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7/17/24 Wednesday

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Russia Blazes Ahead With India Partnership While EU Plays Games to Snub Hungary

Russian President Vladimir Putin has been strengthening ties with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Modi's recent visit to Russia enhanced trade plans between the two countries. Meanwhile, the EU is reportedly planning to sabotage Hungary's leadership as retaliation for their stance on Ukraine.

Dr. David Oualaalou, an international geopolitical consultant, veteran, and author sat down with Sputnik's The Critical Hour on Tuesday. The show's guest tackled issues surrounding the growing relationship between India and Russia, as well as the European Union's (EU) attempts to sabotage a foreign affairs summit that is planned to be hosted in Hungary at the end of August.

"Well, in a nutshell, it's that the new global order which will be economically driven will not bode well for the US. And that's for a reason, because of our ill-conceived and fragmented policies that we've been embarking on for the last three or four decades," the analyst said.

"Saudis recently, two, three days ago announced two things: one, they're not going to be sending more oil to the US, and second they threatened to throw the European bonds on the markets if the US and Europe went ahead with confiscating the Russian assets," the show's guest said. He added that he sees this as a sign of how changes on the global stage is "paving a way for countries" to say to the US that they've "had it".

While running for office in 2020, now-US President Joe Biden vowed to make Saudi Arabia a "pariah" following the assassination of Jamal Khashoggi. But after the war between Russia and Ukraine began, and the West decided to sanction Russia, Biden was forced to go to Saudi Arabia on a bent knee.

In 2022, the president traveled to the largest country in the Arabian Peninsula, in an effort to rebuild relations in order to lower US gas prices while also isolating Russia, a New York Times article wrote at the time.

"Biden called MBS, Mohammed bin Salman a pariah and he said we will bring him to justice. Well, you can't use that kind of rhetoric when your country is depending on oil from the Saudis, even though most Americans do not know that we have far more oil here in this country than we are needing from overseas countries," Oualaalou explained.

Biden's decision to shut down the Keystone XL pipeline came on the heels of a 12 year delay following opposition from locals, Native American tribes, and environmentalists. The project was first proposed in 2008 as a way to bring oil from Canada's Western tar sands to US refiners.

"But it tells you right there how corrupted and dysfunctional [the US] system is to the point that [the US] has to pay for oil instead of using [its] own oil right here. And that was the first order of business that Biden did when he came to power. What was the first thing? To shut down the Keystone pipeline," he added.

Sputnik's Garland Nixon then turned to another topic of conversation. Nixon reported that the relationship between Russia and India has been strengthening, and that their strengthened

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relationship could be “very good” for BRICS. But, he added, it appears as though the US is trying to keep Russia from forming these alliances.

“The same argument can be made about the partnership, the strong friendship between Russia and China. How did we get to this? It was because of the failure of American policy that forced the two countries to get together,” Oualaalou explained.

“Once again, can you just imagine, go back to the '70s. If [the US] had sat down with the Soviet Union and the Chinese, the three would be sitting on the same table and figuring out their differences and working out their differences and their interests and so forth. They would be in a different picture. That's what India is looking for. India is looking after its own interests and rightly so,” he said.

“Can you imagine if India wanted to sit down with the Chinese and work out their differences regarding the borders? I mean, can you imagine how much India would benefit from that economically? Yes, it has a lot of people, but a majority of the people live in poverty,” the geopolitical consultant added.

EU leaders are planning to “boycott” a key foreign affairs summit which will be hosted by Hungary in late August, RT reported on Monday citing Politico. Josep Borrell, a Spanish politician serving as High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, is reportedly planning to hold a separate foreign affairs council at the same time thereby forcing some foreign ministers to have to choose which event to attend.

On Wednesday, Politico also reported that the European Parliament (EP) described Viktor Orbán’s visit to Russia as a “blatant violation of the EU’s Treaties and common foreign policy.” During a vote on Wednesday, members of the EP condemned the meeting in a passing resolution while reassuring their commitment to maintain support for Ukraine. About 495 MEPs voted in favor and 137 voted against.

“The idea that to embark on something like this, it tells you right there what the establishment wants. They don't want peace and they're gonna have it if they keep pushing the Russians way, way, way more than what they are already doing because it's now become evident that [the US] cannot defeat the Russians."

“Russia's GDP per capita is reaching almost $15,000, which wasn't there before and their military production is going full steam ahead to the point that it exposes now the weakness of NATO, let alone for us to fight Russians, that's just an illusion for those in the West who think that we can defeat the Russians.”

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Biden's Charm Offensive - Cartoon

In Biden’s first interview since the assassination attempt on former president Donald Trump, the president attempted to walk an awkward and narrow path: attacking his opponent’s violent rhetoric, while urging Americans to remain peaceful.

On Monday, US President Joe Biden sat down for an interview with NBC News anchor Lester Holt in what appeared to be campaign damage control in the aftermath of the attempted assassination of his election rival, former President Donald Trump.

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During the interview, Biden said he had called Trump to ask about his health and that the call was “cordial”. The president then said that there is “no place at all for violence in politics in America”. However, he then addressed a major criticism of Trump’s political past: the January 6, 2021 attack on Capitol Hill.

However, Trump’s violent rhetoric has been in the media spotlight since he first announced running for president in 2015. The media and the American public have grown so tolerant of his language that it no longer seems to strike the same cord. Holt then asked Biden about his own violent rhetoric which was awkwardly timed considering the recent assassination attempt against the former president.

“You called your opponent an existential threat. On a call a week ago you said, ‘It’s time to put Trump in the bull’s-eye,’” Holt asked Biden.

“It was a mistake to use the word [...] I meant ‘bull’s-eye’, I meant focus on him. Focus on what he’s doing. Focus on ... on his ... on his policies. Focus on the number of lies he told in the debate,” Biden responded. “Look, I’m not the guy that said I want to be a dictator on day one. I’m not the guy that refused to accept the outcome of the election.”

Biden once again called Trump "the threat to democracy", then said "I have not engaged in that rhetoric,” seemingly contradicting himself.

However, Holt called Biden out and said it didn’t sound as though Biden was “turning down the heat”. At one point in the interview Biden appeared to spar with Holt and became frustrated, until he pressed the news anchor on his media coverage, especially about the debate’s aftermath.

Biden is losing support in 14 key states, which are coming under the thumb of Trump ahead of the November elections, CNN reported on Wednesday, citing poll data.

Biden’s popularity has plummeted since his first debate with Trump, who is three years younger than him. Biden’s confused and incoherent demeanor has concluded his support’s fear and his critic’s remarks about his mental unfitness. Since then, some Democratic politicians and donors have called for him to step down as their candidate.

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An Uncontacted Amazon Tribe Has Been Photographed on a Remote Peruvian Amazon River Bank

Photographs of the tribe were taken at the end of June on the banks of a river in the Madre de Dios region in southeast Peru, said Survival International who released the images.

The Indigenous Mashco Piro tribe has been sighted more often in recent weeks, emerging from the rainforest in search of food, and in response to the growing presence of loggers, Reuters reported citing a local Indigenous rights group.

More than 50 tribes people have been reportedly sighted in recent days. Some have appeared near the southeastern village of Monte Salvado, which belongs to the Yine people. But Survival International explained that this tribe does not communicate with locals in the area.

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"These incredible images show that a large number of isolated Mashco Piro live alone a few kilometers from where the loggers are about to start their operations," said Caroline Pearce, the Survival International director.

Logging companies have been granted concession's by the country's government to access the area. According to Survival International, the logging company Maderera Canales Tahuamanu SAC has built more than 120 miles of roads to extract timber. The company also has access to a reported 130,000 acres of forest after receiving certification from the non-profit Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

In previous incidents such as this, authorities said that the tribe people were angered by logging in their territory.

"This is irrefutable evidence that many Mashco Piro live in this area, which the government has not only failed to protect, but actually sold off to logging companies," said Alfredo Vargas Pio, president of local Indigenous rights group FENAMAD in a statement from Survival International.

Vargas Pio added that there is the risk of violence "on either side", regarding the relationship between the loggers and the tribespeople, and that logging workers could bring diseases to the area that could devastate the tribe.

Somehow, the tribe's people remain the world's largest uncontacted tribe, with 750 members. They have managed to survive massacres, and enslavement during the rubber boom of the 1800s, NBC reported.

"The FSC must cancel its certification of Canales Tahuamanu immediately — failure to do so will make a mockery of the entire certification system," said Pearce. "This is a humanitarian disaster in the making — it's absolutely vital that the loggers are thrown out, and Mashco Piro's territory is properly protected."

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China in the Bullseye: NATO Expands Definition of 'North Atlantic' to Confront Beijing

China possesses some 500 nuclear arms while its ally Moscow holds over 5,500.

An article republished in the online magazine Kontinent USA considers the perils of Western saber rattling against Moscow and Beijing, warning that NATO hostility "threatens to set in train a Cuban Missile Crisis of truly global magnitude."

"Recall that in 1962, nuclear war between the US and the Soviet Union was averted only at the last moment," writes German Bundestag member Sevim Dagdelen. "To resolve the crisis, US Jupiter missiles – developed by former Nazi rocket engineer Werner von Braun – had to be withdrawn from Italy's south-eastern region of Puglia and the Turkish city of Izmir."

"Since then, an unspoken diplomatic rule has held that countries in the close proximity of great powers should neither be bound by military pacts, nor make their territories available to rival alliances," the politician notes.

But since the 1990s, NATO expansion amid Western triumphalism over the fall of the Soviet Union threatens to bring the world back to the precipice of nuclear annihilation, Dagdelen warns.

Author and historian Dr. Gerald Horne joined Sputnik's The Critical Hour program to assess the

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odds of global conflict as NATO's summit in Washington and US naval drills in the Pacific signal an escalation of tensions beyond already heightened levels.

"It's clear that US imperialism and its accomplices in NATO are threatening World War Three, and it's important to add that China is in the bullseye," said Horne, a researcher at the University of Houston in Texas. "What was remarkable about this NATO summit, the 75th anniversary noted and marked in Washington, DC, was its attention to geography. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization mentioned China repeatedly in its various communiques."

