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6/21/24 Friday

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Injured Palestinian Strapped to IDF Vehicle in Alleged 'Human Shield' Incident

Israeli and US officials have justified the staggering civilian death toll in Gaza by claiming that Hamas uses human shields, though no strong evidence has been presented.

A video has emerged on social media of what appears to be an injured Palestinian, who was named as Mujahed Azmi by the Reuters news agency, being driven through the city of Jenin in the West Bank while strapped to the hood of an Israeli military vehicle, seemingly being used as a human shield.

The video was taken on Friday and is reportedly from the Jabariyat neighborhood. Israeli special forces were reportedly conducting a raid in the neighborhood while seeking out resistance fighters.

The outlet Mondoweiss spoke with the owners of the house that was raided. They say that Israeli forces injured several men during the raid, shooting at least some of them while they slept. In the video, one of these men can be seen strapped to the Israeli vehicle and driven through the streets. The Israeli vehicle passes several Red Crescent ambulances as it continues down the street. The man was reportedly handed over to Palestinian medical teams eventually, according to several pro-Palestinian Telegram channels.

Israeli forces reportedly arrested three men during the raid. Including at least one injured man, Majd Hussiniyya, whose family reportedly said that they have not heard from Israeli authorities about his condition or whereabouts.

Ra'fat Husseiniyya, the owner of the home, told the Mondoweiss that the three men were his brothers and claimed that they were not suspected to be part of the resistance. The Red Crescent said that they treated three people from Jabariyat suffering from gunshot wounds.

Hamas is not in control of the West Bank, though Jenin has been a central point of Palestinian resistance in the West Bank. The Jenin Brigade posted on its Telegram account that it discovered Israeli special forces in Jabariyat and engaged them using firearms and explosive devices. They claim to have caused casualties among the Israeli Defense Force (IDF).

In a statement, the Israeli military confirmed that they took fire during an operation in Jenin, saying they injured and then apprehended a suspect. It said that the soldiers violated protocol. "The suspect was taken by forces while tied on top of a vehicle," adding that the "conduct of the forces in the video of the incident does not conform to the values" of the IDF and that it is investigating the incident.

This is not the first time the IDF has been caught on camera seemingly using a Palestinian as a human shield. In January, three IDF soldiers were caught on video using a Palestinian shop owner as a human shield.

In May, the human rights group Defense for Children International – Palestine, published three nearly identical interviews with Palestinian children aged 12, 13 and 14 who claimed that they were used as human shields while the IDF cleared apartment buildings in Gaza.

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“The soldiers told me to knock on the doors of the apartments in the building, while they were standing behind me at a fairly short distance, and to ask the residents to come out, and this is what I did,” one of the children recounted. “When we reached the door of one of the apartments, there was no one inside, so the soldiers blew up the door and forced me to go inside alone and check and search it. After I told them that it was empty, they entered it, while I remained held by one of the soldiers at the door.”

The account matched up almost perfectly with a 2002 report by Amnesty International that said the IDF used Palestinians, including women, as human shields in Jenin and Nablus.

“Numerous testimonies show that IDF units frequently forced Palestinians to take part in operations by making a Palestinian camp resident enter a house first and then search it; they also used Palestinians as ‘human shields’ to shelter behind,” the report claimed, saying that the “large number” of cases revealed a “clear pattern” by the IDF.

“The officer, Eitan, said to me: ‘Come with us’. I asked him ‘Why should I go with you? I am not wanted’. He told me to come with him just for 10 minutes, just to a neighbor’s house. I told him that if I go my children will start crying. He again told me to come just for 10 minutes and then said, ‘I would prefer not to use force’. After this, I went with them. When we were leaving the house the officer looked left and right and then grabbed me by the collar and put me in front of him as we exited and went towards the neighbor’s house. There was no firing at the time, but Eitan crouched down just below me and began firing to the left while the other soldiers moved towards the neighbor’s house.

“We entered the neighbor’s house. There was no one there. About 15 soldiers were with us at that time. I was told to stay in one room. I was then taken from this house and told to go to another house alone, and to knock on the door. I did this but no one answered. They told me to come back. I saw that they had a type of metal box that they were carrying and they brought it to the door. I then heard an explosion. I was then told to go back to the house and to go in and if there were any people in the house to tell them to go to one room. When I went back, I found another door. Again, I knocked but no one replied. The soldiers exploded this door. At this time, they sent in a dog and then told me to go in and if I was to find any closed doors, to open them. The soldiers then came in after me.

“It was now about 3.30pm, I told the soldiers that I wanted to go home and one of them replied that I could go back when they found someone else to replace me. The soldiers were searching the house and then we went to the bottom floor of the house where they put a hole in the wall between this house and the next. I was taken by the soldiers and told to go through the hole first. There were about six to seven soldiers that followed behind me. From there, I was taken to another house. Again, the soldiers searched the house; there was no one home. When leaving this house, Eitan grabbed me by the neck and put his machine gun against my right hip. I walked about 20 meters like this. I was then taken to another house of a neighbor, Ibrahim Fraihat, whom I know. When we entered, there were already soldiers there. I was placed with Ibrahim in one room. We stayed there for the night.”

In March, Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor said that it has “documented several consistent testimonies” of Israeli forces using Palestinians as human shields in and around the Shifa Medical Complex.

“Testimonies reveal that Israeli forces used civilians, including patients and displaced individuals inside the Shifa Medical Complex, as human shields, exploiting them to protect their military

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operations within the hospital, form barriers behind their forces and military vehicles, or send them under threat to residential homes and buildings surrounding the medical complex to evacuate them before the Israeli army raids, arrests some of the residents, and subsequently destroys many of these buildings," the report reads. [Emphasis added]

While Hamas has been accused of using human shields by Israeli and US officials, no strong evidence has been presented. Amnesty International noted that Hamas has positioned military targets close to civilians, but that is not considered the same thing as deliberately using civilians as protection from fire.

In previous conflicts with Israel, including in 2014, investigations by the Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the UN Human Rights Council found Hamas guilty of other war crimes, but not of using human shields.

In 2005, an Israeli high court ruled that the IDF's practice of using human shields during combat was illegal under international law. It also noted that the military's claim at the time that it only utilized civilian "volunteers" was still unacceptable because it is unlikely anyone would do so voluntarily.

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Russia-North Korea Pact Major Loss For US Allies in Region

The allies of the United States in Asia, particularly South Korea and Japan, were the biggest losers of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership signed between Russia and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

Both countries have long been adversaries with the DPRK. The Republic of Korea (RoK) since The Korean War and Japan since its brutal occupation of Korea in 1910. After the signing of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, both will have to deal with a stronger, less isolated DPRK which now has the backing of Russia.

"Recall that Japan has been lobbying Moscow incessantly for decades for the return of the Kuril Islands," explained historian and author Dr. Gerald Horne on Sputnik's The Critical Hour. "You see that Japan is staggered by the prospect that North Korea, which specializes in sending missiles into Japanese space, now has a formidable ally in the form of Moscow."

On Thursday, the South Korean Foreign Ministry expressed regret over the deal. "We will sternly respond to any act threatening our security with the international community, including our allies, after conducting thorough analysis on [Putin's] visit to North Korea and their comprehensive strategic partnership agreement," the ministry said in a statement.

Late last year, the Japanese government approved a record military budget, making it the third highest military spender in the world, after the US and China. Just a decade ago, Japan had a pacifist defense policy and would only use its military in direct self-defense. In 2014, that restriction was removed and Japan started expanding its military capabilities.

This "is not consoling to the DPRK," added Horne. "No doubt [it] motivated this recent embrace of Moscow."

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For the RoK, the deal is near catastrophic. In September, the RoK pledged to give Ukraine $2.3 billion, a decision that was undoubtedly noticed by Russian President Vladimir Putin. “In a sense, Russia has struck back and has strengthened [the Rok’s] antagonist,” Horne noted.
Throughout June, the DPRK has floated balloons full of trash and used toilet paper over to the South Korean part of the peninsula. The action was in response to activists in South Korea sending balloons full of propaganda pamphlets and USB drives with South Korean television shows.
At a time when the reunification of Korea looks to be further than it has been in decades, North Korea is being strengthened, as US influence in the region is on the wane.
Ironically, the United States had an opportunity to reach out to North Korea and improve relations during the administration of Donald Trump, who visited with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un during his presidency.
"It is just ironic to me, all the negative press Trump got from the West when he did this in 2019," pondered The Critical Hour co-host Dr. Wilmer Leon. "It just makes me wonder where the Russian North Korean conversations would be today, if Trump had been able to further develop that rapport with Kim [Jong Um]."
“It is a strategic defeat for US imperialism in the sense that Russia is now strengthened diplomatically [and] perhaps even militarily,” Horne said.
“It is also a failure of the entire Cold War era, perpetrated and driven by US imperialism. That is to say that somehow Washington did not realize – I guess they did not study diplomatic history or political geography – that Russia, the largest country by territory on planet Earth, has been designed to play a major role in world politics be they led by communists in Moscow or non-communists in Moscow,” concluded Horne. “Now we see the validation of that particular thesis, because we see that Moscow [has been] resurrected.”

