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Canadians Divided on How to Meet NATO's 2% GDP Defense Spending Pledge – Poll

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) – Canadians are divided on how to fund Canada's defense spending commitment to NATO, with over a fourth opposing an increase in the military budget, a recent Nanos poll commissioned by Bloomberg News revealed.

When asked how the government should allocate funds to reach NATO's requirement of spending 2% of GDP on defense, 26% of those polled said Canada's defense spending must not be increased, while 13% expressed uncertainty.

However, 22% believe Ottawa should cut spending on social programs to meet its commitment to NATO, the poll showed, whereas another 14% think the government should further raise taxes.

Among other top responses, Canadians said Ottawa could borrow more money, better allocate existing funding, cut into government spending, tax the rich or stop funding foreign wars.

On Thursday, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced on the sidelines of Washington's NATO Summit that Canada expects to fully meet its NATO commitment and spend 2% of GDP on defense by 2032.

The decision came after Trudeau faced significant pressure in the past months from US lawmakers and other allied states. However, neither Trudeau nor National Defense Minister Bill Blair explained how Canada would meet its commitment, other than saying that Ottawa would hold regular reviews and release a new defense policy update in 2028.

In mid-April, the Ministry of National Defense released its defense policy update that said Canada plans to invest in defense C$8.1 billion ($6 billion) over the next five years and C$73 billion over the next 20 years. The increased spending would bring Canada's defense budget to 1.76% of its GDP by 2029-2030.

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Biden, Trump Statistically Tied in Presidential Race – Poll

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden and Republican presidential frontrunner Donald Trump are statistically tied, despite a spotlight on the former's mental fitness after his disastrous debate performance, according to a poll conducted by NPR, PBS NewsHour, and Marist.

The poll found that Biden led Trump 50% to 48% in a two-person race, while Trump held an advantage of 43% to 42% if third parties were introduced into the race. The differences were not considered statistically significant, with the poll's margin of error 3.1 percentage points.

The poll also found that other Democrats rumored to potentially replace Biden on the ticket did not score higher than him.

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Still, nearly two-thirds of respondents and almost 40% of Democrats said they believed Biden lacked the mental fitness to serve a second term. Nearly 60% of respondents believe Trump will win the presidency

The nationwide poll of 1,309 respondents was conducted over Tuesday and Wednesday.

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Croatia Acquires Eight UH-60M Black Hawk Helicopters Tripling Its Fleet – Lockheed Martin

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) – Croatia has finalized a deal to triple its UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter fleet by acquiring eight additional aircraft, US manufacturer Lockheed Martin announced on Friday.

"Croatia has officially purchased eight additional UH-60M Black Hawk helicopters built by Sikorsky, a Lockheed Martin company, via U.S. government Foreign Military Sale, bringing the country's Black Hawk fleet total to 12," the company said in a press release.

Besides the aircraft, Croatia will also receive organizational equipment, spare and repair parts, and associated support equipment, according to the release.

In January, the US State Department approved a possible $500 million sale of UK-60M Black Hawk helicopters and related services to Croatia.

The Croatian government said in March that the United States will pay 51% of the total amount while Zagreb will cover $273.8 million.

All eight helicopters are expected to be delivered no later than by 2028, the Croatian government said.

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World's Largest Capitalized Bank JPMorgan Reports Record Quarterly Earnings

NEW YORK, July 12 (Sputnik) - JPMorgan Chase & Co, the world's largest-capitalized bank, reported a record quarterly profit on Friday as its investment bankers and equity traders exceeded expectations amid extraordinary gains netted from a transaction with credit card company Visa.

JPMorgan said it earned a gross net income of $18.1 billion, or $4.40 per share, for the quarter ended June 30.

Analysts on Wall Street had a consensus estimate of just $4.19 a share for net profit at the bank, which is also America's biggest-networked lender with nearly 5,000 branches.

In growth terms, earnings for the 2024 second quarter were 25% higher from the previous record high during the quarter to June 30, 2023.

JPMorgan said the latest windfall was mainly due to higher-than-estimated fees earned from investment banking — which rose 50% — and a 21%-revenue gain from equities trading. The Visa transaction added another $8 billion to net profit.

Chief Executive Jamie Dimon, however, said JPMorgan might be facing more challenges

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ahead from inflation and US interest rates, which stood at two-decade highs.

"There has been some progress bringing inflation down, but there are still multiple inflationary forces in front of us: large fiscal deficits, infrastructure needs, restructuring of trade and remilitarization of the world," Dimon said in a statement accompanying the quarterly results. "Therefore, inflation and interest rates may stay higher than the market expects."

US inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index, grew by 3% for the year to June — well above the Federal Reserve's 2%-per-annum target.

Interest rates are in a range of 5.25% to 5.5%, the highest since 2002.

With over $3.3 trillion in total assets, JPMorgan is the world's largest bank by market capitalization.

Other major US banks due to report earnings for the second quarter of 2024 include Goldman Sachs Group Inc, Citigroup Inc, Morgan Stanley, Bank of America Corp and Wells Fargo & Co.

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UPDATE - Biden Mistakenly Refers to Ukraine's Zelenskyy as Putin During Introduction at NATO Event

(Corrects typo in para 4, adds details in paras 8-9)

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden mistakenly referred to Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy as Russian President Vladimir Putin during a NATO event in Washington.

"And now I want to hand it over to the President of Ukraine who has as much courage as he has determination. Ladies and gentlemen, President Putin," Biden said when introducing Zelenskyy to the podium on stage.

Biden immediately corrected himself, saying that he was so focused on beating Putin.

The NATO leaders standing behind Biden appeared confused by his mistake as most of them withheld their applause.

A White House press pool reporter in the room said the audience "gasped" at Biden's mistake.

This mishap occurred as Biden faces major backlash in his reelection campaign over concerns about his cognitive state and ability to serve another four years in the White House. Biden, 81, is the oldest US president in history and would be 86 at the end of a potential second term.

A growing number of Democratic lawmakers are calling on Biden to drop out of the presidential race.

During a solo press conference on Thursday night, Biden was asked about him mixing up Zelenskyy and Putin. An AFP reporter also asked Biden about whether his "decline" has become damaging for America's standing in the world.

Biden acknowledged that he made the mistake but said that he corrected it immediately. The US president also asserted that the NATO summit that just finished in Washington was "the most successful conference" he has attended in a long time and recommended finding a world leader "who didn't think it was."

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US Telecom Operator AT&T Says 'Nearly All' Customer Records Stolen in Data Breach

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - US telecom operator said on Friday that criminals compromised the call and text records of "nearly all" wireless customers in a new data breach.

In late March, AT&T said that the personal data of 73 million of its current and former customers was leaked to the dark web about two weeks ago.

"In April, AT&T learned that customer data was illegally downloaded from our workspace on a third-party cloud platform," the company said in a statement.

AT&T launched an investigation and has taken steps to close off the illegal access point, the statement said. The telecom operator continues to work with law enforcement in its efforts to arrest those involved in the incident.

At least one person has been apprehended, the company said.

"The compromised data includes files containing AT&T records of calls and texts of nearly all of AT&T's cellular customers, customers of mobile virtual network operators (MVNOs) using AT&T's wireless network, as well as AT&T's landline customers who interacted with those cellular numbers between May 1, 2022 - October 31, 2022," the operator said.

The compromised data also includes records from January 2, 2023, for a "very small number of customers." The records identify the telephone numbers an AT&T or MVNO cellular number interacted with during these periods.

The data does not contain the content of calls or texts, or personal information, the operator said, but noted that "there are often ways, using publicly available online tools, to find the name associated with a specific telephone number."

At this time, the company does not believe that the data is publicly available. The telecom operator "sincerely regrets" the data breach and remains committed to protecting the information in its care, the statement said.

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Biden Says Will Not Allow Zelenskyy to Use US Weapons to Strike Deep Into Russia

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said during a press conference after the NATO summit in Washington that the United States will not allow Kiev to use American weapons to strike deep into Russian territory.

"About [US President Volodymyr] Zelenskyy asking for the ability to strike deep into Russia, we've allowed Zelenskyy to use American weapons in the near term, in the near abroad, into Russia," Biden said when asked whether he would allow Zelenskyy to strike deep into Russian territory.

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Biden Says in Retrospect Wishes He Would Have Convinced Israel to Scale Back War in Gaza

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said during a press conference after the NATO summit that he regrets not convincing Israel to scale back its military operation in the Gaza Strip earlier in the conflict.

"There's a lot of things in retrospect I wish I had been able to convince the Israelis to do, but the bottom line is, we have a chance now," Biden said on Thursday. "It's time to end this war."

