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7/18/24 Thursday

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Biden Wants Voters To Focus on His Record, But It's Worse Than His Debate Performance

America had the biggest 'The Emperor's New Clothes' moment in its history when US President Joe Biden debated Donald Trump last week, turning in a performance that confirmed many Americans' fears that he does not have the cognitive capabilities to be President at his advanced age.

It's political theory 101. When your candidate is weak, focus on their record. When the candidate's record is weak, focus on the candidate. But what do you do when both your candidate and his record are tarnished in the eyes of the public? Most likely, you lose.

That is the conundrum that the Biden administration finds itself in now. As Biden has finally emerged from his long seclusion in an attempt to convince the public that his debate performance was just one "bad night," he has had no choice but to try to change the focus of the campaign to his record over the last four years, but the only thing voters will find there is destruction and incompetence.

"Watch me," Biden famously declared when asked about concerns over his age last year. Now, Biden is asking us to watch his policies, but they are even worse.

Biden ran on a policy of being a stabilizing force in the world after four tumultuous years under Donald Trump. He promised that during his campaign the US would lead by the "power of example" rather than the "example of power," but he has instead ruled unilaterally, promising and starting wars across the globe and turning much of the world against the United States.

"It's ironic that Biden's selling point in 2020 and since is that he's this master foreign policy expert and that he knows what to do," George Szamuely, a senior research fellow at the Global Policy Institute told Sputnik. "He's the grown-up in the room. He's the one who can deal with the foreign policy crisis. He's the one who can reassure allies. But– in fact– America is involved in two extremely dangerous crises, either one of which could lead to a world war. Biden has no plan to bring either to any kind of a conclusion."

Afghanistan

The first major foreign policy challenge the Biden administration faced was admittedly set in motion by his predecessor Trump, who ordered the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan by negotiating with the Taliban and setting a May 2021 deadline.

The Biden administration insisted that date was too soon for the US to safely remove its assets and unilaterally extended the date to September 11, 2021, setting the symbolic date of 20 years after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington DC.

Biden decided against renegotiating the deadline with the Taliban. It is unclear if those talks would have resulted in a positive result, but the administration arrogantly decided that it would be beneath them to try. The result was a hasty withdrawal as the Taliban blitzed across the country, leading to the death of 13 American soldiers.

On August 30, nearly two weeks before the symbolically picked date by Biden, the last US plane left Afghanistan as the Taliban took control of Kabul. Images of desperate Afghans clinging to

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US cargo jets as they sped down the runway were broadcast across the globe, the first major black eye of the Biden administration.

Ukraine

When Russia launched its special military operation in Ukraine, it was only after multiple attempts of dialog by Russia was rebuffed by the United States. Following his disastrous debate performance, Biden has attempted to repaint Ukraine as a success, despite the cost of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian lives, hundreds of billions of dollars and a situation on the battlefield that is quickly deteriorating.

"I've got 50 other nations around the world supporting Ukraine, including Japan and South Korea," Biden bragged during the debate. But a coalition of the willing is not in itself a win, as George W Bush proved in Iraq. Despite the sanctions on Russia and all the military might NATO could spare, Russia has emerged victorious on the battlefield with the only question remaining of when peace talks will start and how much of Ukraine will remain when they do.

Russia and Ukraine were close to a deal in 2022 that would have restored Ukraine's 2021 borders on the condition that it does not join NATO. Those talks were reportedly sabotaged by the US and UK when then-UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson was dispatched and told Ukraine to reject the deal.

Today, Ukraine is looking at giving up significant parts of its former territory to end the conflict, yet Biden still insists that his Ukraine policy contrasts positively with Trump's, even as that policy is to continue as if NATO is winning.

"Let's just go on sending more and more arms in the hope that somehow this will lead to a successful outcome for the United States," Szamuely said, explaining Biden's Ukraine and Gaza policies. "But he never explains how it is going to lead to a successful outcome for the United States."

Gaza

Biden's policy on Israel and Gaza earned him the nickname "Genocide Joe" from young protesters, never a good sign for the party of the youth. Worse, much of the world saw the lie of the Western "rules-based international order" as the US continually blocked UN ceasefire calls using its veto vote.

Putting aside the morality of funding what has been credibly described as a genocide by multiple world leaders and humanitarian organizations, Biden's policy was also bad politics, as he tried to satisfy his base with symbolic gestures that were just enough to anger Zionists in America, but not nearly concrete enough to placate those protesting him on the streets and college campuses. Now, he is criticized for funding a genocide by the left and accused of abandoning Israel from the right.

Economy

The Biden administration will be quick to point towards traditional economic indicators, like GDP, unemployment, and the stock market as evidence that he has led a historic economic revival in the United States following the COVID-19 pandemic.

But the American people aren't buying it and that may be because more tangible economic factors have gotten significantly worse under Biden. Credit card debt and chronic homelessness are at all-time highs. Housing and food costs remain high. Biden can scream about unemployment numbers all he wants, but if Americans can barely afford to put food on the table,

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are surviving on credit cards and see more of their fellow citizens sleeping on the street, no amount of stock market success is going to convince them things are going well.
"[What] people expect from their president is peace and prosperity. Well, Biden isn't delivering either and if a president isn't delivering either peace of prosperity, then he's going to have difficulties getting elected," Szamuely argued.
Biden wants people to focus on his record, which he says is the most successful since Franklin Delano Roosevelt, but a glance at that record reveals almost the complete opposite, a laundry list of failures couched with massive domestic spending that promises to fix problems but never seems to.
Perhaps the Biden administration should go back to focusing on the candidate, or better yet, pick a new one.

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'Finger Pointing' Might Reveal Truths About Trump Assassination Attempt

Last week, former US President and Republican nominee for the 2024 Presidential election Donald Trump, was struck in the ear by a bullet while speaking at a rally. One attendee was killed and another two were injured as the shooter fired off between five and eight shots from a rooftop less than 500 feet away.
The assassination attempt of Donald Trump has raised countless questions about the Secret Service and how a 20-year-old untrained man managed to climb a roof less than 150 yards from the leading Presidential candidate and take at least five shots before being neutralized by snipers. The blame game between officials and agencies is the best chance the public has of getting real answers.
The head of the Secret Service, Kimberly Cheatle has so far been steadfast in her refusal to resign, despite a catastrophic failure of her department that could have caused the country to descend into chaos had her ward not turned his head a few inches at the exact moment he did. As she fights to save her career and reputation, Cheatle and her department have offered two somewhat contradictory explanations for why the roof the shooter, Thomas Matthew Crooks, used to attack the former President was left unguarded. The sloped roof was too dangerousfor the Secret Service, Cheatle implied during an interview. Later, she said that it was the local police who were responsible for the area and that the building fell outside of the Secret Service's perimeter. It was that second explanation that caused local officials to turn on Cheatle, contradicting her already thin explanations.
On Wednesday, the district attorney of Butler Country, Pennsylvania, where the rally took place, confirmed that the Secret Service "was informed that the local police department did not have the manpower to assist with securing that building," before the rally took place.
"I would say that all of these conflicting stories and details that are coming out and finger pointing, in a way they're good, especially the finger pointing, of course, we think of it as a bad thing. You know, putting the blame on others," former FBI special agent and whistleblower Coleen Rowley told Sputnik. "But in many of these cases, it's the only way we can actually get some of the factual truth out."

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Rowley noted the actions of institutions after their failures, including the US intelligence agencies after 9/11 behaved similarly.
“It’s a human tendency that you’re going to believe that it’s more important to protect the goal,” Rowley continued. “The ends justify the means and if you have to cover up the truth, that’s the price we have to pay for this noble goal that our institution or agency has.”
Rowley noted that individual egos are also involved, which seems apparent in Cheatle’s refusal to resign despite reigning over her department’s biggest failure in over four decades.
“I would imagine she's still in [her] position because her bosses have not told her she has to resign. So, that will all hinge on the Biden administration telling her it's over, which might happen,” Rowley explained.

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Israeli Newspaper Says Country is ‘Collapsing’ as 46,000 Businesses Shutter

Israel's GDP fell by nearly 20% from October to December 2023, though it rebounded with a 14% gain the next quarter, that was less than economists expected.
Roughly 46,000 Israeli businesses have shut down since October 7, according to the Hebrew-language newspaper Maariv.
The Israeli economy has been declining rapidly since it launched its campaign in Gaza,particularly after the Yemen Ansar Allah movement (aka Houthi) and the Hezbollah movement in Lebanon have been taking action in solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza.
The Houthis have blockaded the Red Sea from ships it says are connected with Israel or the United States. Because of their actions, the southern port of Eilat –the country's busiest port before the war– has been virtually shut down since October 2023. Exacerbating the situation further, foreign tourism has also collapsed during the war, and as of December, nearly half a million Israelis have left the country and that was before tensions inflamed significantly between Iran and Israel.
Meanwhile, the Ansar Allah movement has been attacking Israel’s north, forcing tens of thousands of Israelis to evacuate the area, virtually wiping out businesses in the area. However, businesses around all of Israel are struggling, the paper said, with construction and ancillary industries being hurt the most but it noted that nearly every industry is being affected.
Yoel Amir the CEO of Coface Bdi, a services and credit risk management firm, told the paper that they estimate 60,000 Israeli businesses could shut down by the end of the year.
“This is a very high number that encompasses many sectors. About 77 percent of the businesses that have been closed since the beginning of the war, which make up about 35,000 businesses, are small businesses with up to five employees, and are the most vulnerable in the economy,” Amir said.
In December, South Africa brought a case against Israel in the International Court of Justice, accusing it of genocide. Since then, a dozen countries have joined it and many more have publicly welcomed the case.
More than 38,300 Palestinians have been confirmed killed and another nearly 88,300 have been seriously injured in Gaza since Israel began its campaign, according to the Palestinian

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Health Ministry. That number is largely assumed to be a massive undercount because of a lack of health services and thousands who remain missing are presumed to be buried under the rubble. A recent study by the British medical journal The Lancet estimates that more than 186,000 Palestinians have likely died as either a direct or indirect result of the Israeli campaign.

