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7/3/24 Wednesday

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'No Exit Strategy, No Plan': Israel Turns Its Eyes on Jerusalem as Gaza Strip War Crumbles

On Wednesday, it was reported that an Israeli strike killed one of Hezbollah's top commanders in south Lebanon.

Palestinian health officials said on Tuesday that an Israeli strike killed at least nine people in the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis just less than a day after the state ordered the evacuation of Palestinians from parts of that city. According to Sam Rose, the director of planning at the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA), about 250,000 people fled to a new "off-limits area", and another 50,000 may also flee in the near future due to their proximity to the fighting.

News of the Palestinians' relocation is disheartening as many of the more than 1 million Palestinian civilians who fled the Israeli assault on Rafah had been sheltering in Khan Yunis and are once more being forcibly displaced, Sputnik's Rachel Blevins noted.

Ecuadorian journalist and editor of The Cradle, Esteban Carrillo, joined The Backstory on Tuesday to discuss the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, as well as Israel's reported threats against Hezbollah. Carrillo suggested that there is no such thing as a "safe zone" in the Gaza Strip and that there hasn't been for the "past nine months".

"At this point in Gaza, NGOs and local officials are saying there's 1.9 million people displaced. Now, remember, the population of Gaza at the start of [this war] was 2.2 million. So, essentially, half, considering the numbers that have already managed to leave and obviously the dead and missing. This is the entire population of Gaza that at this point has been displaced," Carrillo suggested. "They have no homes. Their people are sleeping on the street."

"Gaza, it's such a small place. It's about 360 km square. It's like a small US city, and nine months in it's being flattened, it's being destroyed. No services, no running water, no electricity, no heating during the winter. No cool air during the summer. And what are they doing? You know, what are they doing besides just killing loads of civilians? What is the Israeli army doing there? They are depleting their ammunition supplies. They are essentially running on fumes at this point," he added.

"And Khan Yunis is also the home of the last barely working hospital in Gaza, which is Nasser Hospital. And also this is being under threat at this point. It has been the case over the past, well, nearly nine months at this point," said Carrillo. "Sadly, Khan Yunis was first evacuated on December 5th and then it became kind of like the central, the main tent city in southern Gaza around May, when the operation in Rafah started."

"What is the Israeli army doing in Gaza nine months into this genocide? How much longer is it going to take them to achieve their stated goal, right, which was to completely destroy Hamas. How many times are they going to announce that they disabled Hamas battalions, that they crippled Hamas, that they would destroy all Hamas fighters in specific cities only for two or three months down the line to have to go back in."

Israel seems set to scale down their bombardment of Gaza, and turn their attention to the north with a possible war against Hezbollah on the horizon, Blevins reported. However, US Secretary

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of State Antony Blinken said this week that there have been no signs that Israel will lower their bombardment of the Gaza Strip.

“How can they slow down when the Pentagon sends weapons on an average of every four days? Bombs and shells and ammunition, and they are hitting Gaza with such ferocity that there's concerns that they are running out of shells, despite the fact that they keep getting replenished,” Carrillo explained. “So, the only plan here was, yes, to kill as many Palestinians as possible to make this trip uninhabitable.”

“[Israel has] accomplished absolutely nothing. The wholesale destruction of the Gaza Strip was not a strategic goal of the invasion, right. It was to defeat Hamas. They are nowhere near that,” said Carrillo. “There is no out. There is no exit strategy. There is no plan. There was never an actual plan from the beginning.”

“And I think Israeli leaders are kind of hoping that this is going to be the case for them, too, so that they continue on with their genocide and their ethnic cleansing campaign and without having to deal with so much pressure from the global stage,” he added. “And what makes it, what would make the Israelis stop and not come at us next or somebody else, that is, a proxy of a larger power, like the US.”

On June 18, the IDF reportedly approved and validated operational plans for an offensive in Lebanon. Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz said that Israel was “very close” to a decision to “change the rules” against Hezbollah and Lebanon and threatened to destroy the movement "in an all-out war" and "severely hit" Lebanon, Sputnik reported on Saturday. During the interview, Blevins suggested that Israel may want to escalate tensions with Lebanon as a way to distract the world stage from the humanitarian crises in Gaza.

“[Israel hasn’t] been able to take on Hamas in Gaza after nine months. Hezbollah can make Israel feel such pain that they have never felt before in a matter of days. There's the threat from Israeli leaders about taking Lebanon back to the Stone Age. What do you think's going to happen to Israel? You know, what Hezbollah is going to do to Israel is going to be exactly the same, if not worse, because Hezbollah is not depleted. Hezbollah is not weary. Hezbollah hasn't spent nine months fighting a brutal war,” Carrillo suggested.

“[Israel doesn’t] know where Hezbollah is. Hezbollah also has a network of tunnels in the border. So it's the same situation that they would find themselves in Gaza. The only thing they could go for is for Lebanese infrastructure, and that would just unleash the wrath of not just Hezbollah, the Iraqi resistance that was already pledged to join this fight. The Yemenis would expand their operations. Even there, in Afghanistan, the Taliban has offered to send soldiers to fight Israel. And you have Iran who are saying if Israel expands the war on Lebanon, Hezbollah has our full support.”

“First of all, there is no chance. Hezbollah will remain on the border. There is no way, especially after the events of the last nine months. So all that is really the only force that can keep Lebanon safe from these, ethno-national, this ethno-state that they are sadly neighbors of,” said Carrillo, when asked if Hezbollah will meet Israeli demands and withdraw from the border areas beyond the Litani River.

“You know, this genocidal state. So, of course, they're not gonna move. The Lebanese army is not, it's not, it cannot really defend Lebanon to the extent that Lebanon needs defending, right. Remember, Lebanon is a highly, highly, crisis-hit country,” he added.

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“Lebanon is a member of the Arab League. Lebanon is a country that has ties with the US, with the EU, there's a US embassy here, a UK embassy, a French embassy,” he added. “We're talking about a sovereign nation that has a resistance force that works as the only bulwark to protect its people and its interest against a state that seeks its destruction, right? So it's not really, it's very unlikely to happen.”
Shortly before the publication of this article, it was reported that an Israeli strike killed one of Hezbollah’s top commanders in south Lebanon on Wednesday. The IDF said they killed Hezbollah’s Mohammed Nasser, and claimed he was the commander of a unit responsible for firing from southwestern Lebanon into Israel, Reuters reported.

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Artificial Light Across Coastlines Are Attracting Young Fish, And Their Predators

While it has long been understood that light pollution disrupts natural wildlife patterns, contributes to an increase in carbon dioxide (CO_2) and even disrupts the sleep cycles of humans, it also has an adverse effect on marine ecosystems.
A new study has shown that artificial light at night (ALAN) across coastlines is acting as a predatory trap for young fish.
According to a satellite study conducted about a decade ago, nearly a quarter of the world’s coastline is artificially lit - although that amount could certainly be more now, explained Jules Schligler, the lead author of the study and a Ph.D. student at CRIOBE Laboratory (Centre de Recherches Insulaires et Observatoire de l'Environnement) in Moorea, French Polynesia.
ALAN along the coast could belong to a range of human-caused activities including the use of electrical lights along roads, factories, residences and resorts near bodies of water.
"ALAN is everywhere and marine wildlife is not exempt from its effects," says Schligler. "A quarter of the world coastline is impacted and this level is increasing every year."
For his test, Schligler focused on two dominant coral reef damselfish native to French Polynesia, the yellowtail dascyllus and the blue-green chromis. In testing 48 corals that were split into two treatments, Schligler found that light attracts fish larvae, and that their test sites that used artificial light recruited 2 - 3 times as many fish as naturally lit environments.
“We found that the coral with the light attracted two to three times more fish compared to the naturally lit control site,” Schligler said. “The coral with the [artificial] light is a bad environment for the larval fish because there are more predators, opportunistic fish passing by, that ate them.”
“We can only extrapolate to a certain point but our findings, and other tests we did on crab and shrimp, generally indicate that marine animals are attracted to artificial light,” he said. Schligler also explained that while artificial light could appear to benefit predator fish, more research would be needed to prove that to be the case.
“It could be bad for their sleep, or they could eat too much, we don’t yet know,” he explained.
"ALAN has produced an ecological trap where these fish, misled by human activity, now prefer habitats where their fitness will be lower," says Schligler. "In other words, ALAN has the

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potential to attract organisms to a less suitable environment, generating a peculiar anthropogenic stressor."
"To better understand fish stock replenishment and conservation, it is crucial to take into account as many factors as we can, such as the rarely considered effects of light pollution," he added.

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UK Prisons Could Reach Their Breaking Point Come July 4 Elections

The UK government has been warned for weeks that such an incident with their prison systems could occur. Earlier in the month of June, HM Prison and Probation Service shared their data of an "operational capacity breaking point" within a week of the UK general election.
Prisons in England and Wales will be overcrowded to the point of reaching an "operational breaking point" come the second week of July, Tom Wheatley, president of the Prison Governors' Association told the Financial Times.
Wheatley also said that the UK's criminal justice system will likely "grind to a halt" if immediate changes are not implemented. UK prisons might be faced with being unable to take on new inmates, allowing police cells to fill up, and courts delaying sentencing.
According to Wheatley, the current Conservative government had ignored repeated warnings about overcrowding and said official data has shown jails will not be able to take in any more inmates within "a week or two" of the UK general election.
"The government has known about this for ages. There are things they could have done, and didn't, right up until the election was called," Wheatley said. "They made it inevitable that someone else would have to make very difficult decisions."
The most recent statistics published by the Ministry of Justice on June 28 showed the prison population standing at 87,360, while the capacity (with assigning two prisoners to the same cell) is 88,818 in England and Wales.
Should the Labor Party win the July 4 general election, they could be faced with a logistical nightmare in repairing a broken prison system. It could also trigger "Operation Early Dawn" which is a "crisis measure that allows offenders to be housed in police cells when jails are full, while other measures can prompt magistrates courts to delay cases," The Guardian reported in June.
While Operation Early Dawn has typically only been used for about a week at a time in the past, Wheatley told The Guardian that if the incoming government tries to force more offenders into UK prisons, they could be challenged in the courts.
"If a new government arrives and says: 'We want more people in,' it would be challenged in court by the PGA because ministers would be placing our members at risk," he said.
Last October when the prisons were overflowing, the Ministry of Justice allowed the release of some inmates 70 days early. The Labour Party has reportedly mirrored the Conservatives' pledge to build 20,000 new prison places but has not revealed a plan to address the current overcrowding, The Financial Times said.