Biden further said he warned Israel not to "double down" in Gaza and avoid repeating the same mistake Washington made by prolonging its presence in Afghanistan regardless of killing Osama Bin Laden.

However, the US still supports going after the leadership of Palestinian movement Hamas, he added.

The US president further said he will continue to withhold US shipments of 2,000-pound bombs meant for Israel due to concerns that they will be used in densely populated areas in Gaza.

According to Biden, there has been progress in the latest round of Gaza ceasefire talks but he avoided disclosing any details.

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Biden Says See No Reason to Talk to Putin But Prepared to If He Calls

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said during a press conference after the NATO Summit in Washington DC that he has no reason to talk to Russian President Vladimir Putin but is ready to talk if he calls.

"I have no good reason to talk to Putin right now. There's not much that he is prepared to do in terms of accommodating any change in his behavior," Biden said on Thursday. "I'm not ready to talk to Putin. Unless Putin is ready to change his behavior."

However, Biden then said that he is prepared to talk to any leader who wants to talk, "including if Putin calls me and wants to talk."

The president then added that the last time he talked with Putin was on trying to progress work on an arms control agreement.

"Last time I talked to Putin I was trying to get him to work on an arms control agreement related to nuclear weapons in space. That didn't go very far," Biden said.

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Biden Says He'll Take Neurological Exam If His Doctors Suggest It

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WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden said during a press conference after the NATO summit that he would take a neurological exam if his doctors recommended it but so far he has not received such suggestions from his medical team.
"If they think I should have a neurological exam again, I'll do it, [but] no one's suggesting that to me now," Biden said on Thursday.

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Biden Says Some European Allies To Cut Investment in China Over Alleged Support to Russia

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said that some European allies plan to reduce investments in China if it continues supporting Russia indirectly.
"Some of our European friends are going to be curtailing their involvement in China, as long as China continues to have this indirect help to Russia," Biden said on Thursday during a press conference.
On Wednesday, the Chinese Embassy in Washington told Sputnik that China is not a creator of or a party to the Ukraine crisis, instead Beijing is committed to promoting peace talks. China urges the relevant countries involved in the conflict to immediately stop fueling the fight and inciting confrontation, stop slapping illegal unilateral sanctions, and play a constructive role in ending the conflict and restoring peace, the embassy added.

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Biden Says Will Not Allow Zelenskyy to Use US Weapons to Strike Deep Into Russia

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"About Zelenskyy asking for the ability to strike deep into Russia, we've allowed Zelensky to use American weapons in the near term, in the near abroad, into Russia," Biden said on Thursday when asked whether he would allow Zelenskyy to strike deep into Russian territory.

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Biden Says Would Make No Make Sense to Allow Ukraine to Strike Moscow With US Weapons

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said during the press conference after the NATO Summit in Washington DC that it would not make sense to allow Zelenskyy to use American weapons to strike deep into Russia.
"If he had the capacity to strike Moscow or strike the Kremlin, would that make sense? It wouldn't," Biden said on Thursday

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Russian President Vladimir Putin has warned NATO nations that they should realize "what they are playing with" when they allow Ukraine to use Western weapons to strike deep into Russian territory. He added that Russia will use all means at its disposal if the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity are threatened.

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NATO's Obsession Boosts Russia's Role as Global Leader - Former US Army Lieutenant Colonel

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - The latest NATO joint declaration condemning Russia appears to be backfiring and instead establishing Moscow more than ever as the leader of the global resistance against US hegemony, retired US Army Lieutenant Colonel and political consultant Earl Rasmussen, told Sputnik.

"If anything Russia is acting more of a leader here and thus it may strengthen Russia's hand," former vice president of the Eurasia Foundation Rasmussen said.

Russia was the central focus of the 32-nation Alliance declaration that was issued on Wednesday.

The declaration stated that Russia remains the most significant and direct threat to the Allies' security, and expressed profound concern over the deepening strategic partnership between Russia and China, which aims to undermine and reshape the rules-based international order.

However, despite its hostile tone towards Russia and China, Rasmussen said he doubted the NATO summit had achieved any concrete results.

"I think in general the summit will accomplish very little. It will act as a cheerleader/pep-talk. Very little seems to have been accomplished thus far, with few exceptions." he said.

The declaration document itself showed a provocative mood towards Russia and China, Rasmussen observed.

"It discusses expansion in Europe as well as stronger coordination in Asia and the Middle East in addition to funding contributions and weapon system modernization," he added.

NATO leaders in their declaration also displayed a clearly stated objective to increase the number of joint military exercises and to establish a security presence along their eastern borders with Russia, Rasmussen noted.

The growing tensions expressed at the summit looked likely to endure, Rasmussen said, adding that China and Russia should react with patience but determination against the growing hostility they faced from the West.

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Biden Says 'Correct' When Asked If European Allies Worried Trump Would Weaken NATO

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden during a press conference confirmed that European allies are concerned a potential Trump presidency would weaken NATO and US

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support for Ukraine.
"They're correct," Biden said on Thursday when asked if European allies worry Trump would weaken NATO and Ukraine.
Biden added that he is the best qualified presidential candidate in the US election to ensure Ukraine does not fall.

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Biden on His Campaign: Not In it For His Legacy, Wants to Complete Job He Started

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden during a press conference after the NATO summit said his decision to continue his presidential bid is not about protecting his legacy, but about completing the job he started.
"I'm not in this for my legacy. I'm in this to complete the job I started," Biden said on Thursday.
Biden's response was related to a question about whether he's concerned his campaign might continue to struggle amid calls from Democrats to step aside and prevent his legacy as US president from declining.

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Biden Says He Is Just Going to Keep Moving, Has More Work To Do

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said during the press conference after the NATO Summit in Washington DC that he will continue to keep moving in his position as he has more work to do.
" I am just going to keep moving, keep moving because, look, I've got more work to do," Biden said on Thursday.

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Biden Mistakenly Refers to Ukraine's Zelenskyy as Putin During Introduction at NATO Event

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"And now I want to hand it over to the President of Ukraine who has as much courage as he has determination. Ladies and gentlemen, President Putin," Biden said when introducing Zelenskyy to the podium on stage.
Biden immediately corrected himself, saying that he was so focused on beating Putin.
The NATO leaders standing behind Putin appeared confused by Biden's mistake as most of them withheld their applause.
A White House press pool reporter in the room said the audience "gasped" at Biden's mistake.

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This mishap occurred as Biden faces major backlash in his reelection campaign over concerns about his cognitive state and ability to serve another four years in the White House. Biden, 81, is the oldest US president in history and would be 86 at the end of a potential second term.

A growing number of Democratic lawmakers are calling on Biden to drop out of the presidential race.

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US Army Orders $251Mln More UM-60M Black Hawk Helicopters From Sikorsky - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - Sikorsky has received a more than a quarter-billion-dollar contract extension from the US Army to build more UH-60M Black Hawk combat helicopters, the Defense Department announced.

"Sikorsky [of] Stratford, Connecticut, was awarded a $251,483,904 modification ...contract for UH-60M aircraft," the Defense Department said in a press release on Thursday.

"Work on the extended contract will be performed in Stratford, Connecticut over the next three years with an estimated completion date of June 30, 2027," the release said.

Fiscal 2024 aircraft procurement, Army funds and Foreign Military Sales for Croatia and Jordan funds in the amount of $251,483,904, were obligated at the time of the award, the release added.

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UPDATE- Michigan Democrat Rep. Joins Calls for Biden to Abandon Reelection Campaign

(updates paras 6-8)

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - US Rep. Hillary Scholten of West Michigan joined the ranks of Democrats calling on President Joe Biden to end his bid for reelection and allow another candidate to take his place as the 2024 nominee.

"We just have too much at stake in this election to sit on the sidelines and be silent while we still have time to do something," Scholten told the Detroit News on Thursday.

Scholten said the decision to run is Biden's alone but urged him to drop out of the race, saying he must do so "for the good of the democracy."

Though Scholten praised Biden's political legacy, she said her top concern is about governance. Scholten said that the American people can no longer ignore Biden's poor debate performance two weeks ago and her constituents' confidence in his leadership is shaken.

The congresswoman is the first lawmaker from the battleground state to urge Biden to abandon his campaign.

Three other congressional Democrats joined her plea on Thursday: Brad Schneider of Illinois, Greg Stanton of Arizona, and Ed Case of Hawaii. At least nine other House Democrats and one Senate Democrat have publicly called on Biden to step aside.

"This has nothing to do with his character and record. If it did, there would be no decision to

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make. This is solely about the future, about the President's ability to continue in the most difficult job in the world for another four-year term," said Case in a statement.