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An Elderly Genocider With a Poor Memory

According to recent polling, 65% of Americans do not believe US President Joe Biden has the mental and cognitive health to serve as President. Meanwhile, more than half of Americans, including 75% of Democrats, describe Israel's campaign in Gaza as a "genocide."
US President Joe Biden has a lot of problems. The two largest are that a majority of voters doubt his mental acuity and that most of his base believes that he is funding a genocide.
But the first may give him an out on the second. In February, special counsel Robert Hur declined to press charges against Biden for his handling of classified documents because he felt Biden would present to the jury as an "elderly man with a poor memory" noting that he could not remember which years he was vice president or when his son Beau died.
Hur was attacked by Democrats and left-leaning media for that report, but even the Washington Post had to admit Hur was vindicated after Biden bombed on the debate stage, appearing exactly as Hur described him.
There has been increasing speculation that Biden is not really running the country, but no one can agree who is pulling the strings. Maybe if Biden leans into fears that he is not the one running the country, he can avoid the scorn of anti-genocide protesters by claiming to not remember it.
It's as plausible as any other excuse his handlers may come up with.

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The US Treasury is Denying Jill Stein Matching Funds the FEC Awarded - Campaign Manager

The FEC announced on June 26 that the campaign of Green Party candidate Jill Stein had become eligible for matching funds for the primary season of her campaign.
Jill Stein, the leading candidate for the Green Party's nomination for president is being denied federal matching funds they are entitled to, Stein campaign manager Jason Call said on Tuesday.
The funds come from an optional $3 donation to the Presidential Matching Fund on the US individual federal tax returns. That fund is designed to match political donations under $250 to campaigns that meet certain thresholds and do not take private contributions or spend more than $123.5 million.
Last week, the Federal Election Commission (FEC) confirmed that the Stein campaign reached that threshold and should be awarded $100,000 immediately, with more to come monthly. Call

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says the total amount should be around $270,000. The Stein campaign was the only active campaign to reach the required threshold.

However, the US Treasury has declined to distribute the funds, citing a shortfall. In March, the government raided the fund of $400 million as part of the $1.2 trillion spending package that averted a government shutdown. Most of that, $320 million, was used to fund the Secret Service, $55 million was appropriated for election security, and $25 million went to the Justice Department.

The fund was flush with cash to be raided because, for the last several elections, the two major parties have largely ignored it. According to FEC figures, the fund distributed an average of $165,138,480 per election to the two major parties from its formation in 1974 until 2008, the last election both parties took a significant amount of money from the fund. Since 2008, only $1,088,929 has been distributed to the Democratic Party and none to the Republican party.

According to Call, the Treasury said it has to wait until after each party's convention to see if they will take money from the fund, before distributing the funds the Stein campaign has earned, despite neither party taking general election funds in recent elections due to the restrictions it puts on campaigns. He added that it is not clear if or when the funds will be disbursed. He told Sputnik that even if the funds are eventually distributed, the delay will still harm the campaign.

"If [any party hits] 5% in 2024 they would be eligible for those funds in the 2028 general election. So, them denying us primary matching funds now is limiting our ballot access efforts now because that's what we are putting the majority of our funds into," Call explained in a message to Sputnik, "Therefore [it is] going to limit our opportunity to get 5% in this election. They are taking away our potential voter base and thus prevent us [from] being eligible for those funds in 2028."

Call added that since the funds are for the primary season, the Stein campaign would only be able to use the funds to pay for debts incurred during the primary season and not for the general election, putting them in a precarious position of potentially being bankrupted if the campaign spends the money and then are later denied disbursement.

"Incurring debt is an extremely risky proposition under these auspices. We could incur the debt in the primary, and they could still deny us the funds, 'There's a shortfall!' And we would then be stuck with the debt," Call explained. "In fact, given that [the] Treasury is a politicized department, we think they would probably still deny us the funds to bankrupt us," he argued, noting that the Democratic Party is suing to keep Stein off the ballot in Nevada, a tactic he says the Democrats are not using to win, but rather tie up resources for the campaign.

"I call this the WalMart approach to democracy," explained Call. "Simply using unlimited resources to overwhelm the opposition. We just submitted a confirmed qualifying number of good signatures for Ohio. I have no doubt they will file some legal action to keep us off the ballot there also."

The US Treasury did not respond to Sputnik's request for comment.

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Nasdaq Says No Impact to Its Exchange Systems From Global Tech Glitch

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NEW YORK, July 19 (Sputnik) - Nasdaq, one of the major US stock market exchanges, said on Friday it had not been affected by a tech glitch impacting the computers of airlines to banks and healthcare systems worldwide.

"Our European markets and US pre-market are operating normally," a spokesman of Nasdaq said in an update issued through US media. "We expect our US markets to open normally."

Earlier, in Europe, exchange-operator Euronext said the outage had not affected stocks trading in the region. The London Stock Exchange also said its news service RNS was down earlier in the day, although securities trading wasn't affected.

The glitch occurred after Austin, Texas-based cybersecurity company CrowdStrike, a major provider of malware and virus protection to a large array of companies, issued a single software update that impacted millions of users of Microsoft's Windows devices worldwide.

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New York Subway Says CrowdStrike Outage Impacts Its Ability to See Train Locations

WASHINGTON, July 19 (Sputnik) – The New York City subway system said Friday that the global IT outage has impacted its ability to see train locations, and train arrival information is also now unavailable for certain stops.

"Unfortunately, we cannot assist with inquiries about where these trains are. This technical outage also impacts our ability to see train locations, so we cannot provide that information," it posted on social media.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) added that the outage affected its website, the app, countdown clocks, and arrival announcements.

"Train arrival information is unavailable for A/B/C/D/E/F/G/J/M/N/Q/R/W/Z/Rockaway Park Shuttle/Franklin Av Shuttle due to a worldwide technical outage. Train service is unaffected," it said.

The MTA is among a wide range of businesses affected by a global technology outage that is being attributed to a software update issued by cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike that has caused computers using the Microsoft Windows operating system to crash.

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CrowdStrike CEO Apologizes for Global Outage, Warns Problems Could Persist for ‘Some Time’

WASHINGTON, July 19 (Sputnik) – CrowdStrike CEO George Kurtz apologized for the global IT outage on Friday and warned that the problems could persist for "some time" as hundreds of companies around the world are trying to cope with their systems not working.

"It could be some time for some systems that just automatically won’t recover," Kurtz told NBC. "[CrowdStrike is] deeply sorry for the impact that we've caused to customers, to travelers, to anyone affected by this [outage]."

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Kurtz added though that the issue has been fixed on their end and the company is trying now to figure out where the negative interaction occurred.

On Friday morning, a global failure of Windows-based equipment began, which affected telecom operators, banks, and airlines around the world. US company CrowdStrike confirmed that the global failure in Windows had occurred due to its update for the Falcon Sensor cybersecurity application.

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DC Police Say No Critical Systems Affected by CrowdStrike Outage

WASHINGTON, July 19 (Sputnik) – The Metropolitan Police Department of the District of Columbia said Friday that Microsoft's CrowdStrike outage has not impacted any of its mission critical systems.

"MPD is working closely with OCTO [Office of the Chief Technology Officer DC] on this issue. MPD's operations continue and we remain ready to serve District residents. There are no impacts to any of MPD's mission critical systems," it posted on social media.

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Trump Says Will End Every Global Crisis Created by Biden, Including Ukraine Conflict

WASHINGTON, July 19 (Sputnik) - Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump has said during his speech at the 2024 Republican National Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, that he will end every single global crisis, including the conflict in Ukraine, if he is elected president of the United States in November.

"I will end every single international crisis that the current administration has created, including the horrible war with Russia and Ukraine," Trump said Thursday night.

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Trump Says Will Get Along With N. Korea's Leader, Says Kim Misses Him

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump has vowed to get along with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un if elected next US president in November, adding that Kim misses him.

"I got along very well with North Korea, Kim Jong Un, I got along very well with him… you know, it's nice to get along with somebody who has a lot of nuclear weapons or otherwise," Trump told the 2024 Republican National Convention on Thursday night. "I got along with him, and we stopped the missile launches from North Korea. Now, North Korea is acting up again, but when we get back, I'll get along with him. He'd like to see me back too. I think he misses me. If you

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want to know the truth."