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The video was taken on Friday and is reportedly from the Jabariyat neighborhood. Israeli special forces were reportedly conducting a raid in the neighborhood while seeking out resistance fighters.
The outlet Mondoweiss spoke with the owners of the house that was raided. They say that Israeli forces injured several men during the raid, shooting at least some of them while they slept. In the video, one of these men can be seen strapped to the Israeli vehicle and driven through the streets. The Israeli vehicle passes several Red Crescent ambulances as it

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Israeli forces reportedly arrested three men during the raid. Including at least one injured man, Majd Hussiniyya, whose family reportedly said that they have not heard from Israeli authorities about his condition or whereabouts.
Ra'fat Husseiniyya, the owner of the home, told the Mondoweiss that the three men were his brothers and claimed that they were not suspected to be part of the resistance. The Red Crescent said that they treated three people from Jabariyat suffering from gunshot wounds.
Hamas is not in control of the West Bank, though Jenin has been a central point of Palestinian resistance in the West Bank. The Jenin Brigade posted on its Telegram account that it discovered Israeli special forces in Jabariyat and engaged them using firearms and explosive devices. They claim to have caused casualties among the Israeli Defense Force (IDF).
In a statement, the Israeli military confirmed that they took fire during an operation in Jenin, saying they injured and then apprehended a suspect. It said that the soldiers violated protocol. "The suspect was taken by forces while tied on top of a vehicle," adding that the "conduct of the forces in the video of the incident does not conform to the values" of the IDF and that it is investigating the incident.

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"Numerous testimonies show that IDF units frequently forced Palestinians to take part in operations by making a Palestinian camp resident enter a house first and then search it; they also used Palestinians as 'human shields' to shelter behind," the report claimed, saying that the "large number" of cases revealed a "clear pattern" by the IDF.
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With an increasing number of Ukrainians turning against Volodymyr Zelensky, no chance to win the war and a so-called "international community" abandoning him, Zelensky is finding himself without allies and with no escape from the hell he created for his country.

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A recent poll from a pro-Ukrainian institute found that "Zelensky's approval rating fell throughout winter 2023/2024," noting that "This fall occurred in tandem with the introduction of new mobilization law," which it revealed only 34% of the population supported.

It should be noted that the poll was taken by a pro-Ukrainian institute in a war-torn country under martial law and full-scale mobilization, so it is reasonable to question is respondents felt safe providing anti-regime answers.

Nevertheless, the trend is too difficult for even pro-Ukrainian sources to spin convincingly into an endorsement of Zelensky. And the SVR said that the situation is even worse within the armed forces, where they say approval of Zelensky has dropped to 17%. The SVR also recently noted that they suspect the US will "sacrifice" Zelensky because he has outlived his usefulness.

"This guy is a dead man walking. It's only a matter of time now before he is no longer useful to the United States and they throw him under the bus," explained documentarian Regis Tremblay on Sputnik's The Critical Hour.

With his military dwindling and dissatisfied, his people turning against him, and his allies shunning him, Zelensky might want to think about who his real friends are. Last week, Russian President Vladimir Putin laid out his terms to begin peace negotiations, while Zelensky's NATO benefactors rejected it outright; it was an olive branch he should strongly consider grabbing. "I do not think that such nihilism [by Ukraine and the West] regarding our proposals will remain forever. For sure, something will change, including our conditions, depending on the situation on the ground," Putin noted during his visit to Hanoi.

The United States' policy of international bullying has created a lot of enemies for itself, and in the process, a lot of potential friends for Russia. The most obvious example of this is the relationship between China and Russia. The US has acted aggressively towards both of them, strengthening the friendship and cooperation between the two countries in the process.

In Korea, more than 70 years of aggressive sanctions, blockades and saber-rattling by the West meant that right when Russia could use another ally, there was a militarized nuclear power in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) willing and waiting to stand by Russia against the West. Earlier this week, the two countries signed a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership that security and international relations expert Mark Sleboda described as a "military alliance."

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On Wednesday, Putin visited Vietnam where, despite somewhat warm relations with the West in recent decades, wounds from the Vietnam War have not healed completely. In an official statement, Vietnam thanked Russia for supporting their struggle for independence against the West.

Last week, a Russian flotilla arrived in Cuba and is currently on its way to Venezuela. While the visit is an annual event, this time the Flotilla included nuclear-capable ships and submarines, a clear message to the West not only from Russia but also Cuba, which sits just 90 miles from the US most southern point.

Cuba, of course, has been subject to strict economic sanctions from the US since 1962 and Venezuela has been the subject of numerous coup attempts from the United States, most recently in 2019. Is it any wonder why these countries would let Russia utilize them to stick their thumb in the eye of the US?

“The big message here is that in response to these strategic partnerships with Ukraine and the US striking with missiles inside Russia with the thinly removed proxy of the Kiev regime in Ukraine,” argued Sleboda. “Russia is going back into full-on conflict mode with the United States and is resurrecting all of its Cold War allies. And I think we can expect more.”

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IDF strapped an injured Palestinian to its vehicle in an alleged 'human shield' incident

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Israeli forces (https://t.me/SputnikInt/58990) reportedly arrested three men during the raid. Including at least one injured man, Majd Hussiniyya, whose family reportedly said that they have not heard from Israeli authorities about his condition or whereabouts.

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Russian-North Korean pact is a major loss for US allies in region

The allies of the US in Asia, particularly South Korea and Japan, were the biggest losers of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (https://t.me/SputnikInt/59703) signed between Russia and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

"Recall that Japan has been lobbying Moscow incessantly for decades for the return of the Kuril Islands," explained historian and author Dr. Gerald Horne on Sputnik's The Critical Hour. "Now you see that Japan is staggered by the prospect that North Korea, which specializes in sending missiles into Japanese space, now has a formidable ally in the form of Moscow."

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This "is not consoling to the DPRK," added Horne. "No doubt [it] motivated this recent embrace of Moscow (https://t.me/SputnikInt/59649)."

"It is a strategic defeat for US imperialism in the sense that Russia is now strengthened diplomatically [and] perhaps even militarily (https://t.me/SputnikInt/59866)," Horne said.

"It is also a failure of the entire Cold War era, perpetrated and driven by US imperialism. That is to say that somehow Washington did not realize – I guess they did not study diplomatic history or political geography – that Russia, the largest country by territory on planet Earth, has been

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designed to play a major role in world politics be they led by communists in Moscow or non-communists in Moscow," concluded Horne. "Now (https://t.me/SputnikInt/59778) we see the validation of that particular thesis, because we see that Moscow [has been] resurrected."

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Florida Family Sues NASA After Space Debris Strikes Home

The family's lawyer said in a statement that the incident is an example of how space debris is a "serious issue because of the increase in space traffic in recent years."
A Florida family whose home was struck by a chunk of space debris earlier this year is now suing the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). The cylindrical piece of debris failed to burn up in atmospheric re-entry and flew through a home in Naples, Florida leaving a hole in the roof.
"Space debris is a real and serious issue because of the increase in space traffic in recent years," Mica Nguyen Worthy, the family's attorney, said in a statement. "My clients are seeking adequate compensation to account for the stress and impact that this event had on their lives."
"[The family is] grateful that no one sustained physical injuries from this incident, but a 'near miss' situation such as this could have been catastrophic," the attorney adds, saying that the family's 19-year-old son was home at the time of the incident but was unharmed by the impact.
The claim against NASA was filed last month, and seeks damages including non-insured property damage loss, emotional and mental anguish and other damages, NPR reported.
NASA, who did not respond to the lawsuit, said that the space object was involved in a March 2021 operation aboard the International Space Station (ISS). The agency had reportedly released a nearly 6,000-pound pallet of old nickel hydride batteries that it anticipated would orbit Earth for two to four years before burning in the atmosphere.
Following the impact, the space debris was taken to the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral for analysis. NASA confirmed that the chunk of debris was a metal support that was used to mount the old batters on a cargo pallet for disposal.
NASA will reportedly have six months to respond to the claim.

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Trains in Germany Screech to a Halt During Football Championship - Report

Felix Dachsel, a columnist for Der Spiegel, felt the need to make a joking apology for the state of the rail service in Germany, suggesting that competing teams can "beat Germany" but will "lose to Deutsche Bahn", the report said.
A recent report by The New York Times highlighted what has become an exacerbated issue with Germany's train system. The country has long prided itself on punctuality and efficiency, but in recent years the "failure to invest in rolling stock, upgrade railways and digitalize signal boxes have made Deutsche Bahn notorious for delays and cancellations," the report writes.

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Deutsche Bahn was made private in 1994 and united the railways of East and West Germany. But since then critics have blamed a lack of investment in the system by the German government.