The statements come as President Biden prepares for a news conference Thursday evening to dispel doubts about his leadership ability.

Unless he drops out, Biden is expected to be renominated in six weeks at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago on August 19-22.

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UNGA Adopts Resolution Calling on Russia to Withdraw Troops From Ukraine, Zaporizhzhia NPP

UNITED NATIONS, July 12 (Sputnik) - The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution calling on Russia to withdraw its forces from Ukrainian territory and from the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (NPP), a Sputnik correspondent reported from the scene.

The resolution was adopted in the UN General Assembly hall with 99 states voting in favor, 60 states abstaining and nine states voting against the draft resolution.

"I think it is obvious to all reasonable people present here that such a sensitive and specialized issue should be discussed in the UN Office in Vienna, under the auspices of the agency that possesses the relevant mandate, expertise and competence for this purpose" Polyanskiy said after the vote.

Asked why so many countries abstained from voting, Polyanskiy said numerous states complained that the resolution was introduced and provided to them only the previous day in what he called a "non-transparent process."

The resolution demands that Russia "immediately cease its aggression against Ukraine and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders."

The resolution also demands that Russia withdraw its military and other personnel from the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant and return the plant to the full control of the authorities in Kiev.

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Western States Willing to Undermine IAEA Efforts to Vote on Ukraine Resolution -Polyanskiy

UNITED NATIONS, July 12 (Sputnik) - Ukraine and its Western allies are prepared to undermine IAEA-established nuclear safety pillars to secure a UN General Assembly vote urging Russia to withdraw from the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative Dmitry Polyanskiy said.

“...They are willing to make many sacrifices and even undermine the IAEA’s efforts to ensure the nuclear safety and security of the ZNPP,” Polyanskiy said on Thursday before a vote demanding Russia hand over control of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant to Ukraine.

The resolution demands that Russia withdraw its forces from Ukraine, and remove

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unauthorized personnel from the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, returning control to Ukraine's authorities.

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NATO-Ukraine Council Says Russia Has Not Shown Genuine Openness to Lasting Peace

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - The leaders of the NATO-Ukraine Council said in a joint statement that Russia has not shown a genuine openness to lasting peace in Ukraine despite Russian President Vladimir Putin repeatedly saying that Moscow is open to any dialogue that takes into account its interests.

"Russia has not shown any genuine openness to a just and lasting peace," the NATO-Ukraine Council said in the statement on Thursday.

The statement further mentioned that NATO will support integrated air and missile defense architecture for Ukraine to facilitate full interoperability with the alliance.

In June, Putin said Russia would enter a ceasefire and start talks with Ukraine as soon as Kiev withdrew troops from Russia-controlled regions and abandoned plans to join NATO. Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy rejected the proposal, calling it an ultimatum.

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Photos, Videos Prove Kiev Children Hospital Hit by Ukraine Missile -Russian Diplomat at UN

UNITED NATIONS, July 12 (Sputnik) - The evidence from numerous photos and videos prove that a Ukrainian anti-aircraft missile hit the children's hospital in Kiev, Russian diplomat at the United Nations Sergei Leonidchenko said.

"We would like to once again stress that the numerous photos and videos of the incident clearly show that the hospital was hit by a Ukrainian anti-aircraft missile," Leonidchenko said in the UN General Assembly hall on Thursday.

The Russian diplomat made the comment in response to a claim by Ukraine’s representative earlier that Russia hit the hospital in Kiev.

Ukrainian representatives have avoided mentioning that the Ukrainian military has used at least three facilities in close proximity to the affected children's hospital in Kiev.

The Russian Defense Ministry said on Monday that Ukrainian claims about a deliberate Russian strike on civilian targets in Ukraine do not correspond to reality. Footage from the incident shows that the damage to the children's hospital was caused by a Ukrainian air-defense missile launched from a weapon's system in the city, the Defense Ministry added.

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Man Arrested for Allegedly Asking Agent to Destroy Energy Facilities - US Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - A New Jersey man has been arrested for allegedly asking an undercover law enforcement agent to destroy electrical substations while he himself was planning to flee to Ukraine, the US Justice Department said on Thursday.

"Andrew Takhistov was allegedly on his way to Ukraine to join the Russian Volunteer Corps [terrorist organization, banned in Russia] when we arrested him on charges of recruiting an individual to destroy an electrical substation here in the United States in order to advance his white supremacist ideology," US Attorney General Merrick Garland said in a statement.

Takhistov allegedly asked the undercover agent to sabotage electrical substations after he fled to Ukraine, the statement said.

The US authorities arrested Takhistov at an airport, where he was planning to travel to Ukraine via Paris, the statement said.

Takhistov specifically wanted to join the Russian Volunteer Corps because of its "openly National Socialist" nature, the statement said. Takhistov encouraged violence against certain ethnic and religious communities online, as well as praised mass shooters, the statement said.

The Russian Volunteer Corps is based in Ukraine and fights against Russian forces, although the Ukrainian military denies any official connection to the group.

Takhistov is charged with one count of soliciting another individual to engage in criminal conduct that involved destroying a public service enterprise group circuit breaker and substation, the statement said. Takhistov faces up to ten years in prison if convicted, the statement added.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) -

NATO SUMMIT

* The steps NATO agreed on to undertake at the alliance's summit in Washington will force Russia to take deterrence measures, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Thursday.

* Russia regrets that NATO still has no agenda other than its own dominance and the alliance's leaders will be punished for promoting their misconceptions, Ryabkov said.

* Canada expects to fully meet its NATO commitment and spend 2% of GDP on defense by 2032, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said.

BRICS

* Respect for the others' interests and reliance on democracy are the key cooperation principles among the BRICS countries, Russian President Vladimir Putin told the BRICS Parliamentary

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Forum.
* BRICS pays great attention to the share of national currencies in settlements between countries, Putin said.
* There is a possibility that a BRICS parliament will be created in the future, Putin said.
* The goal of Russia's BRICS presidency is to create favorable conditions for the development of all participants of the association, Putin said.

US DEPLPOYNG MISSILES IN GERMANY
* The decision by the United States to deploy long-range missiles to Germany will not strengthen the security of Western Europe and will only bring about new problems, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said.
* The decision is a "very good" one, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said.
* NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said that he welcomes the announcement of the United States on the deployment of long-range missiles in Germany.

ISRAEL-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT
* White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Thursday that the United States sees the possibility that Israel and Hamas may reach an agreement on a ceasefire and a release of the remaining hostages.
* The United States anticipates that it will wind down Gaza pier operations soon, Sullivan said.
* White House Coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa Brett McGurk informed Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant that some of the critical ammunition, the delivery of which was previously delayed, will be sent to Israel in the coming days, the Israeli Defense Ministry said.

WESTERN AID TO UKRAINE
* US President Joe Biden during a meeting with Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Thursday announced that he has authorized the Defense Department to deliver a new weapons package to Ukraine.
* White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said that the hundreds of F-16 fighter jets being transferred to Ukraine will be based in the country.
* The United States is providing Ukraine with a new $225 million aid package including one Patriot air defense battery, the Defense Department said.
* The European Union, over a dozen individual EU countries, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Japan released a joint statement, dubbed Ukraine Compact, and pledged to accelerate military aid to Kiev.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE
* The United States has not greenlighted the use of ATACMS for strikes deep into Russia, despite Volodymyr Zelenskyy's calls, White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said on Thursday.
* The United States violates the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) by supplying toxic chemicals to Ukraine during a military conflict, Russian Ambassador to the Netherlands and Permanent Representative to the OPCW Vladimir Tarabrin said.
* The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) is ready to take part in the process of the peaceful settlement of the conflict in Ukraine, IPU President Tulia Ackson told Russian President Vladimir