In 2018, Trump and the North Korean leader signed a joint agreement to de-escalate relations between the United States and North Korea. The two leaders met the following year in Vietnam's Hanoi to continue the negotiations but failed to reach a deal on the issue of US sanctions against North Korea.

The relations between the two countries have since remained tense.

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Trump Says Bullet Came 'Quarter of Inch' of Taking His Life, Painful to Tell What Happened

(Adds additional details in paras 4-6, background information in paras 7-8)

WASHINGTON, July 19 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump has shared that a bullet during the assassination attempt against him came one-quarter of an inch of taking his life, and this story is just too painful to tell.

"As you already know, the assassin's bullet came within the quarter of an inch of taking my life," Trump told the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee Thursday night, adding that he will share what happened. "And you'll never hear it from me again a second time because it's actually too painful to tell."

Trump also expressed gratitude to the American people for their love and support following the assassination attempt.

Trump said he is still alive by the grace of God, adding that the shooting was a providential moment.

"If I had not moved my head at that very last instant, the assassin's bullet would have perfectly hit its mark, and I would not be here tonight, we would not be together," Trump said.

The Republican nominee also paid tribute to Corey Comperatore, the firefighter who was killed at the Trump rally shooting in Pennsylvania. Trump said that some $6 million has been raised to date to help his family.

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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the United States in November.
"I will end every single international crisis that the current administration has created, including the horrible war with Russia and Ukraine," Trump said Thursday night.

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Trump Says Will Restore Peace, Stability to World if Reelected

WASHINGTON, July 19 (Sputnik) - Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump said in his speech to the 2024 Republican National Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, that he will bring peace and stability to the world if elected president of the United States in November.
"Under our leadership, the United States will be respected again. No nation will question our power, no enemy will doubt our might. Our borders will be totally secure. Our economy will soar. We will return law and order to our streets, patriotism to our schools, and, importantly, we will restore peace, stability and harmony all throughout the world," Trump said Thursday night.
The ex-president added that the damage that Biden has done to the country is "unthinkable."
"Only going to use the term once, Biden. I'm not going to use the name anymore, just one time. The damage that he's done to this country is unthinkable. It's unthinkable," Trump said.

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Trump Says He Pledges to Nation Tonight That ‘We'll Turn It Around Very Quickly'

WASHINGTON, July 19 (Sputnik) - Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump has told the 2024 Republican National Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, that he vows to the American people "to turn it around very quickly ."
"Our resolve is unbroken, and our purpose is unchanged to deliver a government that serves the American people better than ever before. Nothing will stop me in this mission," Trump said Thursday night.
"I pledge that to our nation, going to turn our nation around, and we're going to do it very quickly," Trump added.

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Trump also expressed gratitude to the American people for their love and support following the assassination attempt.

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Trump Officially Accepts Republican Presidential Nomination Thursday Night

WASHINGTON, July 19 (Sputnik) - Ex-US President Donald Trump has officially accepted the nomination to be the Republican nominee for the US presidential election during the 2024 Republican National Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

"I am running to be president for all of America, not half of America, because there is no victory in winning for half of America," Trump said Thursday night. "So tonight, with faith and devotion, I proudly accept your nomination for president of the United States."

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Hungary Sees No 'Battlefield Solution' to Ukraine Conflict, Backs Negotiations - Szijjarto

UNITED NATIONS, July 19 (Sputnik) - Hungary sees no battlefield solution to the conflict in Ukraine and supports negotiations to resolve the conflict, Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Peter Szijjarto told RIA Novosti.

"We see no battlefield solution. We only see a solution around the negotiating table, and in order to have a result around the negotiating table, everybody should sit there and hope that a ceasefire can be established soon, and taking advantage of this chance so peace talks would be carried out," Szijjarto said on the sidelines of the UN.

Peace talks could begin as soon as later this year if former US President Donald Trump retakes the White House in the 2024 presidential election in the United States, Szijjarto added.

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EU Copying US Pro-War Position on Ukraine Problematic - Szijjarto

UNITED NATIONS, July 19 (Sputnik) - The European Union copying the United States' pro-war position on the conflict in Ukraine is problematic, Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Peter Szijjarto told RIA Novosti.

"The United States - at least the current administration - represents a pro-war position. The European Union doesn't represent anything but copying the United States, and that is the problem," Szijjarto said on the sidelines of the UN.

Hungary urges the European Union to develop its own strategy focused on restoring the

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legitimacy of diplomatic channels, Szijjarto said.

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Szijjarto on EU Fining Hungary: Budapest Decides Whom to Let in Country

UNITED NATIONS, July 19 (Sputnik) - Hungary considers it outrageous that the EU imposed a fine for its refusal to accept a quota of refugees, but will remain true to its sovereignty and will continue to decide for itself who to let live on its territory, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto told RIA Novosti.

In June, the EU Court of Justice ruled that Hungary must pay a fine of 200 million euros ($216 million) for failing to follow the common EU asylum policy. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban called the decision outrageous and unacceptable.

"I think that's a huge scandal, a really huge scandal that a country which is protecting not only itself but the entire European Union has to pay a fine for that. It's so scandalous and outrageous that you can't find an expression which would be strong and expressive enough to express our feelings about this," Szijjarto said.

Nobody from New York or Brussels can take away Hungary's sovereignty and decide who can live there, Szijjarto also said.

"We stick to our national sovereignty. Part of the national sovereignty is that you, as a country, have the sovereign decision, the right for a sovereign decision with whom you are ready to live together, and whom you are ready to let into your country," Szijjarto added.

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Some Biden Cabinet Members Discuss Whether He Should Suspend Campaign Run - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - Several members of US President Joe Biden's cabinet are beginning to have private conversations about whether he should suspend his presidential campaign amid the steep decline in support from his Democratic allies, Bloomberg has reported, citing a person familiar with the matter.

The report said on Thursday that several Biden cabinet members are increasingly concerned about the US president's dim prospects of being able to contend against Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump.

However, the report noted that the cabinet officials involved in these discussions were not themselves urging Biden to drop out of the race, but they believed he reached a breaking point.

The cabinet members also highlighted voters' concerns over Biden's health, especially after his COVID-19 diagnosis on Wednesday that forced him to put his campaign on hold.

Earlier, Politico reported, citing sources, that former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi urged Biden to make a decision to give up his bid for reelection. Per one of Pelosi's allies, she could potentially go public with the demands for Biden to resign his candidacy.

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Other media reports claim Biden could drop out as soon as this weekend.

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Georgia's Foreign Agents Law Aims to Protect Against External Interference - Szijjarto

UNITED NATIONS, July 19 (Sputnik) - Georgia's law on foreign agents is a "very understandable" effort to protect itself from external interference and maintain sovereignty and the European Union has no right to criticize Tbilisi for adopting the measure, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto told RIA Novosti.

"It's a very understandable effort of a country to regulate and restrict the chance of external interference," Szijjarto said. "The fact that Georgia would like to control and push back the external interference in their country is understandable. I don't think that anyone, especially not the European Union, would have a right to criticize the Georgians for such a law."

Hungary has been experiencing the same problem, according to Szijjarto.

"Our opposition has been funded absolutely externally, mostly from the United States, millions and millions of dollars. There was a very, very tough interference into the last elections and since then, opposition and their media are being financed externally. I think this violates the sovereignty of a country," the minister said.

On May 14, the Georgian parliament adopted the law "On Transparency of Foreign Influence" in the third and final reading, despite street protests. On May 18, Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili vetoed the law on foreign agents, calling it "Russian" and "unconstitutional."

Speaker of the Georgian Parliament Shalva Papuashvili signed the law on foreign agents adopted by parliament on June 3 after the president refused to do so. Papuashvili then explained that after signing the law, within 60 days, the Georgian Justice Ministry would develop all the necessary regulations and create an electronic portal for organizations. After 60 days, the organizations that have significant foreign funding will be required to register in the portal and declare their 2023 finances.

The adoption of the law on foreign agents in Georgia caused discontent in the West. The US and EU announced a review of relations with Georgia. Washington has canceled planned military exercises, and the European Union has frozen funding for the Georgian Defense Ministry.

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Nearly Two-Thirds of US Voters Believe Trump Risks More Assassination Attempts - Poll

WASHINGTON, July 19 (Sputnik) - Nearly two-thirds of likely voters in the United States believe that former US President Donald Trump could face more assassination attempts, according to a Rasmussen Reports poll.

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.

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Sixty-five percent (65%) of respondents are concerned that there could be another assassination attempt against Trump, including 43% who are very concerned, the poll report said on Thursday.

Just under one-third of respondents, 32%, said that they are not concerned about more assassination attempts, including 15% who are not at all concerned, 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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Textron Wins $312Mln Contract Boost From US Navy to Build Nine Hovercraft - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, July 19 (Sputnik) - Textron Systems Corporation has received a more than $312 million contract extension from the US Navy for up to nine future hovercraft vessels, the Defense Department announced.

"Textron Systems Corporation [of] New Orleans, Louisiana is awarded a $312,389,283 ...modification ...contract ...for up to nine future ship to shore connector landing craft air cushion (100 class) craft," the Defense Department said in a release on Thursday.