"We had thought that when NATO came into being 75-odd years ago that Moscow was being made the target, and to be sure Moscow remains a major target as evidenced by this escapade in Ukraine," he observed. But the academic claimed China has also become a major focus of the alliance's attention amid Beijing's stratospheric economic rise, arguing, "the only hope for US imperialism right now is somehow to manipulate India against China."

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), founded in 1949, is typically portrayed as a defensive alliance formed to protest Europe against the threat of alleged communist aggression. But the organization was founded a full six years before the creation of the Warsaw Pact, an alliance of the Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies.

Moscow was compelled to respond to the US-led alliance after West Germany's accession to the bloc; Germany's invasion of Russia just a few years prior led to the death of 27 million Soviet citizens, 70% of whom were civilians.

Now as the rise of China once again threatens global Western dominance, Beijing has joined Moscow in presenting an alternative model of development to the US-led capitalist order.

Although America has made efforts to court Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Horne suggests India will not become an offensive pawn against Beijing as Japan was against Moscow a century ago.

"Even though these two giants fought a war in 1962… Prime Minister Modi visiting Moscow just a few days ago suggests that it will be more than a notion, once again, to get India to join this anti-China train, particularly since India is the 'I' in BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa," the researcher observed.

"India is part of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which had its summit in Kazakhstan just a few days ago. And so this presents a riddled dilemma of US imperialism."

China is home to a population of over 1.4 billion and is the world's third largest nation by territorial landmass. Although some Western analysts debate the country's capacity to project military power worldwide, Beijing now possesses the world's largest Navy by number of ships,granting it substantial defensive capabilities.

Admiral Philip Davidson, appointed commander of the United States' Indo-Pacific Command under former President Donald Trump, once claimedthe US must go to war with China by 2027 to stem its threat to Western global hegemony. General Mike Minihan, appointed commander of the US Air Force's Air Mobility Command under President Joe Biden, insisted the confrontation must take place by 2025.

China is a nuclear-armed power, possessing some 500 nuclear weapons while its ally Russia maintains over 5,500. Any conflict with Moscow or Beijing threatens the detonation of these destructive munitions, risking massive loss of life if not the end of human life itself.

"World imperialism is in crisis but that doesn't necessarily mean that it will go down without a fight," Horne warned.

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"A beast, which is what imperialism is, is oftentimes most dangerous when it's cornered and feels like it's losing its grip because of precisely the state of affairs today as we speak."

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Russia Empowered by 'Naive and Ignorant' Western Aggression – Scott Ritter

The former US Marine Corps intelligence officer observed that Russia has benefited economically, diplomatically and politically from the Ukraine proxy war.

Two years after President Joe Biden claimed US sanctions and export controls were "crushing" Moscow, Russia continues to grow at a fasterrate than that of the United States and all other advanced nations. The country's resilience was confirmed earlier this year by the International Monetary Fund, which predicted Russia's economy would expand at a rate of 3.2% in 2024.

On the diplomatic front Russia is as influential as ever as a key player in the growing BRICS economic bloc, which was recently forced to turn away new members amid strong interest from the Global South. Internally, Russia remains politically stable and unified with President Vladimir Putin enjoying an overwhelming mandate and widespread support for the country's military operation against Ukraine.

With Russia not only surviving, but thriving against the backdrop of US-led opposition, one can only conclude that Russophobic leaders are operating from a position of deep ignorance and naivete regarding the Eurasian world power. Such is the conclusion of former UN weapons inspector Scott Ritter, who joined Sputnik's The Critical Hour program Wednesday to discuss the state of relations between Moscow and the West.

"The West is under the impression that it can strategically defeat Russia," claimed Ritter, a former United States Marine Corps intelligence officer.

"That means bringing about the existential end to the Russian Federation, as we now understand it. We heard the former Baltic leader turned European Union senior diplomat brag about how she envisioned breaking up Russia into tiny little component pieces," he noted, referring to comments by Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas suggesting Russia should be split into several "small nations."

"What they don't understand are two things," said Ritter. "Such a desire is literally a suicide pill because Russia's nuclear arsenal is tied to a doctrine that says if the survival of Russia is placed under existential threat, that Russia will use nuclear weapons to ensure that that threat no longer exists."

"But fortunately we don't have to worry about that because Russia itself has shown a proclivity not only to be able to outmaneuver the West, turning sanctions against Russia back on the West – a devastating factor – but also turning the attempt to diplomatically isolate Russia back on the West."

Anti-Russia sanctions have provided Moscow the opportunity to both become more self-reliant and strengthen its alliances with other global powers. India has become a major buyer of Russian oil, as has China, which continues to carry on a robust trade relationship with Moscow.

In some instances the United States' attempts to compel other countries to participate in its attempted isolation of Russia have backfired. Authorities in Niger expelled US armed forces

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from the country recently after reportedly feeling threatened and disrespected during a meeting with a US delegation that warned them against economic and military cooperation with Moscow and Tehran.

The ousting forced the US military to abandon a $100 million air base in the country that was an important hub for regional spy operations. Niger has since turned to Russia's Wagner Group to assist in counterterrorism operations against jihadist groups in the country.

"Russia's actually been empowered by this naive and ignorant Western approach toward dealing with the Russian 'problem,'" Ritter observed. "It's not just suicidal, it's literally ignorant. It's grounded in what I call the fundamental ignorance of the West about the reality of Russia, because that's what Russophobia is… the fear of Russia comes from ignorance of Russia."

"Russia doesn't pose a threat to us," Ritter insisted. "Literally, Russia is no threat to the West. Whatever is happening today is because of a cause-effect relationship where the West triggered the cause. Russia is reacting to the West, not being proactive in the implementation of its 'grand scheme for empire.' The best way to bring Russia under control is to stop provoking Russia."

Reporting in The New York Times earlier this year shed light on the US Central Intelligence Agency's attempts to weaponize Ukraine against Russia going back to 2014's Western-backed Euromaidan coup, which brought an extremist, anti-Russia government to power. The intelligence agency is reportedly operating out of secret bunkers on the Russian border where it helps direct strikes on Russian territory.

The last year has seen a growing number of attacks on Russian cities, many of which have harmed civilian non-combatants. A recent strike killed several Russians vacationing on a beach in Crimea, including a three- and nine-year-old child.

Moscow has emphasized its willingness to negotiate for peace with Kiev if its allies are willing to guarantee "a neutral, non-aligned, non-nuclear status for Ukraine along with its demilitarization."

China in the bullseye: NATO expands definition of "North Atlantic" to confront Beijing

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Researcher Dr. Gerald Horne joined Sputnik's The Critical Hour program to assess the odds of global conflict as NATO's summit in Washington and US naval drills in the Pacific signal an escalation of tensions beyond already heightened levels.

"It's clear that US imperialism and its accomplices in NATO are threatening World War III, and it's important to add that China is in the bullseye," said Horne. "What was remarkable about this NATO summit, the 75th anniversary noted and marked in Washington, DC, was its attention to geography. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization mentioned China repeatedly in its various communiques."

"We had thought that when NATO came into being 75-odd years ago that Moscow was being made the target, and to be sure Moscow remains a major target as evidenced by this escapade in Ukraine," he observed, but the academic claimed China has also become a major focus of attention amid Beijing's stratospheric economic rise.

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Admiral Philip Davidson, commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command under former President Trump, once claimed the US must go to war with China by 2027 to stem its threat to Western global hegemony. Gen. Mike Minihan, commander of the US Air Force's Air Mobility Command under President Biden, insisted the confrontation must take place by 2025.

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Russia empowered by 'naive and ignorant' Western aggression – Scott Ritter

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"Such a desire is literally a suicide pill because Russia's nuclear arsenal is tied to a doctrine that says if the survival of Russia is placed under existential threat, that Russia will use nuclear weapons to ensure that that threat no longer exists," he noted.

"Fortunately, we don't have to worry about that because Russia itself has shown a proclivity not only to be able to outmaneuver the West… but also turning the attempt to diplomatically isolate Russia back on the West," Ritter emphasized.

Anti-Russia sanctions have provided Moscow the opportunity to both become more self-reliant and strengthen its alliances with other global powers. India has become a major buyer of Russian oil, as has China, which continues to carry on a robust trade relationship with Moscow.

In some instances the United States' attempts to compel other countries to participate in its attempted isolation of Russia have backfired. Authorities in Niger expelled US armed forces recently after reportedly feeling threatened and disrespected during a meeting with a US delegation that warned them against economic and military cooperation with Moscow and Tehran.

"Russia's actually been empowered by this naive and ignorant Western approach," Ritter observed. "It's not just suicidal, it's literally ignorant. It's grounded in what I call the fundamental ignorance of the West about the reality of Russia, because that's what Russophobia is … the fear of Russia comes from ignorance of Russia."

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Major Donor Drafts 'I Quit' Letter for Biden to Help Him Leave With Dignity – Reports

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - One of the Democratic Party's key donors has prepared a farewell speech for US President Joe Biden so he can leave the presidential race with dignity amid growing calls from his fellow party members to make way for a more promising candidate

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against Donald Trump, The Daily Beast reported.

The donor, whose name has not been yet disclosed, but who is known to be from the Western Coast of the United States, has drawn a speech consisting of 11 bullet points that should sound "victorious" as Biden delivers it to his constituents to step aside, the report said on Wednesday.

The main messages in Biden's speech will be warnings about the need to save American democracy, which is allegedly threatened by Trump, as well as a call for Americans to be united, according to the report.

In the speech, Biden would also promise to end the war in Gaza and support the Democratic Party's new candidate, the report added.

While the letter has not made its way to Biden's table, it is already circulating among Democrats amid a sharp decline in donations to the Biden campaign, the report said.

On Wednesday, leading US House Democrat Congressman Adam Schiff called on Biden to drop out of the presidential election over concerns he cannot win after the fallout from his dismal performance in the first presidential debate.

ABC also reported on Wednesday that one of Biden's most staunch supporters, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, in a one-on-one meeting with the president urged him to leave the race.

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Trump Campaign Tones Down Convention Speeches After Assassination Attempt - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump's campaign toned down the political rhetoric in speeches delivered at the Republican National Convention following the assassination attempt against Trump, NBC News reported on Thursday, citing four unnamed sources.

This included direct edits and suggestions in order to focus the content on policy contrasts with Democratic frontrunner Joe Biden.