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Putin during a meeting.
* There are leaders in the West who have an objective point of view on the situation in Ukraine, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.
* Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova described a Ukrainian drone strike that injured children in the Belgorod Region as a deliberate terrorist attack.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) –
NATO SUMMIT IN WASHINGTON
* The alliance does not see any military threat coming from Russia at the moment, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said on Wednesday.
* There will be no globalization of NATO, as the alliance will remain regional but will respond to "global threats," Stoltenberg said.
* NATO will declare Russia a "long-term threat" at the ongoing summit in Washington, Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas said.
* US President Joe Biden said that the NATO alliance cannot be allowed to fall behind Russia with respect to defense production.
* Moscow is not expecting any surprises from the ongoing NATO summit in Washington, and the decisions made there will be directed towards escalation of the situation in Ukraine, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko said.
WESTERN SUPPORT TO UKRAINE
* The NATO states are still negotiating on the wording for Ukraine's membership in the final communique of the summit, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said on Wednesday.
* Stoltenberg said that the United States, Italy, Romania, the Netherlands and another member of the alliance will make promises on the supply of five more new air defense systems for Ukraine.
* It is still too early to say when Ukraine will become a NATO member, Stoltenberg said.
* There can be no discussion of Ukraine's membership in NATO, as this would mean a direct conflict between the alliance and Russia, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto said.
* Acting Prime Minister of Belgium Alexander De Croo said that he expects the new government of his country to fulfill a promise on delivery of F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine.
* US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Wednesday that a transfer of F-16s fighter jets was currently underway from Europe to Ukraine.
US RESTRICTIONS ON RUSSIA
* The United States will increase tariffs on products from Mexico that contain aluminum originating in China, Russia, Belarus or Iran, President Joe Biden said.
* The US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) issued a general license, authorizing certain transactions involving the Russian Central Bank, Ministry of Finance and National Wealth Fund.
CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

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* The Russian armed forces have hit hiding spots in the Ukraine-controlled part of the Zaporozhye (also known as Zaporizhzhia) Region where heavy weapons were kept, the coordinator of the pro-Russian underground network in Nikolaev (Mykolaiv), Sergey Lebedev, told Sputnik on Wednesday.
* The Ukrainian armed forces have lost up to 600 soldiers in battles with Russia's Yug (South) group of forces in the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
* Everything that is taking place now in the Kharkov direction (also known as Kharkiv) is aimed at ensuring the security of Russia's Belgorod, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

OPEC REPORT

* OPEC has kept its forecast for the oil production growth in 2024 outside the organization at 1.23 million barrels per day and expects an increase to 53 million barrels per day, the organization said in its fresh report on Wednesday.
* Oil production in Russia in June decreased compared to the previous month by 114,000 barrels per day and amounted to 9.139 million barrels per day, according to a fresh report.
* OPEC has slightly upgraded its forecast for the United States' oil and condensate production in 2024 to 13.23 million barrels per day, according to the organization's fresh report.
* The OPEC+ countries that participate in the oil deal have decreased output by 125,000 barrels per day to 40.801 million barrels per day in May compared to April, OPEC said.
* The oil production in OPEC countries has decreased by 80,000 barrels per day in June and averaged at 26.57 million barrels per day, the organization said.

PUTIN-MODI TALKS

* The talks between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not contain any disagreements, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Wednesday.
* The result of Modi's trip to Moscow has confirmed that India considers Russia as its strategic partner of the same importance as the United States, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko said.

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Kirby Says US Must Think 'Very Carefully' About Risks in Allowing Ukraine to Strike Russia

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - The United States must think very carefully of potential consequences before allowing Ukraine to use US-supplied missiles to strike military targets deeper inside Russian territory, White House National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby said on Thursday.

"We have to think very carefully with every decision we make with respect to not only what we're providing Ukraine, but how that stuff is being used, so that we can also make sure we pay proper attention to the risk of escalation here in this conflict," Kirby said in an interview with CNN.

The United States is restricting Ukraine at present from conducting strikes deep inside Russian territory with US-supplied weapons, including with long-range Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS).

Russian President Vladimir Putin has warned NATO nations that they should realize "what they

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are playing with" when they allow Ukraine to use Western weapons to strike deep into Russian territory. Putin added that Russia will use all means at its disposal if its sovereignty and territorial integrity are threatened.

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Raytheon Secures $1.2Bln Contract for Patriot Air Defense Systems to Germany - Release

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - Raytheon announced in a release on Thursday that it has been awarded a $1.2 billion contract to supply Germany with additional Patriot air and missile defense systems.

"Raytheon, an RTX (NYSE: RTX) business, was awarded a $1.2 billion contract to supply Germany with additional Patriot air and missile defense systems," the release said.

Germany's air defense infrastructure will be augmented with additional Patriot systems, including the latest radars, launchers, command and control stations as well as additional support equipment, the release added.

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US Upset With Putin-Modi Meeting Amid NATO Summit, Requested Rescheduling - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration was upset with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin while NATO held a summit in Washington, the Washington Post reported on Thursday.

The Biden administration told India that the timing of Modi's meeting with Putin would complicate "optics" amid the summit, the report said, citing several US officials familiar with the matter.

US Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell spoke with Indian Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra last month in an effort to encourage India to reschedule the Modi-Putin meeting so as not to coincide with the NATO summit, the report said.

Earlier this week, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said that the United States made its concerns about India's ties to Russia clear.

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Hungary's Orban to Meet With Trump in Florida This Evening - Source

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban will meet with former US President Donald Trump in Florida later this evening, a source familiar with planning told Sputnik on Thursday.

"Can confirm," the source said when asked about reports of the Trump-Orban meeting.

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Orban will travel to Florida after attending the final day of the NATO Washington Summit. Orban recently met with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping as part of his diplomatic effort to open up lines of communication to resolve the conflict in Ukraine.
White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan told reporters earlier that Orban's travels have not been aligned with US foreign policy.

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US Sending to Ukraine 'Older' Patriot Battery, Valued at $100Mln - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - The United States is providing Ukraine an older Patriot battery valued at $100 million in its latest security assistance package, a Defense Department spokesperson told Sputnik on Thursday.
Earlier in the day, the United States announced it is providing Ukraine with a new $225 million aid package that includes one Patriot battery. The price tag on a new Patriot battery system is about $1 billion.
"We are drawing down older equipment that does not have the same value as a new procurement," the spokesperson said. "$100M [million] is the depreciated/PDA value of the Patriot battery that was transferred."
The new aid package was authorized through the Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA), which allows the Defense Department to donate to Ukraine from US military stockpiles.
The package also provides Ukraine with NASAMS munitions, Stinger missiles, HIMARS ammunition, artillery rounds, TOW equipment, and missiles, Javelin and AT-4 systems, small arms ammunition, demolitions munitions, various spare parts and maintenance items, according to the Pentagon.

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US Sending to Ukraine 'Older' Patriot Battery, Valued at $100Mln - Pentagon

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The package also provides Ukraine with NASAMS munitions, Stinger missiles, HIMARS

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ammunition, artillery rounds, TOW equipment, and missiles, Javelin and AT-4 systems, small arms ammunition, demolitions munitions, various spare parts and maintenance items, according to the Pentagon.

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Austin, Blinken Have Talks with Japan, Australia and Philippines in Next Months - Official

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Secretary of State Antony Blinken have set a series of joint meetings with their counterparts from the Philippines, Japan, and Australia over the coming months that are expected to produce key deliverables, US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Ely Ratner said on Thursday.

"I should note as well that the Secretary [Austin] and Secretary Blinken have scheduled a series of 2+2s over the next couple of months also with Japan and then with Australia," Ratner said during a discussion hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Blinken and Austin are expected to meet with Filipino counterparts Enrique Manalo and Gilbert Teodoro at the end of July.

According to Ratner, the meeting between the US and Filipino officials is expected to reveal big new initiatives.

Bilateral work between the United States and the Philippines serves a broader regional strategy, whether it's about force posture, capability, or support, it's occurring on a regional scale, Ratner added.

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Wisconsin's Civic Media Says Biden Campaign Requested Edits to July 4 Interview

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - Wisconsin-based radio network Civic Media said on Thursday that the Biden campaign requested edits to an interview with US President Joe Biden on July 4.

"On Monday, July 8th, it was reported to Civic Media management that immediately after the phone interview was recorded, the Biden campaign called and asked for two edits to the recording before it aired. Civic Media management immediately undertook an investigation and determined that the production team at the time viewed the edits as non-substantive and broadcast and published the interview with two short segments removed," Civic Media said in a statement.

The original interview edited out lines by Biden regarding the number of black people in his administration and former US President Donald Trump's comments on the Central Park Five.

Civic Media disagrees with the production team's judgments to edit the interview at the request of the Biden campaign, the statement said.

The network also published an unedited version of the interview in the interest of transparency.

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Kennedy Says Will Transform NATO Into Alliance Dedicated to Global Disarmament

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - Independent US presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said on Thursday that he will transform NATO into an alliance focused on global disarmament if elected in 2024.

"As President I won't disband NATO. I will transform NATO into a true peace alliance dedicated to global disarmament," Kennedy said via the social media platform X.

NATO should have declared its mission accomplished after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Kennedy said. Instead, NATO became an expansionist, offensive alliance that provokes war and flows money to military contractors, Kennedy said.

On Tuesday, Kennedy said that NATO's top priority appears to be waging war instead of maintaining peace.