Work on the contract will be performed in New Orleans, Louisiana (35%); Camden, New Jersey (21%); Gloucester, United Kingdom (13%); and other locations across the continental United States, the release said.

Work on the extended contract will continue over the next 15 months and is scheduled to be completed by October 2025, the release added.

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US Special Operations Command Orders $750Mln in Ammunition for Future Missions - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, July 19 (Sputnik) - Four companies have received a combined three-quarters-of-a-billion-dollar contract to provide ammunition for the US Special Operations Command (SOCOM), the Defense Department announced.

"Ultimate Ammunition [of] Las Vegas, Nevada; Canadian Commercial Corporation [of] Ottawa, Canada; Blane International Group [of] Cumming, Georgia and Olin Winchester [of] Oxford, Mississippi [have been] awarded a ... contract with a maximum total ceiling of $750 million," the Defense Department said in a release on Thursday.

The companies will provide numerous types of ammunition for all Special Operations Command components, the release said.

SOCOM at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, will oversee the supplying of the ammunition as the contracting activity for the project, the release added.

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US Army, Navy Missile Defense Systems Integrated in Valiant Shield Exercise - Raytheon

WASHINGTON, July 19 (Sputnik) - Raytheon has successfully demonstrated a new integrated missile defense system combining existing US Army detection sensors and battle command systems with the Standard Missile 6 at the 2024 Valiant Shield military exercise with allies, the company announced in a press release.

"At Valiant Shield 24, Raytheon demonstrated a simulated complex missile engagement leveraging the US Army's Lower Tier Air and Missile Defense Sensor, or LTAMDS, and Integrated Air and Missile Defense Battle Command System, IBCS, launching the US Navy's premier, long-range effector, Standard Missile 6 (SM-6)," the release said on Thursday.

The test utilized tracking data from Army LTAMDS simulators and operational SM-6 engagement control software interfaced with IBCS to demonstrate their successful integration, the release said.

"This proves the feasibility of SM-6 as an additional effector within the Army IAMD architecture including IBCS and LTAMDS," the release added.

The experiment used a combination of physical systems' hardware and simulation to demonstrate the effective detection and identification of an in-coming threat, target and track data transfer, launch command, and the successful guide to missile intercept, according to the release.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, July 19 (Sputnik) -

US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

* The Democratic Party would potentially violate state laws if they attempt to replace President Joe Biden as their 2024 nominee, US House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Thursday.
* Johnson said that he does not consider Biden fit to serve another term in office.
* Biden is experiencing mild symptoms from his COVID-19 infection and is receiving antiviral medication Paxlovid as a treatment, White House physician Kevin O'Connor said.

TRUMP ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT

* Former US President Donald Trump is contemplative after the assassination attempt against him at the campaign rally over the weekend, US House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Thursday.
* The classified details about the assassination attempt against Trump are even more alarming than publicly available information about the incident, Johnson said.

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CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump is unlikely to propose any peace initiatives on Ukraine until the US election but will be ready to act as a peace broker before his potential inauguration, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban said in a report to European Council President Charles Michel on Thursday.
* The European Union should conduct high-level political talks with China to discuss the modalities of the next conference on Ukraine, Orban said in a report to Michel.
* The military conflict in Ukraine will radically escalate in the near future, Orban said in a report to Michel.
* There are facts of sexual crimes and abductions of women committed by mercenaries in the Kharkov region, deputy head of Russia's military-civil administration of the Kharkov (Kharkiv) region, Evgeny Lisnyak, told Sputnik.

ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

* The military pressure on the Hamas movement brings closer the deal on releasing as many hostages as possible, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Thursday.
* US President Joe Biden still expects to meet Netanyahu in Washington next week despite his COVID-19 diagnosis, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said.
* Netanyahu confirmed his plans to visit the United States next week to address the US Congress.

WESTERN SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

* The United Kingdom has added 11 oil tankers to the list of anti-Russia sanctions for participating in activities that allegedly undermine the sovereignty of Ukraine, according to a document published by the country's Treasury.
* Slovak Economy Minister Denisa Sakova said that she held a meeting with Ukraine's ambassador in Bratislava, Myroslav Kastran, to discuss restrictions on oil supplies from Russia.

AIR INDIA AIRPLANE EMERGENCY LANDING IN RUSSIA

* A Being passenger plane on Air India flight AI183 from New Delhi to San Francisco made an emergency landing in the Russian city of Krasnoyarsk on Thursday.
* The Indian Embassy in Washington told Sputnik that it is trying to gather details from the Indian Embassy in Moscow about the Air India aircraft that made an emergency landing in Russia while en-route to San Francisco.

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Hunter Biden Seeks to Dismiss Tax Charges, Citing Trump Classified Materials Case - Filing

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - Hunter Biden is seeking to throw out federal tax charges against him based on a recent ruling on the legality of special counsels in a dismissed case involving former US President Donald Trump's alleged mishandling of classified documents, according to a motion to dismiss filed on Thursday.

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Earlier this week, a US district judge dismissed the case against Trump, finding that the US Justice Department's appointment of a special counsel in the case violated the Appointments Clause of the US Constitution.

"Based on these new legal developments, Mr. Biden moves to dismiss the indictment brought against him because the Special Counsel who initiated this prosecution was appointed in violation of the Appointments Clause as well," the filing said.

Prosecutors accuse Biden of engaging in a four-year tax scheme to avoid paying at least $1.4 million in federal taxes.

The US Justice Department relied on the same exact authority to appoint the special counsel in Biden's case as it did in Trump's, the filing said. The filing requests that the court dismiss the indictment.

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US Senator Rubio Suggests Biden Resign as President if He Drops Out of Race - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - US Senator Marco Rubio suggested that President Joe Biden should resign if he drops out of the 2024 election race amid mounting pressure on him to step down, Politico reported on Thursday.

Rubio made the comment while talking to reporters at the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee following the news that Biden had been diagnosed with COVID-19, the report said.

"The question is, if he's not going to be their nominee because he's not up to it, how can he be our president for the next six months?" the report quoted Rubio as saying. "If there's something wrong with you that doesn't allow you to run for president, how can you still be there as president? If they're going to remove him as a nominee, they've got to remove him as president, and that's really bad for our country."

Rubio also noted that he is worried about who is actually running the United States if the Democrats knew about Biden's cognitive decline and deliberately hid this fact from the public.

At the same time, Rubio said he does not see how the Democratic Party could bypass Vice President Kamala Harris if Biden withdraws from the race.

Numerous Democrats have called on Biden to end his campaign and step aside for an alternative nominee, following a dismal debate performance against Republican nominee Donald Trump last month.

The Biden campaign has said that they are not planning for a scenario in which Biden is not the Democratic presidential candidate.

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Listeria Outbreak From Plant-Based Milk Leaves 2 Dead in Canada - Health Ministry

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WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - An outbreak of listeria infections linked to recalled plant-based milk has led to the death of two people and the hospitalization of nine in Canada, the country's health ministry said.

"People became sick between August 2023 and early July 2024. Of the cases reported to us, nine people have been hospitalized and two individuals have died. Many people who became sick reported drinking recalled plant-based beverages before their illnesses occurred," Health Canada said in a public notice.

There are twelve laboratory-confirmed cases of which ten were recorded in Ontario, one in Quebec and another in Nova Scotia, but the outbreak might not be limited to those provinces and territories, the notice said.

Health Canada calls on the public to not consume, use, sell, serve or distribute a range of recalled plant-based refrigerated milk from the Silk and Best Value brands, the notice added.

Listeriosis is a foodborne bacterial illness that can affect anyone exposed to a contaminated food product. The symptoms can be observed as early as three days after being infected and include fever, nausea, ramps, diarrhea, vomiting, headaches and constipation among others.

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Canada Making Headway in 'Persuading' US Lawmakers of Alleged Russian Threat-Ambassador

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) – Canadian Ambassador to the United States Kristen Hillman said on Thursday that progress was being made in persuading US lawmakers of an alleged "Russian threat" to North America.

"I think we are making headway with those who haven't, hadn't thought of it before," Hillman said during a Politico panel from the Republican National Convention with the ambassadors of the United Kingdom, Germany, and Sweden.

The Ambassador added that these things require "consistent and persistent" discussion.

The reply came to a question about how some members of the Republican Party who downplay the threat of Russian President Vladimir Putin and the conflict in Ukraine were impacting her efforts to argue for the alleged case that Moscow is a threat.

Recently, the West has been increasingly discussing the possibility of a direct military conflict between the alliance and Russia. In response, the Kremlin has asserted that Moscow poses no threat to anyone but will not overlook actions that could endanger its interests.

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Speaker Johnson Says Alarming It Took Him 8 Weeks in Winter to Get Meeting With Biden

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Mike Johnson on Thursday called it alarming that he could not get the White House to schedule a meeting he requested with

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President Joe Biden to discuss the border and other urgent matters.

"For about eight weeks, beginning in early January or maybe late December, the staff of the White House was unable to schedule a meeting at my request with the President, and that was alarming," Johnson said during an interview with Politico at the Republican National Convention.