The report notes that prior to the UEFA European Football Championship, which began on June 14, Germany's rail networks have been struggling to keep up with their historic credibility. At one point, staff members from the Munich transport authority had to reportedly be dispatched to aid travelers who had become overheated after being stuck for hours on stalled trains.

In the industrial city of Gelsenkirchen, fans from England decided to take on a three-mile walk to the city's stadium after experiencing delays with Germany's tram system. Hungarian fans in Stuttgart were also unpleasantly surprised to find that a major renovation project begun nearly a decade and a half ago had left the train station replaced with nothing but a hole.

The major construction project- which involves rerouting rail lines around Stuttgart - will take at least another year to be completed, sources at Deutsche Bahn told the news magazine Spiegel, meaning its completion date will be December 2026.

The project, dubbed Stuttgart 21, is controversial not only because of the major disruption caused by it, but also due to its heavy price tag. Deutsche Bahn, which is state-owned, estimates the total expense to be about $11.8 billion - about $7 billion more than initially planned.

And while Germany's rail network may cover over 20,000 miles, about half that length of track has been ripped apart in the last 70 years creating routes that are unable to meet demand. The report found that only 63% of the system's trains reached their destination on time last month, citing Deutsche Bahn, which falls short of Germany's neighbors Austria: 94% punctuality, and France: 87%.

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Majority of Israelis Cannot Sympathize With Gazans, Despite Seeing Images of Destruction - Report

As Israel faces global condemnation for their actions in the Gaza war, many Israelis remain blinded by the trauma of October 7, the report suggested.

Many Israelis, no matter their political affiliation, are blaming Hamas for the humanitarian crises in Gaza, a report published by the New York Times on Sunday said. The war in Gaza has displaced a majority of the population, resulting in the deaths of more than 37,000 people.

But despite the suffering of those living in Gaza, many Israelis blame Hamas for October 7, when the group's gunmen stormed across the border and killed about 1,200 and took 250 or more hostage, said Israeli officials. The report claims that it was "the deadliest day for Jews since the holocaust".

"Many Israelis — both conservative and liberal — blame Hamas for starting the war and for embedding its fighters among the Gazan population, operating, according to the military, out of schools, hospitals and mosques, and in tunnels beneath Gazans' homes," the report adds.

"Many also see Gaza's civilians as complicit, at least ideologically, in the atrocities of Oct. 7, saying that they brought Hamas to power in the first place, in Palestinian elections in 2006."

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However, for years the governments led by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu did their best to undermine the leadership of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, and simultaneously advance the power and control of Hamas for fear of Palestine establishing a Palestinian state, The Times of Israel reported. By propping up the “terrorist group”, Israel essentially created their own enemy responsible for the October 7 attacks.

“Most of the time, Israeli policy was to treat the Palestinian Authority as a burden and Hamas as an asset,” The Times of Israel writes.

And according to a nonpartisan research group, Arab Barometer, a 2023 survey showed that 44% of Gazans said they had “no trust at all” of Hamas authorities, while just 29% expressed either a “a great deal” or “quite a lot of trust” in their government. And 72% of respondents said they believed there was a “large or medium” amount of corruption in the government. The research for the poll, which began on September 28, 2023, ended on October 8, 2023.

Rachel Riemer, 72, who is a longtime resident of the liberal, left-leaning village Urim, said that during a previous conflict she had donated blankets for the children of Gaza. But she says this time, she can’t “pity them”.

“This time, I don’t have place in my heart to pity them,” Riemer told the newspaper. “I know there is much to pity, rationally, I understand. But emotionally I can’t.”

The indifference to the suffering of Palestinians is being seen through a lens of what occurred during the Holocaust in Europe, Avi Shilon, an Israeli historian in Tel Aviv, explained to the New York Times.

Mainstream Israeli news media does not highlight Gazan civilian death tolls or their suffering, but focuses instead on the funerals and profiles of Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldiers who have died in the war. However, a poll from The Israel Democracy Institute found that 68% of Arab respondents and 87% of Jewish respondents reported having seen “a few or many pictures or videos of the widespread destruction in Gaza.”

A majority of Israelis have also agreed to ignore US demands on its conduct in the war, even as the US has given more aid to Israel than any other nation since World War II, a separate poll conducted by The Israel Democracy Institute found in late December. The poll found that about 21% of Arab Israelis and 75% of Jewish Israelis said they think Israel should ignore US demands to reduce heavy bombing in populous areas.

"Since October 7 of last year the death toll from Israeli aggression has grown to 37,551 and 85,911 people were injured. Over the past 24 hours the occupation forces have committed three mass killings of families in the Gaza Strip that left 101 dead and 169 injured," the Gaza Health Ministry said in a statement on Sunday.

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Macron ‘On the Ropes’ as Support for War in Ukraine Takes Political Toll

The French president has been criticized for calling early elections, which detractors say could elevate the controversial Marine Le Pen’s party into power.

Former French leader Nicolas Sarkozy has warned the country could descend into “chaos” as President Emmanuel Macron seeks to fend off the right in upcoming snap elections.

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The electoral contest, announced by Macron after his centrist party took a drubbing in EU parliamentary elections earlier this month, threatens to see Marine Le Pen's National Rally take legislative power. Polling currently show's Le Pen's party leading surveys with the support of 35% of the electorate, with Macron's centrist Renaissance party trailing in third with only 19%.

"It could plunge it into chaos, from which it will have the greatest difficulty emerging," said Sarkozy of Macron's decision to hold early elections, which he said were "a major risk."

"Giving the floor to the French people to justify the dissolution is a curious argument since this is precisely what more than 25 million French people have just done at the polls," said the ex-president, who served from 2007 to 2012, to a French newspaper. "The risk is great [that] they confirm their anger rather than reverse it."

Columnist and political cartoonist Ted Rall joined Sputnik's The Critical Hour program Monday to discuss the development, the latest in a series of political controversies for Macron.

"There's no Jordan Bardella without a Marine Le Pen," said Rall, referring to the party leader who would become Prime Minister if the National Rally prevails later this month.

Le Pen remains a highly controversial figure in France. The 55-year-old politician inherited leadership of her party, previously known as the National Front, from her father Jean-Marie Le Pen, a right-wing figure known for statements criticizing immigration and downplaying the Nazi Holocaust.

The elder Le Pen's shock advancement to the second round of the 2002 French Presidential election prompted an 82% victory for his opponent Jacques Chirac as voters flooded to the polls to prevent a right-wing win.

Elections in 2017 and 2022, in which Marine Le Pen advanced to the second round, similarly prompted a victory for Macron, although with a smaller margin each time. Le Pen's 41% of the vote in 2022 represented the high-water mark for her nationalist party. Observers worry she is poised to prevail the next time she runs.

"The French don't have an appetite for conscription or even for wars of choice," said Rall, saying that Macron's provocative statements suggesting French troops could be sent to fight in Ukraine have dampened his popularity.

"They haven't been engaged in [a war] in a long, long time," he continued. "Ukraine's a hot war. It's a real war. It's not like a police action, like going to quell the natives in New Caledonia. This is real serious. Frenchmen will be coming back in body bags from Ukraine."

"And it's a conflict that a lot of French people are deeply divided about. The politics are bad for Macron. I don't know why he's absolutely so determined to push this narrative because truly he and his administration and his legacy are really on the ropes right now. And the last thing he needs is a controversial or unpopular policy, which this, I think, is."

Currently riding in second place in the polls, a left-wing alliance known as the New Popular Front has risen to 25% support among the public. Former National Assembly member Jean-Luc Mélenchon is leading the bloc of progressive parties, including the Socialist Party, the French Communist Party, pro-environmental groupings and Mélenchon's France Unbowed.

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Netanyahu: Israel Poised for War in Lebanon, Partial Drawdown in Gaza

The Israeli Prime Minister said the country would direct its attention to its northern border, where Hezbollah has been carrying out rocket and drone attacks in response to the IDF's deadly campaign in Gaza.

Israel is planning to remove some troops from Gaza, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said during an interview on Israeli television Sunday less than a week after the IDF reported it had approved plans for a possible military operation in Lebanon.

Forces would be redirected to the north of the country, he claimed, where Israel and the armed group Hezbollah have been trading fire for months.

"We will do this, first and foremost for defensive purposes," Netanyahu said to the controversial Channel 14 network. "And secondly, to allow our residents to return home."

Some 60,000 Israeli citizens have been evacuated from the country's northern region since October of last year, with Tel Aviv funding temporary accommodations for the internal refugees. Hezbollah has continuously subjected the area to rocket and drone attacks in solidarity with Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, where more than 37,500 have been killed.

The conflagration on the border with Lebanon has caused a political and security headache for the Israeli government even as international media has focused on the country's operation against Hamas.