While the speakers so far have mentioned Republican hot button issues such as immigration and crime, they have not mentioned others, such as claims about stolen elections, the January 6 attack on the Capitol, investigations against Biden or other political opponents, and the prosecutors who have pursued indictments against Trump.

Trump himself has also said that he rewrote his nomination acceptance speech.

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US OKs $138.26Mln Sale of Hellfire Missiles, Precision Kill Weapon System to Czechia

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - The United States has approved a possible $138.26 million sale of Hellfire missiles and Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System to the Czech Republic, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Thursday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to

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the Government of the Czech Republic of Hellfire Missiles and Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System and related elements of logistics and program support for an estimated cost of $138.26 million," the statement said.

The DSCA delivered the required certification notifying Congress of this possible sale on Thursday, it added.

The government of the Czech Republic has requested to buy 200 Hellfire Air-to-Ground Missiles, four Hellfire Captive Air Training Missiles, and 600 WGU-59A/B Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System (APKWS) II, according to the statement.

"This proposed sale will support the foreign policy goals and national security objectives of the United States by improving the security of a NATO Ally that is an important force for political stability and economic progress in Europe," the DSCA said.

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us state department approves $138.26 million sale of Hellfire Missiles and Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System to czech republic - pentagon

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Ukraine Peace Talks Could Start This Year if Trump Wins US Presidential Race - Szijjarto

UNITED NATIONS, July 18 (Sputnik) - Peace talks to resolve the conflict in Ukraine will likely begin this year if Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump wins the 2024 US presidential election, Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Peter Szijjarto told RIA Novosti.

"I think that the US presidential elections will definitely be a game changer in this regard [peace talks on Ukraine]," Szijjarto said on Wednesday. "I think if President Trump wins, there will be a good chance for peace talks to be started already this year."

The position of the United States on the conflict will change under Trump, Szijjarto said. Trump is the only potential leader who could be elected in the foreseeable future who could make a "successful mission" to create peace in Europe, Szijjarto added.

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'Up to Ukrainians to Decide' If Zelenskyy Can Enter Talks With Expired Term - Szijjarto

UNITED NATIONS, July 18 (Sputnik) – The question of whether Volodymyr Zelenksyy's expired term poses an obstacle to entering any peace negotiations with Russia is a matter for Ukrainians to decide, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto told RIA Novosti.

“Well, I think the Ukrainians have to deal with that. Zelenskyy is not the president of Hungary. So, thank God, this issue should not be on our table,” Szijjarto said on Wednesday.

Ukraine was due to hold a presidential election on March 31, but it was called off due to the

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ongoing martial law. In May, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that "according to preliminary statements, the only legitimate authorities in Ukraine are the parliament and [its] speaker."

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Baltic Countries Have 'Bad Taste' for Skipping EU Meetings in Hungary - Szijjarto

UNITED NATIONS, July 18 (Sputnik) - The Baltic countries have bad taste for refusing to visit Hungary for upcoming meetings tied to Hungary's European Union presidency, Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Peter Szijjarto told Sputnik.

"They might have bad taste, I think, because being in Hungary is fun and joyous," Szijjarto said on Wednesday. "So they should come to enjoy it, but if they don't want to come, then what can we do?"

Ministers from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, as well as Sweden, Finland, and Poland, will reportedly skip the informal meetings in Hungary during the first phase of its six-month EU presidency, following Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's recent trip to Russia.

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Baltic countries have 'bad taste' for skipping eu meetings in hungary - Szijjarto to ria novosoti

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US Senator JD Vance Accepts Nomination to Be Trump's Vice President - Broadcast

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - US Senator JD Vance has accepted the nomination to be Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump's vice president if the ex-US president is elected in November.

"Tonight, Mr. Chairman, I stand here humbled, and I'm overwhelmed with gratitude to say I officially accept your nomination to be vice president of the United States of America," Vance said during a speech at the Republican National Convention (RNC) on Wednesday night.

Vance vowed that Trump's presidency will help restore the US economy, end the crisis on the southern border, take on China in trade, and force allies to share the burden to address global security challenges.

Vance is known for criticizing the US multi-billion dollar military aid to Ukraine and calling for talks with Russia. He also urges the US government to shift attention toward competition with China. On domestic politics, he supports an abortion ban and the tightening of migration legislation.

Trump is expected to deliver his first public speech since the July 13 assassination attempt at the RNC event on Thursday night.

On Saturday, a 20-year-old man tried to assassinate Trump at a campaign rally in the state of

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Pennsylvania, but the bullet from the gunman's AR assault rifle grazed Trump's right ear. US Secret Service agents killed the gunman moments after he was able to fire several rounds toward the stage, killing one spectator and critically injuring two others.

The FBI continues to investigate the shooting, but the suspect's motive remains unknown, according to US law enforcement.

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Orban Told Trump About His Visits to Russia, China to End Ukraine Conflict - Hungarian FM

UNITED NATIONS, July 18 (Sputnik) - During a recent meeting with former US President Donald Trump, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban shared with him the results of his trips to Russia and China as part of peace efforts to end the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto told RIA Novosti.

"They have spoken about the whole context. Of course, they have spoken about the whole geopolitical situation and if you speak about this geopolitical situation [around Ukraine], you cannot skip the outcome of the talks of the Prime Minister with the leaders you have mentioned [Presidents Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping]," Szijjarto said on Wednesday.

According to Szijjarto, only Donald Trump, out of all contemporary world leaders, can put an end to the conflict in Ukraine if he is reelected in November.

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US presidential election could become 'game changer' for Ukraine conflict, us stance will change if trump wins - Szijjarto to RIA Novosti

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Ukraine Peace Talks Could Start This Year if Trump Wins US Presidential Race - Szijjarto

UNITED NATIONS, July 18 (Sputnik) - Peace talks to resolve the conflict in Ukraine will likely begin this year if Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump wins the 2024 US presidential election, Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Peter Szijjarto told RIA Novosti.

"I think that the US presidential elections will definitely be a game changer in this regard [peace talks on Ukraine]," Szijjarto said on Wednesday. "I think if President Trump wins, there will be a good chance for peace talks to be started already this year."

The position of the United States on the conflict will change under Trump, Szijjarto said. Trump is the only potential leader who could be elected in the foreseeable future who could make a "successful mission" to create peace in Europe, Szijjarto added.

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Hungary Ready to Host Peace Talks Between Russia, Ukraine - Foreign Minister

UNITED NATIONS, July 18 (Sputnik) - Hungary is ready to become a venue for potential negotiations between Russia and Ukraine to resolve the ongoing crisis, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto told RIA Novosti.

"Two days after the war has broken out, I contacted Minister Lavrov and I contacted Mr. Yermak, the Head of the Presidential Administration of Ukraine and I told both of them the same - that Hungary is always ready to facilitate negotiations, we are always ready to offer any place in Hungary, where level playing fields, equal security and equal chances will be provided to both sides," Szijjarto said on Wednesday in an interview.

"So if we are needed, we are at [your] disposal," Szijjarto added.

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Secret Service Chief Agrees to July 22 Hearing on Trump Assassination Attempt -House Panel

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - Secret Service Director Kimberly Cheatle has agreed to appear before a House Committee at a hearing investigating the attempted assassination of former president Donald Trump, the Oversight Committee said on Wednesday.

"Director Cheatle has agreed to comply with Chairman Comer's subpoena and the hearing will take place as scheduled on Monday, July 22," said the statement, which was posted on X.

The announcement comes only a day after US House Oversight Committee Chairman James Comer subpoenaed Cheatle for testimony after Cheatle "failed to cooperate" with the committee's requests for information pertaining to the attempted assassination.

On Saturday, a 20-year-old man tried to assassinate Trump at a campaign rally in the state of Pennsylvania, but the bullet from the gunman's AR assault rifle grazed Trump's right ear. US Secret Service agents killed the gunman moments after he was able to fire several rounds toward the stage, killing one spectator and critically injuring two others.

The FBI continues to investigate the shooting but the suspect's motive remains unknown, according to US law enforcement.

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Schumer in One-on-One Meeting With Biden Urged President to Drop Out of Election - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer in a one-on-one meeting with Joe Biden urged the US president to drop out of the presidential race, ABC News reported, citing sources.

An ABC correspondent during a broadcast on Wednesday said that Schumer during a meeting

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with Biden on Saturday "forcefully" made the case that it would be the best thing for Biden, the Democratic party, and the country if he were to drop out of the race.

ABC reported earlier that Biden recently held a strained call with House Democrats to discuss concerns about his ability to win the 2024 US presidential election.

Leading US House Democrat Congressman Adam Schiff also called on Biden to drop out of the presidential election over concerns he cannot win following the fallout from his dismal performance in the first presidential debate.

Biden has insisted that he's fine and capable of beating Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump.

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NORAD Says Enforced Airspace Restriction Over US Republican Convention in Milwaukee

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) said that it helped the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to enforce a temporary airspace restriction over the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee.

“A NORAD F-35 aircraft assisted the Federal Aviation Administration in enforcing an airspace restriction violation over Milwaukee today,” NORAD said on Wednesday in a statement shared with Sputnik.

NORAD routinely helps the FAA during Temporary Flight Restrictions, the statement said.

The restrictions over Milwaukee are in support of the US Secret Service’s protocols for the Republican convention, the statement added.

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UPDATE-Biden Experiencing Mild Symptoms After Testing Positive for Covid- White House

(Update in paragraphs 3-6)

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden has tested positive for Covid-19, the White House said in a statement after Biden abstained from appearing at a scheduled UnidosUS conference in Las Vegas, Nevada.

"Earlier today following his first event in Las Vegas, President Biden tested positive for COVID-19. He is vaccinated and boosted and he is experiencing mild symptoms," the White House said on Wednesday.

However, the White House pool reported that upon arriving at Harry Reid International Airport Biden leaned out the window of his motorcade at Harry Reid International Airport and offered a thumbs-up to the press.

"I feel good," said Biden when members of the press asked how he was feeling before ascending the stairs to Air Force One without a mask on.

Per the White House, the President is going to his home in Delaware, where he will self-isolate.

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Biden Experiencing Mild Symptoms After Testing Positive for Covid- White House

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden has tested positive for Covid-19, the White House said in a statement after Biden abstained from appearing at a scheduled UnidosUS conference in Las Vegas, Nevada.

