nearly half (48%) said they would like to see fewer, 43% would maintain the current number, and 9% would admit more.

The poll was conducted between November 24-26 and is based on a sample of 1,529 Canadians aged 18 and older.