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7/24/24 Wednesday

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Harris to Uphold Russophobic US Dogma as World Seeks Multipolar Order – Analyst

A formidable confluence of military, intelligence and financial interests alternatively referred to as "the Deep State" or "the Blob" has historically remained hostile towards the Eurasian world power irrespective of which president occupies the Oval Office.

Much speculation has emerged over Vice President Kamala Harris' approach to US foreign policy in the days since the former California Attorney General was announced as Joe Biden's chosen successor Sunday.

Harris, who served in the US Senate from 2017 until 2021, has taken on a relatively low profile. Observers have speculated she has been deliberately tasked with selling controversial policies to the public during her time as Biden's second in command, as when she was dispatched to Guatemala in 2021 to warn prospective migrants against coming to the United States.

"Frankly, we don't know what she's going to do on the international scene. There's nothing that she has said or done that gives us any indication of what her stance is on anything," claimed commentator Michael Maloof.

The former senior security analyst at the US Department of Defense joined Sputnik's Fault Lines program Wednesday to contemplate the possible foreign policy of a Harris administration as much of the world seeks development independent of the United States and the Western liberal world order.

Host Jamarl Thomas suggested Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's address before a joint session of Congress Wednesday could be an early indicator of Harris' approach to the politics of international affairs, if not the substance. Harris has made headlines by refusing to attend Netanyahu's speech as polling shows Democratic Party voters increasingly sympathize with Palestinians in the long running conflict between Israelis and the indigenous inhabitants of the Levant.

But Harris has agreed to meet with the controversial Israeli leader during his time in Washington, leading Thomas to suggest her apparent dispute with Netanyahu is "an optics issue" rather than a difference of policy.

"I agree," responded Maloof. "She doesn't want to be associated with him publicly… That's why she's not showing up at the joint session."

The analyst claimed Harris, who is some 22 years younger than President Biden, may be naturally inclined toward younger Americans' sympathy for the Palestinian cause but would be constrained by the actions of her predecessor. Maloof suggested it would be especially difficult for the politician to chart a new course on relations with Russia, which remains locked in a US-backed proxy war with Ukraine.

"I'm afraid that if they continue the policy toward Russia, as they are right now, that when [Anatoly] Antonov, the current Russian ambassador, leaves, that he will not be replaced. I think [Russia will] downgrade relations," said Maloof. "We're making it much more difficult to renew any relations."

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"We're almost on the verge of a war because of a hoax," he added, referring to the conspiracy theory that Trump colluded with Russia during the 2016 US presidential election. "That's basically what this amounts to and our relationships in the world are now complicated as a consequence."

"I've never seen within three and a half years how we have bungled things so poorly on the international scene when we have all these very smart, educated people at the helm, supposedly, and we're going in the direction we're going. It's unbelievable."

In the 1990s the United States emerged as the world's lone superpower after the fall of the Soviet Union, possessing greater political, cultural, and economic influence than any other nation. But as 21st century US militarism has led to the deaths of some 4.5 million people, countries of the Global South have increasingly rallied behind Moscow and Beijing to seek alternatives to Western hegemony, demonstrated by the emergence of institutions like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the BRICS economic bloc.

Russia and China have also played a greater role in global diplomacy over the last decade, with both countries hosting important reconciliation talks between Palestinian political factions this year. Beijing turned heads last March when it announced it had brokered a surprise deal between longtime rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia, while Russia has made important inroads in Africa offering security assistance to counter jihadist groups, which are often backed by US Gulf allies.

"Because of this multipolar order concept we are seeing more of a shift by countries who have been subject historically to colonization," Maloof posited. "They are rebelling and [among] the few countries that have not been involved in colonization were Russia and China. That's why you're seeing the Global South – Africa, Latin America, Asia – generally gravitating toward this Eurasian concept, toward BRICS, the SCO."

"[BRICS] is becoming, by the way, not just an economic institution, but it could become the defense institution against NATO because NATO wants to expand to the Pacific," he added. The controversial military alliance has strengthened ties with traditional Western allies like Colombia, Japan, and Australia as NATO leaders paint Moscow and Beijing as the primary threats to the US-led world order.

Maloof said Harris would be unlikely to overcome the influence of the United States' foreign policy establishment if she sought to renew ties with Russia. The formidable confluence of military, intelligence and financial interests – alternatively referred to as "the Deep State" or "the Blob" – has historically remained hostile towards the Eurasian world power irrespective of which president occupies the Oval Office.

"Irrespective of which president it is, there's going to be this contentious relationship that we have with Russia," claimed the analyst. "I think that Kamala will be an extension and because she doesn't have that foreign policy footprint, I think she's much more likely to toe the traditional US Democrat or Republican line."

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Same as the Old Boss: Harris Expected to Continue Neoconservative Foreign Policy

The former California senator and state attorney general has been a strong backer of US militarism, according to one analyst.

"We must stand with Israel," declared then-Senator Kamala Harris to healthy applause at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's 2017 policy conference. "Our defense relationship is critical to both nations. Which is why I support the United States' commitment to provide Israel with $38 billion in military assistance over the next decade."

US backing for its Middle Eastern ally has become increasingly controversial as the official death toll during its months-long military operation in the Gaza Strip approaches 40,000. Democratic activists mounted a campaign to win hundreds of thousands of "uncommitted" votes during the party's primary earlier this year as a protest against President Biden's backing of Israel, while some conservative figures such as commentator Tucker Carlson have also questioned continued US support.

But the US-Israel relationship remains an article of faith for the vast majority of lawmakers on both sides of the aisle, notes CovertAction Magazine editor Jeremy Kuzmarov. The author appeared on Sputnik's The Backstory program this week to discuss Harris' record of support for the country and the newly minted Democratic presidential candidate's broader foreign policy vision.

"This is part of the pattern where they're actually subverting democracy,"said Kuzmarov of the controversial process by which the Democratic Party has affirmed Harris as its candidate, "because it's been known for a long time that Joe Biden was in poor health and becoming senile and yet he continued to stay in the race."

"What he could have done was dropped out in December [or] January, and that would allow for an open primary process," he claimed. "Then people could actually choose a candidate they want. It would be probably a popular candidate with a very strong chance of defeating Donald Trump. But what we've seen in the past few years is that the hierarchy in the Democratic Party don't want an open primary. They don't value democracy despite their rhetoric."

The Democratic Party's presidential nominating process was rocked for two successive cycles by Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders' insurgent candidacy in 2016 and 2020. The self-avowed democratic socialist has been openly critical of the party's direction since the 1990s, during which it has charted an increasingly business-friendly, economic neoliberal course.

Critics claim a 2010 Supreme Court decision overturning much of the United States' campaign finance law has made parties even more dependent on the support of wealthy donors and corporate interests. Democratic leaders have responded by backing fiscal conservative candidates at both the state and national level.

"They want to hand select corporate-type candidates and an open primary would lead to the likelihood that somebody with the views of a Bernie Sanders would emerge – the popular candidate," said Kuzmarov. "Your audience, I'm sure, will recall what happened the last two cycles is that the primary was clearly rigged against Bernie Sanders who, whatever his flaws, represented a more progressive, democratic candidate who was promoting policies that would challenge corporate power and that were popular among huge sectors of the electorate, including things like Medicare for All."

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“But the Democratic hierarchy are tied to large corporate interests, and they don’t want a Sanders-type emerging, a genuinely popular candidate… So, [Harris] may be the successor or somebody like her and there’s going to be no vote, no primary.”

Kuzmarov compared the Democrats’ modern day primary process to the party establishment’s selection of Harry Truman as former President Franklin Roosevel’s running mate in the 1944 election. Party leaders insisted on the Cold Warrior Truman over Roosevelt’s previous vice president, the more progressive Henry Wallace. Truman would become president when Roosevelt died less than three months after his inauguration the following year.

The Democratic Party’s neoliberal turn has coincided with an assertive US foreign policy, with Kuzmarov arguing both major parties are “pretty much aligned” on policy regarding Israel, which he claimed “carries out a lot of the US dirty work in the Middle East.”

“She’s tied with the kind of Biden-Clinton wing of the party, which is the pro-empire, pro-war wing of the party,” he said of Harris. “When she was a candidate in the last primary, there was one peace candidate Tulsi Gabbard, who was very progressive in her foreign policy views, and Kamala Harris used red-baiting tactics against Tulsi Gabbard and accused her of being a Putin lover, an Assad lover and that kind of thing when Gabbard was advocating for peace and diplomacy.”