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“We are under no illusions — the situation we inherit will be dire. But we will take steps to address the crisis and fix the justice system for the long-term”, said Shabana Mahmood, the Shadow Lord Chancellor of the UK and a Labour Party politician, who said that the Tories had allowed UK prisons to “become a powder keg, waiting to explode”.
'No exit strategy, no plan': Israel turns its eyes on Jerusalem as Gaza Strip war crumbles

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“Sadly, Khan Yunis was first evacuated on December 5th and then it became kind of like the central, the main tent city in southern Gaza around May, when the operation in Rafah started,” said Ecuadorian journalist and editor of The Cradle, Esteban Carrillo. Palestinian health officials said that an Israeli strike killed at least nine people in the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis just less than a day after the state ordered the evacuation of Palestinians from parts of that city. More than 1 million Palestinian civilians who fled the Israeli assault on Rafah had been sheltering in Khan Yunis and are once more being forcibly displaced, Sputnik’s radio host Rachel Blevins noted. Israel seems set to scale down their bombardment of Gaza, and turn their attention to the north with a possible war against Hezbollah on the horizon, Blevins reported. However, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said this week that there have been no signs that Israel will lower their bombardment of the Gaza Strip. “[Israel hasn’t] been able to take on Hamas in Gaza after nine months. Hezbollah can make Israel feel such pain that they have never felt before in a matter of days. There's the threat from Israeli leaders about taking Lebanon back to the Stone Age. What do you think's going to happen to Israel? You know, what Hezbollah is going to do to Israel is going to be exactly the same, if not worse, because Hezbollah is not depleted. Hezbollah is not weary. Hezbollah hasn't spent nine months fighting a brutal war,” Carrillo suggested. 👉 Follow the link for more details

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‘They’ve Had Enough’: Stagnant Economy Driving Electoral Turmoil in Europe

Voters are fed up with leaders' fixation on war in Ukraine to the exclusion of working class concerns, according to one analyst.
“It’s the economy, stupid.”
The well-known catchphrase, coined by political strategist James Carville, encapsulated the salience of the economy during Bill Clinton’s campaign for the US presidency in 1992. With much of Western world in recession, Clinton successfully rode an economic message to the White House as President George H.W. Bush was cast as aloof to the struggles of working class Americans.
Now, as European powers focus on backing Ukraine’s proxy war against Russia, Western leaders have seemingly forgotten the importance of voters’ material concerns, argues security analyst David Oualaalou. The international affairs expert joined Sputnik’s The Critical Hour

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program Wednesday to react to the rise of anti-establishment right-wing parties throughout the continent.

"The reality is on the ground following, for example, the elections in France," said Oualaalou, referring to the first round of parliamentary elections in the country where President Emmanuel Macron's centrist party came in a distant third place. "I intend to call my family tomorrow just to have a conversation with them because they are there in Paris and I'm going to talk to them. But this is a clear indication where things are headed, that the era of Macron is over."

"This is what you're seeing the Europeans are doing right now – the population, that is," he continued. "They've had enough. They've had enough. And the election is now a reflection of this."

The economic situation is perhaps most dire in Germany, which suffered a recession in 2023 and may be in the midst of another, according to economists. The country, traditionally the industrial powerhouse of Europe, has suffered disproportionately as sanctions on Russian energy have taken a bite out of the manufacturing sector.

"The Ukraine war shut off Germany's access to cheap Russian energy," noted an article Tuesday on the website The Greanville Post. "The lethal blow was the American destruction of the Nord Stream pipeline, with broad European-wide consequences."

"I just read a survey this morning that Germany lost 3 billion dollars," noted Oualaalou. "You know what the losses are in? In theft. People were stealing. Why were they stealing? It's because the prices went up beyond what they can afford. $3 billion for the year of 2023."

"The moment they embarked on following the US blindly with the sanctions against Russia, it backfired on them."

If the right comes to power in Germany, France, and elsewhere in the Western world, they will be tasked with addressing voters' material needs in ways establishment politicians have proven unable to. Italian Prime Minister Georgia Meloni's approval rating has fallen to 41% as the conservative leader, previously feared as a radical populist, has accommodated herself to the mainstream European political establishment's support of the war in Ukraine.

The politician's transformation into a largely conventional figure on matters of foreign policy demonstrates the power of the continent's pro-war establishment to mold leaders of diverse ideologies to their will. If Marine Le Pen, Geert Wilders, and other populist insurgents are to succeed where the Italian head of state has failed they'll need to keep James Carville's maxim in mind, taking care to tend to citizens' economic concerns rather than becoming co-opted by the pro-war interests.

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US Weaponization of Ukraine Against Russia Forced Moscow to Act – Analyst

The United States' transformation of Kiev into an anti-Russian beachhead made conflict inevitable, says one expert.

Former CIA analyst Ray McGovern rejected US President Joe Biden's claims that Russia is poised to invade Poland and the Baltics after the current conflict in Ukraine in an article posted to the website Consortium News.

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"Spoiler Alert: Official Ukrainian sources confirm that Putin did stop in March 2022," wrote the ex intelligence official, "after Ukrainian President Volodomyr Zelensky agreed to forswear membership in NATO." The Russian president repeatedly attempted to maintain peace with Kiev both before and after 2022's special military operation, McGovern noted, only for negotiations to be sabotaged by the United States.

"This constant harping that you hear not just in the United States, but in European countries as well, is a Cold War relic," said analyst Mark Sleboda on Sputnik's The Critical Hour program Wednesday. "'If we don't fight Putin over there, we'll have to fight him over here,' you know, which was a constant propaganda refrain of the Cold War."

"This [conflict] is entirely being forced on Russia, because if they don't take Ukrainian territory now, it's not even a question, they are directly told we will pump Ukraine full of as many weapons as possible," he noted. "'We will bring it into NATO and the EU, and we will weaponize and turn it into a battle platform against Russia,' – Russia is left with no alternative."

Reporting in The New York Times earlier this year revealed the depth of the United States' interference in Ukraine, where the US has encircled Russia with CIA bases since the consummation of the Maidain coup in 2014. The development is the culmination of NATO's attempts to expand towards Moscow after the end of the Cold War, first devouring Eastern Europe before finally attempting to establish itself directly on Russia's border.

Far from bringing an end to tensions between Moscow and Washington, the fall of the USSR only intensified them, Sleboda noted, as the West continued to expand its sphere of influence despite the end of the ideological threat posed by the former Soviet Union.

"NATO no longer wants any gray zones or gray spaces," the expert explained. "They no longer want neutral countries. They want to be right up in Russia's face on their border, implementing what Rand in their grand geopolitical strategy for destroying Russia, overextending Russia, [and] competing for advantageous ground, defined as the pressure cooker."

"You surround an adversary government by hook or crook, by hostile governments, right? You bring governments that are hostile to that government to power so that you politically, militarily and economically isolate them and increase the pressure to try to make them implode… That's the geopolitical, zero-sum logic that the West and the US have been operating under since 1991, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union."

Sleboda noted the inherent contradiction in Western neoconservatives' logic regarding Russia: after arguing that Ukraine must be brought into NATO to prevent an attack by Moscow, they now claim Russia is poised to launch an imminent attack on NATO member states regardless.

"The very same propagandists who are now suggesting that Putin could attack NATO are the same ones who said we have to bring the Kiev regime in Ukraine into NATO as fast as possible because Russia won't dara attack NATO," he noted. "Now, the very same people are spinning their own argument on its head."

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This Day in History: Nazis, Ukrainian Nationalists Launch Massive Pogrom in Lvov

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Stepan Bandera's Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists teamed up with Nazi Einsatzgruppen squadrons for an orgy of antisemitic violence.

A dark chapter in Ukraine's history was written 83 years ago today when Stepan Bandera's Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) launched a violent campaign against the Jewish population of the city of Lvov.

The pogrom took place in the context of World War II's Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the USSR that saw over 27 million Soviet citizens killed by the Nazi Wehrmacht.

On June 30, 1941, the OUN seized control of Lvov, covering the city with antisemitic propaganda advocating violence against Jews and other ethnic minorities. Anti-Jewish violence reached an crescendo as nationalist authorities attempted to ingratiate themselves to the Nazi occupiers, with OUN militias arresting and executing thousands of Jews.

Crowds of local Poles and Ukrainians joined in the violence as Nazi SS death squads initiated their own antisemitic campaign, subjecting victims to rape, beatings, and robbery.

Altogether some 6,000 Jews were murdered during several days of persecution, many of whom had fled the Nazis from other parts of Eastern Europe. After the pogrom OUN militias would work directly under Nazi Einsatzgruppen leaders. The incident was typical of the racist violence of Bandera's nationalist Ukrainian Insurgent Army, which sought to establish a totalitarian, ethnically homogeneous fascist dictatorship in Ukraine.

Although he has been lionized as a national hero in the years since the Maidan regime's seizure of power a decade ago, the historical record is clear: Bandera was a brutal Nazi collaborator who enabled the death of millions as Hitler's army swept through Eastern Europe.

That history has not prevented Ukraine's government from celebrating Bandera with marches, statues, and official commemorations. In 2017 Lvov marked the anniversary of 1941's pogrom with a festival honoring Roman Shukhevych, a key leader of the violence.

President Vladimir Putin has clarified that denazification is a non-negotiable demand of any peace agreement with Ukraine, with Moscow insisting that extremist nationalists must be removed from power at all levels of government. The Kiev regime has killed thousands of ethnic Russians in violence targeted against civilians in eastern Ukraine since 2014's Maidan coup ushered in a Russophobic US puppet regime.

Ukrainian fighters are frequently seen sporting tattoos and using symbols tied to Nazi Germany. In May US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was hosted by Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmitry Kuleba at a Kiev pizza parlornotorious for displaying Third Reich iconography. In November 2014 the notorious neo-Nazi Azov Battalion was granted legitimacy by Kiev when it was officially integrated into Ukraine's armed forces.

Israel breaks three decades record in land seizures this year

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According to an anti-settlement watchdog group, Israel has now claimed their largest seizure of land in the occupied West Bank in more than three decades. The land seizure is the largest since the 1993 Oslo Accords established a framework for a Palestinian state consisting of the West Bank and Gaza, Peace Now said. "Almost half of the lands that were confiscated [since Oslo] were confiscated this year," said Hagit Ofran, who tracks settlement growth at Peace Now.

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"It's huge." In June, Israel laid claim to about 12.7 square kilometers (4.9 sq miles) of the Jordan Valley, allowing Israel to allocate that land for new settlements and to block Palestinians from accessing it. Despite their actions being internationally viewed as illegal, Israel's Civil Administration published the order on Wednesday - about a week after it was enacted, The Wall Street Journal reported. According to Peace Now, Israel has laid claim to a total of 9 square miles of the West Bank since the start of this year, making 2024 a record year for land seizures. Since October 7, Israel has claimed to operate extensively within the West Bank to eliminate Hamas. Israel has built about 160 settlements that house some 700,000 Jews since it first occupied the West Bank and East Jerusalem. "Today, it is clear to everyone that this conflict cannot be resolved without a political settlement that establishes a Palestinian state alongside Israel," the group said.

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Wheatley also said that the UK's criminal justice system will likely "grind to a halt" if immediate changes are not implemented. UK prisons might be faced with being unable to take on new inmates, allowing police cells to fill up, and courts delaying sentencing.

According to Wheatley, the current Conservative government had ignored repeated warnings about overcrowding and said official data has shown jails will not be able to take in any more inmates within "a week or two" of the UK general election.

"The government has known about this for ages. There are things they could have done, and didn't, right up until the election was called," Wheatley said. "They made it inevitable that someone else would have to make very difficult decisions."

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Should the Labor Party win the July 4 general election, they could be faced with a logistical nightmare in repairing a broken prison system. It could also trigger "Operation Early Dawn" which is a "crisis measure that allows offenders to be housed in police cells when jails are full, while other measures can prompt magistrates courts to delay cases," The Guardian reported in June.

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"We are under no illusions — the situation we inherit will be dire. But we will take steps to address the crisis and fix the justice system for the long-term", said Shabana Mahmood, the Shadow Lord Chancellor of the UK and a Labour Party politician, who said that the Tories had allowed UK prisons to "become a powder keg, waiting to explode".