Kennedy's statements come amid the NATO summit in Washington.

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US Encouraged By Reduction in Engagements With Chinese Military in Indo-Pacific - Official

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - The United States is encouraged by the reduction in tense engagements between US and Chinese military forces in the Indo-Pacific region, US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Ely Ratner said on Thursday.

"There continue to be activities in the skies in the Indo-Pacific that are of concern against US forces who are operating legally in accordance with international law, however, the rate of the activities that I spoke about over the last couple years ago has in fact decreased and that is encouraging," Ratner said during a discussion hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Ratner said the United States is concerned about China's behavior towards allies and partners in the East Asian littoral and the South China Sea.

China has been engaged in disputes with several Asia-Pacific countries, including the Philippines, over the territorial affiliation of a number of islands and reefs in the South China Sea. In July 2016, following a lawsuit filed by the Philippines, the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague ruled that China has no grounds for territorial claims in the South China Sea. The court ruled that the islands are not disputed territory and do not constitute an exclusive economic zone. Beijing did not recognize or accept the ruling.

In May, the Philippines pledged to increase defense cooperation with the United States, Japan and Australia. The four allies also held their first joint naval exercise in the disputed South China Sea in April with the stated goal of enhancing regional stability.

China has criticized the formation of exclusive alliances that have increased bloc confrontations

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in the region.

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Majority of US Voters Believe Biden Not Running White House - Poll

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - A majority of likely voters in the United States believe that President Joe Biden is not actually in charge at the White House, a new Rasmussen Reports poll revealed on Thursday.

Most respondents, 52%, believe that other people are making decisions for Biden behind the scenes, a report on the poll said.

Thirty-eight percent (38%) of respondents believe Biden is really serving as president, down from 40% last year, the poll report said.

The poll comes following a lackluster debate performance by Biden against Republican challenger Donald Trump. Biden's performance has sparked concerns among some Democrats about his viability as a candidate.

The poll surveyed 1,103 likely US voters from July 7-9. The poll maintains a margin of error of plus-or-minus three percentage points with a 95% confidence level.

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UPDATE - Canada Expects to Reach NATO 2% GPD Defense Spending Commitment by 2032 – Trudeau

(Updates with more details in paras 3-6)

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - Canada expects to fully meet its NATO commitment and spend 2% of GDP on defense by 2032, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Thursday.

"Canada fully expects to reach NATO's 2% of GDP spending target by 2032," Trudeau said during a press conference.

Ottawa will continue to explore opportunities that might further increase the country's military spending through regular review cycles into Canada's defense and a new defense policy update in 2028, Trudeau said.

The current global context requires Canada to step up its defense spending, Trudeau said, highlighted the C$175 billion ($128 billion) increase since he took office in 2015.

National Defense Minister Bill Blair further said that throughout the several past weeks, Canada has demonstrated to its allies there is a credible and verifiable path to the 2% benchmark. However, Ottawa's commitment to NATO goes farther than just a GDP figure.

"We know there's a great deal of work to do, but respectfully, I think Canada's obligations to our NATO partners and to our own citizens, in the defense of our country, requires more than a little

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bit of accounting," Blair said.

In mid-April, the Ministry of National Defense released its defense policy update that said Canada plans to invest in defense C$8.1 billion ($6 billion) over the next five years and C$73 billion over the next 20 years. The increased spending would bring Canada's defense budget to 1.76% of its GDP by 2029-2030.

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US Unveils New $225Mln Ukraine Aid Package, Includes One Patriot Battery - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - The United States is providing Ukraine with a new $225 million aid package including one Patriot battery, the Department of Defense said in a statement on Thursday.

"This Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA) package, which has an estimated value of $225 million, will provide Ukraine additional capabilities to meet its most urgent needs, including air defense systems and interceptors; munitions for rocket systems and artillery; and anti-tank weapons," the statement said.

The package includes one Patriot battery, NASAMS munitions, Stinger missiles, HIMARS ammunition, artillery rounds, TOW equipment, and missiles, Javelin and AT-4 systems, small arms ammunition, demolitions munitions, various spare parts and maintenance items, according to the statement.

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NATO Washington Summit Declaration Presents Exercise in Fantasy - Veteran CIA Analyst

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - NATO's declaration at its Washington summit celebrating the Alliance's 75th birthday this week proved to be a fantasy document depicting the world as a group of privileged players who have the right to tell all other nations and peoples what to do, former CIA senior analyst Philip Giraldi told Sputnik on Thursday.

"This is what I regard as a fantasy document depicting a world as a group of privileged players would like to see it shaped by a 'rules based' order, dictated by those who know better toward the lesser folk without the law who need to be guided in their behavior," Giraldi said.

If the rest of the nations do not conform to the diktat, war by the allegedly "defensive" alliance is in the cards for them, Giraldi said.

The 32-nation alliance unveiled its new declaration on Thursday in which it pledged to adhere to international law and to the purposes and principles of the UN Charter. However, the declaration made no reference to seeking to negotiate with Russia and China for mutual agreement or compromises on interpretations of what is the "rules-based international order"; instead, it declared repeatedly its rejection of the policies it alleged were being pursued by Moscow and Beijing.

Giraldi said the declaration was produced not to provide any realistic assessment of the

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evolving new 21st century multi-polar world, but in denial of it.

"The only problem is that the world has shifted on its axis due to the heavy (American mostly) hand that has come down on the miscreants, leading to a walk away from the Bretton Woods dollar dominance that has made the whole system work and towards a BRICS [Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa]-type laissez faire national economic management," Giraldi said.

As the United States and the European Union lost absolute and relative economic and industrial power to other rising regions of the world, their influence and that of NATO must inevitably decline too, he said.

"As the money and natural resources go, the power to exercise self-determination go with it," Giraldi said.

Therefore, the post-Cold War world where NATO could act with impunity and demolish nations like Serbia and Libya at will was now over, Giraldi said.

"Goodbye NATO, it's been fun! Well, no, it really hasn't," Giraldi added.

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President Biden Allies See No Chance of Re-Election, Urge Him to Step Down - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden's key allies, including three campaign insiders, believe his re-election chances are zero and fear his candidacy could harm other Democrats, NBC News reported Thursday.

According to the report, the number of Democrats who think Biden should reconsider his decision to stay in the race has grown, with many believing he should exit and let Vice President Kamala Harris take the nomination.

On Monday, Biden sent a letter to Democratic lawmakers to reassure them that he is "firmly committed" to staying in the presidential race despite his poor showing in the first presidential debate last month.

Biden appeared confused and incoherent throughout his first debate with Trump on June 27, reinforcing rather than refuting ongoing concerns about his cognitive abilities at age 81. His poor performance has led some Democratic politicians and donors to call for his removal as a candidate.

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new us aid for Ukraine has estimated value of $225mln, includes air defense systems, interceptors, munitions, anti-tank weapons - Pentagon

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Biden Campaign Fails to Win Over Haley Voters After Debate Debacle - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - The Biden campaign held a call with a group of people who supported former Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley but failed to win them over, Axios reported on Thursday.

The Haley voters expressed concerns about Biden while also declining to throw their support behind presumptive Republican Party nominee Donald Trump, the report said, citing two sources on the call.

The Biden campaign has been attempting to win over Haley voters, which they view as persuadable, the report said.

Although one Haley voter said that they could not vote for Trump due to the January 6, 2021 US Capitol riot, they added that they are not confident in Biden either after his lackluster debate performance against Trump, the report said.

Biden's debate performance has also sparked concerns among Democrats, prompting some Democratic lawmakers to call on Biden to end his campaign and step aside for an alternative nominee.

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US, Philippines Will Soon Announce Steps to Bolster Security Ties - Defense Official

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - The United States and Philippines are preparing to announce the next steps to strengthen defense cooperation between the two countries in the coming months, US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Ely Ratner said on Thursday.

"We're poised to deliver so much more together in the future, including in the coming months," Ratner said during a discussion hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "As you've seen publicly, the United States and the Philippines are discussing the conclusion of a General Security of Military Information Agreement that will strengthen and expand our information sharing."

The Biden administration will also soon have more to announce on plans to help the Philippines through foreign military financing included in the Indo-Pacific national security supplemental that Congress passed this spring.

Tensions between the Philippines and China have been on the rise in the South China Sea due to territorial disputes.

In May, the Philippines pledged to increase defense cooperation with the United States, Japan and Australia. The four allies also held their first joint naval exercise in the disputed South China Sea in April with the stated goal of enhancing regional stability.

China criticized the formation of exclusive alliances that increased bloc confrontations in the region.