“That's right out of the playbook of Joseph McCarthy and the cold warriors of the 1950s,” Kuzmarov argued. “So I think that’s where Harris stands. I mean, she’s backed the Biden policy with regard to Ukraine, where they’ve provided billions in weaponry… The US is building new military bases in the Philippines as part of the strategy of confronting China. And Harris was the point man to negotiate with Ferdinand Marcos Jr., son of a horrific dictator, to get these new bases.’

“We shouldn't forget that this is taxpayer dollars, billions of our taxpayer dollars are going into these militaristic and imperialistic foreign policies. And that’s not money that’s going into where it’s needed here at home, including Sanders’ plan for Medicare for all, which is what many Americans want. So Harris is not a progressive in any way, she’s a militarist.”

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Trump Says He Never Discussed With Musk $45 Mln Monthly Contribution

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) – Former US President Donald Trump said on Thursday that billionaire Elon Musk never promised to support his campaign with a monthly $45 million contribution.

“He never told me he was giving me $45 million,” Trump told Fox News, rejecting media reports on this matter.

On Tuesday, The Wall Street Journal, citing sources familiar with the matter, reported that Musk planned to give $45 million a month to a new political action committee in support of Trump's reelection campaign.

Musk himself has also refuted those reports.

Trump called Musk “a nice guy” but emphasized that he disagrees with him about electric cars. “I'm very much against that, it's ridiculous, really ... You want to have a choice, and that includes

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electric," he said.

However, Trump pointed out that he and Musk have a good relationship.

"He never told me he was giving me $45 million, but he did say I strongly endorse you, despite the fact that I'm strongly against the electric car mandate," Trump said.

Musk has publicly expressed his support for Trump's campaign. He also donated $100,000 to victims of Trump's rally shooting in Pennsylvania earlier this month.

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Trump Urges Congress to Establish 1-Year Jail Sentence for Actions Against US Flag

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said on Thursday that it is necessary to work with Congress to establish a jail sentence for actions undertaken against the flag of the United States.

"We have to work in Congress to get a one-year jail sentence when they're allowed to stomp on the flag and put lighter fluid on the flag and set it afire," Trump told Fox News.

On Wednesday, demonstrations took place in Washington in protest of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to the United States and his address to the US Congress. During the protests, some activists burned the US flag near the Capitol building, according to the media reports.

"When you're allowed to do that, you get a one-year jail sentence, and you'll never see it again," Trump said.

In light of these and previous developments, Trump said the entire world - including China, Russia and North Korea - views the United States "like we're a bunch of babies."

"That wouldn't happen in their countries, it's impossible for that to happen in their countries," Trump added.

Netanyahu arrived in Washington on Monday to hold a series of meetings with US officials, including with President Joe Biden and Trump, as well as to address a joint session of Congress.

Stomping on the US flag or setting it ablaze is protected by the First Amendment of the US Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech, among other rights.

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US GDP Grew 2.8% In 2nd Quarter of 2024 vs 2% Forecast - Commerce Department

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - The US economy grew at an annualized rate of 2.8% in the second quarter of 2024, the Commerce Department announced Thursday in its first reading of gross domestic product for the April-June period that beat Wall Street's forecast's of a 2% growth.

Consumer spending and growth in services were catalysts for the upbeat performance of the quarter, the department said. "The increase in consumer spending reflected increases in both

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services and goods," it said in a statement. "Within services, the leading contributors were health care, housing and utilities, and recreation services."

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First Neuralink Patient Says Using Brain Implant Does Not Make Him Feel Tired

AUSTIN, July 25 (Sputnik), Lenka White - Using Neuralink's brain chip implant is not exhausting but can keep one going, the first patient with the chip device implanted in his brain, Noland Arbaugh, told Sputnik.

"I don't get tired. I think a part of the issue is that I just want to stay up all the time," Arbaugh said.

Arbaugh, who is quadriplegic, made the comment in response to a question about whether the implanted device makes him tired.

Arbaugh pointed out that he recently ended up using the device for more than 17 hours.

"The other day, I couldn't sleep so I decided to hop on at around 2:00 a.m. and I ended up using it all day," he said.

Arbaugh noted that he spends about four hours per day, Monday through Friday, with Neuralink's team in structured sessions.

In addition, Arbaugh said he can spend another six hours on the device outside of the official meetings for personal use.

The N1 implant has been designed to record and transmit neural activity with the help of 1,024 electrodes spread across 64 threads, which are thinner than a human hair. The implant has seen some electrodes retract due to the brain's natural movement. Neuralink has since improved its efficiency.

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First Brain Chip Implanted Patient Says Neuralink Seeks FDA Approval for New Trials

AUSTIN, July 25 (Sputnik), Lenka White - Billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk's company Neuralink is seeking approval from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to conduct new and innovative trials using the first brain-implanted chip device, patient Noland Arbaugh told Sputnik in an interview.

Arbaugh, who is a quadriplegic, is the first human subject to have Nauralink implant the N1 computer chip with an electrode array in his brain for seven months.

"We're constantly discussing new ideas and seeking FDA approval to try them," Arbaugh said. "Since it's a safety study, we need FDA approval for actions like controlling external objects."

Arbaugh explained that seeking approval from the FDA is necessary given that the scientists would similarly need approval even if they were - hypothetically speaking - attempting to gain control over the movements of a car.

"I'm really excited about this because there are many cool things they want me to try.

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Controlling other devices, such as a phone, gaming consoles or assistive devices around my room - there's a lot in the pipeline," Arbaugh said.

The N1 implant has been designed to record and transmit neural activity with the help of 1,024 electrodes spread across 64 threads. The implant has seen some electrodes retract due to the brain's natural movement.

In January, Musk announced that Neuralink had implanted a brain device in a human subject for the first time.

Neuralink aims to develop a comprehensive computer-brain interface that incorporates a generalized input and output device to enable interactions with all aspects of the brain, Musk said.

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Neuralink's First Brain Chip Implanted Patient Says Performance 'Steadily' Increasing

AUSTIN, July 25 (Sputnik), Lenka White - Noland Arbaugh, the first person to have entrepreneur billionaire Elon Musk's company Neuralink implant a brain chip device in his skull, said the device's performance has been improving despite an initial "dip."

"Things have been going really well. There was a dip in performance at the beginning but ever since they [the Neuralink team] re-corrected that, it has been a steady climb upward," Arbaugh told Sputnik in an interview.

Arbaugh, who is a quadriplegic, said he had the N1 computer chip with an electrode array implanted in his brain for seven months.

The implant has been designed to record and transmit neural activity with the help of 1,024 electrodes spread across 64 threads. The implant has seen some electrodes retract due to the brain's natural movement.

Arbaugh said once the device was implanted, the Neuralink team has been constantly working on "new and exciting things."

In January, Musk announced that Neuralink had implanted a brain device in a human subject for the first time.

Neuralink aims to develop a comprehensive computer-brain interface that incorporates a generalized input and output device to enable interactions with all aspects of the brain, Musk said.

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Neuralink's First Brain Chip Implant Patient Says Decided 'Fairly Easy' to Undergo Study

AUSTIN, July 25 (Sputnik), Lenka White - Neuralink's first brain-chip implant recipient Noland Arbaugh told Sputnik that the decision to participate in the company's implant study was easy and he never had any regrets.

"It was a fairly easy decision for me [to apply for the Neuralink study]. Once I made the

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decision, I never looked back. I never doubted myself," Arbaugh told Sputnik in an interview.
Arbaugh admitted, however, that he had to give the decision careful consideration, particularly because as a quadriplegic, his brain was his "last real working piece."
The whole process took about a month from the start of the application, Arbaugh said.
The process included ten interviews, the last of which included undergoing a full day of testing in a hospital, including brain scans, blood draws, urine draws and a psychological exam, he said.
Arbaugh, who was left paralyzed from the shoulders down after a 2016 diving accident, became the first person to receive a Neuralink brain implant in January. The implant includes an N1 computer chip in his skull and an electrode array in his brain that allows him to control a computer with his thoughts.
Arbaugh said his goal is to advance humanity and help anyone who could potentially need the Neuralink implant.
The study will last six years unless Arbaugh decides to withdraw earlier.