Meanwhile the prime minister suggested Israel would remove some troops from Gaza shortly, claiming the end of its "intense phase" in the internationally-recognized Palestinian territory is "very close." Netanyahu stressed the IDF would maintain a presence in the enclave but would seek to free up resources for potential fighting in Lebanon.

"If we can do this diplomatically, great," he said of attempts to end attacks in northern Israel. "If not, we will do it another way… We can fight on several fronts. We are prepared for this."

But observers have questioned Israel's ability to challenge Hezbollah, one of the most heavily armed non-state groups in the world. The country was widely judged to have lost its 2006 war with the Palestinian resistance group, which has grown more powerful in the years since. Hezbollah is estimated to possess some 150,000 rockets and missiles, which it is able to procure much more cheaply than Israel's US-provided armaments.

Israel's international reputation and military readiness have suffered severely during nine months of fighting in Gaza. Hundreds of IDF members have been killed and some 3,000 have been injured, many of them suffering permanent disability. The number is significant in a country of less than ten million that relies on a fighting force of civilian reservists.

Netanyahu dissolved Israel's emergency war cabinet last week after the resignation of opposition leader Benny Gantz, who is typically seen as more outwardly amenable to the Biden administration's public concerns. Observers say the development could make the Israeli prime minister more dependent on more hardline members of his political coalition. But such figures have balked at previous attempts to remove troops from Gaza as Hamas has re-emerged in northern and central areas of the enclave.

The Israeli leader would count on continued military aid and perhaps even US boots on the ground for a campaign in Lebanon. Netanyahu's sitdown with Channel 14 was his first interview in Hebrew in 14 months,symbolizing the importance of American support as the prime minister has remained a fixture in US media.

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In addition to the 60,000 Israelis displaced by fighting in the north, it's estimated that half a million Israelis have fled the country entirely since October 7. Israel has suffered severe economic consequences in recent months; recently chipmaker Intel announced it was suspending a $15 billion effort to build a new factory in the country, citing "business conditions, market dynamics and responsible capital management."
Macron 'on the ropes' as support for war in Ukraine takes political toll

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Former French leader Nicolas Sarkozy has warned the country could descend into "chaos" as President Emmanuel Macron seeks to fend off the right in upcoming snap elections.

"It could plunge it into chaos, from which it will have the greatest difficulty emerging," said Sarkozy of Macron's decision to hold early elections, which he said were "a major risk." Columnist and political cartoonist Ted Rall joined Sputnik's The Critical Hour to discuss the development, the latest in a series of political controversies for Macron.

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Netanyahu: Israel poised for war in Lebanon, partial drawdown in Gaza

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Pentagon Says Aware of Reports Kiev Attacked Sevastopol With ATACMS, 'Have Nothing to Say'

WASHINGTON, June 24 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department is aware of reports Ukrainian armed forces used ATACMS missiles in an attack on Russia's Sevastopol that killed civilians but has nothing to say on the matter, a Pentagon spokesperson told Sputnik.
"We have seen the reports and have nothing to say," the spokesperson said on Sunday.
Earlier in the day, the Ukrainian armed forces attacked Sevastopol, the largest city in the Crimean peninsula, using US-made ATACMS missiles with cluster warheads, four of which were shot down and one deflected and exploded over the city. Sevastopol Governor Mikhail Razvozhayev said that four people had been killed and 151 others had been injured in the attack, including children.

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Antonov Calls to Preserve Memory of WWII Amid West’s Attempts to Forget History

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WASHINGTON, June 22 (Sputnik) - Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov on Friday urged to preserve the memory of the Second World War amid Washington's attempts to forget history.

"Remember those times. Remember those soldiers. Don't let anyone forget what the Soviet people and the Red Army did," Antonov said. "We must keep this memory not only within ourselves, but also pass it on to our children and prevent the world from forgetting about the contribution that the Soviet Union made to the defeat of Nazism."

Antonov stressed that the Red Army liberated both Europe and the world from Nazism.

"Today, when here in Washington, in the West, they try to forget that it was the Soviet Union that broke the back of Nazism, this causes bewilderment, bitterness, pain for those soldiers and officers who gave their lives so that we could live and be here," he said.

Antonov went on to say that today Russia is again fighting Nazism and now in a former Soviet Union country, Ukraine.

"Let's not forget. Let's do everything so that the memory will forever remain in our hearts and in the hearts of our children," the ambassador concluded.

Antonov spoke at the candle-lighting ceremony to commemorate the very start of WWII.

Russian diplomats and their family members in the United States led by Antonov lit candles to commemorate the 83rd anniversary of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, the greatest tragedy in the country's history.

The candle-lighting ceremony called the "Candle of Memory" took place on the territory of the diplomatic mission, starting at 9pm EST (4.00 am Moscow time) - exactly 83 years after Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union by attacking Brest, Kiev and other Soviet cities with the largest force in the history of warfare.

Antonov started the event with the minute of silence to honor those who fell during WWII.

Russian compatriots in the United States as well as representatives of the academic society also took part in the event.

Every year on June 22, Russia commemorates the Day of Remembrance and Sorrow, the anniversary of the day in 1941 when Nazi Germany went to war with the Soviet Union, launching the largest military invasion in human history.

Early on June 22, hundreds of thousands of candles will be lit throughout Russia as part of the "Candle of Memory" ceremony, honoring the 27 million Soviet men, women and children who lost their lives in their country's 1941-1945 war with Nazi Germany.

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Collins Aerospace Wins $264Mln US Air Force Reconnaissance Pod Contract - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, June 22 (Sputnik) - Collins Aerospace has received a more than $264 million US Air Force contract for the DB-110 and MS-110 Reconnaissance Pod program, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"Collins Aerospace ...[of] Westford, Massachusetts has been awarded a $264,595,890 ...contract ... for the DB-110 and MS-110 Reconnaissance Pod program," the release said on Friday.

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The program will be executed in the Air Force Life Cycle Management Center, Intelligence Surveillance Reconnaissance and Special Operations Forces International Support Branch, Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program office, the Defense Department said.

"The contract will have a ceiling of $300 million," the Defense Department said.

Sustainment services in support of the project will include hardware and software delivery, tech maintenance, and all depot-level repairs, the release added.

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US Air Force Boosts Lockheed Contract by $977Mln For Future Space Vehicles - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, June 22 (Sputnik) - Lockheed Martin Space has received a more than $977 million US Air Force modification contract to continue on-orbit development and operational testing of two US Air Force Overhead Persistent Infrared (OPIR) Next Generation OPIR Geosynchronous space vehicles, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"Lockheed Martin Space [of] Sunnyvale, California has been awarded a $977,599,318 ...modification ...contract ...for on-orbit developmental and operational testing, calibration, and tuning of the Overhead Persistent Infrared (OPIR) main mission payload ...for the Next Generation OPIR Geosynchronous System for two space vehicles consistent with the space vehicle 3 descope," the release said on Friday,

Work on the program will be carried out at Sunnyvale, California; Boulder, Colorado and Aurora, Colorado, the Defense Department said.

The work is expected to be completed in five years and one month by July 31, 2029, the Defense Department said.

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US Navy Gives Pennsylvania State University $1.39Bln Research Extension - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, June 22 (Sputnik) - The US Navy has given the Applied Physics Laboratory at Pennsylvania State University a $1.39 billion contract extension to continue its research, development and engineering in six key areas, the Defense Department announced.

The six areas are "guidance, navigation and control; advanced thermal propulsions; advanced propulsors; materials technology and manufacturing technology; atmosphere and defense communications and mission related and public service," the Defense Department said in a press release on Friday.

Work on the programs will be performed in State College, Pennsylvania, over the next three years and eight months and are expected to be completed by February 2028, the release said.

The Naval Sea Systems Command at Washington Navy Yard in Washington will oversee the various areas of research as the contracting activity, the release added.

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US Continues Counterterror Mission Against Boko Haram From Outside Chad - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, June 22 (Sputnik) - The United States continues to conduct its counterterrorism mission against Boko Haram in West Africa from multiple locations outside of Chad, a US Defense Department spokesperson said in a statement.

The United States is part of an international joint task force headquartered in Chad that is responsible for ending the Boko Haram insurgency, but recently it had to relocate some 60 of its military personnel to Germany amid an ongoing review of security cooperation between the countries.

"That team continues to accomplish its mission from multiple locations outside of Chad," the spokesperson said on Friday. "This temporary step is part of an ongoing review of our security cooperation."

The US Defense Department remains committed to working collaboratively with Chad to address mutual security challenges, the spokesperson added.

According to media reports, there were fewer than 100 US troops in Chad.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, June 22 (Sputnik) -

ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT

* Eighteen Palestinians have been killed and another 35 wounded as a result of an Israeli strike on refugee tents in the Mawasi area of Rafah, the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) said on Friday.

* Armenia's recognition of Palestine will have serious long-term consequences on its relations with Israel, Dmitri Gendelman, an adviser to the Israeli prime minister, said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* The European Union wants to sign a document on security commitments with Ukraine by the end of June, a high-ranking source in the EU told reporters on Friday.