"Earlier today following his first event in Las Vegas, President Biden tested positive for COVID-19. He is vaccinated and boosted and he is experiencing mild symptoms," the White House said on Wednesday.

The statement added that the President would self-isolate in his home in Delaware.

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White House says Biden is experiencing mild symptoms, will be returning to Delaware where he will self-isolate

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US Senator Menendez Says He Will Resign From Congress After Bribery Conviction - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - US Senator Bob Menendez notified people close to him that he plans to resign from Congress after a US jury found him guilty of accepting bribes to benefit the governments of Qatar and Egypt, NBC News reported, citing sources familiar with the matter.

On Tuesday, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and several other Democrat colleagues called on Menendez to resign after a US jury convicted him on all 16 corruption charges.

Menendez has his sentencing hearing set for October 29, but his legal team plans to file an appeal.

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Russia Blocking Ukrainian Drone Software in Weeks When US Takes Months - DIB

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) - Russia is adopting and advancing its combat technology, especially to intercept and destroy repeatedly upgraded generations of Ukrainian drones in a matter of weeks whereas it takes the US military establishment months and years to effect such changes, Defense Innovation Board (DIB) Chair Michael Bloomberg said.

"Russia is innovating extremely quickly [in Ukraine]," Bloomberg said on Wednesday.

Bloomberg acknowledged that Russian forces are now able to neutralize Ukrainian drone

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software every two weeks and the Ukrainians have had to immediately adapt to produce replacements.

The board chairman, who is also the founder of Bloomberg News and the former mayor of New York City, said it routinely takes the US Defense Department months and years to implement the same kinds of changes.

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Trump Shooter Fired Shots 62 Minutes After Being Photographed As Suspicious - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) - Trump shooter Thomas Crooks fired shots 62 minutes after being photographed as suspicious, Politico reported on Wednesday.

Last Saturday, a 20-year-old man attempted to assassinate Trump during a campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania. The Republican presidential nominee sustained a gun wound to his right ear and was briefly hospitalized.

The gunman, shooting from a rooftop, killed a man in the audience and critically injured two others before the Secret Service neutralized him.

The FBI is investigating the incident as an assassination attempt and potential domestic terrorism.

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China Will Overtake US in Innovation if Pentagon Does Not Reform - Admiral

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - China will overtake the United States and its armed forces in advanced technology and innovation if the Defense Department cannot fully reform and modernize its procedures, retired former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Mike Mullen told the Defense Innovation Board (DIB).

"If we don't do this and do it well, China will overtake us," Mullen said on Wednesday.

Mullen said he is highly critical of long-established Defense Department procedures that are affecting all the US armed services and harming their effective cooperation.

The Defense Department is very risk averse and full of mismanaged talent, he said.

"We must embrace risk so we can move at speed. ... Leaders have to provide top cover for innovators. We have to stop rewarding mediocrity," Mullen said.

The Defense Department should install new procedures to track and encourage the innovation levels of senior service officers and executives in the defense establishment, Mullen added.

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McConnell Calls for New Leadership at Secret Service After Attempted Trump Assassination

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WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) - US Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell on Wednesday called for new leadership at the Secret Service, saying the United States deserves answers and accountability for the attempted assassination against former US President Donald Trump.

"Last week's near-assassination of former President Trump was a grave attack on American democracy. The nation deserves answers and accountability. New leadership at the Secret Service would be an important step in that direction," McConnell said via social media platform X.

McConnell issued the statement after members of the Senate were briefed by top Secret Service and FBI officials on the assassination attempt.

On Saturday, a gunman attempted to assassinate Trump at a campaign rally in Pennsylvania, shooting him in the ear, killing one audience member and wounding two others.

The US Secret Service and its leadership have come under scrutiny in the wake of the incident, amid indications that law enforcement was aware of the shooter's presence in advance of the assassination attempt.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) -

US-RUSSIA RELATIONS

* The United States and Russia have held unofficial and "second level" expert contacts to discuss issues related to the conflict in Ukraine, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Wednesday.

* Russia has clear evidence that proves the involvement of Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich in spying activities, Lavrov said.

* Russia will be ready to work with any elected president of the United States, Lavrov said.

* The United States and Russia are holding phone conversations from time to time, but there is nothing significant in these conversations, Lavrov said.

ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

* US Central Command deputy head Vice Adm. Brad Cooper said on Wednesday that the US temporary pier in Gaza has successfully fulfilled its mission to increase the flow of humanitarian aid and is no longer required.

* It seems that Israel's goal is to involve the United States in the escalation of tensions with Iran, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.

* Russia's proposal to organize a meeting of external players that have influence on armed groups in the Gaza Strip is still in force, Lavrov said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* Russia will carefully evaluate any possible agreements on the settlement of the conflict in

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Ukraine to avoid being deceived like in previous times, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Wednesday.
* Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's peace formula is unacceptable for Russia, but it still remains the basis for a possible second international conference on Ukraine, Lavrov said.
* Russia has negotiated the release of 95 of its soldiers taken prisoner in Ukraine-controlled territories, who have already returned home, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
* NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has appointed Patrick Turner as the new head of the alliance's representative office in Ukraine.

EU SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA
* The Committee of the Permanent Representatives of the Governments of the Member States to the European Union (COREPER) at a meeting on Wednesday approved an extension of the economic sanctions against Russia, introduced back in 2014 and expanded many times afterwards, for another six months, until the end of January 2025, a European source told RIA Novosti.
* The European Parliament approved the draft of another anti-Russian resolution proposed by the European People's Party faction on continuing support for Ukraine, calling for the confiscation of Russia's sovereign assets frozen in the EU.

DIGITAL FINANCIAL ASSETS IN RUSSIA
* Almost 1.5% of the total electricity consumption of Russia is spent on mining cryptocurrencies, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Wednesday.
* It is important for Russia not to miss the moment, to timely set up the legal framework and regulation for the circulation of digital financial assets, Putin said.
* Russia has already made serious progress in the development and regulation of the circulation of digital financial assets, Putin said.

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NASA Cancels Viper Rover Project to Look for Ice on Surface of Moon

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) - NASA has canceled its Volatiles Investigating Polar Exploration Rover (VIPER) project to look for ice that can be used by US astronauts around the South Pole of the Moon, space agency officials announced at a press conference on Wednesday.
"This is a very tough decision based on budgetary restraints," NASA Science Mission Directorate Associate Administrator Nicola Fox told reporters on Wednesday. "This has been a really tough decision which we made in a rough budget environment. ... [VIPER] was designed to look for ice and we know how important this is."
NASA stated cost increases, delays to the launch date, and the risks of future cost growth as the reasons for canceling the mission. The rover was originally planned to launch in late 2023, but in 2022, NASA requested a launch delay to late 2024 to provide more time for pre-flight testing of its Astrobotic lander.

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"Since that time, additional schedule and supply chain delays pushed VIPER's readiness date to September 2025, and independently its CLPS (Commercial Lunar Payload Services) launch aboard Astrobotic's Griffin lander also has been delayed to a similar time," NASA said in a press release.

The space agency also said it has already notified Congress of its decision to cancel the VIPER project.

The VIPER mission was presented as an important preparation for NASA's already vastly overcost and increasingly delayed Artemis Project to return US astronauts to the surface of the Moon for the first time since 1972 before the end of this decade.

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US Air Force Reserve Gets Replacement Force of C-130J Airplanes to Spray Insects

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) - Lockheed Martin has delivered eight C-130J transport aircraft equipped to operate to exterminate disease-carrying insects with aerial sprays and to disperse oil spills in large bodies of fresh and saltwater, the company announced in a press release on Wednesday.

"Lockheed Martin delivered the first of eight C-130J-30 Super Hercules tactical airlifters assigned to the Ohio Youngstown Air Reserve Station, marking the addition of a new mission capability for the Super Hercules - the aerial spray mission," the release said.

The 910th Airlift Wing operates the Department of Defense's only large area, fixed-wing aerial spray capability to eliminate disease-carrying insects and pest insects and to disperse oil spills in large bodies of water, the release added.

The 910th Airlift Wing received its first C-130 in 1981 and has operated different variants for more than 40 years. Its new C-130J force will preserve the unit's tactical airlift and aerial spray mission, while providing more space, speed, range, and versatility for decades to come, according to the release.

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Biden Announces Exoneration of 258 Black Sailors Convicted After Port Chicago Explosion

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden announced on Wednesday that the US Navy is exonerating 258 Black Sailors unjustly convicted of mutiny and disobeying orders after the Port Chicago explosion nearly 80 years ago.

"Today, the US Navy is righting an historic wrong by announcing the exoneration of 258 Black Sailors who were unjustly tried and convicted of mutiny and disobeying orders following the tragic explosion at Port Chicago, California nearly 80 years ago," Biden said in a statement.

According to the statement, on July 17, 1944, an explosion at Port Chicago, California destroyed two US Navy ships, killing 320 Sailors and civilians, leading to Black Sailors being forced to resume dangerous work without proper training while white Sailors were granted

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leave, resulting in 258 Black Sailors refusing orders and being unjustly convicted of mutiny and disobeying orders.

"At the time, future Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall represented the 'Port Chicago 50' in their appeal of their courts-martial convictions, writing that, 'justice can only be done in this case by a complete reversal of findings.' With this action, we are answering that call," the statement read.

The statement added that after a careful review, the US Navy found the courts-martial of 258 Black Sailors unjust and discriminatory, marking the end of their long struggle for justice and honoring their courage and service to the nation.

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US Special Counsel Appeals Dismissal of Trump Classified Documents Case - Court Document

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) - US Special Counsel Jack Smith filed an appeal on Wednesday in a bid to overturn the dismissal of the classified documents case against former President Donald Trump, a court document showed.

"The United States of America hereby gives notice that it appeals to the United States Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit from the order of the District Court entered on July 15, 2024, Docket Entry 672," the document said.

On Monday, US District Judge Aileen Cannon dismissed the classified documents case against Trump, saying the appointment of Smith as special counsel violated the Constitution.

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Federal Reserve 'Beige Book' Says US Economy Slowing Amid Hopes for Interest Rate Cut

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) - The US economy is slowing, with growth being modest across a majority of the country's districts, the Federal Reserve said in its monthly Beige Book that heightened expectations for an interest rate cut aimed at helping businesses.