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Biden Says Harris Incredible Partner To Him, Leader To Country, Now Choice Up To Americans

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said in an address to the nation that Vice President and presumptive Democratic nominee Kamala Harris is an incredible partner and a leader for the country.
"I would like to thank our great Vice President, Kamala Harris. She's experienced, she's tough, she's capable. She's been an incredible partner to me and a leader for our country" Biden said on Wednesday. "Now, the choice is up to you, the American people."

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Biden Says Will Keep Working Until End of His Term to Keep NATO Strong, End Gaza War

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden said in his address to the nation that he would continue to work until the end of his term in office to keep NATO strong and end the war in Gaza.
"We'll keep NATO, stronger, and I'll make it more powerful and more united than any time in all of our history," Biden said on Wednesday night. "I'm going to keep working to end the war in Gaza, bring home all the hostages, to bring peace and security to the Middle East and end this war."

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Biden Says Nothing Comes in Way of Democracy, Including Personal Ambitions

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said in an address to the nation after his decision to withdraw from the 2024 presidential election that nothing comes in the way of safeguarding democracy, including personal ambitions.

"I believe, I reckon as President, my leadership in the world, my vision for America's future, all married at a second term, but nothing, nothing can come in the way of saving our democracy. That includes personal ambition," Biden said on Wednesday night. "So, I've decided the best way forward is to pass the torch to a new generation. That's the best way to unite our nation."

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Biden in Speech Tonight to Say He Will Be Focused on His Job Over Next 6 Months

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden in an address to the nation later tonight will state that he will be focused on his duty as US president for the remaining 6 months of his presidency following his decision to suspend his reelection campaign, according to excerpts the White House provided ahead of the speech.

“Over the next six months I will be focused on doing my job as President. That means I will continue to lower costs for hard-working families and grow our economy. I will keep defending our personal freedoms and our civil rights – from the right to vote – to the right to choose.”

Biden will deliver his speech from the White House at 8 p.m. EST tonight.

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Biden in Address to Nation to Say Best Way to Unite US Is to Pass Torch to Next Generation

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden in remarks to the nation later tonight will explain that his decision to drop out of the presidential race was made in order to unite the country and pass the torch to a new generation, according to excerpts the White House provided ahead of the speech.

"I have decided the best way forward is to pass the torch to a new generation. That is the best way to unite our nation," Biden is expected to state on Wednesday night.

Biden will deliver his speech from the White House at 8 p.m. tonight.

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Biden in Oval Office Address to Say That Over Next Six Months Will be Focused on Doing His Job - Excerpts

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Biden in Oval Office Address to Say He Decided Not to Run And The Best Way to Unite Nation To Pass Torch to New Generation- Excerpts

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US Intercepts Russian, Chinese Military Aircraft Near Alaska, Not Seen as Threat - NORAD

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - US and Canadian fighter jets intercepted Russian and Chinese military aircraft flying in international airspace near Alaska but they were not seen as a threat, the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) said in a press release.

"NORAD detected, tracked, and intercepted two Russian TU-95 and two PRC H-6 military aircraft operating in the Alaska Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) on July 24, 2024," the release said on Wednesday.

NORAD fighter jets from the United States and Canada conducted the intercept, the release noted.

The release said that the Russian and Chinese aircraft remained in international airspace and did not enter American or Canadian sovereign airspace.

The Russian and Chinese flights were not seen as a threat but NORAD will continue to monitor similar activity near North America and "meet presence with presence," the release said.

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Trump Says Kamala Harris 'Radical Left Lunatic,' Blames Her for Every Biden Catastrophe

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump said presumptive Democratic nominee Kamala Harris is a "radical left lunatic" who is the driving force behind every failed policy from the Biden administration.

"Lying Kamala Harris has been the ultra-liberal driving force behind every single Biden catastrophe," Trump said during a rally in North Carolina on Wednesday evening. "She is a radical left lunatic who will destroy our country if she ever gets the chance to get into office. We're not going to let that happen."

Trump also said that Harris is unfit to lead and would be worse than President Joe Biden.

The Democratic National Committee (DNC) intends to nominate a presidential candidate by August 7. The vote for US president will be held on November 5.

An aggregation of national polls by RealClearPolitics shows that Trump leads Harris 47.6% to 45.9% as of Wednesday afternoon.

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Pelosi Says Netanyahu's Speech 'Worst Presentation' by Foreign Dignitary in US Congress

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech to lawmakers in the US Congress was the worst ever presentation by a foreign dignitary there, former US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said.

"Benjamin Netanyahu's presentation in the House Chamber today was by far the worst presentation of any foreign dignitary invited and honored with the privilege of addressing the Congress of the United States," Pelosi said via the social media platform X on Wednesday.

Earlier in the day, Netanyahu delivered a speech to US lawmakers at the invitation of congressional leaders. However, a number of lawmakers, including Pelosi, opted not to attend the speech.

The families of hostages held in the Gaza Strip are seeking a ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas, Pelosi said.

Pelosi said that she wishes Netanyahu would spend his time working on achieving a ceasefire.

Netanyahu's speech prompted protests in Washington, during which law enforcement deployed pepper spray and detained some demonstrators.

National Director of the ANSWER Coalition, Brian Becker, told Sputnik that law enforcement's response was an unprovoked attack on the protesters.

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Kamala Harris to Lose 2024 Election if She Fails to Support Palestine - Advocacy Group

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - Vice President and presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris is going to lose the election if she goes against Americans who support a free Palestine, according to a protester in Washington who spoke to Sputnik on condition of anonymity.

The protester is a leader of one of the main advocacy groups in defense of Palestine who protested on Wednesday the visit and address of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the US Congress.

"Kamala Harris can do whatever she wants to do, but if she goes against us [supporters of Palestine], she's going to lose this election," the protester told Sputnik. "If Democrats want to maintain their power, they need to change their course on Gaza."

President Joe Biden had to step down because he failed to resolve the conflict in Gaza and not because of the dire situation on the US border with Mexico, the protester said.

On Monday, Netanyahu arrived in Washington to hold meetings with Biden and with his main opponent Donald Trump, as well as to address a joint session of Congress.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) -

NETANYAHU ADDRESS TO US CONGRESS

* Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu proposed in a speech to Congress on Wednesday that the United States and Israel forge a security alliance to counter Iran, in the same way that the United States allied with Europe to counter the Soviet Union.
* Netanyahu said that he is confident ongoing hostage talks with Hamas will be fruitful.
* Netanyahu said that if the International Criminal Court ties Israel's hands, the hands of the United States are next.
* The US Capitol Police said its officers deployed pepper spray on demonstrators protesting against Netanyahu's visit and speech.

OIL TRANSIT THROUGH UKRAINE

* The European Commission should not delay its consideration of the issue related to halting the flow of Russian oil by Ukraine, Slovak Foreign Minister Juraj Blanar said on Wednesday.
* Slovakia may take retaliatory measures if Ukraine does not resolve the issue of oil transit from Russia, said Slovak President Peter Pellegrini said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* It is difficult to talk about the details of possible negotiations with Kiev without knowing the details of the statement by Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmitry Kuleba, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Wednesday.
* The peace process is the preferred option for resolving the conflict in Ukraine, Peskov said.
* Moscow does not know what is behind Kuleba's statements and hopes to receive clarifications in the near future, Peskov said.
* Volodymyr Zelenskyy has clearly lost his legitimacy, Peskov said.
* The message voiced by Kuleba about Kiev's readiness to begin negotiations with Russia is in line with Moscow's position, Peskov said.

CAR BOMBING IN MOSCOW

* The Zamoskvoretsky court of Moscow told Sputnik on Wednesday that it had arrested Yevgeny Serebryakov, a defendant in the car bombing case in Moscow.
* The investigation appealed to the Zamoskvoretsky court of Moscow with a petition for the arrest in absentia of the defendant in the car bombing case in Moscow, who was also put on the international wanted list, the court told Sputnik.
* Turkish Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya announced the detention of a suspect in a car bombing in Moscow in Bodrum.
* Serebryakov, who was detained in Bodrum, is being prepared for possible extradition, and he has passed medical control, Turkish media reported.

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RUSSIAN ECONOMY

* The production of passenger cars in Russia in January-June has increased by 62.2% year-on-year to 330,000 units, Russian Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat) said on Wednesday.

* The production of liquefied natural gas (LNG) in Russia increased by 4.7% to 17.3 million tonnes year-on-year in January-June, the Rosstat said.