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UN Welcomed US Pier When Functioning But Will Push for Road Aid Transfers - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, July 11 (Sputnik) - The United Nations was pleased when the US-built pier aimed to facilitate aid deliveries into Gaza was functioning but the organization will continue to advocate for more route deliveries, UN Spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Thursday.

"We welcomed the pier as an additional resource while it worked but we will keep pushing for what we actually need, which is a large-scale road transfer of aid into Gaza," Dujarric said.

The United Nations has said on several occasions that the US-built pier cannot replace road aid deliveries to the residents of Gaza.

Earlier on Thursday, White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said the United States anticipates that it will wind down its Gaza pier operations soon.

Pentagon spokesperson Patrick Ryder said in a separate statement that details on the process and timing of plans to close the temporary pier will be announced in the coming days.

Ryder explained that US military personnel struggled to anchor the pier to the beach in Gaza on Wednesday due to technical and weather-related issues. The pier has been moved to Ashdod, off the Israeli coast, where it will remain until further notice, but a re-anchoring date has not been set yet, Ryder said.

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UN Spokesperson Says World Without Nuclear Weapons Only Way to Ensure Safety

UNITED NATIONS, July 11 (Sputnik) - UN Spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Thursday that the only way to be safe from nuclear weapons is to not have any in the world.

"… the only way to be safe from nuclear weapons is to be in a world free of nuclear weapons," Dujarric said in the UN briefing to journalists when asked about the UN's position on NATO's goal to modernize nuclear weapons.

NATO said in its Washington Summit Declaration published on Wednesday that the alliance remains committed to taking all necessary steps to ensure the effectiveness and security of the nuclear deterrence mission of the coalition.

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Biden Tells Zelenskyy He Authorized New Weapons Package for Ukraine

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden during a meeting with Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Thursday announced that he has authorized the Defense Department to deliver a new weapons package to Ukraine.

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"Today, I'm proud to announce a new security assistance package for Ukraine. This will be the eighth package I have authorized since we signed the National Security bill. The secretary of defense can talk about what the details of all that are, I signed it yesterday - last night I guess," Biden said as he met Zelensky on the sidelines of the NATO summit in Washington.

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More Air Defenses in Ukraine 'Most Effective Way' to Stop Russian Attacks - White House

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - Providing more air defense systems in Ukraine is the most effective way to protect the country from Russian attacks, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Thursday.

"Our position is: let's get that air defense into Ukraine so Ukraine can shoot them down. That is the most effective way to protect these guys in Ukraine," Sullivan said when asked to comment on the agreement reached between Ukraine and Poland that includes a provision on downing Russian missiles from Polish territory.

On Monday, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed a ten-year security cooperation agreement on providing for the interception of Russian missiles and drones.

The agreement includes a provision for shooting down Russian missiles and drones in Ukraine's airspace that are fired in the direction of Poland, but Warsaw would need to consult with NATO allies before it moves forward with this plan.

Sullivan emphasized in his comment that the United States urges each ally to send as many air defense systems to Ukraine as they can.

Russia has consistently warned against the West's continued arms deliveries to Ukraine, saying that they only prolong the conflict without changing its outcome.

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Canada Expects to Reach NATO 2% GPD Defense Spending Commitment by 2032 – Trudeau

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - Canada expects to fully meet its NATO commitment and spend 2% of GDP on defense by 2032, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Thursday.

"Canada fully expects to reach NATO's 2% of GDP spending target by 2032," Trudeau said during a press conference.

In mid-April, the Ministry of National Defense released its defense policy update that said Canada plans to invest in defense C$8.1 billion ($6 billion) over the next five years and C$73 billion over the next 20 years. The increased spending would bring Canada's defense budget to 1.76% of its GDP by 2029-2030.

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Michigan Democrat Rep. Joins Calls for Biden to Abandon Reelection Campaign

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - US Rep. Hillary Scholten of West Michigan on Thursday joined the ranks of Democrats calling on President Joe Biden to end his bid for reelection and allow another candidate to take his place as the 2024 nominee.

"We just have too much at stake in this election to sit on the sidelines and be silent while we still have time to do something," Scholten told the Detroit News.

Scholten said the decision to run is Biden's alone but urged him to drop out of the race, saying he must do so "for the good of the democracy."

Though Scholten praised Biden's long-lived legacy, she said her top concern is about governance. Scholten said that the American people can no longer ignore Biden's poor debate performance two weeks ago and her constituents' confidence in his leadership is shaken.

The congresswoman is the first lawmaker from the battleground state to urge Biden to abandon his campaign. At least nine other House Democrats and one Senate Democrat have publicly called on Biden to step aside.

Unless he drops out, Biden is expected to be renominated in six weeks at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago on August 19-22.

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Biden Tells S. Korea President US Will Deter N. Korea With 'Full Range of Capabilities'

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden has assured his South Korean (ROK) counterpart Yoon Suk-yeol that the United States will deter North Korean (DPRK) attacks with "full range of capabilities," the White House said on Thursday.

"The Presidents reaffirmed their commitments in the US-ROK Washington Declaration and highlighted that any nuclear attack by the DPRK against the ROK will be met with a swift, overwhelming, and decisive response. President Biden reiterated that the US commitment to extended deterrence to the ROK is backed by the full range of US capabilities, including nuclear," the White House said in a statement.

Earlier on Thursday, Biden and Yoon met to reaffirm the advancements in US-South Korea security cooperation on extended deterrence since the two countries reached the Washington Declaration in April 2023.

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US Anticipates Will Wind Down Gaza Pier Operations Soon - White House

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(Updates with more details in paras 3-5)

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - The United States anticipates that it will wind down its Gaza pier operations soon, White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said on Thursday.

"I do anticipate that in relatively short order we will wind down pier operations," Sullivan said on the margins of the NATO summit in Washington.

Pentagon spokesperson Patrick Ryder said in a separate statement that details on the process and timing of plans to close the temporary pier will be announced in the coming days.

Ryder explained that US military personnel struggled to anchor the pier to the beach in Gaza on Wednesday due to technical and weather-related issues.

The pier has been moved to Ashdod, off the Israeli coast, where it will remain until further notice, but a re-anchoring date has not been set yet, Ryder said.

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George Clooney Notified Obama Ahead of Op-Ed Calling on Biden to End Campaign - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - US actor George Clooney notified former president Barack Obama of his plans to call on current officeholder Joe Biden to end his reelection bid ahead of the publication of his op-ed, Politico reported on Thursday.

Obama did not advise Clooney on what to say in the article but did not object to it either, the report said, citing people familiar with the exchange.

Clooney is one of numerous prominent figures, including some Democratic lawmakers, who have called on Biden to end his campaign, following a lackluster debate performance against Republican challenger Donald Trump last month.

Former US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has also expressed concerns about Biden's viability as a candidate, the report said, citing lawmakers and people who have spoken with her or are familiar with such conversations.

Pelosi has encouraged House Democrats in competitive districts to do what they must to secure reelection, including calling on Biden to end his campaign, the report said.

Pelosi also urged members who are not in swing districts to take their concerns about Biden directly to the White House or his campaign, although some have not been able to reach them, the report said.

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White House Believes Israel-Hamas Agreement Possible - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) – White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said Thursday that the United States "sees the possibility" of Israel and Hamas reaching an agreement on a ceasefire and the release of hostages.

"We see progress. We see the possibility of reaching [an] agreement. Obviously, I can't guarantee that because there's a lot of details to be hammered through ... We think that the

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remaining issues can be resolved, should be resolved, and we're going to keep driving until we actually get a deal," Sullivan said on the margins of the NATO summit in Washington.

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Sullivan Says Cannot Share Details on Number of Jets, Time of Delivery of F-16s to Ukraine

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said on Thursday that he is unable to reveal any details, including the timing and numbers, of the transfer of F-16s to Ukraine.
"I think it's a completely fair question to ask for details on numbers, exact dates, exact places, and those are just things I can't share for operational reasons. What we have said is that the transfer is underway and that Ukrainian pilots will be operating in theater this summer in F-16s," Sullivan said.

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F-16s En Route to Ukraine Will be Based in Ukraine – White House

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) – White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said Thursday that the hundreds of F-16 fighter jets being transferred to Ukraine will be based in Ukraine.
"The F-16s will be based in Ukraine," Sullivan said during a press briefing.

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Sullivan Says Orban's Ukraine Peace Mission 'Adventurism' Inconsistent With US Policy

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said on Thursday that Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's peace efforts to resolve the Ukrainian conflict are "adventurism" undertaken without Ukraine's support and not in line with US policy.
"Whatever adventurism is being undertaken without Ukraine's consent or support is not something that's consistent with our policy, the foreign policy of the United States," Sullivan said.