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Israel Breaks Three Decades Record in Land Seizures This Year

Even as Jewish settlements in the West Bank are considered illegitimate by much of the global community, on Wednesday the Israeli authority declared an additional 5 square miles of the Jordan Valley as their own.
According to an anti-settlement watchdog group, Israel has now claimed their largest seizure of land in the occupied West Bank in more than three decades. The land seizure is the largest since the 1993 Oslo Accords established a framework for a Palestinian state consisting of the West Bank and Gaza, Peace Now said.
In June, Israel laid claim to about 12.7 square kilometers (4.9 sq miles) of the Jordan Valley, allowing Israel to allocate that land for new settlements and to block Palestinians from accessing it. Despite their actions being internationally viewed as illegal, Israel's Civil Administration published the order on Wednesday - about a week after it was enacted, The Wall Street Journal reported.
According to Peace Now, Israel has laid claim to a total of 9 square miles of the West Bank since the start of this year, making 2024 a record year for land seizures. Since October 7, Israel has claimed to operate extensively within the West Bank to eliminate Hamas. Israel has built about 160 settlements that house some 700,000 Jews since it first occupied the West Bank and East Jerusalem.
More than 500 Palestinians in the West Bank have been killed since the war in Gaza first began, while the death toll from Israeli strikes on the Gaza Strip has risen to 38,011 with 87, 445 people injured, according to the enclave's health ministry.
"Almost half of the lands that were confiscated [since Oslo] were confiscated this year," said Hagit Ofran, who tracks settlement growth at Peace Now. "It's huge."
Mu'ayyad Shaa'ban, the head of the Palestinian Authority's settlement-monitoring commission explained that the land seizures are designed to dispossess Palestinians as part of a "large plan aimed at controlling the eastern part of the West Bank". Meanwhile, the UN has criticized the land seizure as a "step in the wrong direction" for what they hope can be a two-state solution for the war in Gaza.

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The report from The Wall Street Journal, an American newspaper, even acknowledged that Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich is opposed to the creation of a Palestinian state and acknowledges "working to weaken the Palestinian Authority". Smotrich, who considers the West Bank a part of a "Greater Israel", had also created a new "deputy role" in Israel's Civil Administration, and that post has been filled by a pro-settler who will make decisions regarding land designations.

Smotrich also celebrated news that the Israeli military's Higher Planning Council was meeting to approve plans for over 5,000 new settler homes in the West Bank in a post to X.

And last week, the watchdog group released a tape recording revealing that Smotrich's party is planning to complete the transfer of management of settlement from "the military to civilian officials; the creation of a 'legalization bypass route' for settlement outposts; expanding the authorization of agricultural outposts; and cracking down on unauthorized Palestinian construction," BBC reported.

Peace Now has accused Smotrich and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of being "determined to fight against the entire world and against the interests of the people of Israel for the benefit of a handful of settlers".

"Today, it is clear to everyone that this conflict cannot be resolved without a political settlement that establishes a Palestinian state alongside Israel," the group said.

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Hurricane Beryl Slams Into Cayman Islands After Leaving a Path of Destruction in Jamaica

On Wednesday, authorities confirmed that one man was swept into a storm water drain while another woman died after a house collapsed on her as a result of the brutal storm.

Hurricane Beryl has rammed into the Cayman Islands after leaving a path of death and destruction in Jamaica. Beryl, which became a category 3 hurricane with wind speeds near to 120 miles per hour (193km/h) has been wreaking havoc in the Caribbean since Monday, nearly destroying parts of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Grenada.

The storm has also damaged or destroyed about 95% of homes in Mayreau and Union Island in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, this past week.

Earlier on Thursday, meteorologists said Beryl was 50 miles south-west of Grand Cayman but moving away from the island. Hurricane Beryl weakened to a Category 2 storm as it sailed over open water toward Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula on Thursday where Mexico's tourist centers of Cancún lie.

The storm's center was roughly 215 miles (345 kilometers) east-southeast of Tulum, Mexico as of Thursday afternoon with maximum sustained winds of 110 mph (175km/h) and moving west-northwest at 20 mph (31km/h), AP News reported.

Out of fear that the storm may bring more destruction with it, Cancún's airport filled with tourists hoping to board the last flights out before the arrival of the storm. Mexico's defense ministry also opened about 120 storm shelters and shared warnings and instructions on evacuation and other measures.

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Beryl, the first hurricane of the 2024 Atlantic season, reached its peak earlier this week as the earliest category 5 storm on record. The storm reportedly left at least 11 people dead after ramming through St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Venezuela, Grenada and Jamaica, CNN reported.

After the storm touched down in Jamaica on Wednesday it forced airports to close and sent nearly 1,000 people into shelters provided for by the government. The storm managed to uplift roofs, electric poles and trees as well as caused widespread flooding, The Guardian reported. The storm also left many without water and at least 60% of people without electricity.

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro told state media that three people had died as a result of the storm and four more were missing. More than 8,000 homes had also been damaged by Beryl.

Laura Velázquez, the head of Mexico's civil defense agency said on Thursday that Beryl is expected to shrink down to a Category 1 hurricane before it reaches an unpopulated area south of Tulum on Friday. However, the storm could rebuild to hurricane strength before hitting the Mexico-US border at Matamoros, she warned.

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France Set to Deploy 30,000 Police Ahead of Parliamentary Election

The National Rally finished first in last Sunday's first-round election with 33% of the vote, followed by the New Popular Front (NFP) alliance with 28%.

France plans to deploy about 30,000 police across their country late on Sunday following the second round of a parliamentary election, according to the Minister of the Interior of France Gérald Darmanin.

The interior minister added that 5,000 police would be on duty in Paris and the surrounding area so that the "radical right and radical left do not take advantage of the situation to cause mayhem".

The announcement comes after a growing number of political candidates and activists in France have been targeted by violent or verbal attacks. On Wednesday evening, a group of youths were arrested after Prisca Thevenot, the government spokesperson, said she and her deputy and a party activist were attacked while putting up campaign posters in Meudon.

"I don't say this only as spokesperson of the government, but more as the daughter of immigrants and mother of mixed-race children," Thevenot told French broadcaster TF1, citing repeated and intensified racist attacks. "They no longer do it anonymously, but with uncovered faces and even with a certain pride."

But National Rally candidates have also come under attack, with European Parliament Member Marie Dauchy saying she was "violently assaulted" while campaigning at a market in La Rochette near Grenoble.

Conservative candidate Nicolas Conquer also complained that he and a female colleague had been pelted with eggs following an incident the month prior, when another National Rally candidate had to be treated in the hospital after he was attacked for handing out pamphlets.

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Sunday's voting is expected to lean heavily in the favor of the National Rally and it may allow them to become the biggest party in parliament, even if they are unable to reach the 289 seats needed to form the next government, The Guardian reported. And Le Pen on Thursday claimed her party could reach a majority if the voter turnout is high.

"I think there is still the capacity to have an absolute majority with the electorate turning out in a final effort to get what they want," Le Pen told BFM TV. "I say turn out to vote, as it's a really important moment to get a change in politics in all the areas that are making you suffer right now."

However, more than 200 candidates across France's political spectrum have withdrawn their candidacies as a way to allow whatever party would be best equipped to defeat the National Rally a clearer path. The latest polling also suggests the National Rally will win 210-240 seats - just short of the 289 needed to form a government.

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'Free Fall': Western Elites Lose Grip on Power Amid Political Crisis in US, France

Neoliberal policy and support for Western imperialism in Ukraine and Palestine is discrediting establishment political forces on both sides of the Atlantic.

US President Joe Biden is considering dropping out of the 2024 US presidential race after last week's disastrous debate performance, according to reporting from The New York Times.

The news emerged early Monday after the president was said to be in discussions with members of his family over the weekend on whether to continue his candidacy amid widespread concern over his age. Last week's televised debate with former President Donald Trump, where Biden frequently appeared to have trouble finishing thoughts and responding to questions, stoked public anxiety among many Democratic Party officials. Opinion surveys since Thursday night's event appear to show the octogenarian head of state falling further behind in the polls.

The renewed panic comes as observers in France are urging a center-left alliance ahead of elections this weekend to deny Marine Le Pen's party a parliamentary majority. Observers fear the controversial figure could prevail in the second round of voting Sunday, ushering in the country's first right-wing government since World War II.

Both incidents are drawing concern internationally as establishment political forces struggle to fend off increasingly potent challenges to their power, according to Dr. George Szamuely, a senior research fellow at London's Global Policy Institute. The author joined Sputnik's The Final Countdown program Wednesday to offer analysis on the twin developments and their implications for Western countries.

"This makes the United States look weak because if Biden does step aside and they say 'I'm not physically and mentally competent to run,' then the next question will be, 'well, are you physically and mentally competent to remain president?'" said Szamuely. "It's going to be very hard for Biden to say, 'yes, I can still function for another six months as president while there are two serious wars taking place in which America is actively involved. I think there will immediately be calls for Biden to resign forthwith and the result will be great anxiety."

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“So already you have people concerned about Trump, but at least Trump is a known quantity,” he added. “But now, well, what's going to happen now? I mean, what happens during the next six months? What happens at the convention? Everything is up in the air. So internationally there's just a great deal of concern of an America in turmoil.”

“Yeah, it feels like a bit like a free fall for sure,” agreed host Angie Wong.

European leaders are said to be worried over the potential of a second Trump term amid concerns the former president would pull the United States out of the NATO military alliance. The European Union has investigated ways to ensure continued funding for Ukraine’s proxy war against Russia in the event the former president ends US support for the conflict upon returning to the White House.

But Europe’s political establishment is also losing its grip on power as support surges for right-wing populist parties throughout the continent. Marine Le Pen’s National Rally party won the most support in the first round of recent French parliamentary elections, leading President Emmanuel Macron to seek alliances to prevent her triumph in the second round.

Although Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s coalition bested Macron’s centrist party in the first round of voting, the French president is unlikely to include the leftwing in figure in any coalition, said Szamuely, noting that ”Macron seems to really hate him.” The analyst suggested the French leader would seek more moderate allies, forming a center-left alliance of establishment political figures to deny Le Pen power.

“Once [Le Pen] did so well last Sunday, it was clear that there would be a gathering momentum to keep out National Rally because that's really what the French elite have been about now for several decades, ever since probably in 2002 when Jean-Marie Le Pen was the presidential candidate against Chirac,” Szamuely recalled. “The elite has been absolutely determined to do whatever it can to keep out National Rally. So I wasn't at all surprised that this is what they would do.”

“Now the question is – and this is obviously the rather salient issue – whether you can keep creating all these alliances to keep out National Rally, and you can just keep whipping up hysteria every few years about National Rally,” he continued. “It hasn't really worked because step by step, year by year, National Rally's vote has been going up. So even if they manage this time to form a coalition government that keeps out the National Rally, then what happens in 2027?”

“There's going to be a lot of anger and a lot of frustration among the French that France's problems are not being addressed. The ruling elites keep whipping up hysteria about National Rally and there's going to be a presidential election and this time they may well vote in Marine Le Pen.”

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Biden Says He ‘Screwed Up’ in Shambolic Debate as Calls Grow to Drop Out

Americans overwhelmingly believe the US president is too old to serve another term, but party donors may be the ones who decide the octogenarian politician’s fate.

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Hans Christian Andersen's fable The Emperor's New Clothes remains a widely-understood allegory of elite incompetence almost 200 years after its original publication.

Commentators on Russian television have noted the salience of the tale in recent weeks as most Democratic Party lawmakers remain unwilling to acknowledge President Joe Biden's rapid deterioration in health as a stunning 86% of Americans voters now

The classic folktale, which has been translated into over 100 languages, tells the story of an egocentric ruler whose subjects are too intimidated by his power to point out his nakedness. Wishing to remain in the emperor's good graces, the king's officials complement his fashionable new garment, with only a young child willing to point out he is wearing nothing at all.

Commentators on Russian television have noted the saliency of the tale in recent weeks as most Democratic Party lawmakers remain unwilling to acknowledge President Joe Biden's rapid deterioration in health, while a stunning 86% of Americans voters now say the commander in chief is too old to serve a second term.

Biden himself acknowledged his troubling performance in last week's debate with former President Donald Trump during a pre-recorded interview that aired Thursday.

"I had a bad night. And the fact of the matter is that, you know, I screwed up. I made a mistake," the president said, speaking with a radio station in the swing state of Wisconsin.