* Russia's gas production increased by 9.4% year-on-year and amounted to 292 billion cubic meters in January-June, the Rosstat said.

* Industrial production in Russia rose by 4.4% in the past six months of 2024 year on year and by 3.7% year-on-year in the second quarter of 2024, the Rosstat said.

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Biden, Netanyahu to Discuss Integrating Mideast Partners To Defense Israel - US Official

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during a meeting on Thursday are expected to discuss a range of regional security matters in the Middle East including work to integrate partnerships in the region to help defend Israel, a senior US administration official said on Wednesday.

"We'll talk about our ongoing efforts to ensure the defense of Israel, including through broader integration in the region," the official said.

The two leaders will also discuss other topics related to Iran and its so-called proxy forces in the Middle East, Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, the Gaza hostage and ceasefire negotiations, among other issues.

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Framework of Gaza Deal Nearly Ready But Some Issues Need to Be Resolved - US Official

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - Israel and Hamas are close to finalizing the framework for the hostage and ceasefire deal being negotiated between the two parties but several very serious issues still need to be worked out, a senior US administration official said on Wednesday.

"The framework of the deal is basically there," the official told reporters. "There are some very serious implementation issues that still have to be resolved ... There are some things we need from Hamas, and there's some things we need from the Israeli side, and I think you'll see that play out here over the course of the coming week."

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framework of gaza deal basically in place, parties working out implementation with some very serious issues yet to be resolved - senior us official

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Washington Hotel 'Sanitized' After Maggots Released in Protest of Netanyahu Visit

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - Staff at the Watergate Hotel in Washington have "sanitized" the premises after protesters released maggots and crickets during Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's stay there this week, a spokesperson for the property told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"We took the necessary steps to ensure the property has been sanitized and is now operating as normal. We are cooperating fully with authorities, who are handling the situation," the hotel said in a statement.

Videos posted to social media platforms showed maggots, meal worms and crickets in common spaces in the hotel, including hallways, lobbies and on a table where the Israeli and American flags stood side by side in the background.

The Watergate Hotel's management said the "unfortunate incident" occurred on Tuesday.

Netanyahu arrived in Washington on Monday to hold a series of meetings with US officials, including with President Joe Biden and his Republican challenger Donald Trump, as well as to address a joint session of Congress.

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FBI Director Wray Should Resign for Not Describing Biden as Cognitively Declined - Trump

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said on Wednesday that FBI Director Christopher Wray should resign for not describing President Joe Biden as appearing cognitively declined in recent talks.

On Wednesday, Wray attended a US House Judiciary Committee hearing to discuss the July 13 assassination attempt against Trump.

A lawmaker asked Wray about whether he noticed any signs of cognitive decline by Biden during recent talks. Wray said that he did not observe any such decline.

"If that is the case, Director Wray should resign immediately from the FBI, and stop ‘sweet talking’ Congress every time he goes up, which he loves to do, because anybody can see that Joe Biden is cognitively and physically challenged, and if you can’t see that, you sure as hell can’t be running the FBI," Trump said via the social media platform Truth Social.

On Sunday, Biden said that he will not seek reelection in 2024 given concerns among many Democrats about his viability as a candidate.

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Biden Decided to Step Aside on Sunday With Family, Group of Advisors - White House

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden made the decision to step aside from the 2024 elections on Sunday, accompanied by his family and a group of advisors, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Wednesday.

"It started Saturday evening. Next afternoon, which was Sunday afternoon, he made that decision. Small group of advisors, including family, was with him on Saturday night and then Sunday afternoon, he made the decision," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing.

The press secretary was further questioned on the reasons behind holding a news briefing days after Biden announced his decision to step aside, to which she replied that it was protocol not to hold briefings when the President is out of the White House.

Jean-Pierre further noted that Biden remained acting president and commander-in-chief despite his decision to withdraw from the presidential race.

"He's [Biden] still very much going to lead this country in the way, in the direction that he believes is right," she said.

On Sunday, incumbent President Joe Biden announced his withdrawal from the 2024 US presidential race and endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris to be the Democratic Party's nominee. Harris said on Tuesday that she had secured enough Democratic votes to become the Democratic presidential nominee.

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UPDATE - Oil Market Gets First Break in Weeks After Broad US Stockpile Draw

(Updates with more details in paras 2, 3)

NEW YORK, July 24 (Sputnik) - The oil market caught its first major break in weeks after the US government reported on Wednesday across-the-board draws in stockpiles of crude, gasoline and distillates, assuaging concerns about questionable fuel demand during the peak summer period for travel.

After tumbling to six-week lows on Tuesday, US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude turned higher, settling at $77.59 per barrel. That was 63 cents, or 0.8%, higher from the previous close of WTI, which hit $76.41 on Tuesday - the lowest since early June. The US crude benchmark lost a combined 4% over the course of two prior weeks although it remains up 8% on the year.

UK-origin Brent crude for September settled at $81.71 per barrel, up 70 cents, or 0.9%. The global crude benchmark fell 4.5% over two prior weeks, reaching a six-week low of $80.53 on Tuesday. Brent is still up 6% for 2024.

"Oil prices are bouncing back from a six-week low as the market tries to get the story straight. Should the oil market be concerned about weakening demand or evidence of rapidly tightening supply?" Phil Flynn, an energy analyst at Chicago's Price Futures Group, who's typically bullish

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on oil, asked in his daily note.

The Energy Information Administration (EIA) noted in its Weekly Petroleum Status Report released on Wednesday a crude inventory decline of 3.741 million barrels for the week that ended on July 19, adding to the prior week's tumble of 4.87 million. US crude inventories have fallen almost 25 million barrels in all over the past four weeks.

However, the real significant draws reported by the EIA were in inventories of fuel-related products.

The agency cited a decline of 5.572 million barrels in gasoline in the latest week versus a build of 3.328 million barrels in the prior week. Analysts had a forecast build of 1.4 million barrels instead. Gasoline is the primary motor fuel in the United States and makes up the largest component of the country's energy mix.

In distillates, the EIA reported a drop of 2.753 million barrels, against the gain of 1.53 million forecasts by analysts after the prior week's build of 3.454 million. Distillates are primarily processed into the diesel required by trucks, buses, and ships, and also go into making airplane fuel.

Crude prices hit six-week lows Tuesday partly on concerns of a potential Israel-Hamas ceasefire in the Middle East. The Gaza war zone and its proximity to some of the world's biggest oil producers - including Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates - had been a boon to the 2024 oil rally, especially after some disruption to crude shipments from rockets fired by Hamas.

Efforts by Egypt and Qatar to broker a ceasefire in Gaza have escalated over the past month and oil's war-risk premium was now at risk, analysts said. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu this week told families of hostages held by Hamas that a deal to secure their release could be near. Netanyahu delivered a speech to the US Congress on Wednesday and is seeking to meet President Joe Biden at the White House.

Crude prices have also been weighed lately by weaker oil demand in China, the second-largest consumer of the commodity after the United States.

Data recently showed China's refinery output falling 3.7% in June from a year earlier. China's economy also grew by just 4.7% in the second quarter of this year, its slowest growth since the first quarter of 2023, well below the forecast of 5.1%.

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Democratic National Committee Plans to Nominate Presidential Candidate by August 7

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - The Democratic National Committee (DNC) intends to nominate a presidential candidate by August 7, following US President Joe Biden's departure from the race.

The DNC's Rules and Bylaws Committee agreed to the plan during a virtual meeting.

Candidates can begin declaring their intent to pursue the nomination on Thursday and virtual voting will begin on August 1.

On Sunday, Biden announced that he will not pursue reelection. Biden endorsed US Vice President Kamala Harris as his replacement.

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Democrats will hold their national convention in Chicago on August 19-22.

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US Police Wage 'Unprovoked Attack' on Protesters During Netanyahu Address – Activist

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) – Police in Washington launched an "unprovoked attack" against peaceful protesters who marched near the US Capitol during Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's address to Congress, the National Director of the ANSWER Coalition Brian Becker told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"They started pushing us, and then they started pepper spraying everybody in the front line of the protest, myself included," Becker said. "So, it was an unprovoked attack by the police, completely unprovoked."

Becker added that it was "a full blast" of pepper spray.

The activist said that "dozens and dozens" of protesters were affected.