Johnson explained that they had some important issues related to national security that the speaker of the House and the president should discuss, including the border.

"The subjects now don't matter so much as what happened for eight weeks: they stonewalled me," he said.

Johnson recalled that the meeting was eventually organized with other lawmakers participating, and in the middle of it Biden asked for some time with Johnson.

"It occurred to me that they did not want that to happen, now we all know why," Johnson said.

Numerous Democrats have called on Biden to end his campaign and step aside for an alternative nominee, following a dismal debate performance against Republican nominee Donald Trump last month.

However, the Biden campaign said that they are not planning for a scenario in which Biden is not the Democratic nominee.

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US Authorities Indict Georgia Man for Threatening FBI Director Wray - Justice Department

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - John Woodbury of Georgia has been indicted on federal charges for threatening FBI Director Christopher Wray, the US Attorney's office for the Northern District of Georgia said in a release on Thursday.

"John Woodbury has been indicted on federal charges of transmitting interstate threats to injure FBI Director Christopher Wray and others," the release said.

The case is currently being investigated by the FBI, the release added.

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Canada Might Reciprocate Trump's 10% Tariffs Proposal on Imports - Ambassador

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) – The Canadian Government would face significant pressure to reciprocate if former US President Donald Trump implements a proposal to impose a 10% tariff on all imports, Canadian Ambassador to the US Kristen Hillman said on Thursday.

The Republican presidential candidate has pledged to impose a 10% across-the-board tariff on all the products imported into the US if he wins the November elections.

"I think that we will be eager to point out how challenging that could be for US consumers … inevitably, our government would be under enormous pressure to reciprocate," Hillman told Politico during a panel discussion on the sidelines of the Republican National Convention.

Hillman recalled that during Trump's previous term in office, his administration renegotiated the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), removing tariffs on nearly 100% of the products

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traded between Canada and the US.

If Trump is reelected and the 10% tariff measure is indeed applied to Canada and Mexico, an important conversation will likely take place, Hillman said, as what was negotiated under his administration in regard to NAFTA is significantly different from the policies Trump intends to apply.

The ambassador further noted that the Canadian mission to Washington is engaging with Trump's advisors, urging him to reconsider the tariffs and their implications on bilateral trade.

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Trump Not Likely to Advocate for Gun Restrictions After Rally Shooting - US House Speaker

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump is not likely to advocate for gun restrictions following the campaign rally shooting, US House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Thursday.

"I haven't heard anybody talking about that on our side, and I don't think President Trump will be an advocate for it," Johnson said during an interview with Politico at the Republican National Convention.

Johnson added that gun regulations should not be tightened because some people misuse guns.

He added that the 20-year-old man who tried to assassinate Trump "had serious problems," but did not give details.

Trump has long been a strong supporter of the Second Amendment of the US Constitution, which guarantees the right to keep and bear arms.

On July 13, a gunman 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.

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Trump Deep, Contemplative Following Assassination Attempt - US House Speaker Johnson

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump is deep and contemplative following an assassination attempt at a campaign rally over the weekend, US House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Thursday.

"I think in his heart and in his head, [Trump] is in the place where you would want a future president to be in a moment like we're facing for the country," Johnson said in an interview with Politico. "You want your president to be deep and contemplative, and you can see it on President Trump's face right now, that's where he's at."

Trump's speech at the Republican National Convention on Thursday will be momentous and historic, Johnson said.

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Classified Details of Trump Assassination Attempt More Alarming Than Public Info - Johnson

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - The classified details about the assassination attempt against former US President Donald Trump are even more alarming than publicly available information about the incident, US House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Thursday.
"The classified parts are even more alarming, that we've heard so far. It's completely inexcusable," Johnson said in an interview with Politico.
Johnson said that he called the White House on Thursday morning to ask US President Joe Biden to fire US Secret Service Director Kimberly Cheatle. However, Johnson said that the White House would not connect him with Biden.

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US House Speaker Johnson Says Does Not Think Biden Fit for Job Right Now

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) -US House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Thursday that he does not consider US President Joe Biden fit to serve another term in office.
"I don't believe he is fit for this job right now," Johnson said in an interview broadcast by Politico on the sidelines of the Republican National Convention.

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Indian Embassy in US Says Trying to Get Details on Air India's Boeing Landing in Siberia

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - The Indian Embassy in Washington told Sputnik on Thursday that it is trying to gather details from the Indian Embassy in Moscow about the Boeing-made Air India commercial aircraft that made an emergency landing in Russia's Siberia while enroute to San Francisco.
"I will try to get the details from our Embassy in Moscow on what is happening there and what's likely to be the future course of action," an embassy spokesperson said in a statement.
Earlier, Boeing passenger plane Air India flight AI183 from New Delhi to San Francisco made an emergency landing in the Russian city of Krasnoyarsk in Siberia.
Emergency services told Sputnik that the fire alarm went off in the airliner's cargo compartment.

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Democrats Would Potentially Violate US State Laws by Replacing Biden as Nominee - Johnson

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WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - The Democratic Party would potentially violate state laws if they attempt to replace US President Joe Biden as their 2024 nominee, US House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Thursday.

"If they go about the process of having a few people in a backroom make this magical decision and kick their candidate off the ballot, it defies all the work that's been done for 14 months," Johnson said in an interview with Politico. "[Biden is] the duly selected candidate for president for reelection, and I don't know how they can just wave a magic wand and make it all go away without violating at least some great tradition and probably some statutory law itself, at least in some of these states."

Johnson said that he would expect legal challenges in some states if Democrats attempt to replace Biden with an alternative nominee.

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US Says Monitoring Russian Remarks on Nukes Deployment in Response to US Arms in Germany

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - The United States is closely monitoring Russia's statements that it could deploy nuclear missiles in response to the US's plans to station American long-range missiles in Germany, State Department deputy principal spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Thursday.

"Of course, any kind of rhetoric, language on talking about the use or deployment of nuclear warheads is, of course, concerning, and something that we'll continue to pay close attention to," Patel said during a briefing. "We are of course continuing to monitor closely."

Earlier in the day, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said that Russia will choose from the widest possible range of options when developing its response to the planned deployment of US long-range missiles in Germany. Russia will not rule out any options, including the deployment of nuclear-armed systems, the diplomat said.

Ryabkov noted that due to the fault of both Germany and, foremost of all, the United States, which has been at the helm of NATO, arms control agreements have been totally destroyed.

On July 10, the two countries said that the US would begin episodic deployments of long-range fire capabilities in Germany in 2026 as part of planning for the permanent stationing of these weapons in the future. This includes SM-6, Tomahawk and developmental hypersonic missiles, which have a significantly longer range than the current land-based weapons in Europe.

The deployment of US long-range strike systems and other missiles in Germany from 2026 poses a threat to Russia's security and will require adequate response measures from Moscow, Russian Ambassador in Berlin Sergey Nechaev said last week. The diplomat called the move a "dangerous step" that leads to more confrontation.

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indian consulate in US trying to get details from embassy in moscow about boeing that made emergency landing in russia - spokesperson to sputnik

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US Appeals Court Blocks Entirety of Biden Administration's Student Debt Plan - Filing

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - The US Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals blocked the entirety of the Biden Administration's student debt plan, according to an order filed Thursday.

"Appellants' emergency motion for an administrative stay prohibiting the appellees from implementing or acting pursuant to the Final Rule until this court rules on the appellants' motion for an injunction pending appeal is granted," the filing said.

Last month, separate federal courts issued conflicting injunctions related to the Biden administration's Saving on a Valuable Education (SAVE) plan on student debt relief.

A Kansas court blocked some elements of the plan but allowed others to move forward. A Missouri court also blocked loan forgiveness aspects of the plan but allowed the US Department of Education to implement the rest of the plan.

Missouri appealed the partial injunction to the Eighth Circuit. The Tenth Circuit granted a request for a stay on the Kansas injunction to the Biden administration, which three states appealed to the US Supreme Court.

The Eighth Circuit also previously blocked the Biden administration's attempt to provide thousands of dollars in loan forgiveness to millions of borrowers, which the Supreme Court upheld.

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Pelosi's Office Downplays Media Reports Claiming She Urges Biden to Drop Out of Race

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - Former US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's office is of the opinion media reports are misrepresenting her conversation with President Joe Biden regarding whether he should drop out of the 2024 presidential race, Bloomberg News reported on Thursday.

"Speaker Pelosi respects the confidentiality of her meetings and conversations with the President of the United States," a Pelosi spokesperson said as quoted by Bloomberg News. "Sadly, the feeding frenzy from the press based on anonymous sources misrepresents any conversations the Speaker may have had with the president."

Earlier in the day, Politico reported that Pelosi has urged US President Joe Biden to make a decision to give up his bid for reelection. Per one of Pelosi's allies, she could potentially go public with the demands for Biden to resign his candidacy.

Media previously reported that US Democratic House representatives are hoping that Pelosi will convince Biden to withdraw as the 2024 Democratic presidential nominee. Other media

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reports claim Biden could drop out as soon as this weekend.

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Biden Campaign Seeks Delegates' Support Amid Worries About President's Candidacy - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - The Biden campaign has contacted many Democratic Party delegates to secure their support amid calls by some Democrats for President Joe Biden to withdraw from the 2024 election due to his declining cognitive abilities, the New York Times reported on Thursday.