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US Says Has Not Allowed Use of ATACMS to Strike Deep Into Russia Despite Zelenskyy's Calls

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - The United States has not greenlighted the use of ATACMS for strikes deep into Russia, despite Volodymyr Zelenskyy's calls, White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said on Thursday.

"We have not authorized the use of ATACMS for deep strikes into Russia," Sullivan said.

On Tuesday, Zelenskyy called on the US to allow Ukraine to conduct deeper strikes inside Russia using US-supplied weapons.

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UPDATE - US House Rejects Resolution to Hold Garland in Inherent Contempt of Congress

(Updates with more details in para 8; changes date in lede)

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives rejected a resolution on Thursday to hold US Attorney General Merrick Garland in inherent contempt of Congress and fine him $10,000 a day until he complies with a subpoena he defied.

House lawmakers rejected the resolution in a vote of 204 in favor and 210 opposed.

Last month, the US House of Representatives passed a measure recommending that Garland be held in contempt of Congress for defying subpoenas to provide lawmakers with recordings from Special Counsel Robert Hur’s interview with US President Joe Biden as part of his investigation into Biden’s mishandling of classified materials.

However, the US Justice Department, which Garland leads, said that it will not prosecute the attorney general for contempt of Congress.

Inherent contempt is a process that allows Congress to hold an individual accountable for refusing to comply with congressional demands. The power enables lawmakers to bring an individual before the chamber for a trial by the bar and detain them in the Capitol or in Washington.

However, the resolution would instead fine Garland $10,000 per day until he complies with the subpoena to turn over the audio tapes.

Unlike civil or criminal contempt, inherent contempt does not rely on another branch of government to enforce. Relying on other branches of government to enforce contempt of Congress charges undermines the separation of powers and puts the integrity and effectiveness of the legislative process at risk, Luna said.

Luna said that House Republicans will bring the resolution back to the floor for another vote when members are present to vote. A dozen Republican members did not cast votes on the

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resolution.

Former US President Donald Trump expressed support for the resolution. Trump also called on House Republicans to subpoena special counsel Jack Smith to investigate his probe into the former president.

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Sullivan Says Months Ahead in Ukraine Will Be Difficult Regardless of New NATO Assistance

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - The months ahead on the battlefield in Ukraine will continue to be challenging regardless of the latest commitments made by NATO members at the Washington summit this week, White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said on Thursday.

"Ukraine has secured a historic set of deliverables, air defense, F-16s, additional security assistance, a compact of nations committed to supporting Ukraine for the long term and the concrete elements of a bridge to NATO, [but] doesn't mean the days ahead, the weeks ahead, the months ahead, are not going to be difficult," Sullivan said during the NATO summit in Washington.

The road ahead will be challenging as Russian President Vladimir Putin is determined to achieve his goals set out in Ukraine, Sullivan added.

Moreover, Sullivan noted that Russia's support from countries like Iran, North Korea and China also reinforce Moscow's efforts.

On Wednesday, the Chinese Embassy in Washington told Sputnik that China is not a creator of or a party to the Ukraine crisis, instead Beijing is committed to promoting peace talks. China urges the relevant countries involved in the conflict to immediately stop fueling the fight and inciting confrontation, stop slapping illegal unilateral sanctions, and play a constructive role in ending the conflict and restoring peace, the embassy added.

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US Sanctions 3 Israeli Individuals, 5 Entities Over West Bank Violence - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - The United States is imposing sanctions on three Israeli individuals and five entities for acts of violence against Palestinian civilians in the West Bank, the State Department said in a statement on Thursday.

"The United States has consistently opposed actions that undermine stability in the West Bank and the prospects for peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians alike. Today, we are imposing sanctions on three Israeli individuals and five entities connected to acts of violence against civilians in the West Bank," the statement said.

One of the targets of the sanctions is Lehava, an organization led by US-designated Ben-Zion Gopstein, which has been involved in acts of violent extremism and whose members have repeatedly committed violence against Palestinians.

"Additionally, we are imposing sanctions on four outposts that are owned or controlled by US-designated individuals who have weaponized them as bases for violent actions to displace Palestinians. Outposts like these have been used to disrupt grazing lands, limit access to wells, and launch violent attacks against neighboring Palestinians," the statement read.

The United States is deeply concerned about extremist violence and instability in the West Bank, urging Israel to take immediate action against the responsible individuals and entities, and warning of continued US accountability measures if no action is taken, the statement said.

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US Electric Vehicle Producers to Get $1.7Bln in Aid to Retool, Save Jobs - White House

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is providing a combined aid of $1.7 billion to 11 vulnerable electric vehicle (EV) manufacturing and assembly facilities in the United

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States to help them retool and save jobs, the White House and the US Energy Department said on Thursday.

"This investment will create thousands of good-paying, union manufacturing jobs and retain even more - from Lansing, Michigan to Fort Valley, Georgia - by helping auto companies retool, reboot, and rehire in the same factories and communities," President Joe Biden said in a White House statement.

Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said in a separate statement issued by the Energy Department that the government aid of $1.7 billion will complement the $177 billion generated in private sector investment for EV and battery manufacturing under the Biden administration's Investing in America agenda.

The aid will cover manufacturing for a broad range of EV products, including parts for electric motorcycles and school buses, hybrid powertrains, heavy-duty commercial truck batteries and electric suburban vehicles.

The move is expected to help thwart foreign competition, without specifically naming China, which the Biden administration views as the main threat to US EVs.

Trade Representative Katherine Tai said in April that the United States was embarking on "early decisive action" to shield its EV industry from China's price discounting and other harmful subsidies.

Granholm said in the statement that there is nothing harder to a manufacturing community than to lose jobs to foreign competition and a changing industry.

"Even as our competitors invest heavily in electric vehicles, these grants ensure that our automotive industry stays competitive - and does it in the communities and with the workforce that have supported the auto industry for generations," Granholm added.

More than half of the $1.7 billion will go to three companies in the EV business: General Motors; Stellantis NV; and ZF North America Inc., according to US media reports. GM and Stellantis will get more than $500 million each, while ZF will receive nearly $158 million.

Tesla, the pioneer of the EV industry, which has also faced a slump in business this year, will not get any help, nor will the first US automobile company, Ford.

Tesla and China's BYD are currently the world's largest electric vehicle makers, becoming direct competitors in the Chinese market as well as in much of the world. The rivalry comes as Tesla is already losing sales momentum in the United States as it delivered fewer cars in the first-quarter of 2024 than even the most bearish estimates of Wall Street analysts despite its own price cuts.

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US Sanctions Venezuela Criminal Group Tren de Aragua - Treasury

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - The US Department of the Treasury on Thursday sanctioned the Venezuela-based transnational criminal organization Tren de Aragua, according to a release.

"Today, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC)

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sanctioned Tren de Aragua, a Venezuela-based transnational criminal organization that is expanding throughout the Western Hemisphere and engaging in diverse criminal activities, such as human smuggling and trafficking, gender-based violence, money laundering, and illicit drug trafficking," the release said.

Originating as a prison gang in Aragua, Venezuela, Tren de Aragua has expanded throughout the Western Hemisphere in recent years, focusing on human smuggling and other illicit acts that target desperate migrants, the release said.

Tren de Aragua also generates revenue from criminal activities such as illegal mining, kidnapping, human trafficking, extortion and the trafficking of illicit drugs such as cocaine, the release said.

It has also infiltrated local criminal economies in South America, established transnational financial operations, laundered funds through cryptocurrency and formed ties with the US-sanctioned Brazilian organized crime group Primeiro Comando da Capital, the release added.

The US State Department announced rewards totaling up to $12 million for information leading to the arrest and/or conviction of several Tren de Aragua leaders for conspiring to participate in, or attempting to participate in, transnational organized crime.

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IMF Says Ukraine Has Sufficient Capacity to Repay Loan

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) – Ukraine has sufficient capacity to repay its $15.6 billion loan under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF), International Monetary Fund (IMF) spokesperson Julie Kozack said on Thursday.

"Our assessment is that Ukraine has sufficient capacity to repay the IMF. This is supported by both their policy commitments under the program to restore external viability and, in addition, Ukraine does benefit from added assurances provided by a significant group of creditors and donors with respect to the amounts currently outstanding to the IMF," Kozack told reporters.

The IMF sees signs of an economic slowdown in Ukraine due to the power outages and other impacts of the ongoing conflict with Russia, she said.

"Risks do remain exceptionally high, particularly due to uncertainties around the war," Kozack said.