Although the expression of humility is striking in US politics, observers still criticized the statement, noting that it cast the president's apparent mental decline as something closer to a fleeting verbal gaffe or flub. Biden's campaign strategists have again moved the goalposts, suggesting he can redeem his increasingly quixotic candidacy in the coming weeks with a series of "make-or-break" appearances on ABC News and other media platforms.

High-ranking members of the Democratic Party politburo, meanwhile, voiced continued support for the president Wednesday after an emergency White House meeting. Marlyland's Wes Moore, Minnesota's Tim Walz, and New York's Kathy Hochul were among the state leaders claiming Biden is "fit for office," while others such as California governor Gavin Newsom and Michigan governor Gretchen Whitmer voiced support on the X social media platform.

But figures close to the president have suggested his family, and especially his wife Jill Biden, are his closest advisors.

"Joe Biden's inauguration was an image in his mind," read the prologueto author Franklin Foer's recent biography of the longtime politician, describing his quest for presidential power. "It took hold there decades earlier, and it looked something like a brisk winter's day, when the nation's establishment huddled around him, wrapping its arms around the kid from Scranton. It was a triumphalist scene, but also a revenge fantasy, since Washington's liberal elite had long rolled its eyes at him… The consistent underestimation of Joe Biden was his diesel. It propelled him to keep chasing the image, over the course of three presidential runs."

"That is a description of Richard Nixon," said political commentator Josh Ettinger, referring to the famously vengeful and paranoid US leader who struggled to remain in the White House during the Watergate scandal of the 1970s. The former head of state has become a metaphor in the US for presidential corruption and abuse of authority as he tenaciously clung to power.

For now, most Democratic leaders have stood behind Biden, seemingly remaining most concerned with their own career prospects in the party. Some Democratic Party lawmakers are reportedly drafting a letter calling on the president to drop out, threatening to keep the issue in the news in the coming weeks unless the effort is quashed by senior figures.

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But ultimately, "wealthy donors" may hold the most power in America's pay-to-play political system, admitted The New York Times, with "Democratic megadonor" and Netflix founder Reed Hastings recently becoming one of the most prominent figures to urge Biden to end his candidacy. Some $14.4 billion was spent during 2020's presidential election as much of the United States' campaign finance regulations have been struck down by a series of Supreme Court decisions.

Some moneyed interests are reportedly working behind the scenes to encourage the president to drop out. Until they do, the thoughts of 86% of the public will apparently remain irrelevant.

"It's a big club," remarked satirist George Carlin once, commenting on elite power in US politics. "And you ain't in it!"

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UK Conservative Party Suffers Worst Electoral Defeat in Party's History – Exit Poll

Meanwhile Labour is set to become the largest party in the House of Commons after Nigel Farage's Reform UK party split the rightwing vote.

The UK's ruling Conservative Party suffered an historic defeat in Thursday's election, according to exit polling, with Keir Starmer's Labour Party the primary beneficiary of the collapse in support.

Exit surveys predicted the party of current Prime Minister Rishi Sunak will lose a stunning 234 seats, the worst result in the party's history, leaving it with an estimated 131 members in the House of Commons. The Labour Party, meanwhile, is expected to end the night with about 410 seats, returning the party to power for the first time since its defeat in 2010 under former Prime Minister Gordon Brown.

"We've not really given enough thought to what the electorate wants,"said one unidentified Tory minister quoted by Politico. "Some of it is our own mismanagement."

"No two ways about it, it's a catastrophic comedown even from the turn of the year," said another. "Over-promoted ex-[advisers] who steered us at full tilt into this iceberg should be exiled to Ascension… or somewhere a little more remote."

""We will go through a grieving process, then we will have to at some point earn the right to be heard again," said Conservative minister Steve Baker to the BBC.

Sunak has been criticized by party members for calling the risky early election. The British Prime Minister, the wealthiest in history and the country's first leader of Indian descent, has ruled without an electoral mandate since the resignation of his predecessor Liz Truss in 2022. Truss, herself an unelected Prime Minister, resigned after less than two months in power, symbolizing the highly chaotic nature of UK politics since former Tory leader Boris Johnson's ascent to power in 2019.

"People wanted change and people have voted for that in large numbers," said Labour MP Rachel Reeves, who is set to become chancellor in Starmer's cabinet.

Indeed, exit polling indicates the desire for change was the primary motivating factor in Thursday's election, with the Labour Party sailing to victory despite perhaps the lowest voter turnout ever recorded.

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Defenders of former party leader Jeremy Corbyn have pointed out that Starmer's Labour Party won Thursday with a lower share of the popular vote than the 40% garnered during the party's narrow loss under Corbyn in 2017. But the UK's first-past-the-post electoral system rewarded Starmer's strength in more rural constituencies whereas support for Labour under Corbyn was more concentrated among younger voters in urban areas.

Labour was also granted an assist this year from Nigel Farage's Reform UK party, which split the right-of-center vote. The populist party surprised observers with its better than expected performance, winning 13 seats and pushing the Conservative Party into third place in many constituencies.

Starmer has earned the ire of many Labour supporters for expelling Corbyn from the Labour Party over his response to a concocted antisemitism "crisis" in the party. Corbyn was opposed by Zionist donors in the UK, who rejected his defense of the Palestinian cause.

"The [Zionist] lobby's campaign against Corbyn got help from the Israeli government, British intelligence, and the entire British media, including the liberal Guardian newspaper, the BBC, the right wing of the Labour Party, and even the CIA," reported the website Modoweiss.

"The public deserves answers about the UK's new opposition leader and his relationship with the British national security establishment, including the MI5 and the Times newspaper," wrote journalist Matt Kennard in 2020, criticizing Starmer's links to British intelligence services. Corbyn ran for reelection Thursday against Labour Party candidate Praful Nargund, a venture capitalist veteran of the UK's private healthcare industry recruited to unseat the leftist MP.

Starmer's allies have signaled the party will promote neoliberal policyduring his time as prime minister, with Reeves claiming the UK will be a "safe haven" for wealthy investors. "Starmer has promised to work with business to stimulate growth, with an agenda that includes planning reform and state investment in green technology," reported the Financial Times.

"Labour will also pursue a traditional agenda of reforms to worker rights," the newspaper added, without elaborating.

Results indicate Corbyn will win reelection in his Islington North constituency, maintaining a platform in parliament to criticize Labour's establishment-oriented leader and his support for Israel's deadly military operation in Gaza.

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Biden says he 'screwed up' in shambolic debate as calls grow to drop out

US President Joe Biden acknowledged his troubling performance in last week's debate with former President Donald Trump during a pre-recorded interview that aired Thursday.

"I had a bad night. And the fact of the matter is that, you know, I screwed up. I made a mistake," the president said, speaking with a radio station in the swing state of Wisconsin. Recent polling shows 86% of the American public now believes Biden is too old to serve a second term.

Although the expression of humility is striking in US politics, observers still criticized the statement, noting that it cast the president's apparent mental decline as something closer to a fleeting verbal gaffe or flub. Biden's campaign strategists have again moved the goalposts, suggesting he can redeem his increasingly quixotic candidacy in the coming weeks with a series of "make-or-break" appearances on ABC News and other media platforms.

High-ranking members of the Democratic Party politburo, meanwhile, voiced continued support for the president Wednesday after an emergency White House meeting. Marlyland's Wes Moore, Minnesota's Tim Walz, and New York's Kathy Hochul were among the state leaders claiming Biden is "fit for office," while others such as California governor Gavin Newsom and Michigan governor Gretchen Whitmer voiced support on the X social media platform.

But figures close to the president have suggested his family, and especially his wife Jill Biden, are his closest advisors.

Ultimately, "wealthy donors" may hold the most power in America's pay-to-play political system, admitted The New York Times, with "Democratic megadonor" and Netflix founder Reed Hastings recently becoming one of the most prominent figures to urge Biden to end his candidacy.

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No one eats like Americans 🍔🌭😤

New York held its traditional Independence Day hot dog eating contest Thursday. The eater of the year was Patrick Bertoletti, who managed to consume 58 sausage rolls in 10 minutes (the

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components of the dish are consumed separately; the bread is soaked in water and shoved into the mouth as a soggy white mass). The current record is held by American professional eater Joey Chestnut — nicknamed "Jaws" — who has eaten an astounding 76 hot dogs in ten minutes, but the reigning champ was MIA at this year's competition.

Miki Sudo won the women's competition, setting a new record of 51 hot dogs in 10 minutes and proving women can eat with the best of them.

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US Sought to Block Sale of DRC Copper Mine to Chinese Defense Company - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 5 (Sputnik) – US officials intervened to block the sale of a Democratic Republic of the Congo copper mine to a Chinese defense manufacturer, the Financial Times reported on Friday, citing unnamed sources.

The sources said that US officials sought for Congolese state miner Gecamines to review the sale of Chemaf Resources to Norin Mining, which is a subsidiary of the Chinese state-owned defense company Norinco, in order to curb Beijing's control of critical minerals. Gecamines leases to Chemaf the permit for its flagship mining project Mutoshi.

Norinco had planned to acquire Chemaf's Mutoshi and Etoile mines and other mining licenses.

Gecamines said that its board vetoed the sale because it should have been informed of it in advance and that any changes in control required its approval. However, Chemaf said that it had notified Gecamines of the sale prior of its announcement. It said the sale had also been approved by Congo's mining minister.

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US Adds 206,000 Jobs in June, More Than Forecast But Jobless Rate Up Too - Labor Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 5 (Sputnik) - The United States added 206,000 jobs in June, the Labor Department said Friday, announcing another beat on employment forecasts, but the jobless rate rose as well, leaving mixed expectations for a Federal Reserve interest rate cut in September.

The Labor Department revised down May's non-farm payrolls growth to 218,000 from a previously published 272,000. That created a net decrease of 12,000 jobs between what the department reported for June and May. But when compared with the 190,000 growth forecast by Wall Street economists for June, the number was 16,000 higher.

The department also reported that the US jobless rate went up to 4.1% in June from 4.0% in May. With that, the United States moved away for the first time in more than two years from a "maximum employment" situation defined by the Fed. Given the mixed employment report, Wall Street economists did not have much to add to expectations for a rate cut in September.

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PREVIEW - June US Jobs Numbers Could Presage September Rate Cut

WASHINGTON, July 5 (Sputnik) - It might appear as a long shot but a modest US jobs growth number in June could just be the start of what would prompt the Federal Reserve to cut interest rates in September.

The Labor Department will report on Friday last month's non-farm payrolls (NFP) number, after May's growth of 272,000.

Economists on Wall Street are expecting an addition of 190,000 payrolls to the June NFP report. But what would truly prod the Fed toward a rate cut would be a growth of 150,000 or thereabouts, said those in the know.

"Weighing the data and our internal models, the leading indicators point to a roughly as expected reading in this month's NFP report, with headline job growth potentially coming in somewhere in the 150K-200K range, albeit with a big band of uncertainty given the current global backdrop," economists on forex.com said in a forecast issued Wednesday.

The Fed's policy-making Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) will meet four times before the end of this year to review rates standing at two-decade highs.

The first of those FOMC meetings will be on July 31. But Wall Street is betting on a cut to happen at the following meeting scheduled on September 18.

Fed Chairman Jerome Powell declined to entertain any speculation earlier this week on whether a September easing was likely.

But at an European Central Bank forum on Tuesday, Powell did say that disinflationary trends were beginning to emerge in the United States — acknowledging that the seeds for a policy pivot may have been sown.

Powell also said that if "the labor market unexpectedly weakens, that would also cause us to react."

Economists pounced on that, underscoring the importance of a dovish NFP report for June for a rate cut to happen in September. The Fed has long said that the best US jobs market in 50 years has enabled Americans to spend more than anticipated by the central bank, keeping inflation higher than thought.

Forex.com's forecasters said a "decent jobs report" for June would be the "proverbial nail in the coffin" for rate cut hopes, while a major slowing of the labor market could create the opposite effect.