The Biden campaign has been contacting hundreds of Democratic National Convention delegates to confirm their understanding of their roles as pledged delegates and to secure their continued support, the report said.

The calls to the delegates began well before the first debate between Biden and his Republican challeger Donald Trump as part of the campaign's efforts to organize thousands of people for the nominating process and convention, the report added.

On June 27, Biden appeared confused and incoherent throughout the debate with Trump. The dismal performance reinforced rather than alleviated ongoing concerns about Biden's cognitive abilities. Biden has so far said he intends to stay in the race.

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Biden Campaign 'Close to End' Amid Calls to End 2024 US Presidential Bid - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - The Biden campaign is nearing its end amid calls by some Democrats for US President Joe Biden to end his 2024 reelection bid, NBC News reported on Thursday.

"We're close to the end," the report quoted one person close to Biden as having said.

There is a feeling among the campaign that the situation for Biden has shifted, the report said, citing five people with knowledge of the matter.

Numerous Democrats have called on Biden to end his campaign and step aside for an alternative nominee, following a dismal debate performance against Republican nominee Donald Trump last month.

However, the Biden campaign said that they are not planning for a scenario in which Biden is not the Democratic nominee.

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Pentagon Confirms 2 Drones Attacked Coalition Base in Iraq, One Caused Minimal Damage

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - Pentagon Deputy Press Secretary Sabrina Singh on Thursday confirmed that two unmanned drones attacked Al-Asad Air Base in Iraq, which hosts US-led Coalition force, but said only one caused minimal damage to the base.

"On July 16, two one-way attack UAS systems attacked US and Coalition forces at Al-Asad Air Base in Iraq," Singh said during a press briefing. "One system was successfully destroyed, and one impacted the base, but it caused minimal damage."

On Tuesday, a source in the Coalition told Sputnik that two booby-trapped drones had attacked Al-Asad airbase in the Al Anbar governorate in western Iraq, but caused no damage to the base.

Some Iraqi Shia paramilitaries had reportedly threatened that they may resume their attacks against US bases in Iraq and Syria, media reported. Since February, these groups had focused their attacks on Israeli ports.

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Biden Experiencing Mild Symptoms From COVID, Receiving Paxlovid - Physician

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden is experiencing mild symptoms from his COVID-19 infection and is receiving antiviral medication Paxlovid as a treatment, White House physician Kevin O'Connor said on Thursday.

"The President is still experiencing mild upper respiratory symptoms associated with his recent COVID-19 infection. He continues to receive Paxlovid," O'Connor said in a memorandum to White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre.

On Wednesday, the White House announced that Biden tested positive for COVID-19 despite being vaccinated and boosted. Biden will self-isolate at his home in Delaware, the White House said.

O'Connor said that he will continue to provide regular updates on Biden's health with the president's permission.

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Biden's Mideast Envoy on Visit to UAE, Jordan - White House

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - White House Coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa Brett McGurk is traveling in the Middle East with stops in the United Arab Emirates and Jordan, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Thursday.

"Brett is traveling in the region with stops primarily in UAE and Jordan," Kirby said.

The remarks were in response to a reporter's question asking Kirby to address reports about McGurk's travel to the region for Gaza talks.

Kirby added that it is not unusual for McGurk to travel to the Middle East, as it is a significant

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part of his job. He mentioned that McGurk is frequently in and out of the region.
On May 31, US President Joe Biden said that Israel had offered the Palestinian movement Hamas a new three-phase proposal with a road map that would lead to an enduring cessation of hostilities in the Gaza Strip and the release of all hostages.
On Friday, Biden said that Israel and Hamas agreed to a framework for a Gaza ceasefire.

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UPDATE - Canadian Labor Minister to Quit Trudeau Cabinet, Not Run in Next Elections

(Modifies lede and para 2 to add O'Reagan's official statement)
WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) – Canadian Minister of Labor Seamus O'Regan on Thursday announced that he will resign from his Cabinet functions and not run in the 2025 federal elections.
"I have informed the Prime Minister [Justin Trudeau] that I intend to step down as Minister of Labour and Minister for Seniors, effective July 19, 2024. I shall not be seeking reelection. I intend to serve as Member of Parliament for St. John's South-Pearl until the next general eelctions," O'Reagan said in a statement shared via the X platform.
On Wednesday, media reported that Trudeau would be convening a cabinet meeting on Friday to hold discussions about "appointments". The minister's resignation comes amid diving voting intentions in public opinion polls and growing speculation over a potential cabinet shuffle sometime in the summer.
Following the Liberal debacle in the Toronto-St. Paul federal by-election which was lost to their Conservative counterparts after holding the region for 30 years, concerned and dissenting voices have arisen from within the Liberal Party.
Several lawmakers have publicly or under the cover of anonymity urged Trudeau to convene a national caucus as soon as possible, whereas some have called for a "course correction" and others have even called for his resignation. Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland and Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault reiterated their support for Trudeau, saying he would lead the Liberals in the next election scheduled to take place on or before October 20, 2025.
In mid-June, an Ipsos poll revealed that Nearly 70% of Canadians would like to see Prime Minister Justin Trudeau step down from the premiership position. In addition, three in four would like to have another party take over the government and only a quarter believes the Liberals deserve to be reelected.

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US Focused on 'Today' Amid Speculations on Post-Conflict Security Needs in Gaza- UN Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, July 18 (Sputnik) - The United States remains focused on the present security and stability needs in Gaza instead of long-term planning, US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield said on Thursday.

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"There are numerous discussions about the day after and what will be required in terms of security and stability forces when this conflict comes to an end," Thomas-Greenfield said to the UN reporters during her scheduled speech on Sudan. "I can't share any details on that … We are focused on today."

In addition, Thomas-Greenfield expressed hope that they would eventually reach a ceasefire.

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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Effort to Oust Biden From US Election 'Attempted Coup' by Democratic Party - Trump Adviser

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - The Democrats' pressure on President Joe Biden to drop out of the 2024 presidential race is an attempted coup by the party, Trump campaign adviser Chris LaCivita said on Thursday.

"This is nothing more than an attempted coup by the Democrat Party," LaCivita said in an interview with Politico. "They are actively engaged in an attempt, in my view, and a lot of people share this view, in deposing the president of the United States."

La Civita suggested that Biden might not drop out of the race because doing so would ruin his legacy and it would be a bad look for a sitting president to admit defeat while serving.

US media reported earlier that top Democrats believe Biden may withdraw from the presidential race as soon as this weekend under pressure from party leaders and close friends, including Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

On June 27, Biden, 81, appeared confused and incoherent throughout the first debate with Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump, 78. The dismal performance reinforced rather than alleviated ongoing concerns about Biden's cognitive abilities, leading many Democratic politicians and donors to call for his removal as a candidate.

The Democratic Party can theoretically replace Biden at its convention in August, but in practice it would be difficult to remove the primaries-winning candidate if he does not refuse to participate in the race.

So far, Biden is saying that he intends to stay in the race.

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Obama Says Biden Should Reconsider Candidacy as Path to Victory Much Diminished - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - Former US President Barack Obama has told allies that current President Joe Biden's ability to win the 2024 presidential race is compromised and Biden must contend with the viability of his candidacy, the Washington Post reported on Thursday.

Obama said that Biden's path to victory has greatly diminished and he remains concerned about protecting Biden and his legacy as president, the report said, citing people familiar with the talks.

Earlier on Thursday, media reported that Democrats believe Biden may withdraw from the 2024 presidential race as soon as this weekend under pressure from party leaders and close friends.

However, the Biden campaign reiterated that it is not preparing for a scenario in which Biden is not the Democratic Party's presidential candidate.

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Canada Becomes Fifth NATO Country to Test Above Horizon Anti-Drone Laser – Research Center

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) – Canada became the fifth NATO member state to test above-the-horizon anti-drone lasers, the Defence Research and Development Canada (DRDC) said on Thursday.

"During a recent counter-drone demonstration event, Canada became the fifth NATO country to test above-the-horizon lasers to defeat drone threats without a mountain or other geographic backdrop to stop the laser," DRDC said in a statement.

Accordingly, the tests were conducted by Boeing and AIM Defence during the Innovation for Defence Excellence and Security program's Counter Uncrewed Aerial Systems Sandbox from May 27 to June 21 at the DRDC's Suffield Research Centre, the statement added.

Canada is interested in the laser systems due to their cost effectiveness and expedient ways of defeating drones, all while minimizing collateral damage that conventional weaponry cannot, DRDC said.

The testing is also aimed at providing the Department of National Defense and Canadian Armed Forces with science-based advice on the benefits and threats of the technology, it continued.

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White House Says Unable to Verify Reports of Israel Transferring Control of Rafah Crossing

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration cannot confirm reports that Israel is considering transferring control of the Rafah border crossing to the European Union and the Palestinians, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on

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Thursday.
"I'm not able to confirm those reports," Kirby said.
However, Kirby said that he is aware of the reports.
Earlier on Thursday, Bloomberg reported that Israeli officials are considering giving control of the border crossing to the European Union and the Palestinians, citing people familiar with the matter.
Kirby said the United States wants to see the crossing open in a way that allows the flow of humanitarian assistance into the Gaza Strip.
The United States is in constant touch with Egyptian and Israeli counterparts about achieving such an outcome, Kirby added.