"Economic activity maintained a slight-to-modest pace of growth in a majority of districts," the Fed said in the report released on Wednesday.

The Beige Book, which covers anecdotal surveys in 12 US business districts, cited flat consumer spending, mixed manufacturing activity, a gradual increase in residential real estate and modest demand for loans. It also flagged slight growth in employment and a modest-to-moderate advance in wages.

Businesses surveyed expected slower growth over the next six months on uncertainties over November's upcoming US presidential election and worries about domestic policy, geopolitical conflicts and inflation.

"The economy is still growing, but the pace is modest, and there are increasing indications of areas where growth is stalling or declining," economist and analyst Adam Button wrote on the

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forum Forex Live in response to the Fed's findings.

Button indicated that all these would be helpful for the rate cut Wall Street was gunning for, adding that "consumer spending is stable but not growing and customers are more price-sensitive."

The Beige Book came as Fed Governor Chris Waller raised on Wednesday Wall Street's hopes for a rate cut by September. He said the central bank appeared to be closing in on its first rate cut in four years amid steadily softening economic data, even as US inflation remained above target.

Inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index, grew 3% during the year to June, versus the Fed's 2% target. The economy expanded at a yearly rate of 1.4% in the first quarter of 2024, slowing from the previous quarter's 3.4% growth.

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UPDATE - Oil Snaps 3-Day Loss As Dollar Weakens On US Rate Cut Hopes

(Updates with settlement prices, paragraph 6-8)

NEW YORK, July 17 (Sputnik) - Crude prices rebounded from a three-day slide on Wednesday as the dollar weakened on a Federal Reserve official's hint of an imminent rate cut that could boost business sentiment in the United States, the world's largest oil consuming country.

The Energy Information Administration (EIA), meanwhile, reported a large weekly drawdown in US crude inventories, helping sentiment in a market weighed down earlier in the week by worries about a lack of oil refining activity in China.

Still, huge builds in US fuel stockpiles such as gasoline and distillates made some energy traders queasy about demand during the summer, the busiest period for travel in the United States.

"This is the time of the year when you should be seeing runaway fuel demand," said John Kilduff, partner at New York energy hedge fund Again Capital. "Without that, any drawdown in US crude will have limited impact, especially with Chinese demand still in the woods."

China accounts for the world's largest oil imports, and ranks second after the United States for consumption.

At the close of Wednesday's trade, US West Texas Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude's most-actively traded contract, for delivery in August, was at $82.25 per barrel — up $2.09, or 2.6%.

The rebound effectively rolled back WTI's accumulated loss of 2% over the past three sessions that had pushed the US crude benchmark towards a test of its $80-per-barrel support. It also re-energized this year's oil rally, with WTI showing a near 14% gain since the end of 2023.

UK-origin Brent crude settled at $85.05 per barrel, up $1.35, or 1.6% on the day. The global crude benchmark is up almost 11% on the year.

The dollar weakened after Fed Governor Chris Waller suggested the first rate cut in four years was within view amid steadily softening economic data, although inflation remained above the central bank's target.

A weaker dollar makes oil denominated in the US currency more affordable for international

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buyers of the commodity, while a rate cut, in general, lowers the cost of doing business in the United States.

The EIA reported a crude inventory decline of 4.87 million barrels during the week ended July 12, adding to the prior week's tumble of 3.443 million. US crude inventories have fallen more than 20 million barrels in all over the past three weeks.

But the EIA also reported a build of 3.328 million barrels in gasoline for the week that ended July 12, versus the prior week's decline of 2.006 million. Analysts had forecast a decline of 1.7 million barrels instead. Gasoline is the primary motor fuel in the United States and makes up the largest component of the country's energy mix.

The EIA also reported a distillates build of 3.454 million barrels for last week, negating the previous week's draw of 4.884 million. Analysts had forecast a drop of 500,000 barrels instead. Distillates are primarily processed into the diesel required by trucks, buses and ships, and also goes into making airline fuel.

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RPT - US Says Open to Joint Risk Reduction Measures With China After Beijing Suspends Talks

(Repeats to fix dateline)

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) - The United States is open to developing and implementing concrete risk reduction measures with China, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Wednesday, after Beijing suspended arms control consultations.

Earlier in the day, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian said that Beijing has suspended consultations with Washington on arms control and non-proliferation due to the US's sale of weapons to Taiwan.

"The United States will remain open to developing and implementing concrete risk reduction measures with China. However, it requires a PRC willingness to also manage strategic risks," Miller said during a press briefing.

Miller said it is "unfortunate" that China took that step.

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Pentagon Says US Military Pier for Gaza Aid Deliveries No Longer Required

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) – US Central Command Deputy Commander Vice Adm. Brad Cooper said on Wednesday that the US temporary pier in Gaza has successfully fulfilled its mission to increase the flow of humanitarian aid and is no longer required.

"While the US military pier is no longer required, the US will maintain coordination elements in place in the near term to ensure humanitarian assistance continues to flow into Gaza through this new maritime pathway [in Ashdod]," Cooper said.

The maritime pier will transition to a new pathway for humanitarian aid deliveries through

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Ashdod, an Israeli port city to the north of Gaza, Cooper added.
In the coming days, the US military will begin delivering the remaining 5 million pounds of aid from Cyprus to Ashdod and then to Gaza, Cooper noted.

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US House Panel Subpoenas Secret Service Chief Over Trump Assassination Attempt - Letter

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) - US House Oversight Committee Chairman James Comer on Wednesday subpoenaed Secret Service Director Kimberly Cheatle for testimony at a July 22 hearing on the assassination attempt on former President Donald Trump.
"The Committee on Oversight and Accountability is investigating the July 13, 2024, assassination attempt on former President Donald J. Trump. The Oversight Committee is subpoenaing you, Director of the US Secret Service [Kimberly Cheatle], to appear for a public hearing on July 22, 2024," Comer said in a letter to Cheatle.
Comer noted that the committee first wrote to Cheatle on the day of the July 15 attack requesting specific information. He said the committee followed up with a request last Saturday for Cheatle's voluntary attendance at the July 22 hearing. The Secret Service initially committed to Cheatle's attendance, Comer said.
"Subsequently, however, DHS [Department of Homeland Security] officials appear to have intervened and your attendance is now in question. In addition, since DHS's intervention, there have been no meaningful updates or information shared with the Committee," Comer said.
Comer said the "lack of transparency and failure to cooperate" had prompted the committee to issue the subpoena compelling Cheatle's appearance.
On Saturday, a 20-year-old man tried to assassinate Trump at a campaign rally in the state of Pennsylvania, but the bullet from the gunman's AR assault rifle grazed Trump's right ear. US Secret Service agents killed the gunman moments after he was able to fire several rounds toward the stage, killing one spectator and critically injuring two others.
The FBI continues to investigate the shooting but the suspect's motive remains unknown, according to US law enforcement.

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Суд в США приговорил россиянина Марченко к 36 месяцам тюрьмы и 3 годам надзора

ВАШИНГТОН, 17 июл - РИА Новости, Дмитрий Злодорев. Суд в США приговорил россиянина Максима Марченко, заключенного в тюрьме по обвинениям в незаконной закупке и переправке в Россию американской микроэлектроники двойного назначения, к трем годам тюрьмы и аналогичному сроку нахождения под надзором, сообщил РИА Новости в среду представитель суда.
"Он приговорен к 36 месяцам тюрьмы и к трем годам под надзором", - сообщил представитель суда.

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Дело рассматривалось в Окружном суде США Южного округа Нью-Йорка.
В марте нынешнего года 51-летний Марченко признал себя виновным по одному пункту обвинения в отмывании денег и по одному пункту обвинения в контрабанде товаров двойного назначения. Мужчина был арестован в сентябре 2023 года.

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Israeli Steps to Crack Down on Settler Violence 'Not Sufficient' - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) - The United States has seen some efforts by the Israeli authorities to curb the settler violence in the West Bank, but those actions are not enough, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Wednesday.
"We have seen the government of Israel taking some steps to crack down on settler violence in the West Bank. We have seen them at times stopping settler violence and at times arresting those engaged in it," Miller said during a briefing. "But those steps have not been sufficient, and so, we continue to call on the government of Israel to take further steps."
Earlier in the day, the US imposed visa restrictions on a former Israel Defense Forces sergeant for killing a wounded Palestinian attacker in the West Bank in 2016.
Washington is also taking steps to impose visa restrictions on an additional group of individuals for having been involved in or meaningfully contributed to undermining the peace, security, or stability in the West Bank, the State Department said.
Following the October 7, 2023 attack on Israel by Palestinian organization Hamas, Israeli authorities increased movement restrictions in the West Bank. In 2023, Israeli policing operations in the West Bank were the deadliest since 2005, according to Amnesty International. The West Bank has also seen a surge in Israeli settler violence.
In April, the US State Department said in its annual human rights report that the United States condemns the record levels of violence in the West Bank, including attacks by Israeli extremist settlers on Palestinian civilians.

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Biden Discusses 2024 Election Concerns in ‘Tense’ Call With House Democrats - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden held a strained call with House Democrats to discuss concerns about his ability to win the 2024 US presidential election, ABC News reported on Wednesday.
Biden talked with the New Democrat Coalition about their electoral concerns in the wake of a lackluster debate performance against Republican challenger Donald Trump, the report said, citing multiple sources familiar with the call.
The call became “tense” and personal during a heated exchange with US Congressman Jason Crow, the report said.
Biden became defensive after Crow questioned him about his age and mental fitness to serve

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as president, including whether such concerns present a national security risk, the report said.
One House Democrat on the call reportedly described Biden's responses as "rambling" and said the president appeared unprepared for questions. Biden was some 30 minutes late for the call, the report added.
Numerous Democratic lawmakers have called on Biden to end his reelection bid and step aside for an alternative nominee, although the Biden campaign has insisted that they intend to move forward.