The Fed says it wants to cut rates, but is wary of doing so with inflation well above its 2%-per-year target.

"We made quite a bit of progress on inflation [but] we need to be more confident before reducing policy rates," Powell said on Tuesday. "We have the ability to take our time and get this right. If we go too soon, we could undermine the work we've done on inflation."

The Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) Index, closely watched by the Fed for inflation, grew 2.6% year-on-year in May, from 2.7% in April.

Another key price gauge — the Consumer Price Index (CPI) — also moderated in May, growing at 3.3% year-on-year, from April's 3.4%.

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Until 2019, inflation grew for more than a decade in opposite fashion to now, with the Fed struggling to get to its 2% per year target in order to stimulate the economy.

The COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 changed all that, with inflation supercharged by the resulting shutdown of the economy, disruption of supply chains and trillions of dollars in recovery spending by the government.

By June 2022, the CPI hit a four-decade high 9.1% a year. It came down to current levels of around 3% after the Fed hiked interest rates 11 times between March 2022 and July 2023.

The current range for rates, at between 5.25% and 5.5% is at the highest since 2002, compared with the pre-pandemic low of between zero and 0.25%.

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US Officials Admit Europeans Noticed Biden's Mental Decline Before Debate – Reporter

WASHINGTON, July 4 (Sputnik) – US officials have privately disclosed that Europeans had noticed US President Joe Biden's mental decline prior to his poor performance in last week's presidential debate, a New York Times White House correspondent said on Thursday.

"We talked to officials who said that privately European officials that were talking to him were making remarks about noticing his decline, even crowding around him when he would come into a room in case he trailed off as well," New York Times' Zolan Kanno-Youngs said during a CNN roundtable discussion.

"We talked to officials who said, 'Look, if I was still working for President Biden and the US government, they weren't sure if they would put him in a meeting with a foreign adversary," the journalist added.

Biden's confused and shaky performance while debating Republican frontrunner Donald Trump for the first time in the 2024 election season on CNN has reinforced rather than refuted ongoing concerns about his ability to serve a second presidential term at the age of 81.

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"We talked to officials who said that privately European officials that were talking to him were making remarks about noticing his decline, even crowding around him when he would come into a room in case he trailed off as well," New York Times' Zolan Kanno-Youngs said during a CNN roundtable discussion.

"We talked to officials who said, 'Look, if I was still working for President Biden and the US government, they weren't sure if they would put him in a meeting with a foreign adversary," the journalist added.

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Biden's confused and shaky performance while debating Republican frontrunner Donald Trump for the first time in the 2024 election season on CNN has reinforced rather than refuted ongoing concerns about his ability to serve a second presidential term at the age of 81.

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ABC to Air Biden's First Post-Debate Interview on Friday Night

WASHINGTON, July 4 (Sputnik) – ABC News announced it would air its interview with US President Joe Biden – his first since his dismal debate performance last week – as a primetime special on Friday night.

"ABC News announces the exclusive, first television interview with President Joe Biden following the presidential debate last week will air in its entirety as a primetime special, Friday, July 5, at 8:00 p.m. ET/PT [00:00 GMT Saturday] on ABC," the network said in a statement.

A transcript of the unedited interview, which will be conducted in Wisconsin by ABC News anchor George Stephanopoulos, will also be released on Friday.

The interview is widely viewed as an opportunity for Biden to publicly demonstrate his cognitive fitness, after his shaky debate performance reinforced rather than refuted lingering concerns about his ability to serve a second presidential term at the age of 81.

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DC Water Lifts Precautionary Boil Water Advisory

WASHINGTON, July 4 (Sputnik) – The District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority (DC Water) lifted its precautionary boil water advisory on Thursday after it was confirmed the tap water provided by the regional utility met established quality standards, according to a statement.

The advisory, announced on Wednesday, affected all customers in the District of Columbia, as well as the Pentagon, Arlington National Cemetery, Reagan National Airport and Arlington County.

"All DC Water customers under the precautionary boil water advisory can use tap water for all purposes after it was confirmed that drinking water provided by the Washington Aqueduct never deviated from U.S. EPA established water quality standards as had been anticipated," the statement said.

DC Water was notified by the Army Corps of Engineers Washington Aqueduct on Wednesday that the Dalecarlia Water Treatment Plant had reduced production due to turbidity. This prompted the utility to issue a precautionary boil water advisory while it tested the water quality.

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Pentagon's R&D Arm Partners With HyperSpectral for AI-Driven Rare Minerals Detection

WASHINGTON, July 4 (Sputnik) – The Pentagon's main research and development arm, Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), has partnered with HyperSpectral, a company that may be able to apply AI to find rare earth minerals, Defense One reported.

HyperSpectral uses AI to analyze spectroscopic data, which could potentially enable satellites or drones to detect rare earth minerals. Sourcing such minerals is a key national security issue for the United States, as the majority have been found thus far in China, the news outlet said on Wednesday.

While HyperSpectral has focused on food safety, using spectroscopy to detect bacteria in food, the company's CEO, Matt Thereur, told Defense One that AI could be used to combine different types of spectroscopic analysis.

Moreover, while its agreement with DARPA is still in its early stages, the company said there are many possible applications for defense purposes, such as using satellites to detect specific materials in enemy equipment.

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US Dem. Governors After Meeting With Biden Say He Fit For Office, Vow to 'Stand With Him'

WASHINGTON, July 4 (Sputnik) - Several US Democratic governors have told reporters that they concluded a meeting with US President Joe Biden where they had honest discussions on their concerns about his dismal debate night, but overall they believe he is still fit for office and they will continue to support his reelection bid.

"Yes, fit for office," Minnesota Governor Tim Walz told reporters on Wednesday. "None of us are denying Thursday night was a bad performance. It was a bad hit, but it doesn't impact what I believe he's delivering."

Walz and Maryland Governor Wes Moore emphasized that although all the 24 Democratic governors who participated in the meeting expressed honest and candid concerns, in the end, they all pledged to stand behind his run for reelection.

Moore and New York Governor Kathy Hochul added that Biden is all in to win the US presidential election in November.

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US, China Shouldn't Be Antagonizing Each Other - US Investor

WASHINGTON, July 4 (Sputnik) - The United States and China should not be hostile toward each other, as neither side benefits from trade disruptions, renowned US investor Jim Rogers told Sputnik

"I don't think the US and China should be antagonizing each other. Those are the two largest economies in the world. And everybody would be better off if we traded together," Rogers said.

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"So, I am not in favor of the antagonism between China and America right now."

Rogers went on to say that politicians love to gain a domestic boost by blaming foreign countries for local problems.

"If they can find a country that they say that's a bad foreign country, they love it, because they think it gets some votes," he explained. "Doesn't get my vote, because I think everybody should be friends and trade and travel. But politicians everywhere, not just in America, always love to blame the foreigners when they have problems."

In May, the White House announced that US President Joe Biden is increasing US tariffs on $18 billion worth of Chinese imports, including electric cars, solar panels and steel, to allegedly protect domestic businesses from Beijing's "unfair trade practices." Beijing vowed to take all the necessary measures to protect its interests from the adverse effects of the tariff hikes.

The International Monetary Fund recently said the United States would be better served by maintaining open trade policies that have been crucial to its economy. It also urged the United States and China to work together toward a solution that addresses the underlying concerns that have exacerbated trade tensions between the two countries.

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US Army Orders Nearly $580Mln in Self-Propelled Howitzers, Ammo Carriers - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, July 4 (Sputnik) - BAE Systems Land and Armaments was awarded a US Army $579,309,813 contract for M109A7 Paladin 155mm self-propelled howitzers and M992A3 tracked ammunition carriers, the Department of Defense said in a press release.

"BAE Systems Land and Armaments [of] York, Pennsylvania was awarded a $579,309,813 ...contract for M109A7 and M992A3 vehicles and fielding kits," the release said on Wednesday.

Work on the contract will be performed in York, Pennsylvania; Sterling Heights, Michigan; Aiken, South Carolina; Elgin, Oklahoma; and Anniston, Alabama, the Defense Department said.

The project is expected to take four and a half years with an estimated completion date of January 31, 2029, the Defense Department said.

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Congressional Source Says Democrat Lawmakers in 'Utter Chaos' Amid Biden Downward Spiral

WASHINGTON, July 4 (Sputnik) - A congressional source told Sputnik that Democratic lawmakers are in a chaotic mess following the massive backlash President Joe Biden has been receiving from his dismal debate performance last week.

"Biden's election weakness has been exposed and the Democrats are in utter chaos," the source said on Wednesday when asked about the latest engagements between Congressional Democrats and the White House.

Earlier on Wednesday, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters that

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Biden had a call with congressional Democrat leadership, but she did not disclose details of their discussions.

US House Democrat leaders are reportedly holding a separate conference call in wake of the White House meeting.

Bloomberg News reported that dozens of Democratic lawmakers are considering writing a letter demanding Biden withdraw from the presidential race following the recent debate.

According to the New York Times, Biden told a key ally that he may drop out of the 2024 US presidential election after his poor debate performance, but the White House rejected that claim.

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US Journalist Tucker Carlson Says Secured Interview With Zelenskyy

WASHINGTON, July 4 (Sputnik) - US journalist Tucker Carlson said that he secured an interview with Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy, having already interviewed Russian President Vladimir Putin earlier this year.

"Looks like we've got the Zelenskyy interview. We've been trying for two years, and with particular intensity after interviewing Putin in February," Carlson said on Wednesday via the social media platform X.

The interview is intended to bring Americans much-needed information about the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, Carlson said.

The interview should be coming soon, Carlson added.

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UPDATE - Oil Rally Resumes Even as Traders Fear Dial Back in Massive US Crude Draw

(Modifies headline and lede; updates prices in paragraphs 7, 8)

NEW YORK, July 4 (Sputnik) - The rally in oil momentarily stalled on Wednesday before resuming, although concerns persisted among traders that a massive weekly drawdown in crude inventories reported by the US government could be reversed in part at least.

The US Energy Information Administration (EIA) said in its Weekly Petroleum Status that crude stockpiles across the country fell by 12.157 million barrels during the week ended June 27, after a build of 3.591 million the week prior.

Historical EIA data showed it to be the largest weekly use of crude by US refiners since the first week of August 2023. Industry analysts on Wall Street had expected a decline of just around 550,000 barrels for the week to June 27.

"If true, it would signal massive consumption by refiners ahead of the peak summer driving season in the US," John Kilduff, partner at New York energy hedge fund Again Capital, said. "But that would depend on the EIA not sharply dialing back this number in next week's data release."

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Summer marks the busiest time for travel in the United States, the world's biggest oil consumer. US demand for oil usually spikes a couple of weeks before the warm season.

This year, however, has seen crude stockpiles building rather falling in the run-up to summer. Thus, the gigantic draw reported for last week is being treated with skepticism and weighing on crude prices instead.

US West Texas Texas Intermediate crude settled at $83.88, up $1.07, or 1.3%, on the day. Earlier in the day, it was as low as $82.47 after hitting a two-month high of $84.38 on Tuesday. Year-to-date, the US crude benchmark has gained almost 17%.

UK-origin Brent crude settled at $87.34, up $1.10, or 1.3%, after hitting a session low of $85.90 earlier. Brent reached a two-month high of $87.45 on Tuesday, gaining 13% on the year.

Aside from the crude draw, the EIA reported a drop of 2.214 million barrels in gasoline for the week that ended on June 27 versus the prior week's build of 2.654 million barrels. Analysts had forecast a decline of just around 390,000 barrels. Gasoline is the primary motor fuel in the United States and makes up the largest component of the country's energy mix.