* The $50 billion loan to Ukraine, which will be repaid by using the future windfall profits from frozen Russian assets, can be provided by the end of the year, Belgian Finance Minister Vincent Van Peteghem said.

* The Russian armed forces have carried out 14 group strikes using high-precision ground and air weapons against storage Ukrainian facilities, airfields, electrical substations, training sites for unmanned boats, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

* The Ukrainian military has lost up to 4,290 soldiers in battles with Russia’s army group South over the past week, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

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* The Ukrainian military targeted the Raduga substation on Friday and damaged its transformer, the administration of Enerhodar in the Zaporizhzhia Region said.

ARMS CONTROL
* Russian President Vladimir Putin announced on Friday plans to further develop the Russian nuclear triad.
* Washington's conditions for possible nuclear talks with Moscow show that US officials are not following the statements of Russian President Vladimir Putin, presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA
* The United States has imposed new Russia-related sanctions on 12 people, including Kaspersky Lab executive leadership, the US Department of the Treasury announced.
* The decision to ban the use of the cybersecurity firm Kaspersky Lab's software in the United States is an example of unfair competition, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.
* Japan's new sanctions against Russia represents another step toward the destruction of bilateral relations, the Russian Foreign Ministry said on Friday.
* Seizing Russia’s frozen assets in the European Union will lead to unpredictable consequences and it is necessary to "share the risks" when it comes to providing a loan to Ukraine, Belgian Finance Minister Vincent Van Peteghem said.
* The European Union is discussing the possibility of changing the current mechanism to extend sanctions on Russia to repay a loan to Ukraine from the profits from Russia's frozen assets even in case of lifting sanctions, EU Commissioner for Economic Affairs Paolo Gentiloni said.

EU RESTRICTIONS ON GEORGIA
* The European Union is discussing a range of measures targeting Georgia in connection with the passing of the Foreign Agents Law, including cutting financial assistance and restricting visa-free travel, the Euractive news outlet reported on Friday.
* The EU Foreign Ministers will discuss the situation in Georgia on Monday, but a decision on sanctions is not expected, a high-ranking source in the European Union told reporters.

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US Sanctions Against Kaspersky Another Politicized Step by US Administration - Antonov

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - Washington's move to impose new sanctions against Kaspersky Lab and its executive leadership is yet another politicized step by the US administration, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said on Friday.
"[This is] another politicized step by the administration in an attempt to present the situation as if any business activity in Russia is 'under the hood of the special services,'" Antonov said. "And [an attempt] to try to scare away businesses from normal mutually beneficial interaction, and consumers from purchasing Kaspersky products."

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Earlier in the day, the US imposed new Russia-related sanctions on 12 people, including Kaspersky Lab executive leadership. On Thursday, the US Commerce Department issued a new rule prohibiting information and communications technology and services (ICTS) transactions with Kaspersky effective September 29 and imposed export restrictions on the company.

"In reality, there is a desire to 'strengthen' the capabilities of their own corporations using dishonest methods," Antonov said. "Many of these corporations are not ashamed to admit that for the sake of government contracts they work in close cooperation with US intelligence."

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US Continues to Restrict Ukraine's Strikes on Key Air Bases in Russia - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - The United States continues to restrict the range of Ukrainian strikes in Russia and puts some of the key air bases out of harm's way, the Washington Post reported on Friday, citing Ukrainian officials.

According to the officials, Ukraine is still not authorized to launch US-made missiles deep enough to strike airfields used by the Russian Air Force to drop highly effective glide bombs on Ukrainian military positions.

Ukraine is currently allowed to strike up to 100 km or 62 miles deep into Russian territory from the border, the officials said.

Even though Kiev welcomed Washington's decision to allow hitting targets inside Russia, it still believes that it does not yet have the necessary weapons as well as the range to change the situation on the battlefield.

Earlier in June, the Biden administration gave Ukrainian forces the greenlight to use the transferred weapons against targets in Russian territory adjacent to the Kharkov (also known as Kharkiv) region, but left in place a ban on cross-border strikes using ATACMS missiles and other long-range munitions.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said that Russia was following the statements on strikes inside its territory after several countries that have been supplying weapons to Ukraine began to endorse the idea. Putin warned that NATO countries should be aware of "what they are playing with."

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Oil Stumbles But Ends Week Up Again As Summer Driving Begins

NEW YORK, June 21 (Sputnik) - Crude prices fell from near two-month highs Friday but that didn't stop oil bulls from celebrating a second straight week of gains as US crude returned to above $80 per barrel amid the start of summer driving.

The most-active August contract for US West Texas Texas Intermediate crude settled at $80.73 per barrel, down 56 cents, or 0.7%, on the day. For the week though, it finished up 2.9%,

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extending the prior week's 3.9%-gain.

Thursday's peak of $81.51 was the US crude benchmark's highest since May 1, when it got to $81.57. Thursday also marked the official start of the northern hemisphere summer, the busiest season for driving in the United States.

UK-origin Brent crude's most-active August contract settled at $85.24 per barrel, down 47 cents, or 0.6% on the day. For the week, it rose 3.2% after the prior week's climb of 3.8%.

On Thursday, the global crude benchmark hit a session high of $85.96, its best since a May 1 peak of $85.89.

Until two weeks ago, oil prices had been under pressure due to an unflattering supply-demand picture in the United States, the world's largest consumer of the commodity. Both US crude and Brent lost about 5.5% for all of May.

The demand picture turned more positive in early June after the global oil-producing alliance OPEC+ assured the market that it would carry out adequate output cuts to offset any weakness in fuel demand during the summer — the busiest season for driving in the United States.

OPEC has since committed to remove some 2.2 million barrels per day through 2025 from the joint production of the 23 nations in the alliance. It was originally supposed to make those cuts only until September this year. The alliance groups the 13-member Saudi-led Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries with 10 other oil-producing nations steered by Russia.

Backing the demand picture on Thursday was the latest weekly report on US oil inventories, which showed an across-the-board drop in balances of crude to fuels.

The US Energy Information Administration reported that crude stockpiles fell by 2.547 million barrels during the week ended June 14, versus a build of 3.73 million in the prior week to June 7. Energy analysts on Wall Street had anticipated a slightly higher decline of 2.8 million barrels in the latest week.

In gasoline, there was a drop of 2.28 million barrels over the prior build of 2.566 million. Wall Street's bet was for a 1.05 million barrel build. Gasoline is the primary motor fuel in the United States and makes up the largest component of the country's energy mix.

In distillates, there was a slide of 1.726 million barrels above the prior week's rise of 881,000 barrels. Wall Street's forecast was for a build of 1.05 million barrels. Distillates are primarily processed into the diesel required by trucks, buses, and ships, and also go into making airline fuel.

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At Least Nine People Shot, 2 Fatally at Local Grocery Store in Arkansas - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - At least nine people were shot, two of them fatally, outside a local grocery store in the US state of Arkansas on Friday, a local CBS affiliate broadcaster reported citing state police.

The report said, citing Arkansas State Police, that nine civilians were shot, two of them fatally, outside a local grocery store in Fordyce, Arkansas.

One police officer was also shot and suffered non life-threatening injuries, the report added.

State police also said that the shooter was "critically injured" after being shot by officers and

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has been taken into custody.
Arkansas Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders in a statement via X said she's been briefed on the shooting and is in constant contact with state police at the scene.

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One Pilot Dead, Another Injured After Crop Duster Planes Collide Midair in Idaho - Police

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - Two crop duster airplanes crashed midair west of the Arco airport in Idaho, killing one pilot and injuring another one, the Butte County Sheriff's Office said on Friday.
"On Thursday, June 20 at about 12:30 pm. the Butte County Sheriff's Office received a report of a two airplane crash west of the Arco airport," the statement said.
According to the statement, two crop duster airplanes collided midair and crashed into a sage and grass-covered area, with the investigation into the circumstances still ongoing.
"As a result of the crash one pilot was killed and one was transported to area hospitals with life-threatening injuries," the statement read.
The condition of the injured pilot at the time of the statement's release is unknown.

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US Justice Department Says Convicted 5 Men for Running Massive Illegal Streaming Service

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - A Las Vegas jury convicted five men for operating one of the largest illegal streaming services in the United States, the US Justice Department said in a statement.
The five men began operating the subscription-based service, dubbed Jetflicks, as early as 2007, according to the statement on Thursday. The group downloaded pirated copies of television content and hosted them on the site's servers, the statement said.
"The group reproduced hundreds of thousands of copyrighted television episodes without authorization, amassing a catalog larger than the combined catalogs of Netflix, Hulu, Vudu, and Amazon Prime," the statement said.
The group made millions of dollars through the operation, which provided the stolen content to tens of thousands of subscribers, the statement said.
The convictions underscore the Justice Department's commitment to protecting intellectual property rights by prosecuting digital piracy schemes, the statement said.
Four of the men face a maximum penalty of five years in prison and one faces up to a 48-year sentence, the statement said. A sentencing date has not yet been set, the statement added.