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Taiwan Has Been Paying for Own Defense, Not Charity - State Dept. on Trump Comments

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) – The Taiwanese Government has been paying for its own defense and the military equipment it purchases from the United States, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Wednesday.
Millers' remarks addressed a question on comments made by former US President Donald Trump about whether Taiwan should pay for its defense.
"I will point out that Taiwan has been paying for its defense. Taiwan has been purchasing military equipment from the United States to the tune of billions of dollars," Miller said during a press briefing when asked to address comments made by former US President Donald Trump about the need for Taiwan to pay for its defense.
The purchases of military equipment support American manufacturing, industry, and technology, Miller said. The defense acquisitions are not only important for maintaining regional security but also for the US economy, he added.
Taiwan has been buying US-made weaponry for decades, Miller said. There is no charity involved, he continued.
On Friday, China imposed sanctions on six US defense industry companies and their executives for selling weapons to Taiwan, an island seen as a Chinese territory by Beijing. Taiwan has been governed independently of mainland China since 1949.
Earlier on Wednesday, the Chinese Foreign Ministry announced that Beijing was suspending consultations with Washington on arms control and non-proliferation due to the US's sale of weapons to Taiwan.

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US Congress Commission Chair Suggests Raising Taxes to Spend More to Counter China

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) – Former member of Congress Jane Harman, who is currently serving as the chair of the Commission on the National Defense Strategy, suggested on Wednesday that the United States should raise taxes in order to spend more on defense and counter alleged threats posed by China.
"We've done that in the past. Our taxes were much higher during the Cold War, and certainly

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during World War Two. I mean, it's not fun to raise taxes, but it's not fun to lose a major war with China either. I think that would get people's attention," Harman said during a panel discussion hosted by the Aspen Security Forum.

Harman also suggested putting more effort into educating the American public on the seriousness of the threats facing the United States.

Earlier in July, the Senate Armed Services Committee voted 22-3 to pass the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2025, which requests a total of $895 billion for national defense.

According to Econofact, current US military spending is higher than at any point of the Cold War in inflation-adjusted terms and accounts for nearly 40% of global defense spending.

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US Says Open to Joint Risk Reduction Measures With China After Beijing Suspends Talks

WASHINGTON, July 15 (Sputnik) - The United States is open to developing and implementing concrete risk reduction measures with China, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Wednesday, after Beijing suspended arms control consultations.

Earlier in the day, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian said that Beijing has suspended consultations with Washington on arms control and non-proliferation due to the US's sale of weapons to Taiwan.

"The United States will remain open to developing and implementing concrete risk reduction measures with China. However, it requires a PRC willingness to also manage strategic risks," Miller said during a press briefing.

Miller said it is "unfortunate" that China took that step.

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US Court Sentences Russian National Marchenko to 36 Months in Prison - Clerk

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) – The US court sentenced Russian national Maxim Marchenko to 36 months in prison and three years of supervised release on charges of money laundering and smuggling goods from the United States, a court clerk told Sputnik on Wednesday.

“He was sentenced to 36 months in prison and three years of supervised release,” the clerk said.

The sentencing took place at the US District Court for the Southern District of New York.

Last year, the United States arrested Marchenko for his alleged involvement in illegally procuring US dual-use, military-grade microelectronics for Russian entities. In March, he pleaded guilty to charges against him.

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Us open to developing, implementing concrete risk reduction measures with China but PRC Must also be willing to manage strategic risks - state dept.

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Oil Snaps 3-Day Loss as Dollar Weakens on US Rate Cut Hopes

NEW YORK, July 17 (Sputnik) - Crude prices rebounded from a three-day slide on Wednesday as the dollar weakened on a Federal Reserve official's hint of an imminent rate cut that could boost business sentiment in the United States, the world's largest oil consuming country.

The Energy Information Administration's report of a large weekly drawdown in US crude inventories also helped sentiment in a market weighed down earlier by worries about a lack of oil refining activity in China.

Still, huge builds in US fuel stockpiles such as gasoline and distillates made some energy traders queasy about demand for the summer, the country's busiest for travel.

"This is the time of the year when you should be seeing runaway fuel demand," said John Kilduff, partner at New York energy hedge fund Again Capital. "Without that, any drawdown in crude will have limited impact, especially with Chinese demand still in the woods."

China accounts for the largest oil imports in the world, ranking second after the United States for consumption.

With 90 minutes to the close of Wednesday's trade, US West Texas Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude's most-actively traded contract, for delivery in September, Tuesday's trade at $81.37 per barrel — $1.66, or 2.1%.

That rebound effectively rolled back WTI's losses over three previous trading sessions that had pushed the US crude benchmark towards a test of its $80-per-barrel support. It also re-energized this year's oil rally, with WTI showing a near 14% gain since the end of 2023.

UK-origin Brent crude was at $85.09 per barrel, up $1.36, or 1.6% on the day. The global crude benchmark is up almost 11% on the year.

The dollar weakened after Fed Governor Chris Waller suggested the central bank was closing in on its first rate cut in four years amid steadily softening US economic data, although inflation remained above target.

A weaker dollar makes oil denominated in the US currency more affordable for international buyers of the commodity, while a rate in general, lower costs for businesses in the United States.

The EIA reported a crude inventory decline of 4.87 million barrels during the week ended July 12, adding to the prior week's tumble of 3.443 million. US crude inventories have fallen more than 20 million barrels in all over the past three weeks.

But the EIA also reported a build of 3.328 million barrels in gasoline for the week that ended July 12, versus the prior week's decline of 2.006 million. Analysts had forecast a decline of 1.7 million barrels. Gasoline is the primary motor fuel in the United States and makes up the largest

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component of the country's energy mix.

The EIA also reported a distillates build of 3.454 million barrels for last week, negating the previous week's draw of 4.884 million. Analysts had forecast a drop of 500,000 barrels instead. Distillates are primarily processed into the diesel required by trucks, buses and ships, and also goes into making airline fuel.

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UN Denies Receiving Israeli Docs Alleging UN Palestine Agency's Role in October 7 Attack

UNITED NATIONS, July 17 (Sputnik) - The United Nations denies receiving extensive documents to support the claim by Israel officials that the UN Palestine Agency was involved in the October 7 attack, the UN Spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Wednesday.

"No…I can tell you that there have not been a million documents handed over to the Secretary-General," Dujarric said in response to a question asking whether the UN has received "a million" documents proving that UNRWA was involved in the October 7 attack.

On Tuesday, the spokesperson for the Prime Minister's Office of Israel in his daily briefing made remarks saying that millions of documents show that the UN Palestine Agency was involved in Hamas' October 7 attack.

Dujarric said that the spokesman's comment calling Commissioner-General of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) Philippe Lazzarini a liar is "reprehensible" and "puts him at risk."

On Wednesday, Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergey Lavrov chaired the UN Security Council meeting on the situation in Palestine. Lavrov took part in the UN Security Council debate on multilateral cooperation and the Middle East from July 16-17.

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IMF Deputy Managing Director Antoinette Sayeh to Retire in September - Statement

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) - International Monetary Fund (IMF) Deputy Managing Director Antoinette Sayeh will retire in September, the IMF said on Wednesday.

"Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), announced today that Deputy Managing Director Antoinette Sayeh intends to conclude her service on September 12, 2024," the IMF said in a statement.

Georgieva pointed out that Sayeh, a Liberian national, has been a pillar of the IMF leadership team for many years, the statement said.

"Her incredible experience, deep integrity and wise judgment have been invaluable to us, and her unwavering commitment to our institution has been truly exemplary," Georgieva said. "Antoinette represents the best of a life devoted to public service: genuine care for the well-being of the people we serve and her ability to place them front and center of our work."

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Sayeh joined the IMF senior leadership in 2020 and has since overseen key aspects of IMF's operations, policies and corporate priorities, the statement said. She was the first woman to head the IMF's Africa Department from 2008 to 2016.

The IMF said that the process is underway to identify a candidate to succeed Sayeh as IMF Deputy Managing Director and will provide further announcements in due course.

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US Designates Ex-IDF Soldier for 2016 Extrajudicial Killing in West Bank - State Dept

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed visa restrictions on a former Israel Defense Forces sergeant for killing a wounded Palestinian attacker in the West Bank in 2016, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Wednesday.

"We are designating Elor Azaria, a former Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) sergeant, pursuant to Section 7031(c) for his involvement in a gross violation of human rights, namely an extrajudicial killing in the West Bank," Miller said in a statement.

Azaria and his immediate family members are now ineligible for entry into the United States.

"We are also taking steps to impose visa restrictions on an additional group of individuals for having been involved in or meaningfully contributed to undermining the peace, security, or stability in the West Bank," Miller added. "Specifically, these visa restrictions are being pursued against those who have used violence against persons or property, or unduly restricted civilians' access to essential services and basic necessities to include access to food, water, electricity, or medical supplies."

The United States is urging both Israel and Palestine to hold accountable anyone responsible for violence in the West Bank, the statement said.

On March 24, 2016, two Palestinians stabbed an Israeli soldier at an IDF post in Hebron, moderately injuring him. IDF soldiers opened fire, killing one and seriously injuring the other.

Azaria, then 19 and a conscript medic, arrived at the scene to help treat the injured soldier. Then he shot the wounded disarmed Palestinian, who was already lying on the ground, with several other soldiers standing nearby.

Azaria was sentenced to 18 months in prison for violating the army's code of ethics, but was released after serving nine months.

Following the October 7, 2023 attack on Israel by Palestinian organization Hamas, Israeli authorities increased movement restrictions in the West Bank. In 2023, Israeli policing operations in the West Bank were the deadliest since 2005, according to Amnesty International. The West Bank has also seen a surge in Israeli settler violence.

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China's UN Envoy Says Hunger in Gaza Should Not be Weaponized, Politicized

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UNITED NATIONS, July 17 (Sputnik) - Warring parties in Gaza should not be using hunger as a weapon and misuse humanitarian aid, Chinese Ambassador to the UN Fu Cong said on Wednesday.

"Hunger should not be weaponized, no humanitarian issues politicized," Fu Cong told the UN Security Council on Palestine.

In addition, he underlined that land transportation routes are the most effective means of facilitating aid and there is no substitute for them.

Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergey Lavrov is chairing the UN Security Council meeting on the situation in Palestine. Lavrov took part in the UN Security Council debate on multilateral cooperation and the Middle East from July 16-17.

Lavrov is visiting the United Nations after Russia assumed the rotating presidency of the UN Security Council for the month of July.