"We are marching to protest the fact that Benjamin Netanyahu is getting a hero's welcome before both houses of Congress," Becker said.

The police stopped the march at Constitution Avenue and warned that they would tear gas only if protesters tried to break security fences.

"We stood up by their line, we were chanting, we should be able to march," Becker said, adding that the First Amendment to the US Constitution gives people the right to protest peacefully.

He also said out that the protest would continue until the end of Netanyahu's speech.

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Police Start Detaining Pro-Palestinian Protesters in Washington - Sputnik Correspondent

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - Police have started detaining participants at the pro-Palestine rally in Washington, a Sputnik correspondent reported on Wednesday.

At least two people were detained at the park in front of the Union Station near the US Congress, when police was trying to clear out the area.

The mass protest started in the morning and included several thousand participants from across the United States.

The protest began in front of the US Capitol, where Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressed Congress, and then continued as most of the participants moved to nearby Union Station.

The entrances to Union Station are closed and there is an increased police presence in the area. The authorities have closed traffic on all adjacent roads.

The protesters changed the displayed US flags on the poles in front of Union Station with Palestinian ones.

Police are presently preparing to clear out the main square and many are wearing masks.

Earlier, the police used pepper spray against the protesters to clear out the area in front of the

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US Capitol building. Dozens of people were affected by the pepper spray.

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Biden's Decision to Quit Campaign Was Difficult And Personal – White House

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden made a "personal, difficult" decision to quit his presidential campaign, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said on Wednesday.

"He was able to make a decision, and say, 'It is not about me, it is about the American people, it is about the country,' and make, again, a personal, difficult decision," Jean-Pierre told reporters.

Biden is proud to have made this decision, she added.

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Полиция начала задерживать протестующих против Нетаньяху в Вашингтоне

ВАШИНГТОН, 24 июл - РИА Новости. Полиция в Вашингтоне в среду начала задерживать протестующих против визита премьер-министра Израиля Биньямина Нетаньяху, уже задержали двоих, передает корреспондент РИА Новости.

Полиция начала отгонять протестующих с площади у вокзала Юнион-Стейшн, как минимум двух человек уже задержали.

В то же время парковая полиция Вашингтона заявила в соцсети X, что "толпа на площади Колумбус нарушает закон и противодействует правоохранительным органам на месте происшествия. Полиция пытается снизить напряженность и обратиться за помощью к организатору мероприятия".

Ранее в среду Нетаньяху в своем обращении к конгрессу обрушился с критикой на протестующих в Вашингтоне и по всей Америке, назвав их "идиотами".

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Глава антивоенной коалиции обвинил полицию в США в беспричинной атаке на протестующих

ВАШИНГТОН, 24 июл - РИА Новости. Глава американского отделения антивоенной коалиции ANSWER Брайан Беккер в комментарии агентству Sputnik обвинил полицию Вашингтоне в необоснованной атаке на участников протеста против выступления в конгрессе премьер-министра Израиля Биньямина Нетаньяху.

Ранее в среду корреспондент РИА Новости передал, что полиция в Вашингтоне применила перцовый газ против части участников протестов у Капитолия. Всего на протестах ожидалось порядка 50 тысяч участников, в связи с чем в помощь местной

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полиции из Нью-Йорка прибыли около 200 их коллег.
"Это было неспровоцированной атакой полиции, совершенно неспровоцированной. Ранее они сказали, что будут использовать слезоточивый газ только в том случае, если протестующие попытаются пробиться через заграждения. Но мы стояли в рамках их линий", - Беккер заявил после того, как сам попал под перцовый газ.
Он отметил, что в определенный момент местная полиция перестала использовать силу против их постоянных протестов, однако теперь она возобновила эти действия, несмотря на то, что протестующие заранее подали документы на проведение митинга.
ANSWER - международная антивоенная коалиция со штаб-квартирой в США, ее название расшифровывается как "действуйте сейчас, чтобы остановить войну и покончить с расизмом" (Act Now to Stop War and End Racism - ANSWER).
В то же время Нетаньяху в своем обращении к конгрессу обрушился с критикой на протестующих в Вашингтоне и по всей Америке, назвав их "идиотами".

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Biden to Discuss Historic Decision to Step Aside, Put Country 'Above All' – White House

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) – United States President Joe Biden will discuss his historic decision to withdraw from the 2024 US presidential race, putting the country "above all," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Wednesday.
"Tonight, the President will discuss his historic decision to put the country above all else, and above the inflection point we face as a country in this moment. This is one of those rare moments when the decisions we make now will determine the future of our nation," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing.
On Sunday, incumbent President Joe Biden announced his withdrawal from the 2024 US presidential race and endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris to be the Democratic Party's nominee. Harris said on Tuesday that she had secured enough Democratic votes to become the Democratic presidential nominee.

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Police Start Detaining Pro-Palestinian Protesters in Washington - Sputnik Correspondent

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Netanyahu Says Wants to Forge NATO-like Mideast Security Alliance to Counter Iran

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in an address to the US Congress on Wednesday proposed that the United States and Israel should forge a security alliance to counter Iran, in the same way that America allied with Europe to counter the

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Soviet Union.
"Now here's my vision for the broader Middle East, it's also shaped in part by what we saw in the aftermath of World War II, after that war, America forged a security alliance in Europe to counter the growing Soviet threat. Likewise, America and Israel today can forge a security alliance in the Middle East to counter the growing Iranian threat," Netanyahu said.
All countries that are at peace with Israel and all those countries who will make peace with Israel should be invited to join this alliance, which should be called the "Abraham Alliance," Netanyahu added.

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US Coast Guard Faces Major Problems Running Shipbuilding Programs - Congressman

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - The US Coast Guard is at least half a decade behind schedule and grossly over budget in administering its own new shipbuilding and other acquisition programs, US House Homeland Security Transportation and Maritime Security Subcommittee Chair Carlos Gimenez said.
"The Coast Guard has experienced major problems in administering its acquisition programs," Gimenez said in the subcommittee hearing on Wednesday.
According to a Congressional Budget Office (CBO) assessment, the costs of the Polar Security Cutter program will be almost 60% higher than the Coast Guard's current estimate, Gimenez said.
Congressman Bennie Thompson told the hearing that the Coast Guard must earn back the trust of its service members and the American public.
"It is long past time for accountability," Thompson said.
On Monday, the US Coast Guard offloaded more than 7,300 pounds (3,311 kilograms) of cocaine worth $96 million at Port Everglades in Florida.

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Netanyahu Says Wants to Forge NATO-like Mideast Security Alliance to Counter Iran

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"Now here's my vision for the broader Middle East, it's also shaped in part by what we saw in the aftermath of World War II, after that war, America forged a security alliance in Europe to counter the growing Soviet threat. Likewise, America and Israel today can forge a security alliance in the Middle East to counter the growing Iranian threat," Netanyahu said.
All countries that are at peace with Israel and all those countries who will make peace with Israel should be invited to join this alliance, which should be called the "Abraham Alliance,"

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Netanyahu added.

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Israel Must Retain Overriding Security Control in Gaza for Foreseeable Future - Netanyahu

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said during his address to a joint session of the US Congress that Israel must retain overriding security control in Gaza for the foreseeable future.

"Israel does not seek to resettle Gaza, but for the foreseeable future we must retain overriding security control there to prevent the resurgence of terror, to ensure that Gaza never again poses a threat to Israel," Netanyahu said.

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US Coast Guard Facing Illegals, Cannot Fight Drug Cartels in Caribbean - Congressman

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - The deluge of immigrants seeking to enter the United States illegally from Central America and the Caribbean has overwhelmed the US Coast Guard and left it with very limited capabilities to combat criminal cartels and drug smugglers in the region, US House Homeland Security Transportation and Maritime Security Subcommittee Chair Carlos Gimenez said.

"In the Caribbean, the Coast Guard is under severe pressure to interdict the massive waves of illegal immigrants, leaving scant resources for counter narcotics missions," Gimenez said on Wednesday. "This leaves cartel activities to go unchecked."

Coast Guard Commander Adm. Linda Fagan told the hearing that Congress had only approved half of the shipbuilding funding that the Coast Guard regarded as necessary to maintain its modernization program and deal with the complex security and criminal threats it had to deal with.

Fagan said that despite an uptrend in recruiting, the Coast Guard was still 2,300 people below its budgeted and required operating personnel level.