The EIA also reported a distillates decline of 1.535 million barrels for last week, on top of the previous week's draw of 377,000. Analysts had forecast a drop of just around 150,000. Distillates are primarily processed into the diesel required by trucks, buses and ships, and also goes into making airline fuel.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, July 4 (Sputnik) -

PUTIN-ERDOGAN MEETING

* Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed the situation in Ukraine, Israel and Syria during their meeting in Astana, the Turkish presidency said on Wednesday.
* Relations between Russia and Turkey are developing progressively despite all the current difficulties the world, Putin said.
* Erdogan said that he expects Putin to visit Turkey.
* Ankara and Moscow have a goal to reach a $100 billion level of trade, Erdogan said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* Russia will seek reactions from international organizations to Ukraine's drone attack targeting Energodar (also known as Enerhodar), Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Wednesday.
* Kiev's drone attack on an electrical substation Raduga in the city of Energodar has led to the disruption of normal functioning of the Zaporozhye (Zaporizhzhia) Nuclear Power Plant's (ZNPP) facilities as well as of the city's power supply, the plant said.
* The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said that it has been informed about drone strikes in the vicinity of the ZNPP.

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* Ukraine's new drone attack on an electrical substation Raduga in the city of Energodar shows Kiev's readiness to continue criminal activities, Russian state nuclear corporation Rosatom said.

XI-PUTIN TALKS

* Moscow sees positive dynamics in the Russia-China trade in the first half of this year, President Vladimir Putin said on Wednesday.
* Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping discussed all areas of bilateral relations between Moscow and Beijing during their meeting in Kazakhstan, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.
* Xi Jinping said that Beijing is willing to continue making efforts for political settlement of the conflict in Ukraine and other crises, Xinhua reported.
* Xi said Beijing supports Moscow when it comes to Russia's chairmanship of the BRICS, uniting the global south and preventing a new Cold War, Xinhua reported.

WESTERN AID TO UKRAINE

* US President Joe Biden has delegated Secretary of State Antony Blinken to direct the drawdown of up to $150 million in new military aid for Ukraine, the White House announced on Wednesday.
* The United States is providing Ukraine with a new $2.2 billion military aid package that includes air-defense and other munitions, the US Defense Department said.

US PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

* President Joe Biden in a call earlier with his staff acknowledged that the last few days have been challenging because of the fallout from his poor debate performance and he underscored that it's important they all continue to support each other during this time, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Wednesday.
* Biden is absolutely not considering stepping down from the presidential race despite his worrying performance in the recent debate, Jean-Pierre said.
* Dozens of Democratic congressmen are considering writing a letter demanding Biden withdraw from the presidential race following the recent debate, Bloomberg reported.
* Biden told a key ally that he may drop out of the 2024 US presidential election after a poor debate performance against Republican challenger Donald Trump, the New York Times reported.

ISRAEL-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

* Israel has received a response from Palestinian movement Hamas on a ceasefire proposal in exchange for freeing hostages, and will provide its answer after evaluation, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said on Wednesday.
* Israeli tanks that were used in the military operation in Rafah are able to reach the Litani River in Lebanon to push back fighters of the Hezbollah movement if necessary, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said.
* The Lebanese Hezbollah movement said that it has launched 100 rockets toward two Israeli military headquarters.

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US Crude Oil Exports Pressured by Cheaper West African Supply - Trade Sources

NEW YORK, July 3 (Sputnik) - US oil exports are under pressure as buyers, especially from Europe, seek cheaper West African supply amid higher premiums fetched since the start of 2024 by the leading American crude benchmark, trade sources said.

Those closely following oil shipment data compiled by cargo trackers tell Sputnik that West African (WAF) crude headed for Europe from destinations such as Nigeria, Angola and the Republic of Congo has spiked in recent months as US-origin West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude increased in pricing.

The trade sources' assessments concurred with a media report published on Wednesday, citing cargo tracker Kpler's findings that US crude exports to Europe slowed to 1.45 million barrels per day last month - the lowest for any month since July 2022.

According to the Kpler report, the volume of European-bound US crude in July was 27% lower than in June and 14% below May levels.

Outside of Europe, WAF and WTI exports are almost at par, trade sources said, although that could change if the US benchmark keeps rising in pricing.

WTI's pricing went from a December 2023 low of $67.71 to a high of $84.38 on Tuesday.

In terms of global exports, WAF ships around 4.5 million barrels per day while US crude exports 4.4 million.

WAF, which is typically cheaper than UK's North Sea Brent crude, became more attractive to European buyers in recent months as WTI's discount to Brent narrowed.

Until a year ago, WTI traded at its typical discount of about $5 per barrel to Brent. By Wednesday's close though, the difference was less than $3.50 per barrel, as Brent settled at $87.34 versus the $83.88 for WTI.

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USCENTCOM Says Destroyed 2 Houthi Radar Sites, 2 Uncrewed Surface Vessels in Yemen,Red Sea

WASHINGTON, July 3 (Sputnik) – US military forces destroyed two Houthi radar sites in Yemen and two uncrewed surface vessels (USV) in the Red Sea, US Central Command (CENTCOM) said on Wednesday.

"In the past 24 hours, U.S. Central Command forces successfully destroyed two Iranian-backed Houthi radar sites in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen and two uncrewed surface vessels (USV) in the Red Sea," CENTCOM said in a statement.

US authorities determined that the radar sites and USVs presented imminent threats to US coalition forces and merchant vessels in the region, it added.

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Yemen's Houthis, also known as Ansar Allah, have controlled much of northern Yemen since 2016. The group vowed in November 2023 to attack any ships linked to Israel until the country halts military action in Gaza.

The attacks prompted the United States to form a multinational coalition that includes the United Kingdom, Canada, and other Western countries to protect shipping in the Red Sea area and strike Houthi targets on the ground.

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Saks Fifth Avenue Buys Neiman Marcus for $2.65Bln With Backing From Amazon - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 3 (Sputnik) - Luxury department store chain Saks Fifth Avenue finalized a deal to purchase competitor Neiman Marcus for $2.65 billion with support from Amazon, The Wall Street Journal reported on Wednesday.

Both companies' boards approved the deal, which could be announced as soon as Wednesday evening, the report said, citing people familiar with the matter.

The deal comes after months of negotiations between the companies, the report said.

Combined into a single entity, the companies would garner some $10 billion in annual sales, the report said.

Amazon will take a minority stake in the new company, dubbed Saks Global, the report said.

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Second Sitting House Democrat Calls on Biden to Drop Out of Presidential Race – Reports

WASHINGTON, July 3 (Sputnik) – House Democrat Raul Grijalva has become the second sitting lawmaker to call on US President Joe Biden to leave the presidential race following his weak performance in the first debate against Donald Trump, The New York Times reported on Wednesday.

Grijalva follows Congressman Lloyd Doggett, who called on Biden to step down earlier this week in the first instance of a fellow party member to do so.

"If he's the candidate, I'm going to support him, but I think that this is an opportunity to look elsewhere," the report quoted Grijalva as saying in an interview about Biden. "What he needs to do is shoulder the responsibility for keeping that seat — and part of that responsibility is to get out of this race."

Discussions on how soon Biden may either resign or be forced to step down for medical reasons erupted even in mainstream US media publications and web platforms following the president's poor performance in his Thursday night debate with former President Donald Trump.

However, the Biden campaign said that it had not held any discussions about replacing Biden with an alternative nominee for the presidency.

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Trump Campaign Says All Democrats, Mainstream Media Share Blame in Biden's Fallout

WASHINGTON, July 3 (Sputnik) - All Democrats and mainstream media outlets who backed President Joe Biden's policies throughout his presidency also share blame for the current fallout from his poor debate performance last week, the Trump campaign said on Wednesday.

"Every Democrat who is calling on Crooked Joe Biden to quit was once a supporter of Biden and his failed policies that lead to extreme inflation, an open border, and chaos at home and abroad," the campaign said. "Make no mistake that Democrats, the mainstream media, and the swamp colluded to hide the truth from the American public - Joe Biden is weak, failed, dishonest, and not fit for the White House."

Each Democrat and media outlet that previously supported Biden has lied about Biden's cognitive state and supported his "disastrous policies" over the past four years, the campaign said.

The campaign added that former President Donald Trump will beat any Democrat put against him for the November 5 vote in the US election.

The New York Times reported earlier that Biden told a key ally that he may drop out of the 2024 US presidential election after his poor debate performance. The White House rejected that claim.

On Thursday, Biden and Trump participated in a CNN-hosted debate in Atlanta. Biden's performance reportedly sparked concerns among Democrats and raised questions about the future of his candidacy.

Biden and his campaign admitted that he had a rough showing at the debate in Atlanta but assured the public that they would not end the reelection bid.

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General Dynamics Says 2 Injured, 1 Missing in 'Pyrotechnics' Incident at Arkansas Plant

WASHINGTON, July 3 (Sputnik) - Two people have been injured and one is missing after an incident involving pyrotechnics at a General Dynamics plant in the US state of Arkansas, General Dynamics Ordnance and Tactical Systems said in a statement on Wednesday.

"Today at 8:15 a.m. CDT, an incident involving pyrotechnics occurred at the General Dynamics Ordnance and Tactical Systems facility in Camden, Arkansas. At this time, we are working with first responders and can confirm the incident resulted in at least two injuries and one missing individual," the statement said.

The company is cooperating with authorities investigating the incident, the statement added.

Members of the Arkansas congressional delegation, including Senator John Boozman and Congressman Bruce Westerman, said that they are monitoring the situation.

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US Registers Fourth Case of H5 Bird Flu in Humans in Colorado – CDC

WASHINGTON, July 3 (Sputnik) - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said on Wednesday that it had registered the fourth US case of H5 bird flu in humans in the state of Colorado amid an outbreak of the virus in the country.

"A human case of highly pathogenic avian influenza A(H5) virus infection in the United States has been identified in the state of Colorado. This is the fourth case associated with an ongoing multistate outbreak of A(H5N1) in dairy cows and the first in Colorado," the CDC said in a press release.

The latest case is a worker on a dairy farm where cows have tested positive for the virus, the release said.

Currently, human cases of avian influenza have been reported in the US states of Michigan and Texas, 2 and 1, respectively, according to the release.

On Tuesday, the US Department of Health and Human Services awarded Moderna $176 million to develop an mRNA vaccine against the H5 bird flu virus.

The bird flu is an infectious disease caused by the influenza A virus, which is widespread throughout the world. Many species of wild birds survive the infection without any obvious signs of harm to their health, but some, including domestic birds, develop the disease, which can also be transmitted to mammals, including humans.

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US Anti-War Activist Calls Conflict in Ukraine Worst Covered Ever

WASHINGTON, July 3 (Sputnik) – US lawyer, scholar, and peace activist Daniel Kovalik said on Wednesday that the ongoing conflict in Ukraine is the worst covered one in his lifetime and called the Western coverage a joke and a shame.

“I think this is the worst covered conflict I've ever seen in my lifetime. It's, frankly, a joke, and it's just a shame how this has been covered,” Kovalik said during a press briefing at the United Nations.

Kovalik, US journalist Jackson Hinkle, and member of the Administrative Committee of United National Anti-War Coalition Christopher Helali have just returned from a trip to Donbas where they had a chance to talk to the people and to see in person the devastation caused by the Ukrainian continued bombardment of civilians in the region.

Kovalik pointed out that the conflict in Ukraine is the most likely candidate to start World War 3 and there are people at the White House who want it to take place.

The peace activists especially noted the fact that Donbas, and Lugansk in particular, are dotted with traces of Ukrainian bombardments using American shells and systems, most of which continue to fall on civilian targets, including schools, kindergartens, and hospitals.

Earlier in June, President Vladimir Putin said that Russia would immediately cease fire and

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begin negotiations with Ukraine after Kiev withdraws troops from the territory of Russia's new regions and officially abandons plans to join NATO. The US State Department called Putin's terms for peace in Ukraine "maximalist."