The IMF is encouraging and working very closely with the authorities to continue delivering the "robust" macroeconomic policies and reforms, she added.

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US Fiscal Deficit 'Too High,' Time to Take Action While Economy Strong - IMF

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) – The fiscal deficit in the United States remains too high, and now it is high time to address the issue while the economy is in good condition, International

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Monetary Fund (IMF) spokesperson Julie Kozack said on Thursday.
"Now, the fiscal deficit is too high, and it is the time now, especially that the economy is strong, to take action to put debt to GDP on a decisive downward path," Kozack told reporters.
That will require a broad set of fiscal measures, and the IMF will publish full details on them in the Article IV report in the coming weeks, she added.

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US in Dangerous Security Posture With Respect to Some Clean Energy Technologies - Podesta

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - The United States is in a dangerous security posture when it comes to certain clean energy technologies, Senior Advisor to the US president for International Climate Policy John Podesta said on Thursday.
"I think we also have to recognize that we're in a dangerous security posture with respect to some of these clean technologies, very over-dependent on a single source of supply for critical minerals, for batteries, for upstream solar technologies," Podesta said at the NATO Public Forum.
Podesta called for working with European allies to develop "secure market-based and responsive supply chains."
The United States must speed up its transition to a zero carbon world in order to encourage European allies to partner with it, Podesta said.

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Trudeau Pledges $368Mln in Military Assistance, More Pilot Training for Ukraine

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) – Canada will provide an additional C$500 million ($368 million) in military assistance to Ukraine and train more Ukrainian pilots, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Thursday.
On the sidelines of the NATO summit in Washington on Wednesday, Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that he had discussed with Trudeau Ukraine's defense needs, coordinated cooperation within the fighter jets coalition and the potential expansion of the training mission for Ukrainian pilots.
"News I shared with @ZelenskyyUA in our talks at @NATO: Canada plans to reinforce Ukraine's defense with $500 million more in military support – and train more Ukrainian fighter pilots to defend their skies against Russia," Trudeau said via the X platform.
Western countries have ramped up their military and financial aid for Kiev since the start of Russia's military operation in Ukraine in February 2022. Canada alone has provided over C$14 billion in assistance, C$4.5 billion of which is of military nature.
Russia has consistently warned against the West's continued arms deliveries to Ukraine, saying that they only prolong the conflict. New supplies of weapons by the West to Kiev, including F-16 jets, cannot fundamentally change the situation on the ground, Kremlin

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spokesman Dmitry Peskov previously said .

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US Shipbuilding Industry Too Small to Meet US Demand for More Icebreakers - Official

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - The US shipbuilding industry is too small and not efficient enough to produce the necessary icebreakers to match Russia's growing fleet, a senior US administration official told reporters.

"The problem we're trying to solve is we need to build our icebreaking fleet faster and more efficiently than we can right now ... We want to attract private investment in order to build American yards," the official said. "Right now it's too small, it's taking too long, and we're not generating the production that we need."

As a result of this mission, the official announced that the United States, Finland and Canada are intent on forming a trilateral arrangement to collaborate on the production of icebreakers, which is especially meant to combat Russian and Chinese influence in polar regions. However, the official noted that it's too early to give a timeline for the potential number of new US icebreakers that can be built through this new trilateral agreement.

In May, the Biden administration said in a report to the US Congress that the US Coast Guard's proposed next generation polar icebreaker to reestablish and maintain a strong US presence in the Arctic Ocean is at least five years behind schedule and $2 billion over budget with many design and shipbuilding problems still unresolved.

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US to Sign Icebreaker MoU with Finland, Canada by End of Year - White House

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - The United States will sign a memorandum of understanding with Finland and Canada on cooperation in icebreaker production by the end of the year, White House Deputy National Security Advisor for International Economics Dalip Singh said during a background call.

"In terms of the next steps, we intend to sign a formal memorandum of understanding by the end of the year, with Finland, and Canada, and then implementation will begin," Singh said on Wednesday.

The partnership on icebreaker production will reinforce the message to Russia and China that the US and its allies are committed to increasing their "competitive edge" in strategic industries like shipbuilding and projecting power in polar regions to "enforce international norms and treaties," Singh stated.

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US, Canada Agree on Key Elements of Modernized Columbia River Treaty - Statements

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) – The United States and Canada have reached an agreement in principle over key elements of an updated Columbia River Treaty Regime, President Joe Biden and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Thursday.

"Today, with Prime Minister Trudeau visiting Washington D.C., I am pleased to announce that our countries have reached agreement in principle on the key elements of a modernized Treaty," Biden said in a statement.

Biden said the modernized treaty would "elevate" the voices of US tribes and Canadian indigenous peoples alike, just as it will allow a re-balancing of bilateral energy coordination.

"This agreement-in-principle is the result of extensive engagement, notably with Indigenous and local communities, to ensure that all interests are heard, represented, and addressed," Trudeau added in a statement.

The US is going to preserve more clean hydropower for its domestic needs at the same time Canada will have more opportunities to import from or export to the American market. This is "critical" for both countries to achieve their clean energy goals, Biden said.

Trudeau further noted that the agreement is a major milestone that will allow for the treaty to be updated, ensuring continued flood risk management and co-operation on hydropower for the Columbia River. It will also include provisions previously not considered in the original agreement, such as ecosystem health and Indigenous cultural values, he said.

The 1964 Columbia River Treaty is a transboundary water management agreement between Canada and the United States. It required the construction of 4 large dams – 3 in Canada's British Columbia and 1 in the US – to optimize energy production and reduce the risk of devastating yearly floods on both sides of the border.

Although it has no expiration date, either party to the treaty can unilaterally terminate the treaty starting September 2024, provided that a 10-year notice is given.

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US Consumer Prices Grow 3% in Year to June, Below Forecast in Boost to Rate Cut Hopes

(Adds details, comments and context in paras 9-17)

WASHINGTON, July 11 (Sputnik) - US consumer prices posted an annual growth of 3% in June, down from 3.3% in May, according to data on Wednesday from the Labor Department that raised expectations of an interest rate cut by the Federal Reserve by September.

Economists on Wall Street had expected the Consumer Price Index (CPI) to show a 3.1% year-on-year growth in June.

It was the first time in three years that the CPI had reached an annual growth of 3% after the trillions of dollars in government spending and other inflationary effects brought on by the coronavirus pandemic.

The CPI went from 2.6% in April 2021 to a four-decade high of 9.1% by July 2022, before it began its retreat to current levels.

Another inflation marker closely watched by the Fed — the US Personal Consumption

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Expenditures (PCE) Index — grew 2.6% year-on-year in May, from 2.7% in April. The June reading for the PCE is due on July 26.

The Fed's target for inflation is a mere 2% per annum and the central bank has said it will cut rates when the CPI and other key price gauges come nearer to that threshold. US interest rates are currently in a range of 5.25% to 5.5%, their highest in two decades.

The latest moderation of the CPI boosted expectations of an impending Fed rate cut.

The central bank's policy-making Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) will meet next on July 30-31 for a decision on rates, though money market traders are really betting on an easing occurring at the Fed's September 17-18 meeting.

"The market was pricing 49 bps of easing before year end prior to the report with a 70% chance of a cut in September. Those numbers are now 57.5 bps and a 92% chance of a September cut," economist Adam Button wrote on the ForexLive forum.

Some are of the opinion that the FOMC is overthinking the impact of inflation and have urged for a quicker rate cut, to avoid withholding economic growth.

The US economy expanded at a yearly rate of 1.4% in the first quarter of 2024, slowing from the previous quarter's 3.4% growth.

"I'm concerned that if the Fed waits too long to lower rates, the Fed could undo the progress we've made on creating good paying jobs," Sherrod Brown, who heads the US Senate Banking Committee, told Fed Chair Jerome Powell this week. "If unemployment trends upward, you must act immediately to protect Americans' jobs. Workers have too much to lose if the Fed overshoots [its] inflation target and causes a completely unnecessary recession."

The Fed is not only responsible for keeping inflation low but also has a mandate for ensuring maximum employment for Americans.

Powell assured the Senate that the central bank was on the right track with both goals.

The Fed chief conceded that reducing policy restraint too late or too little "could unduly weaken economic activity and employment." As such, the FOMC will continue with its path of "carefully assessing incoming data and their implications for the evolving outlook, the balance of risks, and the appropriate path of monetary policy," he added.

The White House seems to be on Powell's side too. "Today's report shows that we are making significant progress fighting inflation," President Joe Biden said after the CPI update, although he added that "prices are still too high."

Powell has said the Fed might get to its 2%-per-year inflation target by the end of 2025 or the following year.

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