Some of the Coast Guard's aging air and sea assets have been in service for almost 80 years since the end of World War II, Gimenez said.

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Netanyahu in Address to Congress Says if Israel's Hands are Tied, America is Next

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said during his congressional address on Wednesday that if the International Criminal Court ties Israel's hands,

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the hands of the United States are next.

"I want to thank all of you here today who forcefully opposed the false accusations of the [International Criminal Court] and stood up for the truth. These lies are not only libels, they're downright dangerous. The ICC is trying to shackle Israel's hands and prevent us from defending ourselves, and if Israel's hands are tied, America is next," said Netanyahu.

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Harris Might Have Different Position on Israel Conflict - CODEPINK Co-Founder

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Kamala Harris might have a slightly different position on the conflict between Israel and Hamas than US President Joe Biden, the co-founder of women-led peace group CODEPINK Medea Benjamin told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"I expect that she will have a little bit of a different position," Benjamin said. "I think she's going to have a position that says we have to get more humanitarian aid in there, we've got to get a ceasefire, that kind of thing."

Netanyahu is delivering at present a speech to lawmakers during a joint session of Congress, although some lawmakers skipped the speech in protest. Harris also declined to attend the speech.

Harris became the presumptive Democratic Party presidential nominee for the 2024 race after President Joe Biden ended his reelection bid.

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US Lacks Resources to Protect Caribbean Nations From Chinese Pressure - Congressman

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - The United States lacks the resources to protect Caribbean nations from increasing Chinese influence and pressure, Congressman Carlos Gimenez told the US House Homeland Security Transportation and Maritime Security Subcommittee on Wednesday.

"The Coast Guard does not have enough people to maintain a consistent presence in areas where the People's Republic of China is poised to seize the initiative and impose its will on smaller states [in the region]," Gimenez, who chairs the subcommittee, said.

The small Caribbean nations lack the means and governance structures to push back against the growing Chinese presence in their region without sufficient US support to back them up, Gimenez said.

The organization's structural shortcomings ultimately hinder the Coast Guard's ability to maintain a sufficient presence in critical mission areas, Giminez said.

"I am particularly concerned," Gimenez added.

China invested over $10 billion in six Caribbean nations between 2005 and 2022 prioritizing

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their tourism, transportation, extractive metals, agriculture and energy sectors, according to published reports.

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US Public 'Totally Against' Netanyahu Visit - CODEPINK Co-Founder

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - The American public is totally against the visit to the United States by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the co-founder of the peace group CODEPINK Medea Benjamin told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"The US public is totally against this visit, and so many members of Congress feel obligated, despite all the money they get from the lobby groups, they feel like they have to respond to the public and not show up," Benjamin said.

Netanyahu is delivering a speech to a joint session of Congress in Washington despite some members of Congress having skipped the speech in protest.

There are also protests in Washington against Netanyahu's visit to the United States and Israel's military actions in Gaza and the region. Thousands of people have gathered in the US capital on Wednesday to express their disagreement. The US Capitol Police said that they deployed pepper spray against several violent unruly protesters.

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People Will Remember Biden as 'Hawkish' President Who Promoted War - CODEPINK Co-Founder

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will be remembered as a hawkish leader who promoted war, the co-founder of women-led peace group CODEPINK Medea Benjamin told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"In general, I think he will be remembered as a president who was very hawkish and promoted war," Benjamin said.

Biden perpetuated the conflict in Ukraine instead of promoting peace talks, Benjamin said.

Biden has also been very antagonistic towards China, Benjamin said.

On Sunday, Biden announced his withdrawal from the 2024 presidential race and endorsed US Vice President Kamala Harris as his replacement.

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Fox News Proposes Presidential Debate Between Trump, Harris on September 17 - Letter

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WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - Fox News has invited former President Donald Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris to a presidential debate in Pennsylvania on September 17, President of Fox News Media Jay Wallace said in a letter on Wednesday.

"We'd like to request the opportunity to host a Presidential Debate between former President Trump and VP Harris. We propose to host the debate in the state of Pennsylvania on Tuesday, September 17," the letter to Trump campaign advisers Chris LaCivita and Susie Wiles said.

The letter added that Fox News believes that Bret Baier and Martha MacCallum are the top choices for moderating the presidential debate.

On Tuesday, Trump said that he is willing to debate Harris, after she replaced President Joe Biden as the Democratic Party's presumptive nominee.

On Sunday, Biden announced his withdrawal from the 2024 US presidential race and endorsed Harris as his replacement.

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Endless Delays in Building US Coast Guard Polar Cutter Anger Congressional Panel Chairman

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - The first of five Polar Security Cutters to renew the US maritime security presence in the Arctic and Antarctic regions is five years behind schedule, its keel has not been laid yet and no firm date for doing so has been confirmed, US Coast Guard (USCG) Commander Adm. Linda Fagan told Congress on Wednesday.

"I don't have the exact keeling date," Fagan said at a hearing of the US House Homeland Security Transportation and Maritime Subcommittee.

Subcommittee Chair Representative Carlos Gimenez, a Republican from Florida, responded that Fagan had been giving the same assurances to his members for at least the past two years.

"You're supposed to have a cutter in the water [but] you're still working on the design. You're five years behind," Gimenez said. "What's the problem? That does not give us much confidence. This is an issue of national security."

Fagan said different factors had gone into the delay including repeated redesigns of the proposed vessel, the removal of the contract from one shipyard to another and then the takeover of the second shipyard by another company and disruptions caused by the 2019-22 COVID-19 pandemic measures.

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Israel's Netanyahu in Address to Congress Says Confident Hostage Talks Will be Successful

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in an address to the US Congress on Wednesday that he is confident ongoing hostage talks with Hamas will be fruitful.

"We're actively engaged in intensive efforts to secure their release, and I'm confident that these

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efforts can succeed. Some of them are taking place right now," Netanyahu said.

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US State Dept. Says Only Congress Can Authorize Restoring Funding for UNRWA

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - Only US Congress can lift the ban on funding the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) after it concludes its internal investigation into the circumstances of the October 7 attack on Israel, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said.

"We just simply don't have the flexibility to make that decision because of the action that Congress took [to ban funding for UNRWA]," Miller said during a press briefing on Wednesday.

Earlier in July, UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini said that all states that stopped funding UNRWA with the exception of the United States have resumed their financial support for the agency.

In January, Israel shared data with UNRWA leadership on the alleged involvement of some of its staff members in the October 7 attack. Israel vowed to hold accountable anyone involved in "acts of terror."

The United States, Finland, Italy, Germany, Sweden, Australia, Canada, Japan, the United Kingdom and several other countries responded by suspending funding for the agency.

In early February, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appointed an independent review panel led by former French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna to examine UNRWA's activities.

The final report was published on April 22, saying that Israel had provided no evidence of the agency's workers allegedly being members of "terrorist organizations." Following the announcement, many nations resumed funding the agency.

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US Capitol Police Say Deployed Pepper Spray on Anti-Netanyahu Protesters

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - The US Capitol Police said on Wednesday that officers deployed pepper spray on demonstrators protesting against a speech to lawmakers by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"Part of the crowd has started to become violent at First Street and Constitution Avenue, NW. The crowd failed to obey our order to move back from our police line. We are deploying pepper spray towards anyone trying to break the law and cross that line," the US Capitol Police said via social media platform X.

A Sputnik correspondent on the scene reported that police are now wearing shields and gas masks.

Netanyahu is set to deliver a speech to lawmakers at the US Capitol on Wednesday at the invitation of congressional leaders. However, some lawmakers are skipping Netanyahu's speech in protest.

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us capitol police deploying pepper spray after protests against netanyahu 'started to become violent' - statement

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Musk Says Attending Netanyahu's Speech at US Capitol

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - Billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk said on Wednesday that he will attend Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech to lawmakers at the US Capitol.

"I am," Musk said, when asked whether he is attending Netanyahu's speech later on Wednesday.

Musk added that he is attending as a guest of Netanyahu.

Congressional leaders invited Netanyahu to speak to lawmakers at the US Capitol, although some members of Congress are skipping the speech in protest.

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US New Home Sales Down 7% Annually In June Amid High Prices, Lending Rates

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - Sales of newly constructed US houses fell 7% year-on-year in June, the Commerce Department reported Wednesday, as prohibitive lending rates and home prices near all-time highs kept potential buyers away.