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US Announces New $2.2Bln Military Aid Package for Ukraine - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, July 3 (Sputnik) - The United States is providing Ukraine with a new $2.2 billion military aid package that includes air-defense and other munitions, the US Defense Department said on Wednesday.

The $2.2 billion package in Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI) funds comes in addition to $150 million in Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA), the Pentagon said in a statement.

The USAI funds will be used to purchase interceptors for PATRIOT and NASAMS air defense systems, the statement said.

The PDA package will include missiles for HAWK air defense systems, ammunition for HIMARS, artillery rounds, Javelin anti-armor systems and TOW missiles, among other equipment, the statement said.

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Biden Acknowledges in Call With His Staff That Last Few Days Challenging - White House

WASHINGTON, July 3 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden in a call earlier with his staff acknowledged that the last few days have been challenging because of the fallout from his poor debate performance and he underscored that it's important they all continue to support each other during this time, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Wednesday.

"The [White House] Chief of Staff Jeff Zients did have an all staff call, he wanted to gather the team across the building and acknowledge what the President said himself that the last few days have been challenging," Jean-Pierre told reporters. "President ... conveyed the importance of executing on our mission. He talked about the importance of coming together as a team and also having each other's backs."

According to media reports, morale is low among White House staff after Biden had a poor showing in the debate last week against Donald Trump.

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pentagon announces $2.2 billion in military aid for ukraine that includes hawk air defense systems, himars ammunity, tow missiles, javelins

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White House on Whether Biden Considering Stepping Down From Race: Absolutely Not

WASHINGTON, July 3 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden is absolutely not considering stepping down from the presidential race despite his worrying performance in the recent debate, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said on Wednesday.

"Absolutely not," Jean-Pierre said when asked whether Biden is considering abandoning his bid for re-election.

Jean-Pierre again dismissed concerns about Biden's mental acuity, saying the president was jet-lagged and suffering a cold during the debate. Biden had returned from Europe to the United States on June 15, just 12 days before his debate with former President Donald Trump.

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US Avoids Preventing Flow of Illegal Arms Shipments to Haiti- Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, July 3 (Sputnik) - Washington does not want to prevent the current flow of arms trafficking from the US into Haiti, Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said on Wednesday.

"… we do not see the current embargo doing anything to prevent the flow of arms trafficking from the US," Nebezia said during a UN Security Council. "If Washington wanted to, it could have tackled this problem long ago."

Moreover, he said that it seems that the US prefers to use illegal weapons shipments on which American arms dealers earn significant sums as a lever of influence to affect the situation in the country.

In June, Kenyan forces arrived in Haiti as part of the Multinational Security Support mission to help provide security in the country.

Haiti has long been mired in a socio-economic and political crisis that escalated after the assassination of President Jovenel Moise in 2021. The country has faced an unprecedented increase in the activities of criminal groups that engage in extortion, kidnapping for ransom, and control entire areas of the country, as well as foreign interference.

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US Judge Postpones Sentencing for Vinnik Due to Complexity of Case - Lawyer

WASHINGTON, July 3 (Sputnik) – A US judge has postponed the sentencing for Russian national Alexander Vinnik due to the complexity of his case and will hopefully set a new date by spring 2025, Vinnik's lawyer told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"The reason for the change of date is the case's complexity. My client spent almost six years in

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jail, and we have multiple elements required to be prepared," Arkady Bukh said.
The lawyer pointed out that it is necessary to obtain many documents and conduct calculations and negotiations related to the potential loss and damage to the government and people.
"All those factors need to be negotiated, and hopefully, by spring 2025, we will have new sentencing set, and hopefully, Mr. Vinnik will come back home soon," he added.
When asked about the potential sentencing, Bukh said that the defense wants Vinnik to get time served.
"We are working, and we are trying to get time served. In reality, we will see what happens," he said.
The US government accuses Vinnik of enabling criminal activity through the cryptocurrency exchange BTC-e by obscuring and anonymizing transactions and sources of funds.

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Biden Delegates Drawdown of Up To $150Mln in New Ukraine Military Aid - Memorandum

WASHINGTON, July 3 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden has delegated Secretary of State Antony Blinken to direct the drawdown of up to $150 million in new military aid for Ukraine, the White House announced on Wednesday.
"By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America... I hereby delegate to the Secretary of State: the authority under section 506(a)(1) of the FAA to direct the drawdown of up to $150 million in defense articles and services of the Department of Defense, and military education and training, to provide assistance to Ukraine and to make the determinations required under such section to direct such a drawdown," the memorandum said.
Biden also delegated the authority to determine "whether it is important to the security interests of the United States to furnish up to $12 million in assistance to Ukraine without regard to any provision of law within the purview of section 614(a)(1)" of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961.

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us judge postpones sentencing for russian national vinnik due to complexity of case, will hopefully set new date by spring 2025 - lawyer to sputnik

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US, Quad Officials Discuss Situation in Indo-Pacific, Support for ASEAN - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 3 (Sputnik) - Senior US diplomats Daniel Kritenbrink and Donald Lu met with their Quad counterparts from Australia, India and Japan on July 2 to discuss the situation in

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the Indo-Pacific region and the importance of regional institutions, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the State Department said on Wednesday.

"The senior officials reaffirmed the Quad's commitment to the people and communities of the Indo-Pacific region, including most recently through coordinated humanitarian and disaster relief assistance to Papua New Guinea in the wake of the tragic landslide in May," the State Department said in a statement.

The parties highlighted the Quad's support for regional institutions, including ASEAN, the Pacific Islands Forum and the Indian Ocean Rim Association, the statement said.

The US officials and their counterparts also addressed other pressing regional and global issues, the statement added.

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Allies of VP Harris Plan for Scenario If Biden Drops Out of Presidential Race - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 3 (Sputnik) - Allies of US Vice President Kamala Harris are privately planning scenarios in the event that President Biden drops out of the upcoming presidential race amid rumors that his candidacy isn't salvageable, CNBC reported on Wednesday.

According to the report, allies of the Vice President are quietly discussing what a Harris candidacy would look like should Joe Biden drop out of the presidential election, the report said.

These discussions, allegedly through phone calls and texts, are taking place among people who raised money for Harris during her attempted 2020 Democratic primary campaign and are focused on whether or not the Vice President would retain Biden-Harris campaign resources, which are currently managed by Biden's team, the report said, citing people familiar with the matter.

Biden's campaign, which began in June with over $91 million and raised nearly $150 million by early July, is expected to have most of its funds inherited by Harris, the report said, quoting campaign manager Julie Chavez Rodriguez.

The report added that Harris' allies are discussing the Vice President's need to start meeting with some of the Democratic Party's largest donors if Biden drops out of the race.

Earlier on Wednesday, the New York Times reported that Biden told a key ally he may drop out of the 2024 US presidential election after a dismal debate performance against Republican challenger Donald Trump. The White House has denied the claim.

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Oil Prices Dip on Worry Massive US Crude Draw Report Could Be Aberration

NEW YORK, July 3 (Sputnik) - The rally in oil stalled on Wednesday on concerns that a massive stockpile drawdown in crude reported by the US government for last week was an aberration that could be reversed as early as next week.

The US Energy Information Administration (EIA) said in its Weekly Petroleum Status that crude

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stockpiles across the country fell by 12.157 million barrels during the week ended June 27, after a build of 3.591 million the prior week.

Historical EIA data showed it to be the largest weekly pull in crude by US refiners since the first week of August 2023. Industry analysts on Wall Street had expected a decline of just around 550,000 barrels.

"If true, it would signal massive consumption by refiners ahead of the peak summer driving season in the US," John Kilduff, partner at New York energy hedge fund Again Capital, said. "But that would depend on the EIA not sharply dialing back this number in next week's data release, and I guess that's the broader market concern today in keeping crude prices down."

Summer marks the busiest time for travel in the United States, the world's biggest oil consumer. US demand for oil usually spikes a couple of weeks before the warm season.

This year, however, has seen crude stockpiles building rather falling in the run-up to summer. Thus, the gigantic draw reported for last week is being treated with skepticism and weighing on crude prices instead.

With two hours to Wednesday's settlement, US West Texas Texas Intermediate crude was at $82.79, down 2 cents on the day. Just a day earlier, the US crude benchmark hit two-month highs at $84.38, gaining nearly 16% year-to-date.

UK-origin Brent crude was at $86.23, down one cent on the day. Brent reached a two-month high of $87.45 on Tuesday, gaining 12% on the year.

The EIA reported a drop of 2.214 million barrels in gasoline for the week that ended on June 27 versus the prior week's build of 2.654 million barrels. Analysts had forecast a decline of just around 390,000 barrels. The EIA also reported a distillates decline of 1.535 million barrels for last week, on top of the previous week's draw of 377,000. Analysts had forecast a drop of just around 150,000.

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House Democrats May Sign Letter Demanding Biden Drop Out of Presidential Race-Reports

WASHINGTON, June 3 (Sputnik) - Dozens of Democratic congressmen are considering writing a letter demanding US President Joe Biden withdraw from the presidential race following the recent debate, Bloomberg reported on Wednesday.

According to the report, citing a senior party official, Democratic lawmakers who are running for reelection in traditionally Democratic districts are circulating the letter.

The report added that candidates fear Biden's candidacy could lead to a Republican sweep in Washington, causing panic within the party.

Earlier on Wednesday, White House spokesperson Andrew Bates denied a media report claiming President Joe Biden told a key ally he is considering dropping out of the presidential race.

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US Stands 'Always Open to Dialogue' With Maduro Govt. in Venezuela - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 3 (Sputnik) - US Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Brian Nichols said on Wednesday that the United States is "always open to dialogue" with Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his government.

Maduro said on Monday that he had agreed to resume negotiations with the United States over the coming days as he seeks sanctions relief for Venezuela.

"We're always open to dialogue, I've said that many times. Beyond that, I have no comments," Nichols said.

Maduro has reportedly said the United States has been reaching out to him over the last two months in an attempt to revive negotiations.

Maduro added that he expects the US government to follow up on agreements made in Qatar last year in order to reestablish the terms of the urgent dialogue.

In April, the United States reinstated some sanctions on Venezuela's oil and gas sector operations due to Washington's election-related concerns in Venezuela.

The Maduro government has cracked down on some opposition figures ahead of the July 28 elections over allegations that they are plotting against him.

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Trudeau Pledges to Talk, Listen to Lawmakers as They Call for Holding National Caucus

WASHINGTON, July 3 (Sputnik) – Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau committed on Wednesday to engage with Liberal lawmakers as they urge him to convene a National Caucus meeting to address the electoral loss in the Toronto-St. Paul by-election.

“I will continue to engage, to talk and to listen, to meet with all my MPs from across the country, to talk about how we can both understand what we need to improve on, given last week's by-election defeat, but also how we continue to be there for Canadians in a really important moment,” Trudeau said during a press conference.

The remarks came in response to questions he did not directly address, specifically his refusal to hold a National Caucus meeting despite being asked to. Trudeau was further questioned about what differentiated him from other premiers kicked out of office by voters after a decade in power, to which he replied that democracies around the world are facing challenges.

“There is a challenge faced by democracies all around the world right now … This is a really important time for governments to step up and deliver concretely for citizens,” Trudeau said while pointing out he was working hard on the matter.

In late June, the Liberal Party faced the unexpected loss to their Conservative counterparts of the Toronto-St. Paul federal by-election. The seat had been held by the Liberals for more than 30 years and was considered to be one of the politically "safest."

In the by-election fallout, Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland and Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault reiterated their support for Trudeau, saying he would lead the Liberals in the next election scheduled to take place on or before October 20, 2025.