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US Hopes IOC Will Name Salt Lake City Host for 2034 Winter Olympics - Official

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - The United States fully expects the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to name Salt Lake City, Utah, the host of the 2034 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the US Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC) Chair Gene Sykes said on Friday.

The IOC Executive Board proposed last week that Salt Lake City be put up for election at the IOC Session in Paris on July 22-24.

"Knowing how athletic-centered, how fiscally responsible, how thoughtful in terms of Olympic Games legacy, sustainability, and engagements with the communities around the Salt Lake and the state of Utah this state is, we absolutely expect full endorsement," Sykes said.

Sykes expressed confidence that the IOC will follow the recommendations of its board and support Salt Lake City.

Utah residents have welcomed the idea of hosting the Winter Olympics in their state, Sykes said.

"The level of local support, excitement, and enthusiasm is remarkable," Sykes added.

Salt Lake City hosted the Winter Olympic Games in 2002.

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US Home Prices at Record-High in May, Even as Sales Drop 3rd Month in Row

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - US home prices hit record highs in May even as sales of previously-owned houses fell for a third month in a row amid a near 20% climb in supply from a year ago, the National Association of Realtors said Friday.

"Home sales refuse to recover," Lawrence Yun, chief economist at the association, said in a statement. Realtors had expected a recovery since the spring season in March but with the onset of summer on Thursday, Yun said he had come to the conclusion that "we are not seeing it."

The median price of an existing home sold in May was $419,300, up 5.8% on the year and at an all-time high, according to the association's records.

Existing home sales fell 0.7% from April to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 4.11 million. Sales also fell 2.8% compared with May last year.

Inventory of homes for sale, meanwhile, jumped 6.7% in May and was 18.5% higher than a year ago.

Home prices hit record highs after the mortgage rate of banks began climbing from pandemic-era lows to match interest rate hikes by the Federal Reserve. The central bank hiked interest rates 11 times between March 2022 and July 2023, bringing them from the COVID-19 lows of 0-0.25% to a two-decade high of 5.25-5.5%.

In December, existing home sales sank to a near 30-year low as the average rate on a 30-year mortgage surged to a 23-year high of 7.79%.

The average rate on a 30-year mortgage has mostly hovered around 7% this year as stronger-than-expected inflation kept the Fed from cutting interest rates. The central bank had

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previously projected as many as three cuts in 2024, which raised expectations for a drop in mortgage rates. Buyers awaiting lower rates have, accordingly, held back purchases.

"Eventually, more inventory will help boost home sales and tame home price gains in the upcoming months," Yun said. "Increased housing supply spells good news for consumers who want to see more properties before making purchasing decisions."

First-time homebuyers who don't have much cash to put as down payment continue having a tough time getting into the housing market. This group has historically accounted for 40% of sales. Last month, that share dropped to 31% from 33% in April.

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Norway's Arctic Military Telecom Satellites Sent to Vandenberg Launch Site - Northrop

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - Norway's two new military telecommunications satellites for operations over the Polar and Arctic regions have been sent to Vandenberg Space Force Base in California, where they will be launched into orbit next month, Northrop Grumman announced in a press release on Friday.

"Northrop Grumman delivered its two-satellite constellation to the launch site for Space Norway's Arctic Satellite Broadband Mission (ASBM)," the release said. "These satellites will bring commercial broadband and protected military satellite communications to the hard-to-reach northern polar region."

The ASBM satellites are scheduled for launch on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from Vandenberg Space Force Base as early as mid-July, the release said.

"Space Systems Command's Enhanced Polar System-Recapitalization (EPS-R) payload, designed for secure military satellite communication, will be the first operational U.S. military payload hosted on a commercial space vehicle operated by an international partner," the release added.

ASBM is a combined effort between Space Norway, the Norwegian Armed Forces, the US Space Force, Viasat and Northrop Grumman, according to the release.

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ANALYSIS- Bird Flu Risk Among US Dairy Herds High, But Impact on Industry Minimal

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - A bird flu virus is spreading at a concerning rate across hundreds of dairy farms in the United States, and although the impact on the national industry is minimal at present, the risks it poses for individual farmers can be tragic, industry experts told Sputnik.

As of June 20, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is reporting that 115 dairy herds across 12 US states have been infected with Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), also known as bird flu. This specific strand of bird flu, H5N1, was first detected in the United States in February 2022.

Bird flu infections have been reported in cattle in Texas, New Mexico, Idaho, South Dakota,

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Colorado, Michigan, Ohio, Wyoming, Kansas, Minnesota, Iowa, and North Carolina.

Three human cases of bird flu virus infection have been reported in the United States, but the CDC claims the risk of severe infection in humans is low.

South Dakota State University Veterinary Professor Russ Daly said the steady spread of bird flu among dairy herds concerns him.

"Yes, to me the constant trickle of new herds being discovered makes me concerned for dairy farmers," Daly told Sputnik. "It seems many of them are just waiting for the next shoe to drop. This is a virus that is good at changing over time… what we see now might not be the same as what we see a few months from now."

Daly said it's difficult to determine the number of cattle that have died directly from bird flu, but based on his conversations with dairy owners and a veterinarian, it seems to be very low.

Daly also doesn't expect it will have much of an impact on the dairy industry.

"The numbers of affected farms are still low enough – and the numbers of affected cows within those herds – still low enough to not make much of a dent in the national milk supply," Daly said.

However, bird flu has been more severe among poultry, he said.

As of May 2024, the CDC has reported outbreaks in poultry flocks in 48 US states. The virus causes serious illness and death in infected chickens.

The poultry industry has for some time learned to evolve and put measures in place to mitigate biohazards, but the dairy industry is barely confronting its own farms' biosecurity or lack thereof, Daly said.

"This is not an industry that's really had to worry about diseases being brought in," Daly said.

Meghan Harshbarger, head of communications at the Ohio Department of Agriculture, warned that nationwide economic impacts could be significant for the affected affected producers.

"There can be immediate financial loss from lost milk production, increased costs for replacement animals, and losses from reduced herd inventory," Harshbarger told Sputnik.

For now, the bird flu has only had a minimal impact on dairy farms in Ohio, Harshbarger said, and there is no evidence of spread or additional detections in the state.

Harshbarger noted that cattle mortality rates are low from infection, only a limited number of dairy cows have died due to secondary infections or metabolic issues after poor response to medical treatment.

Colorado Department of Agriculture Communications Director Olga Robak told Sputnik that they've seen several cases of cows having to be removed when they were no longer able to produce milk after recovering from the bird flu virus.

Ten dairies in Colorado have confirmed bird flu cases in their herds, according to Robak.

The Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) communications department told Sputnik it continues to actively work with federal, state, academic, and industry partners to learn more about the evolving situation and to respond effectively.

The TAHC has only seen a "normal" level of removal of dairy cows from herds despite bird flu infections, but there have been some cases of cow deaths due to secondary bird flu infections.

It's not unusual for cows to be removed from dairy herds for being unable to produce any more milk.

"Throughout the situation, dairymen, veterinary medicine practitioners, diagnosticians, and other animal health responders have learned and evolved providing more effective supportive treatment protocols for affected cattle while mitigating the impact of secondary sequelae and

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improving the recovery process," the TAHC said.

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Criticism Mounts Over Ineffectiveness of Gaza Pier After String of Setbacks - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) – The much-vaunted $230 million US-built temporary Gaza pier that was supposed to significantly increase the flow of humanitarian aid to starving civilians is drawing increasing criticism after repeated failures and just over 10 days of operation since mid-May, The Washington Post reported on Friday.

The US military personnel put the pier into operation on May 17, but it did not bring much benefit to Gazans. Over a week later, the pier came loose from its moorings amid high waves, and the deliveries of aid were halted. It took another week to re-anchor it. However, after a few days, the Pentagon again decided to dismantle it due to impending bad weather.

On Thursday, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) re-anchored the temporary maritime pier off the coast of Gaza and resumed delivering humanitarian aid to the enclave, according to the Pentagon.

Head of the UN humanitarian coordination office in Gaza Georgios Petropoulos has openly called the US pier operation "a failure," the report said.

"Let's be honest with ourselves. It's much to do about nothing. Distracted us for three months," the report quoted Petropoulos as saying.

US media reported earlier this week that the Biden administration is planning to completely dismantle the pier in early July after it proved to be ineffective in changing the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza.

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UN Chief Says Russia-DPRK Relationship Must be In Compliance With UNSC Resolutions

UNITED NATIONS, June 21 (Sputnik) - The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Friday that any country having a relationship with the DPRK, including Russia, must abide by UN Security Council resolutions towards the DPRK.

"There are sanctions approved by the Security Council in relation to the DPRK," Guterres said to UN journalists during his press stakeout. "Any relationship that any country has with the DPRK, including the Russian Federation, must entirely abide by those sanctions."