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US Expanding Exercises in Philippines to Eventually Deploy Forces Equipment There –Wormuth

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) – The United States is expanding the number of joint military exercises in the Philippines to allow Washington to eventually deploy its forces and equipment in the country, US Secretary of the Army Christine Wormuth said on Thursday.
"We are expanding the number of exercises in the Philippines to allow us to put more equipment and deploy forces there eventually," Wormuth said during a panel discussion during the Aspen Security Forum.

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Obama Says Biden Should Reconsider Candidacy as Path to Victory Much Diminished - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - Former US President Barack Obama has told allies that current President Joe Biden's ability to win the 2024 presidential race is compromised and Biden must contend with the viability of his candidacy, the Washington Post reported on Thursday.
Obama said that Biden's path to victory has greatly diminished and he remains concerned about protecting Biden and his legacy as president, the report said, citing people familiar with the talks.
Earlier on Thursday, media reported that Democrats believe Biden may withdraw from the 2024 presidential race as soon as this weekend under pressure from party leaders and close friends.
However, the Biden campaign reiterated that it is not preparing for a scenario in which Biden is not the Democratic Party's presidential candidate.

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Biden Still Expects to Meet Netanyahu Next Week Despite COVID Diagnosis - White House

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden still expects to meet Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Washington next week despite his diagnosis with Covid-19, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Thursday.

"We have every expectation that the two leaders will have the chance to see each other while Prime Minister Netanyahu is in town," Kirby said during a press briefing, though he acknowledged that he was not "qualified" to speak about the process of recovery from Covid-19.

Kirby added that the White House physician and "whole team" were helping Biden through his illness.

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US, Brazilian Security Advisers Discuss Issues on Venezuela and Haiti - White House

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan during a meeting with Brazilian Presidential Advisor Celso Amorim discussed regional security matters related to Venezuela and Haiti, the White House said on Thursday.

"National Security Advisor Sullivan and Presidential Advisor Amorim also discussed several global and regional priorities, including Haiti, Venezuela, Russia's war against Ukraine, and the Middle East," the White House said in a press release.

The two officials also discussed progress in other areas of the bilateral relationship, the release noted.

The White House highlighted that Sullivan and Amorim also went over US-Brazilian cooperation on other bilateral interests, including the Partnership for Workers' Rights, which the two sides launched last year to combat labor rights issues in Brazil.

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Canadian Labor Minister to Quit Trudeau Cabinet, Not Run in Next Elections – Reports

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) – Canadian Minister of Labor Seamus O'Regan is set to announce that he will resign from his functions and not run in the 2025 federal elections, CTV News reported on Thursday.

The minister will announce as early as today that he intends to quit his position in the cabinet of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau for "personal reasons," the report said, citing sources within the Liberal Party. O'Regan informed Trudeau of his intention to leave politics on Canada Day. He will continue to work as a lawmaker until the next elections, it added.

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On Wednesday, the media reported that Trudeau would be convening a cabinet meeting on Friday to hold discussions about “appointments.” The minister’s resignation comes amid diving voting intentions in public opinion polls and growing speculation over a potential cabinet shuffle sometime in the summer.

Following the Liberal debacle in the Toronto-St. Paul's federal by-election which was lost to their Conservative counterparts after holding the region for 30 years, concerned and dissenting voices have arisen from within the Liberal Party.

Several lawmakers have publicly or under the cover of anonymity urged Trudeau to convene a national caucus as soon as possible, whereas some have called for a “course correction” and others have even called for his resignation. Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland and Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault reiterated their support for Trudeau, saying he would lead the Liberals in the next election scheduled to take place on or before October 20, 2025.

In mid-June, an Ipsos poll revealed that Nearly 70% of Canadians would like to see Prime Minister Justin Trudeau step down from the premiership position. In addition, three in four would like to have another party take over the government and only a quarter believe the Liberals deserve to be reelected.

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US, Kazakh Officials Sign Partnership Deal on Critical Minerals Supply Chains

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - US and Kazakh officials signed a partnership agreement on critical minerals supply chains, the Department of State said in a release on Thursday.

"The US Department of State also signed a memorandum of understanding with the Kazakh National Geological Survey and National Mining Company Tau-Ken Samruk to expand and diversify critical minerals supply chains," the release said.

Senior US officials with the departments of State and Energy are in Astana on Thursday to participate in the 2024 US-Kazakhstan Strategic Energy Dialogue.

The dialogue deepened cooperation on shared mutual priorities of enhancing energy security, accelerating the clean energy transition and methane mitigation, and developing Kazakhstan’s critical minerals sector, the release said.

During the meeting, US and Kazakh energy and international affairs experts discussed progress and planned activities on greenhouse gas emissions reduction, sustainable critical materials mining and refining, civil nuclear cooperation, renewable energy sources, energy security and global nuclear security, the release added.

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Top Democrats Say Biden May Withdraw From Race by Weekend – Reports

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) – Top Democrats say that US President Joe Biden may withdraw from the presidential race as soon as this weekend under pressure from party leaders

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and close friends, Axios reported on Thursday.

Biden has been facing increasing pressure to step aside after a disastrous performance at the presidential debate with Republican nominee Donald Trump last month reinforced rather than refuted ongoing concerns about his fitness to serve a second term at age 81.

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ANALYSIS - Trump, Vance Needed as Trailblazers to Break US Free of Dangerous Delusions

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - Supporters are already praising Donald Trump's new running mate, US Senator JD Vance, as representing a new direction for the United States, experts told Sputnik.

Trump announced on Monday that Vance would be his running mate in the 2024 US presidential election, with Vance's campaign activities focusing on workers and farmers in states like Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio, and Minnesota.

Political consultant and retired US Army Lt. Col. Earl Rasmussen praised Trump's choice of Vance as a wise and positive decision and suggested that Vance's youth and realist outlook on international affairs were some of the main reasons behind it.

"We shall see where the road goes but we need Trump and Vance as trailblazers to find a new path," Rasmussen said. "Our current leadership is trapped in another world and their own delusions, moving us in a very dangerous direction."

Rasmussen particularly praised Vance for seeking a rapid and negotiated end to the Ukraine conflict.

"He does not support the continual funding of Ukraine and realizes that there may need to be concessions made to Russia regarding territory to bring peace. He also knows the background that led us to where we are in Ukraine and the provocation of the West in creating the current environment," Rasmussen said.

Trump's selection of Vance appeared to have been well thought out and one that was made with the future of the United States in mind that can hopefully steer the country to become an active leader and participant in a multipolar world, he added.

A HEIR APPARENT

Political commentator and former hedge fund manager Charles Ortel predicted that in choosing Vance as his running mate, Trump had also selected his own heir apparent to follow him into the White House four years from now.

"Trump has crowned an outstanding choice to follow him in 2028 and then spend eight years ensuring that America grows back into greatness," Ortel said.

Once a private critic of Trump nine years ago, Vance became an enthusiastic supporter of his policies during his presidency from 2017 to 2021 and is now seen by Trump supporters as an embodiment of the values of patriotism, family, business success, and hard work that they argue need to be revived across the United States.

"Vance has a heroic life story but he married well to a great legal mind who hails from India, originally. Their young family should relate well to rising generations, not simply because of DNA but due to their towering accomplishments," Ortel said.

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VANCE MORE SUPPORTIVE AND ENERGETIC THAN PENCE

Retired Brown University Assistant Professor of Economics Barry Friedman agreed that Vance was likely to be far more supportive and energetic on behalf of Trump than previous running mate and Vice President Mike Pence had been.

"I'd guess that Vance is more likely to be a loyal Trump servant than was Mike Pence, with electoral appeal in the same fundamentalist Midwest states," Friedman said.

Friedman observed that Vance's selection accelerates the trend of white Southern rural voters, historically Democrats, consolidating within the 21st-century Republican Party. He noted this reflects the ongoing support of Republicans by white Southerners on cultural grounds, regardless of economic policies or corruption charges.

However, Vance was unlikely to help Trump in the handful of battleground states in the Middle Atlantic and Southwest, Friedman cautioned.

"More likely the election will hinge on the popularity of Trump in those places, and perhaps concerns about illegal immigration, inflation, and high mortgage rates," he said.

WIDER SUPPORT NEEDED

Trends Research Journal publisher Gerald Celente agreed that despite his impressive resume, Vance appeared unlikely to significantly expand Trump's electoral base.

Trump should have chosen a woman, person of color, or Latino to attract votes from a different political spectrum and gain the electoral votes he missed in 2020, Celente advised.

"In 2020, Trump won Ohio with 53.27% of the vote, defeating Biden who received 45.24% of the vote, a margin of 8.03%. To pick a guy from a state that he won big makes no sense. It is nonsense," Celente said.

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US Treasury Sanctions A Dozen Individuals, Vessels, Network Funding Houthis - Treasury

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - The US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) on Thursday sanctioned a dozen individuals and vessels involved in financing the Houthis' destabilizing activities through Sa'id al-Jamal's network.