Sales of new houses totaled 617,000 units last month, down 0.6% from May's 621,000 units, and 7.4% below the June 2023 figure of 666,000, the department said in a news release.

Underscoring last month's weak sales was the department's finding on home prices.

"The median sales price of new houses sold in June 2024 was $417,300," the department said. "The average sales price was $487,200."

That left the price on a new home in the United States little changed from a year ago as builders tried to cash in on a buying rush that peaked in mid-2023 on fear that the Federal Reserve would keep up with rate hikes, sending mortgage rates soaring further.

The Fed raised rates 11 times between March 2022 and June 2023, bringing interest rates to a two-decade high of 5.5%. The rate on a 30-year home loan reached a 20-year peak of 7.79% in October 2023.

The slump in new home sales since the end of 2023 has not resulted in an appreciable price drop, intensifying the battle of endurance between buyers and builders.

"More expensive markets are getting harder to grow sales from not very elevated levels either,"

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HousingWire Lead Analyst Logan Mohtashami said.

Some realtors, however, defended the pricing structure. “Well-priced and marketed listings are still selling relatively quickly,” Zillow senior economist Orphe Divounguy said.

Housing plays an important role in the US economy, with owners often using equity built in their homes to take out loans. Home construction is also a key provider of employment.

In the 2008/09 financial crisis, a crash of the housing market precipitated what later came to be known as the era of the Great Recession. Since then, the US property market has rapidly recovered on the back of economic recovery as well as demand from buyers. Even the 2020/22 coronavirus pandemic only had a fleeting impact on home buying in the United States.

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US Lawmakers Call on Netanyahu to Avoid Partisan Rhetoric in Address to Congress - Letter

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - A group of Democratic senators and congressmen sent a letter to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu earlier on Wednesday to urge him to avoid partisan rhetoric in his address to Congress that could jeopardize the peaceful resolution of the Gaza conflict.

"It is our hope and expectation that you will avoid partisan rhetoric and will use your remarks to present a path towards a deal to secure the release of hostages, bring an end to the fighting in Gaza, provide humanitarian relief to civilians in Gaza, and facilitate the normalization of ties between Israel and Saudi Arabia to progress," the letter reads.

The authors of the letter are close to President Joe Biden Democratic senators Chris Coons and Michael Bennet as well as Democratic congressmen Thomas Suozzi and Chrissy Houlahan.

On Monday, Netanyahu arrived in Washington to hold a series of meetings, including with Biden on Thursday and with his Republican opponent Donald Trump on Friday, as well as to address a joint session of Congress on Wednesday night.

Netanyahu’s arrival to Washington has been marked by massive pro-Palestinian and anti-war protests near Capitol Hill with several thousand people taking part in the protest.

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FBI Director Says Shooter Fired 'At Least' Eight Rounds at Trump Rally

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - FBI Director Christopher Wray said on Wednesday that shooter Thomas Crooks fired at least eight shots at former President Donald Trump's rally in Pennsylvania, as eight cartridges were found at the scene.

"We know that he [Trump shooter Thomas Crooks] fired at least eight because we recovered eight cartridges on the roof," Wray said during a US House Judiciary Committee hearing.

Wray added that the collapsible stock of the weapon used in the shooting at a Trump rally may

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have made it less visible to the crowd.

The shooting took place on July 13 at a Trump rally in Butler, the US state of Pennsylvania. Trump sustained a gun wound to his right ear and was briefly hospitalized. Thomas Crooks, 20, killed a member of the audience and injured two others in the crowd before the Secret Service neutralized him.

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

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Ukraine Conflict Unlikely to End Before US Holds Elections in November - Ex-Senator

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - The ongoing conflict in Ukraine is unlikely to end before the US elections in November given that President Joe Biden is fully committed to the war and his financial donors are invested in defeating Russia, former Virginia State Senator Richard Black told Sputnik.

"The war in Ukraine is unlikely to end before the US elections on November 5," Black said. "President Biden is fully committed to the war. His cabinet secretaries and his big financial donors are heavily invested in defeating Russia."

Black noted that the American public has lost much of its interest in the war in Ukraine while there is a political division among Democrats and Republicans on the issue.

"Most Democrats still want to see Russia defeated, but most Republicans do not," Black said. "Republicans want to stop funding distant wars and refocus on defending America's own borders. Most of those who attended the Republican National Convention are strongly against funding the war. Many of them understand that Russia was forced into the war because the CIA and British MI-6 staged a coup in 2014 that overthrew the legitimate head of Ukraine, President Viktor Yanukovych."

On Tuesday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the conflict in Ukraine should end as soon as possible. US media has cited Ukrainian officials as saying that Kiev was concerned about potential complications in the war efforts in 2025 if Donald Trump were reelected as US president.

Biden dropped out of the presidential race and endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris as the Democratic Party's nominee for presidency. If nominated, she will take on Republican Party nominee Trump on November 5.

Trump has repeatedly claimed that if reelected, he would put a prompt end to the conflict in Ukraine.

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Trump Almost Certain Winner in Fair Election But US Vote Not Necessarily So - Ex-Senator

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WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - Former President and current Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump would almost surely win the upcoming November election but US elections are not necessarily fair so the outcome will be uncertain, former Virginia State Senator Richard Black told Sputnik.

"In a fair election, Trump would almost certainly win. But US elections aren't necessarily fair," Black said.

Black pointed out that US elections are "notoriously corrupt" and the Democrats have enacted many laws that extend the period for voting, allow unsupervised ballots to be mailed in, and allow unidentified persons to deposit ballots in unattended drop boxes.

"These laws obviously facilitate voter fraud. So, we anticipate that many fraudulent votes will be cast, almost all for Democrats," Black said.

The former senator said the Democrat Party is preparing to nominate Vice President Kamala Harris for president despite being unpopular with both major political parties in the United States for a number of reasons.

"Today, she held a rally and only 75 people showed up. No Republican with such pitiful support could ever win an election," Black said.

On Sunday, incumbent President Joe Biden announced his withdrawal from the 2024 US presidential race and endorsed Harris to be the Democratic Party's nominee. Harris said on Tuesday that she had secured enough Democratic votes to become the Democratic presidential nominee.

Black emphasized recent polls show Trump being ahead of Harris in most of the seven key "swing" US states.

The former senator also noted that the Biden administration allowed millions of migrants to enter the United States illegally and may utilize them for voting.

"Wherever possible, these migrants will be illegally registered to vote for Democrat candidates," Black said. "The presence of 10 million new aliens will make the election's outcome uncertain until the very end."

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UPDATE- US Sanctions Chinese Individuals, Companies for North Korean Nuclear Assistance –Treasury

(Updates to headline, additional info throughout the text)

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) – The US Treasury sanctioned six individuals and five companies based in China on Wednesday for helping procure items supporting North Korea's nuclear program, according to a release.

"Today, the Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned a network of six individuals and five entities based in the People's Republic of China (PRC), involved in the procurement of items supporting the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) ballistic missile and space programs," the release stated.

The Treasury noted that North Korea has continued to conduct ballistic missile launches and has supplied Russia with ballistic missiles, in violation of UN Security Council resolutions.

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The five sanctioned Chinese nationals center on Shi Qianpei, a key facilitator for Choe Chol Min, a Beijing-based representative of North Korea's Second Academy of Natural Sciences (SANS). Aside from Shi himself, Shi's employees Du Jiaxin and Wang Dongliang, Shi's wife Chen Tianxin, and Shi's father Shi Anhui are also being sanctioned.

Beijing Sanshunda Electronics Science and Technology Co., Ltd; Qidong Hengcheng Electronics Factory; Shenzhen City Mean Well Electronics Co., Ltd; and Beijing Jinghua Qidi Electronic Technology Co., Ltd are companies used by Shi Qianpei and his associates to procure items and materials on behalf of Choe Chol Min.

The sixth Chinese national sanctioned is Han Dejian, a supplier of metal alloy sheets via his company, Yidatong Tianjin Metal Materials Co., Ltd, which is also being sanctioned. Shi Qianpei relied on Han Dejian for his metal material orders.

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Harris Not Attending Netanyahu Speech Proof Democrats Fear Associating With Him - Black

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Kamala Harris' refusal to attend Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech to the US Congress is a straightforward proof of the Democrats' fear of being associated with the Israeli Prime Minister, former Virginia State Senator Richard Black told Sputnik.