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Tories Vow to Fire Canada's Consul to New York After Govt. Bought $6.6Mln Residence

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) - The leader of the Conservative Party of Canada Pierre Poilievre vowed on Wednesday to fire Consul General to New York Tom Clark after the purchase of a C$9 million ($6.6 million) luxury residence for him by the Canadian government.

Clark was appointed Consul General in 2022 by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. He previously chaired the Global Public Affairs communications firm and is a decades-long career journalist.

"Trudeau spent $9 million on a luxury 'Billionaires' Row' Condo for his Liberal media hack, Tom Clark, whom he made Consul General - whom I will fire," Poilievre said via the social media platform X.

Poilievre also said life has never been better for Trudeau's friends amid increasingly challenging times for ordinary Canadians that include high inflation, housing and affordability crises.

On Tuesday, the National Post reported that the Canadian government had purchased a multimillion dollar luxury condominium at the Steinway Tower - an 84 floor residential skyscraper - located in Manhattan. The 3,600-square-foot condominium will serve as Clark's official residence in New York and will replace the previous one that was reportedly in need of renovation.

Global Affairs Canada said in a statement that it was advised to relocate the official residency to a "new, smaller, more suitable and more economical" apartment due to the projected high costs of renovating the former residence. The relocation is expected to save C$2 million in taxpayers' money, it added.

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Senior US Military Official Says China Aims to Displace US as Global Leader in Space

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WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) - US Defense Intelligence Agency Director Lt. Gen. Jeff Kruse said on Wednesday that China aims to displace the United States as a global leader in space as it makes "tremendous" gains in modernizing its capabilities in this domain.

"China aims to displace the United States as the global leader in space, and to exploit space in a way that is to our detriment and it counts on what they perceive as a US over reliance on space, and it intends to hold that capability at risk," Kruse said during a panel discussion hosted by the Aspen Security Forum.

Kruse explained that China has made tremendous progress in directed energy weapons, electronic warfare and anti-satellite capabilities, among other projects.

The military official also noted China's increase of launch capability and its lunar activities

The United States expects China will use its space power for economic and military purposes, Kruse said.

Last month, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin in a meeting with Chinese Defense Minister Dong Jun brought up an array of US security concerns over China's activities, including in space.

In May, the United States and six other Western friendly partners on the UN Security Council blocked a Russian draft resolution on preventing an arms race in space that had also received support from China.

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US Democrat Congressman Schiff Calls on Biden to Drop Out of Presidential Race

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) - Leading US House Democrat Congressman Adam Schiff on Wednesday called on President Joe Biden to drop out of the presidential election over concerns he cannot win following the fallout from his dismal performance in the first presidential debate.

"A second Trump presidency will undermine the very foundation of our democracy, and I have serious concers about whether the President (Biden) can defeat Donald Trump in November," Schiff said in a statement circulated on social media. "While the choice to withdraw from the campaign is Biden's alone, I believe it is time for him to pass the torch."

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US Secret Service Official Says Agency Long Been Spread Too Thin by Resourcing Constraints

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) - The US Secret Service (USSS) has long been spread too thin due to resourcing constraints, USSS Office of Investigations Cyber Policy and Strategy Director Matthew Noyes said on Wednesday.

“I think that’s long been the case,” Noyes said during an Aspen Security Forum event, in response to a question about whether the agency is spread too thin. “We are constrained by the resources we have. We do the best we can with the resources we have, but we have been constrained for well over a decade now in terms of resourcing and hiring.”

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The USSS and its leadership have been subject to scrutiny in recent days, following an assassination attempt against former US President Donald Trump during a campaign event in Pennsylvania on Saturday.

The USSS is tasked with a variety of missions, including protecting presidents, presidential candidates and other top officials, combating counterfeiting and investigating other financial and cyber crimes.

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Federal Reserve 'Getting Closer' to Cut US Interest Rates - Governor Waller

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) - The Federal Reserve is closing in on its first interest rate cut in four years amid steadily softening US economic data, although inflation remains well above target, Chris Waller, one of the US central bank's seven governors, said on Wednesday.

"I believe current data are consistent with achieving a soft landing, and I will be looking for data over the next couple months to buttress this view," Waller said. "So, while I don't believe we have reached our final destination, I do believe we are getting closer to the time when a cut in the policy rate is warranted."

Waller outlined three potential rate-change scenarios. The first in which inflation data turned more positive, justifying an easing in the not too distant future; the second, which involves a fluctuation in data that still points toward a moderation. The third was inflation turning higher, forcing the Fed to hike instead.

Waller's comments came after Fed Chairman Jerome Powell admitted on Monday the central bank's mistake in waiting too long to raise interest rates in the aftermath of the spending excesses from the coronavirus pandemic measures that led to overwhelming inflation. Powell vowed not to do the same with interest rate cuts.

But even as some Fed policy makers prefer that Americans pay less for their borrowings sooner rather than later, there are others who caution against a hasty rate cut.

Adriana Kugler, another governor at the central bank, suggested on Tuesday that there be no change to rates until inflation came in line with the Fed's 2%-per-annum target.

Inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index, stood at 3% in the year to June.

Most Fed policy makers are of the opinion that there can be at least two rounds of cuts before the end of 2024. The Fed's policy-making Federal Open Market Committee will meet four times before the year ends to review rates: July 31, September 18, November 7 and December 18.

Kugler's remarks cast doubts on Wall Street's bets for a rate cut happening as early as the September meeting.

Rates are currently in a range of between 5.25% and 5.5%, their highest in two decades. Wall Street is expecting a 0.25% cut each in the two easings projected for this year.

The last time the Fed cut rates was in March 2020 - at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic - when it slashed a full 100 basis points or 1%.

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US Space Force Chief Says Fully Confident SpaceX Will Quickly Fix Recent Falcon 9 Mishap

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) - US Space Command chief Gen. Stephen Whiting said on Wednesday that he has full confidence that SpaceX will quickly address a mishap experienced during a recent Falcon 9 rocket launch.

Last week, the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said that it grounded SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket while it investigates the mishap that occurred during a mission to launch Starlink satellites into orbit on July 11.

"I personally have full confidence in SpaceX, working with the FAA, working with NASA, working with the Space Force, to figure out what happened and continue launching," Whiting said during the Aspen Security Forum in Colorado. "They've launched the Falcon 9 hundreds of times, and I'm sure they'll figure this out quickly."

The FAA said the Falcon 9 rocket will be grounded until the issues have been resolved and it is determined that there is no threat to public safety.

SpaceX said in a separate statement that a liquid oxygen leak developed on the Falcon 9's second stage rocket during the launch, which affected the engine's power. As a result of the incident, the Starlink satellites were released into space in a lower than intended orbit and eventually burned-up during reentry into the Earth's atmosphere.

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US Needs to Know What Russia Has Learned in Space Warfare From Ukraine Conflict - Official

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) - The United States needs to gain understanding of what lessons Russia has learned related to space warfare from the Ukraine conflict, US Defense Intelligence Agency Director Lt. Gen. Jeff Kruse said on Wednesday.

"I think one of the lessons learned out of the entire Ukraine conflict ... is Russia actively targeting through electronic warfare in the low Earth orbit domain and having minimal repercussions," Kruse said. "In this conflict, [they] were not escalatory actions, and we need to make sure we understand what lessons Russia might be drawing from that."

The United States needs to develop a strategy to counter military activities in space and send a message that there may be repercussions for activities impacting US interests, Kruse added.

Kruse made the remarks alongside several other US officials during a panel discussion at the Aspen Security Forum in Colorado.

The panel focused mostly on Chinese and Russian activities in space and US efforts to address those concerns.

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Trump Shooter's Parents Told Police Son Missing Prior to Assassination Attempt - Report

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) - The parents of Trump shooter Thomas Crooks told police that their son was missing in the hours ahead of his assassination attempt against former US President Donald Trump, Fox News reported on Wednesday.

Crooks' parents told police that their son was missing and they were worried about him, the report said.

The parents are cooperating with investigators, the report added.

On Saturday, Crooks attempted to assassinate Trump at a campaign rally in Pennsylvania. Crooks shot Trump in the ear, killed one audience member and wounded two others before being neutralized by the Secret Service.

The FBI is still trying to determine a motive for the shooting, the report said.

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US House Speaker Announces Special Task Force to Investigate Trump Assassination Attempt

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Mike Johnson announced on Wednesday the creation of a special task force with subpoena authority to investigate the assassination attempt on former president Donald Trump.

"I'll be setting up on Monday a task force, a special task force within the house. And the reason we're going to do it that way is because that is a more precision strike. It goes quicker... And we'll have subpoena authority for that task force as well," Johnson said during an interview with Fox News.

Last Saturday, a 20-year-old man attempted to assassinate Trump during a campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania. The Republican presidential nominee sustained a gun wound to his right ear and was briefly hospitalized. The gunman, shooting from a rooftop, killed a man in the audience and critically injured two others before the Secret Service neutralized him.

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US Believes Russia Made Progress Toward Putting Nuclear Weapon in Space - DIA

WASHINGTON , July 17 (Sputnik) - The United States believes that Russia has made progress toward placing nuclear weapons in space and has nearly achieved this capability, Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency Lt. Gen. Jeffrey A. Kruse said on Wednesday.

"We have been tracking for almost a decade Russia's intent to design the ability to put a nuclear weapon in space," Kruse said at the Aspen Security Forum in Colorado. "They have progressed down to a point where we think they're getting close."

The United States is engaged in direct talks with Russia on the issue of Moscow's alleged plans to deploy a nuclear weapon in space, White House National Security Council Communications Adviser John Kirby said in June.

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President Vladimir Putin has said that Russia has always been categorically opposed to deploying nuclear weapons in space. Russia's activities in space are no different from those of other countries, including the US, Putin stressed.

The allegations represent a ploy to prompt negotiations on the issue with terms that benefit the US, Putin said.

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Palestine Did Not Discuss Post-Conflict Future of Gaza with US – Permanent Observer to UN

UNITED NATIONS, July 17 (Sputnik) – Palestinian authorities did not have any discussions with the United States regarding the future of Gaza after the end of military hostilities there, Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations Riyad Mansour told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"Our efforts are now focused on ending the war. We will have enough time to resolve all other issues after we stop hostilities," Mansour told reporters when asked if he has discussed the future of Gaza with US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield.