"Today, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) is designating and identifying as blocked property a dozen persons and vessels, respectively, that have played a critical role in financing the Houthis' destabilizing regional activities as part of the network of Sa'id al-Jamal," the Treasury Department said in a statement.

According to the statement, the Treasury has sanctioned Malaysian and Singaporean national Mohammad Roslan Bin Ahmad, also known as Royston, as an illicit shipment facilitator for Sa'id al-Jamal's network, while Chinese-based businessman Zhuang Liang has engaged in money laundering and other finance-related schemes for the same network.

Furthermore, the statement read that Sa'id al-Jamal's network uses various companies across different jurisdictions to generate substantial illicit revenue, including Seychelles-registered Ascent General Insurance Company and UAE-based Fornacis Energy Trading Co. LLC, both of which are now sanctioned for supporting the network's operations.

These sanctions lead to the blocking and reporting of all property and interests in property of

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the designated persons in the US or controlled by US individuals, prohibiting transactions with them without specific OFAC authorization, the statement added.

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General Jennie Carignan Sworn in As Canada's Chief of Defense Staff – Ceremony

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) – The command of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) was transferred from outgoing Chief of the Defense Staff General Wayne Eyre to his successor General Jennie Carignan during a ceremony on Thursday.

The command transfer took place in the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa. It was attended by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the last three defense ministers, as well as government officials and foreign diplomats. Carignan will become Canada's first female Chief of the Defense Staff.

"You know, it's time to go when the majority of the platforms you served on are here in a museum," Eyre jokingly told the ceremony attendance. "General Carignan, I gave you enough advice. You are now ready to fulfill this role that you fully deserve. I'm proud to cede you the burden of the command."

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

Her deployments include Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Syria as well as Iraq, where she supervised the NATO mission to the country from 2019-2020. From 2021, Carignan served as Chief of professional Conduct and Culture, National Defense , leading "cultural reforms" in the CAF

Appointed as Chief of the Defense Staff in November 2021, Eyre retired following 40 years of service.

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Biden Campaign Not Planning for Scenario Without Biden as Nominee - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - The Biden campaign is not planning for a situation in which US President Joe Biden is not the Democratic Party's nominee for the 2024 race, Bloomberg reported on Thursday.

The campaign is not preparing for a scenario where Democrats replace Biden at the top of their ticket, the report said, citing Biden campaign manager Quentin Fulks.

Some Democrats have expressed concerns about Biden's viability as a candidate and called on him to drop out of the race, following a lackluster debate performance against Republican challenger Donald Trump.

However, the Biden campaign has repeatedly said that they intend to move forward with Biden as the presumptive Democratic nominee.

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Top Democrats believe that Biden may withdraw from the presidential race as soon as this weekend under pressure from party leaders and close friends, Axios reported earlier in the day.

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US Sanctions Organization Smuggling, Harboring Illegal Migrants - Treasury

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - The US government has sanctioned a transnational criminal organization that illegally smuggles migrants into the United States and harbors them in the country, the Treasury Department said in a statement on Thursday.

"Today, Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned the Abdul Karim Conteh Human Smuggling Organization (Karim HSO), a transnational criminal organization (TCO) based in Tijuana, Mexico. Human smuggling is a federal crime in which criminals smuggle noncitizens into the United States, as well as transport and harbor noncitizens already in the country illegally, all in deliberate violation of US immigration laws," the statement said.

Karim HSO has smuggled migrants into the US for years for its own financial gain, the statement said.

The organization's standard methodology is to transport migrants to the US border and instruct them on how to illegally enter the country, the statement said.

The group provided migrants with fraudulent documents and leveraged the US financial system to receive payment for their illegal operations, the statement said.

The organization is led by Sierra Leonean national Abdul Karim Conteh, who is responsible for smuggling thousands of migrants into the US from Africa, China, the Middle East, Central Asia and Russia, the statement added.

The United States also sanctioned Karim's wife, Mexican national Veronica Roblero Pivaral, and two other members of the organization, Togolese national Pasaman Francis Marin Abbe Pidoukou and Sierra Leonean national Issa Kamara, according to the statement.

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Top Democrats Says Biden May Withdraw From Race by Weekend – Reports

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) – Top Democrats say that US President Joe Biden may withdraw from the presidential race as soon as this weekend under pressure from party leaders and close friends, Axios reported on Thursday.

Biden has been facing increasing pressure to step aside after a disastrous performance at the presidential debate with Republican nominee Donald Trump last month reinforced rather than refuted ongoing concerns about his fitness to serve a second term at age 81.

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Trump Leads Biden in 7 Swing States, Nationally After Assassination Attempt – Poll

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - A new poll conducted by Emerson College after the assassination attempt on Donald Trump showed that the former host of the White House is ahead of President Joe Biden in seven swing states and nationally.

The poll found that 46% of registered voters support Trump while only 42% are ready to vote for Biden with 12% still undecided.

The support for Biden has dropped by two percentage points since earlier this month while Trump's support remained the same, according to the poll results.

Trump has either extended or maintained his advantage over Biden in six of the seven swing states, which include Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.

Since March, the former US President has managed to gain one point in Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, and two points in Arizona, but he has lost a point in Michigan, the poll showed.

American voters are generally divided on whether Biden should withdraw from the race with 52% nationally thinking he should and 48% thinking he should not, according to the poll.

The polling was conducted by Emerson College Polling July 15-16 by contacting 2,000 respondents via cell and landline phones with a credibility interval of +/-2.1%.

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Biden Administration Cancels Another $1.2 Billion in Student Loans – White House

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) – The Biden administration on Thursday canceled $1.2 billion in student loan debt for 35,000 public service workers, the White House said in a press release.

"Today, my Administration is canceling student debt for 35,000 people through Public Service Loan Forgiveness, bringing the total number of Americans who have benefited from our various debt relief actions to 4.76 million people," US President Joe Biden stated in the release.

The 35,000 borrowers approved for forgiveness are public service workers, such as teachers, nurses, law enforcement officials and first responders.

They will each receive an average of over $35,000 in debt cancellation.

With the latest student loan forgiveness, the Biden administration has now waived about $168.5 billion in debt for 4.76 million people, the Education Department said in a separate press release.

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Canada, South Korea Launch Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Action Plan – Ministry

WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) – The Canadian and South Korean foreign ministers have launched a comprehensive strategic partnership action plan, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) said on Thursday.

Earlier in the day, Canada's top diplomat Melanie Joly arrived in South Korea for her fourth visit to the country since 2022.

"During her visit, Minister Joly met with Cho Tae-Yul, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, to launch the Canada-Korea Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Action Plan," GAC said in a statement.

The action plan is a "key component" of Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy and provides for a detailed framework toward the full implementation of five priority pillars in the areas of values and human rights, security and defense, economic prosperity and security, climate change, the environment and sustainability, and health and culture, the statement said.

The ministers committed to jointly working to address regional and global issues, including through the Canada-South Korea 2+2 High-Level Dialogue on Economic Security, the High-Level Foreign and Defense Policy Dialogue (2+2) and cooperation in the North Pacific region, the statement said.

The ministers also exchanged views on the military cooperation between Russia and North Korea as well as the conflict in Ukraine, the statement continued.

In November 2022, Canada unveiled its Indo-Pacific strategy in an effort to cement the country's alleged leading role in the region, including through a C$2.3 billion ($1.7 billion) investment over five years to boost military and cyber security in the region and through enhancing trade ties with regional partners.

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UPDATE - Canadian Foreign Minister to Visit China on July 18-20 – Chinese Foreign Ministry

(Adds details in paras 4-6, background in paras 7-10)

BEIJING/WASHINGTON, July 18 (Sputnik) - Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly will visit China from July 18-20, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian said at a briefing on Thursday.

"At the invitation of Wang Yi, member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and foreign minister, Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly will visit China from July 18 to 20," Lin said.

He noted that during the visit the two countries will hold an in-depth communication on China-Canada relations and issues of mutual interest.

Joly intends to discuss with Wang Canada-China relations as well as complex global and regional security issues, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) said in a press release. The ministers will discuss possible avenues for collaboration on common challenges. They will also exchange views on concrete ways to enhance the "already deep ties" between the people of Canada and China, the release said.

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Canada is committed to pragmatic engagement with a wide range of countries to advance its national interests and uphold its values, Joly said as quoted by GAC.

"As described in Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy, we must maintain open lines of communication and use diplomacy to challenge where we ought to, while seeking cooperation in areas that matter most to Canadians. I look forward to a productive meeting," Joly stated.

Canadian-Chinese ties took a nosedive in December 2018 after China detained two Canadian nationals, Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig, for allegedly spying on behalf of Canada. Ottawa maintained their innocence and argued that the move was politically motivated and in response to the detention of Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou. The two were released in September 2021 following the return of Meng to China

The ties continued to worsen amid allegations by Canadian media and the political establishment that China meddled in the 2019 and 2021 federal elections.

The situation resulted in reciprocal expulsion of diplomats and the creation of the Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference in Federal Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions to probe alleged meddling by China, but also Russia and India among others.

All the three countries have rejected the claims.

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