The statement comes following Russian President Vladimir Putin's trip to the DPRK. During his visit, the Russian President called the sanctions imposed on the DPRK "inhumane" and comparable to Nazi Germany's siege of Leningrad.

Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un signed a strategic partnership treaty in Pyongyang on Wednesday. Kim said the pact provided for the development of economic, political, and military cooperation, while Putin did not rule out closer military cooperation with Pyongyang.

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Putin also commented that the agreement is "almost the same" as its predecessor from 1961.

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Biden May Decline Democratic Nomination if He Does Poorly in Upcoming Debate - Hersh

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - Democrats are discussing plans to have President Joe Biden decline the Democratic presidential nomination if he has a bad showing at the upcoming presidential debate on June 27, Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist Seymour Hersh reported on Friday, citing a longtime friend of the US president.

Hersh reported that there is a serious concern among the Democratic Party leadership and major Democratic donors about Biden's ability to defeat former President Donald Trump in the November election.

"One extreme possibility in the case of a very bad showing Thursday night, I have been told, is to obtain agreement from Biden and his family advisers for the president to come to the Democratic convention in Chicago in August and accept the accolades of a first-round delegate victory; then he would decline the nomination and throw the nominating process open to all," Hersh said.

California Governor Gavin Newsom and Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker could be favorites to replace Biden, Hersh said.

Next week, Biden is going to need to match the intensity he demonstrated at his State of the Union address in March if he wants to stay in the race, Hersh said.

An aggregation of national polls by RealClearPolitics shows that Trump holds a half-a-point lead over Biden and leads him in all seven swing US states.

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Australia Orders 3 New Anti-Submarine Warfare Frigates - BAE Systems

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - Australia has ordered three new frigate warships from the United Kingdom-based defense contractor BAE Systems, the company announced in a press release on Friday.

"The Commonwealth of Australia has awarded BAE Systems Maritime Australia a contract to build the first three Hunter class frigates as the program celebrates its transition into formal construction phase," the release said.

Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles and the Premier of South Australia, Peter Malinauskas, officially cut steel on the first ship at a ceremony at the Osborne Naval Shipyard in Adelaide, the release said.

The Hunter class is one of the world's most advanced anti-submarine warfare frigate designs and will provide the Royal Australian Navy with next-generation capability, the release added.

The new vessels are based on the United Kingdom's own Type 26 Global Combat Ship, the first four of which are under construction at BAE Systems' site in Glasgow, Scotland, according

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to the release.

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Bannon Asks US Supreme Court to Delay Prison Sentence Pending Appeal - Filing

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - Former Trump adviser Steve Bannon is asking the US Supreme Court to delay his prison sentence pending further appeal of his contempt of Congress convictions, according to a request filed Friday.

"Appellant Stephen K. Bannon seeks continued release pending further appeal of his convictions in this case. Given his surrender date of July 1, 2024, he respectfully requests a ruling before that date, and an administrative stay of the surrender date if necessary to allow for sufficient time to consider this matter," the filing said.

In July 2022, Bannon was convicted on contempt of Congress charges for refusing to comply with a subpoena from the US House of Representatives' January 6 Select Committee. Bannon received a four-month prison sentence for the charges.

Earlier this month, a US district court judge ordered Bannon to report to prison by July 1.

Bannon is not likely to flee or pose a danger to the safety of others if released, the filing said. There is no claim that Bannon's pursuit of appeal is for the purpose of delay, the filing added.

Bannon has said that the US Justice Department is attempting to suppress former President Donald Trump and his supporters ahead of the 2024 presidential election.

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US Govt. Likely to Forgo Charges Against Boeing Over Settlement Violations - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Justice is leaning toward not pursuing criminal charges against Boeing for allegedly breaching a 2021 deferred-prosecution agreement following two fatal 737 MAX aircraft crashes, the New York Times reported on Friday.

According to the report, the Justice Department intends to extend a deferred prosecution agreement with Boeing, mandating the installation of a federal monitor to oversee safety enhancements.

On May 14, the Justice Department notified Boeing that the company breached a 2021 agreement between them to avoid criminal charges for the two fatal 737 MAX crashes.

Under the agreement, Boeing paid $2.5 billion in penalties and vowed to improve its safety and compliance protocols.

However, the Justice Department notified Boeing that it is now subject to criminal prosecution after going through a series of safety mishaps this year, including a door plug that blew off an Alaska Airlines flight shortly after takeoff.

The Justice Department told Boeing that it has determined the company breached its obligations in multiple parts of the 2021 agreement by failing to design, implement and enforce a compliance and ethics program to prevent and detect violations of the US fraud laws throughout

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its operations.

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US State Dept. Israel-Palestine Affairs Official Resigns Due to Heavy Workload - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Israeli-Palestinian Affairs Andrew Miller resigned due to a heavy workload amid the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Washington Post reported on Friday.

Miller said he decided to resign due his work taking too much time away from his family over the past eight months, the report said.

Miller reportedly said that he would have preferred to remain in his role if not for the impact of the heavy work schedule on his family.

People familiar with Miller have described him as a supporter of Palestinian statehood and a nuanced thinker on Middle East issues.

Miller is the most senior US official working on Israeli-Palestinian affairs to resign since Hamas' October 7, 2023 attack on Israel from the Gaza Strip.

The attack on Israel resulted in the death of some 1,100 Israeli military personnel as well as civilians and the abduction of some 240 others.

Israel's military operations in Gaza have killed more than 37,300 Palestinians, according to local authorities.

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Blinken Condemns Russia-DPRK Military Cooperation in Call With South Korean Counterpart

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken during a call with South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul condemned military cooperation between Russia and North Korea, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Friday.

"The Secretary condemned deepening military cooperation between the DPRK and Russia, including ongoing arms transfers that violate multiple UN Security Council resolutions, and reaffirmed the vital importance of the ironclad U.S.-ROK alliance in promoting peace, security, and prosperity around the world," Miller said in a statement.

Blinken also thanked his counterpart for Seoul's continued support of Ukraine, he added.

The two sides agreed to continue working together to address the complex and evolving security challenges on the Korean Peninsula, according to the statement.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un signed a strategic partnership treaty in Pyongyang on Wednesday. Kim said the pact provided for the development of economic, political and military cooperation, while Putin did not rule out closer military cooperation with Pyongyang.

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Any Imprudent Decision by Israel Could Plunge Region in New War - Iran Mission to UN

UNITED NATIONS, June 21 (Sputnik) - Any unwise decision by Israel to save itself could lead to a new regional war that could result in the destruction of Lebanon's infrastructure, Iran's mission to the United Nations said on Friday.

"Any imprudent decision by the occupying Israeli regime to save itself could plunge the region into a new war, the consequence of which would be the destruction of Lebanon's infrastructure as well as that of the 1948 occupied territories. Undoubtedly, this war will have one ultimate loser, which is the Zionist regime," the Iranian mission to the United Nations said in a statement via X.

The Lebanese resistance movement Hezbollah has the capability to defend itself and Lebanon, the statement said.

"[P]erhaps the time for the self-annihilation of this illegitimate regime has come," the statement said.

Earlier on Friday, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken reiterated the United States' ironclad commitment to Israel's security and underscored the importance of avoiding further escalation between Israel and Lebanon.

On Tuesday, Israel said it approved and validated operational plans for an offensive in Lebanon. Foreign Minister Israel Katz said later on that Israel was very close to reaching a decision to "change the rules" against Hezbollah, and warned that both the movement and Lebanon would be severely hit in a new war.

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Nebenzia Warns Weapons Left Behind by West in Afghanistan Could End Up in Hands of ISIS-K

UNITED NATIONS, June 21 (Sputnik) - There is a real risk that a large amount of weapons left behind by the US-led coalition in Afghanistan could end up in the hands of the ISIS-Khorasan terrorist group (banned in Russia), Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said on Friday.

"Taking into account the amount of weaponry left by the Western forces in the country - the threat that they will end up in the hands of the fighters and spread in the region - that danger is becoming very real," Nebenzia told UN Security Council members during a meeting on Afghanistan.