Mansour underscored that it is also necessary to increase the amount of humanitarian aid delivered to the Palestinian population and begin the process of reconstructing Gaza and prosecuting "the criminals who committed all the crimes against the Palestinians."

State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday that Israel has begun developing plans for the post-war future of Gaza, adding that Tel Aviv will have to make "tough decisions" if it wants security.

On October 7, 2023, Palestinian movement Hamas launched a large-scale rocket attack against Israel and breached the border, attacking both civilian neighborhoods and military bases. Nearly 1,200 people in Israel were killed and some 240 others abducted during the attack. Israel launched retaliatory strikes, ordered a complete blockade of Gaza, and started a ground incursion into the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages.

The death toll in the Gaza Strip has reached 38,584 since last October, while over 88,800 have been injured, according to the Palestinian enclave's health ministry's estimates.

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Blinken Announces Initiative to 'Turbocharge' Semiconductor Capacity in Western Hemisphere

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced on Wednesday a new initiative to boost the capacity of the semiconductor industry in the Western hemisphere, with the first projects taking place in Mexico, Panama and Costa Rica.

"Today, I'm happy to announce one such effort, the Western Hemisphere semiconductor initiative, thanks to funding from the bipartisan Chips Act. This initiative will turbocharge

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countries' capacity to assemble, test and package semiconductors, beginning with Mexico, Panama and Costa Rica," Blinken said in his opening remarks at the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity ministerial plenary meeting.

The United States will hold a symposium in Mexico in September to identify ways to develop a larger role for the region in the global supply chain for semiconductors, Blinken added.

In March, the US State Department said that the United States and Mexico will collaborate on efforts to diversify the supply chain of semiconductor chips.

The Biden administration aims to have US facilities produce 20% of the world's high-end chips by 2030. The effort began after a semiconductor shortage during the Covid-19 pandemic that disrupted the production of goods including computers, cars, appliances, smartphones and video games.

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US Army Bungled Ukraine Project Invoices Worth $20Mln - Inspector General Report

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) - US Army contracting personnel bungled their reviews of 53 invoices last year worth $20 million on a contract dealing with Ukraine and also approved improper payments, the Defense Department Inspector General said in a new report on Wednesday.

"During our audit of the RDC-U [Remote Maintenance and Distribution - Ukraine] contract, we identified that Army contracting personnel did not properly review 53 contractor invoices as of July 26, 2023, totaling $20 million, to ensure compliance with the contract, despite established requirements and best practices to review invoices," the report said.

The problems occurred because the contracting officer inappropriately waived the contracting officer's representative review and approval of invoices, the report said.

"In addition, the contracting officer relied on the Defense Contract Audit Agency's (DCAA) closeout audits, which primarily focus on indirect cost rates and not on whether invoiced amounts were allowable, allocable, or reasonable," the report added.

The overpayments could have been avoided if the contracting officials had reviewed invoices prior to payment, according to the report.

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Most Adults in US Believe Biden Should Withdraw From 2024 Presidential Race - Poll

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) - Most adults in the United States believe that US President Joe Biden should end his 2024 reelection bid, according to an AP/NORC poll released Wednesday.

Seventy percent (70%) of respondents believe Biden should withdraw from the race and allow the Democratic Party to select an alternative nominee, the poll report said. Nearly two-thirds of

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Democrats, 65%, believe Biden should drop out of the race, the poll report said.

The poll comes amid concerns among some Democrats about Biden's viability as a candidate, following a dismal debate performance against Republican challenger Donald Trump last month. Some Democratic lawmakers have called on Biden to end his reelection bid, although his campaign insists that they are moving forward.

A majority of respondents, 57%, also believe that Trump should drop out of the race, the poll report said. However, most Republicans, 73%, believe the Trump campaign should continue, the poll report said.

The poll surveyed 1,253 US adults from July 11-15 and was mostly completed prior to the assassination attempt against Trump during a campaign rally in Pennsylvania on July 13, the poll report added.

The poll maintains a margin of error of plus-or-minus 3.8 percentage points.

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UN Workers in Gaza Facing 'Mortal Risk' Due to Ineffective Notification System - Official

UNITED NATIONS, July 17 (Sputnik) - The notification system to protect United Nations humanitarian personnel are ineffective and workers in the Gaza Strip continue to be exposed to mortal risk, UN Secretary-General's chief of staff Courtenay Rattray said on Wednesday.

"The humanitarian notification system and other coordination mechanisms are not effective, resulting in delayed and aborted aid missions and the exposure of humanitarians to mortal risk," Rattray said during a UN Security Council meeting on Palestine. "The United Nations still does not have the necessary security equipment in Gaza to manage the extreme risks our personnel face."

Rattray also said that much more aid needs to be provided despite the continuous dialogue with the Israeli authorities.

Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergey Lavrov is chairing the UN Security Council meeting on the situation in Palestine.

Lavrov took part in the UN Security Council debate on multilateral cooperation and the Middle East from July 16-17.

Lavrov is visiting the United Nations after Russia assumed the rotating presidency of the UN Security Council for the month of July.

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Most Republican US Voters Believe Anti-Trump Rhetoric Caused Assassination Attempt - Poll

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) - Most Republican voters in the United States believe that rhetoric from former US President Donald Trump's political opponents is to blame for an assassination attempt against him over the weekend, according to a Rasmussen Reports poll released Wednesday.

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On Saturday, a gunman attempted to assassinate Trump at a campaign rally in Pennsylvania, shooting the former president in the right ear, killing one audience member and wounding two others.

A majority of Republican voters, 57%, believe that anti-Trump rhetoric is to blame for the assassination attempt, the poll report said.

Just over one-quarter of Democratic voters, 26%, and 39% of unaffiliated voters believe that anti-Trump rhetoric is to blame, the poll report said.

Overall, 41% of likely US voters believe that the shooting was mainly caused by the rhetoric of Trump's political opponents and 40% believe mental illness is to blame, the poll report said.

The poll surveyed 995 likely US voters from July 15-16. The poll maintains a margin of error of plus-or-minus three percentage points with a 95% confidence level.

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Trump's Ex-Adviser Navarro Released From Prison After Serving 4 Months – Reports

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) – White House advisor in the Trump administration Peter Navarro was released from prison after serving his four-month sentence for contempt of Congress, CNN reported on Wednesday.

In January, a US court sentenced Navarro to four months in prison for not complying with a congressional subpoena issued by the January 6 committee. The appeals court in March denied a motion for release pending appeal.

Navarro reported to a prison in Miami, Florida on March 19 to start serving his sentence.

Trump's ex-adviser is currently heading to the Republican National Convention taking place this week in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the report said.

Another Trump's adviser Steve Bannon began serving his four-month sentence earlier this month at a federal prison in the US state of Connecticut.

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DNC to Hold Virtual Roll Call on Biden Nomination in August, Not July 21 – Letter

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) – The Democratic National Convention (DNC) has decided to hold a virtual roll call to nominate US President Joe Biden in August and not on July 21 as had been previously reported, according to a DNC letter published on Wednesday.

On Tuesday, Punchbowl News reported that a letter was circulating on the Hill asking Democratic lawmakers to cancel plans for an early roll call to nominate Biden amid mounting calls for him to leave the election race.

US media had been reporting since May that the Democratic Party had decided not to have a formal roll call during the Democratic National Convention on August 19 in Chicago. Instead, they reportedly chose to add Biden to the ballot during a virtual meeting scheduled for July 21.

"As Rules Committee Co-Chairs, we have confirmed with the Democratic National Committee

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and the Democratic National Convention that no virtual voting will begin before August 1," the letter first obtained by CBS reads.

The letter has been sent by the heads of the Democratic Convention Rules Committee, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz and Leah Daughtry.

"None of this will be rushed. Unlike our nation's other major political party, our rules are set in public meetings, anchored in the Party's charter and its traditions. That will continue in the 2024 cycle, as it must with so much at stake," the letter said.

According to the letter, the DNC's rules committee, which has more than 180 delegates, the majority of whom remain loyal to Biden, will hold a video call on Friday to determine how the virtual roll call will work in August.

The push to confirm Biden comes as internal opposition to his candidacy persists after his presidential debate with Republican challenger Trump last month reinforced rather than refuted ongoing concerns about his mental fitness to serve a second presidential term at age 81.

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US, Russian Delegations Have No Planned Meetings Amid Lavrov's Visit - Deputy Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, July 17 (Sputnik) - There is no meeting planned between the delegations of Russia and the United States amid the visit of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, US Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Robert Wood said on Wednesday.

"Not that I am aware of," Wood told reporters when asked whether a meeting between the delegations of Russia and the United States has been planned.

Lavrov is chairing the ministerial-level open debate of the UN Security Council on July 16-17.

Later on Wednesday, Lavrov will chair the ministerial-level open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including in Palestine.

Lavrov's schedule also includes bilateral meetings during his visit to the United Nations.

Russia assumed the rotating presidency of the UN Security Council for the month of July.

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Canadian Health Minister Expresses Concern Over New US Regulations on Dog Travel

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Sputnik) - Canadian Minister of Health Mark Holland said on Wednesday that he was worried about the new regulations on cross-border dog travel to be introduced in the United States starting August 1.

"I'm quite concerned, if I'm honest, about the regulations that are being brought in by the United States, requiring, as of August 1, a number of new measures for folks bringing their dogs across the border," Holland said during a news conference.

Canadian and US nationals have been able to go back and forth across the border with their dogs notably because Canada is a rabies free country and has a policy environment that is

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similar to the US's one, Holland said.

The minister said that he understood the idea and necessity behind measures aimed at protecting the country from dog-carried diseases but noted that hemispherical policies would be better suited than individual ones between two countries.

Holland expressed hope that logic will prevail. Moreover, the minister noted that Ottawa was able to obtain important changes and was expecting Washington to approve a "grace period" of several months past August 1 for individuals to adapt pending further progress in the talks.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) said in late May that starting on August 1, dogs entering or returning to the United States would need to meet new requirements depending on where the animals were six months prior to their admission into the country.

Among the new rules, dogs must be at least six months old at the time of their entry in the United States and appear healthy upon their arrival. Animals will not be allowed in if they are carrying diseases. In addition, the pets will need an implanted International Organization for Standardization compatible microchip and owners a CDC dog import form receipt that needs to be filled two to 10 days prior to the arrival.

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