However, concerned and dissenting voices have arisen from within the Liberal Party. Several

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lawmakers have publicly or under the cover of anonymity urged Trudeau to convene a national caucus as soon as possible, whereas some have called for a “course correction” and others have even called for his resignation.

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US Adds Secondary Sanctions Risk Language to Hundreds of Russia-Related Persons - Treasury

WASHINGTON, July 3 (Sputnik) - The US Treasury Department announced on Wednesday that it has broadened the scope of Russia-related companies and individuals that can be sanctioned by adding the "secondary sanctions risk" language to hundreds of existing designations, which makes it possible to sanction persons outside of US jurisdiction.

"The following language, ‘Secondary sanctions risk: See Section 11 of Executive Order 14024,’ has been added to the below names on the Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) List and/or the Sectoral Sanctions Identifications (SSI) List," the Treasury Department said in a press release.

Executive Order 14024 was signed by President Joe Biden on April 15, 2021, to block property related to Russia's allegedly harmful foreign activities, including efforts to undermine the conduct of free and fair democratic elections and institutions in the United States and its allies as well as to engage in malicious cyber activities.

With the start of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine in 2022, the executive order became the main instrument of the US sanctions war against Russia. With the new language added to each sanctioned person, the United States has essentially acquired the legal right to extend its authority to hundreds and possibly thousands of companies outside its jurisdiction.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said that despite the unprecedented number of sanctions imposed on Russia, the country is overcoming the problems created by them, including by using its own capacities and resources.

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White House Denies Report Biden Told Key Ally He Weights Suspending 2024 Presidential Bid

WASHINGTON, July 3 (Sputnik) - White House spokesperson Andrew Bates said on Wednesday that a media report claiming President Joe Biden told a key ally that he is considering dropping out of the presidential race is false.

"That claim is absolutely false," Bates said in a statement via the social media platform X. "If the New York Times had provided us with more than 7 minutes to comment we would have told them so."

The New York Times reported earlier that Biden told a key ally he may drop out of the 2024 US presidential election after a dismal debate performance against Republican challenger Donald

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Trump.

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Pentagon Announces $10Bln Plan to Modernize Tactical Aircraft Based in Japan

WASHINGTON, July 3 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department announced on Wednesday a $10 billion modernization plan to upgrade US tactical aircraft across multiple military installations in Japan.

"The modernization plan, which will be implemented over the next several years, reflects over $10 billion of capability investments to enhance the US-Japan Alliance, bolster regional deterrence, and strengthen peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region," the Defense Department said in a press release.

The release noted that the US Air Force will upgrade its presence at Kadena Air Base by deploying 36 F-15EX aircraft to replace 48 F-15C/D aircraft as part of the modernization plan. The F-15EX is one of the US military's most advanced tactical aircraft.

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pentagon announces $10 billion plan to modernize tactical aircraft based in Japan

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Biden Discusses Ending 2024 US Presidential Bid With Key Ally - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 3 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden told a key ally that he may drop out of the 2024 US presidential election after a poor debate performance against Republican challenger Donald Trump, the New York Times reported on Wednesday.

The key ally reportedly said that Biden is aware his campaign could become unsalvageable if he cannot restore public confidence in his competence in the coming days.

Biden's lackluster showing in the first debate against Trump last week sparked concerns among Democrats about the viability of his campaign, prompting one sitting House Democrat to call on him to drop out of the race.

Biden is "well aware" of the political challenge he faces in the wake of the debate, the report quotes another top Biden adviser as saying.

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Trudeau Appoints First Female Chief of Defense Staff - Office

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WASHINGTON, July 3 (Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Wednesday appointed Lt. Gen. Jennie Carignan as the new chief of the Defense Staff, making her the first woman to head the nation's armed forces.

"The Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, today announced the upcoming appointment of Lieutenant-General Jennie Carignan, currently Chief, Professional Conduct and Culture, National Defence, as Chief of the Defence Staff," his office said in a statement.

Carignan will be promoted to the rank of general and will replace outgoing Chief of the Defense Staff, Gen. Wayne Eyre, who is retiring from the armed forces, the statement said.

Carignan has served in the CAF for some 35 years and has commanded two Combat Engineer Regiments as well as the 2nd Canadian Division where she took over crisis operations and led over 10,000 service members during flood relief efforts in Quebec, the statement said.

Her deployments include Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Syria as well as Iraq where she supervised the NATO mission to the country from 2019-2020, the statement said. Since 2021, Carignan has served as Chief, Professional Conduct and Culture, National Defense leading the "cultural reforms" in the CAF, it added.

Appointed as Chief of the Defense Staff in November 2021, Eyre will retire following 40 years of service. He will continue to fulfill his duties until Carignan assumes the role on July 18, the statement said.

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Biden Told Key Ally That He's Considering Dropping Out of Race - New York Times

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Deconfliction Element in Gaza 'Not Working' - UN Official

UNITED NATIONS, July 3 (Sputnik) - The deconfliction element in Gaza is not working whereby premises that were as supposed to be de-conflicted were not, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (MOCHA) in the Occupied Palestinian Territory head Andrea De Domenico said on Wednesday.

"What is not working is the deconfliction element because we have seen over and over again situations where premises that were supposed to be de-conflicted were not de-conflicted at the end and have been hit at times by ricochet or straight bullets, but at times that were targeted," Domenico said.

The World Food Program for example has been hit twice in May and the United Nations is trying to continue a dialogue with the Israelis, Dominico added.

On October 7, 2023, Palestinian movement Hamas attacked Israel from Gaza, killing more than 1,100 Israelis - both military and civilians - and abducted some 240 others. Israel implemented a complete blockade of Gaza and started a bombing campaign and a ground invasion of the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas and rescuing the hostages. Israeli forces have so far killed some 38,000 Palestinians and wounded some 87,000 others

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since October 7, according to the local authorities.

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UN Team in Gaza Has No Preference for Starlink But Needs Reliable Telecoms - Official

UNITED NATIONS, July 3 (Sputnik) - The United Nations humanitarian team in Gaza needs a reliable communications connection but does not care whether it is provided by Starlink or a different company, the head of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the Occupied Palestinian Territory Andrea De Domenico said on Wednesday.

"So, would it be Starlink, would it be another technology, I don't really care, as long as we have all we need to communicate safely with with our teams, for safety and for operations," Domenico told reporters in a briefing broadcast from East Jerusalem.

He added that because connections often go down during Israeli military operations, the team needs alternative systems to maintain communication.

Domenico could not confirm news reports that the UN and the Israelis are both in touch with Elon Musk's Starlink to provide a communications system in Gaza.

Axios earlier on Wednesday reported that the United Nations informed Israel that it needs Starlink terminals to resume its aid distribution in the Gaza Strip

On October 7, 2023, Palestinian movement Hamas launched a large-scale rocket attack against Israel and breached the border, attacking both civilian neighborhoods and military bases. Nearly 1,200 people in Israel were killed and some 240 others abducted during the attack.

Israel launched retaliatory strikes, ordered a complete blockade of Gaza, and started a ground incursion into the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas and rescuing the hostages. Nearly 38,000 people have been killed and over 87,000 others have been wounded in Israel's military operations in the Gaza Strip since October 7, according to local authorities

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Colorado Libertarian Party Says Placing Kennedy on Presidential Ballot

WASHINGTON, July 3 (Sputnik) - The Libertarian Party of Colorado said that it is placing independent 2024 US presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. on ballots in the state instead of the ticket nominated at the Libertarian National Convention.

"The Libertarian Party of Colorado Board of Directors passed a resolution voting in favor of a groundbreaking partnership with the independent presidential campaign of [Kennedy]," the party said via the social media platform X. "As part of this partnership, the Libertarian Party of Colorado will place the Kennedy/Shanahan ticket on the Colorado state ballot for president and vice president."

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The move reflects the party's commitment to offering voters a choice that transcends the traditional partisan divide and promotes individual liberty, personal responsibility and limited government, the statement said.

Kennedy shares many of the Libertarian Party's core principles, including commitments to civil liberties, the free market and a non-interventionist foreign policy, the statement added.

Last month, the Colorado Libertarian Party opted not to place Chase Oliver, whom the Libertarian Party chose as its nominee at its national convention, on ballots in the state.

The party criticized Oliver for his stances on public health, gender-affirming care and allegations of Russian collusion in the 2016 US presidential election. The party called on the Libertarian National Committee to decertify Oliver's nomination or allow states to pursue their own electoral strategies.

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Hillary Clinton Urges New Ukraine Offensive in Call With Poroshenko Imposter

WASHINGTON, July 3 (Sputnik) - Former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said during a prank call with Russian pranksters Vovan and Lexus that Ukraine needs to "go forward" as best as it can and start an offensive against Russia.

During the call with Clinton, the pranksters pretended to be former Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, according to the audio recording of the conversation published on Wednesday.

"Let's take it, as we can, giving you the means you need to support yourself, to try to not only hold the line, but engage in an offensive, and then obviously many of us in this country will do everything we can to reelect President Biden," Clinton said.

"So that has to be your, you know, your understanding that you go forward as best you can, and the rest of us will do everything we can to continue supporting you and to support President Biden," she stated.

Clinton noted that she and her husband, former US President Bill Clinton, were working hard to help Biden win the election.

As regards Ukraine's prospects of joining NATO, Clinton said that she doesn't know what the final decision will be on the issue but added that former NATO Secretary General Anders Rasmussen and Zelenskyy's Chief of Staff Andriy Yermak are working very hard to help Kiev become the 33th member of the military bloc.

The former top US diplomat also spoke extremely unflatteringly about Biden's main rival, Donald Trump, whom she called dangerous.

"He [Trump] is a very dangerous candidate, and he would be very bad to the United States, as well as for the rest of the world, including Ukraine," Clinton said.

The Poroshenko imposter also offered to help "find something" on Trump and to use it to attack him from "different sides" before the election. Clinton agreed enthusiastically.

"Well, anything you could do to attack him [Trump] I am all for," Clinton replied.

Politico reported on Tuesday that Trump, if elected in November, will consider a plan to end NATO's eastward expansion and enter negotiations with Russian President Vladimir Putin to discuss ending the conflict in Ukraine.

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Putin has repeatedly said that Ukraine's non-aligned status is extremely important to Russia and NATO's expansion in Ukraine creates threats for Moscow. Putin also said that while Russia always opposed Ukraine's membership in NATO due to national security concerns, it never opposed Kiev's aspirations to join the European Union.

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Prime Minister Says Haitian Govt. Will Retake Full Control of Nation's Territory - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 3 (Sputnik) - The Haitian government will regain full control over the entire territory of the country regardless of what the gangs there plan to do, Prime Minister Gary Conille told Radio France International).

"In this sense, probably yes, I presume gangs are positioning themselves. I don't know. What I can say for sure is that regardless of what they are doing, I can assure you that in a not-so-distant future the state will regain control over all of the national territory," Conille said on Tuesday.

Conille made the remarks while addressing a question on whether the slow deployment of the Kenya-led international force to Haiti was allowing gangs in the country to adapt to their arrival.

The prime minister noted that the current size of the Kenyan contingent slightly surpasses 200 officers and a substantial increase is expected in the coming weeks. However, Conille declined to provide a completion date to the deployment of the entire 2,500-strong support force.

Questioned on the possibility of dialogue with gangs after the notorious gang leader Jimmy Cherizier expressed readiness to talk, Conille said it was important for them to acknowledge the government first.

"Before any dialogue, first, arms must be laid down and the state's authority must be recognized. That's the first step … then we'll see," Conille said.

Haiti has long been mired in a socio-economic and political crisis that escalated after the assassination of President Jovenel Moise in 2021. The country has faced an unprecedented increase in the activities of criminal groups that engage in extortion, kidnapping for ransom and control entire areas of the country, as well as foreign interference.

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