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US Supreme Court Upholds Gun Ban on People With Domestic Violence Restraining Orders

(Update: adds Biden's response in paras 8-9)
WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court on Friday upheld a federal statute that bans people subject to a domestic violence restraining order from possessing a firearm, ruling that the statute is consistent with the Second Amendment of the US Constitution.
"Held: When an individual has been found by a court to pose a credible threat to the physical safety of another, that individual may be temporarily disarmed consistent with the Second Amendment," the Supreme Court ruling said.
The Second Amendment of the US Constitution guarantees the right to keep and bear arms. However, courts have upheld some legal limits on firearm ownership, such as restrictions on convicted felons and users of controlled substances.
The United States has imposed firearm regulations since its founding to stop people who threaten physical harm to others from misusing firearms, the ruling said. The restriction on domestic abusers fits within such a legal tradition, the ruling said.
The Supreme Court reversed a circuit court ruling that rejected the statute and remanded the case.
Justice Clarence Thomas filed a lone dissenting opinion in the case, contending that the statute does not fall within the United States' historical tradition of firearm regulation. The statute does not require a finding that a person ever committed a crime of domestic violence and does not distinguish contested orders from joint orders, Thomas said.
The statute strips people of their ability to possess a firearm without any due process, Thomas added.
However, US President Joe Biden praised the Supreme Court's decision. The ruling ensures "critical protections" for victims of domestic violence and their families, Biden said in a statement.
The Biden administration remains committed to ending violence against women and keeping Americans safe from gun violence, the statement said.

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Guterres Urges Israel, Lebanon to Immediately Return to Cessation of Hostilities

UNITED NATIONS, June 21 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Friday called on Israel and Lebanon to immediately renew their commitment to Security Council resolution 1701 and return to a cessation of hostilities.
"The parties must urgently recommit to the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 and immediately return to a cessation of hostilities," Guterres told journalists.
UN peacekeepers are also on the ground trying to de-escalate the tense situation, he added.
Israel and Hezbollah have exchanged fire almost daily since the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel and the Israeli assault on Gaza.
On Tuesday, the Israel Defense Forces said it had approved and validated operational plans for an offensive in Lebanon as part of a situational assessment. Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz

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said later that Israel was very close to reaching a decision to "change the rules" against Hezbollah. Katz warned that an all-out war will destroy Hezbollah and severely hit Lebanon.

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Israel, Lebanon must urgently recommit to full implementation of unsc resolution 1701, immediately return to cessation of hostilities - guterres

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Guterres Says World Cannot Afford Lebanon to Become Another Gaza

UNITED NATIONS, June 21 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Friday that humanity cannot afford Lebanon to turn into "another Gaza."

"Let's be clear: The people of the region and the people of the world cannot afford Lebanon to become another Gaza," Guterres told journalists.

On Tuesday, the Israel Defense Forces said it had approved and validated operational plans for an offensive in Lebanon as part of a situational assessment. Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz said later that Israel was very close to reaching a decision to "change the rules" against Hezbollah. Katz warned that an all-out war will destroy Hezbollah and severely hit Lebanon.

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Guterres says people of Middle East, world cannot afford Lebanon to become another gaza

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US Announces New Russia-Related Sanctions Targeting 12 people - Treasury

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) – The United States has imposed new Russia-related sanctions on 12 people, including Kaspersky Lab executive leadership, the US Department of the Treasury announced Friday.

The new sanctions affect Kaspersky Lab's Chief Operating Officer Andrey Tikhonov, Chief Business Development Officer Andrey Efremov, and Chief Legal Officer Igor Chekunov, among others.

On Thursday, the US Commerce Department issued a new rule prohibiting information and communications technology and services (ICTS) transactions with Kaspersky Lab effective September 29, imposed new export restrictions on Kaspersky and blacklisted Kaspersky Lab, Kaspersky Group and Kaspersky Labs Limited for their alleged cooperation with Russia's

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military and intelligence authorities.

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US Announces New Russia-Related Sanctions Targeting 12 people - Treasury

(Updates with more details, quote in paras 2, 3)
WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed new Russia-related sanctions on 12 people, including Kaspersky Lab executive leadership, the US Department of the Treasury announced in a press release on Friday.
"Today, the Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated twelve individuals in executive and senior leadership roles at AO Kaspersky Lab (Kaspersky Lab)," the release said. "All the individuals below were designated pursuant to E.O. 14024 for operating in the technology sector of the Russian Federation economy."
The United States is not designating the founder and CEO of Kaspersky Lab, Eugene Kaspersky, as well as its subsidiary companies.
The new sanctions affect Kaspersky Lab's Chief Operating Officer Andrey Tikhonov; Chief Business Development Officer Andrey Efremov and Chief Legal Officer Igor Chekunov, among others.
On Thursday, the US Commerce Department issued a new rule prohibiting information and communications technology and services (ICTS) transactions with Kaspersky Lab effective September 29; imposed new export restrictions on Kaspersky; and blacklisted Kaspersky Lab, Kaspersky Group and Kaspersky Labs Limited for their alleged cooperation with Russia's military and intelligence authorities.

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US Supreme Court Upholds Gun Ban on People With Domestic Violence Restraining Orders

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"Held: When an individual has been found by a court to pose a credible threat to the physical safety of another, that individual may be temporarily disarmed consistent with the Second Amendment," the Supreme Court ruling said.
The Second Amendment of the US Constitution guarantees the right to keep and bear arms. However, courts have upheld some legal limits on firearm ownership, such as restrictions on convicted felons and users of controlled substances.
The United States has imposed firearm regulations since its founding to stop people who threaten physical harm to others from misusing firearms, the ruling said. The restriction on domestic abusers fits within such a legal tradition, the ruling said.

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The Supreme Court reversed a circuit court ruling that rejected the statute and remanded the case.

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The statute strips people of their ability to possess a firearm without any due process, Thomas added.

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Canada Sanctions Three Haitian Gang Leaders - Foreign Ministry

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) – The Canadian government on Friday sanctioned three Haitian gang leaders over their role in undermining the country's peace and security, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) said.

"The Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Foreign Affairs, today announced that Canada is imposing additional sanctions under the Special Economic Measures (Haiti) Regulations to address the escalating gang violence in Haiti … These latest sanctions target three Haitian gang leaders: Luckson Elan, Gabriel Jean-Pierre and Ferdens Tilus," GAC said in a statement.

The three individuals have engaged in activities that have undermined the peace, security and stability of Haiti and that have contributed to acts of gross and systematic human rights violations in the country, the statement said.

Canada vowed to further target with sanctions and other tools individuals who support violence and insecurity in Haiti. Ottawa will continue its work with Haitian authorities and international partners, GAC added.

Since November 2022, the Canadian government has sanctioned 31 Haitian individuals.

Haiti has long been mired in a social and political crisis that escalated after the assassination of President Jovenel Moise on July 7, 2021. The country has faced an unprecedented increase in the activities of criminal groups, while the humanitarian situation has further deteriorated due to a multitude of natural disasters.

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US Announces New Russia-Related Sanctions Targeting 12 people - Treasury

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) – The United States has imposed new Russia-related sanctions on 12 people, including Kaspersky Lab executive leadership, the US Department of the Treasury announced Friday.

The new sanctions affect Kaspersky Lab's Chief Operating Officer Andrey Tikhonov, Chief Business Development Officer Andrey Efremov, and Chief Legal Officer Igor Chekunov, among others.

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On Thursday, the US Commerce Department issued a new rule prohibiting information and communications technology and services (ICTS) transactions with Kaspersky Lab effective September 29, imposed new export restrictions on Kaspersky and blacklisted Kaspersky Lab, Kaspersky Group and Kaspersky Labs Limited for their alleged cooperation with Russia's military and intelligence authorities.

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Cyprus Should Not Count on NATO Help in Event of Attack by Hezbollah - Stoltenberg

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - NATO will not defend Cyprus in the event of an attack by Hezbollah given that Cyprus is not a member of the military alliance, Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said on Friday.

On Wednesday, Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah said his movement would consider Israel's continued use of Cypriot airports and bases for military purposes as interference by Cyprus in the Middle-East conflict.

"Cyprus is not a NATO ally. I don't think it is right to speculate, but first of all, I think it is important to prevent that from happening," Stoltenberg said in an interview for CNN when asked whether NATO would react to an attack on Cyprus by Hezbollah.

On Tuesday, Israel said had approved and validated operational plans for an offensive in Lebanon. Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz said later that Israel was very close to reaching a decision to "change the rules" against Hezbollah and Lebanon as well as threatened to destroy the movement in an all-out war and severely hit Lebanon.

The situation on the Israel-Lebanon border worsened after the resumption of hostilities between Israel and the Palestinian movement Hamas in October 2023. The Israeli military and Lebanese Hezbollah, which supports Palestine in the conflict with Israel, have since then exchanged fire across the border almost daily.

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Blinken, Romanian Counterpart Sign Memorandum of Understanding on Disinformation

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Luminița-Teodora Odobescu on Friday signed a memorandum of understanding on countering "foreign disinformation."

"Today, US Secretary of State Antony J Blinken and Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs [Odobescu] are signing a memorandum of understanding to strengthen cooperation between the United States and Romania on countering foreign state information manipulation in shared recognition of the threat of foreign disinformation," a State Department spokesperson said during a signing ceremony.

The memorandum will pave the way for the expansion of bilateral cooperation and alignment of government policies along the five key action areas established by the US Department of

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State's framework to counter foreign state information manipulation, the spokesperson said.

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Blinken, Romaian Foreign Minister Sign Memorandum of Understanding on Countering 'Foreign State Information Manipulation'

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