"Netanyahu plans to address the US Congress this Wednesday, but many congressmen plan not to attend," Black said. "Both Kamala Harris and J.D. Vance will be away. Since Vice President Harris normally presides over the Senate, her absence is glaring proof that Democrats fear being associated with the Prime Minister of Israel."

Harris will skip Netanyahu's address on Wednesday but will hold a separate private bilateral meeting with him sometime this week, Politico reported, citing sources familiar with the matter.

Approximately 80 Democratic lawmakers in the House of Representatives and at least six in the Senate are expected to skip Netanyahu's speech to the US Congress, CNN reported on Wednesday, citing public statements and unnamed sources.

Black noted that representatives of 14 Palestinian factions, including Hamas and Fatah, just signed a declaration in Beijing on ending their split, strengthening Palestinian national unity and forming a joint government in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the future.

"Israel has long sought to resist a two-state solution by politically dividing the Palestinian people. Unity between the factions will complicate Israel's war effort and increase pressure to establish a permanent Palestinian homeland," Black said. "For now, the war will continue as it has for nine months, with the Biden administration providing 2,000-pound bombs to destroy Palestinian infrastructure. The enormous bloodshed has complicated the US elections for Democrats, who must win in the heavily Muslim state of Michigan."

Biden's unwavering support for Netanyahu has badly undermined Democrats in that crucial state, complicating Harris' campaign for president, Black added.

On Monday, Netanyahu arrived in Washington on Monday to hold a series of meetings, including with Biden on Thursday and his Republican opponent Donald Trump on Friday, as well

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as to address a joint session of Congress on Wednesday night.

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FBI Says Believes Russia Wants to Influence, Interfere With US Elections

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - The FBI believes that Russia seeks to influence and interfere in the United States' upcoming elections in November, FBI Director Christopher Wray said on Wednesday.

"We assess that the Russian government continues to want to influence and in various ways interfere with our democracy, with our electoral process," Wray said during a US House Judiciary Committee hearing.

However, actors in other countries also seek to interfere in US elections, Wray added.

On Sunday, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said that US elections are an internal matter with which Russia does not interfere.

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Trump Gunman Searched for Kennedy Assassination Details Ahead of Rally Shooting - FBI

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - The man who attempted to assassinate former US President Donald Trump searched for information about the assassination of John F. Kennedy ahead of his own assassination attempt, FBI Director Christopher Wray said on Wednesday.

On July 13, a gunman attempted to assassinate Trump at a rally in Butler, Pennsylvania. The shooter shot Trump in the ear, killed one audience member and wounded two others.

"On July 6, he did a Google search for, 'how far away was Oswald from Kennedy?' So that's a search that obviously is significant in terms of his state of mind," Wray said during a US House Judiciary Committee hearing.

On the same day that the shooter searched for information about the Kennedy assassination, he registered to attend the Trump rally in Pennsylvania, Wray said.

The shooter was generally interested in public figures but the FBI has not yet found any information related to a potential motive or ideology, Wray said.

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Oil Market Gets First Break In Weeks After Broad US Stockpile Draw

NEW YORK, July 24 (Sputnik) - The oil market caught its first major break in weeks after the US government reported on Wednesday across-the-board draws in stockpiles of crude, gasoline, and distillates, assuaging concerns about questionable fuel demand during the peak summer period for travel.

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After tumbling to six-week lows on Tuesday, US West Texas Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude turned higher, trading at $78.03 per barrel by 11:35 AM Eastern Time US (3:35 PM in London). That was $1.07, or 1.4%, higher from the previous close of WTI, which hit $76.41 on Tuesday — its lowest since early June. The US crude benchmark lost a combined 4% over the course of two prior weeks although it still remains up 9% on the year.

UK-origin Brent crude for September was at $82.06 per barrel, up $1.05, or 1.3%. The global crude benchmark fell 4.5% over two prior weeks, reaching a six-week low of $80.53 on Tuesday. Brent is still up 6% for 2024.

“Oil prices are bouncing back from a six-week low as the market tries to get the story straight. Should the oil market be concerned about weakening demand or evidence of rapidly tightening supply?” Phil Flynn, an energy analyst at Chicago’s Price Futures Group, who’s typically bullish on oil, asked in his daily note.

The Energy Information Administration (EIA), its Weekly Petroleum Status Report released on Wednesday, noted a crude inventory decline of 3.741 million barrels for the week ended July 19, adding to the prior week’s tumble of 4.87 million. US crude inventories have fallen almost 25 million barrels in all over the past four weeks.

However, the real significant draws reported by the EIA were in inventories of fuel-related products.

The agency cited a decline of 5.572 million barrels in gasoline in the latest week versus a build of 3.328 million barrels in the prior week. Analysts had a forecast build of 1.4 million barrels instead. Gasoline is the primary motor fuel in the United States and makes up the largest component of the country’s energy mix.

In distillates, the EIA reported a drop of 2.753 million barrels, against the gain of 1.53 million forecasts by analysts after the prior week’s build of 3.454 million. Distillates are primarily processed into the diesel required by trucks, buses, and ships, and also go into making airplane fuel.

Crude prices hit six-week lows Tuesday partly on concerns of a potential Israel-Hamas ceasefire in the Middle East. The Gaza war zone and its proximity to some of the world’s biggest oil producers — including Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates — had been a boon to the 2024 oil rally, especially after some disruption to crude shipments from rockets fired by Hamas.

Efforts by Egypt and Qatar to broker a ceasefire in Gaza have, however, escalated over the past month and oil’s war-risk premium was now at risk, analysts said. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu this week told families of hostages held by Hamas that a deal to secure their release could be near. Netanyahu will deliver a speech to the US Congress on Wednesday and is seeking to meet President Joe Biden as well at the White House.

Crude prices have also been weighed lately by weaker oil demand in China, the second-largest consumer of the commodity after the United States.

Data recently showed China's refinery output falling 3.7% in June from a year earlier. China's economy also grew by just 4.7% in the second quarter of this year, its slowest growth since the first quarter of 2023, well below the forecast of 5.1%.

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200 NYPD Officers Support DC Police Amid Huge Protest During Netanyahu's Speech- Officer

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - At least 200 NYPD officers have been sent to assist Capitol police, as 50,000 people are expected to join a pro-Palestinian rally during Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech to Congress, an NYPD officer told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"We were told that about 50,000 are expected to attend the rally," the police officer said.

Netanyahu arrived in Washington on Monday to hold a series of meetings, including with Biden on Thursday and his opponent Donald Trump on Friday, as well as to address a joint session of Congress on Wednesday night.

Meanwhile, thousands of people started gathering at Pennsylvania Avenue - the main street leading to the Capitol building.

There is an enhanced law enforcement presence with helicopters and police drones in the sky, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

The event is peaceful with a stage installed just a few blocks away from Congress and in front of the Capitol building. Some speakers take the stage and Arabic music is playing.

Approximately 80 Democratic lawmakers in the House of Representatives and at least six in the Senate are expected to skip Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech to the US Congress, CNN reported on Wednesday, citing public statements and unnamed sources.

US Vice President Kamala Harris will skip Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's address to Congress on Wednesday but will hold a separate private bilateral meeting with him sometime this week, Politico reported, citing sources familiar with the matter.

The United States supplies an estimated 69% of Israel's arms.

According to Gaza's health ministry, more than 39,000 people have been confirmed killed and more than 90,000 injured in the ten months of Israel's military operations in the Palestinian enclave.

However, The Lancet recently issued an estimate that the death toll may increase to more than 186,000 people or about 8% of Gaza's pre-war population of 2.3 million.

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Thousands of Protesters Gathering for Mass Rally Ahead of Netanyahu Speech to Congress

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - Thousands of pro-Palestine protesters are gathering for a mass rally in Washington hours before Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is scheduled to deliver a speech to US Congress, a Sputnik correspondent reported on Wednesday.

While the speech is scheduled to start at 2:00 p.m., the protesters started gathering several hours earlier; at 10:00 a.m. a couple of thousand people had already assembled on Pennsylvania Avenue - the main street leading to the Capitol building.

The number of people arriving is growing by the minute and the streets are becoming

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increasingly crowded on the way to Congress. The authorities have closed to traffic numerous adjacent streets.

There is an enhanced law enforcement presence in the area that includes a police helicopter hovering above.

The protesters have set up a stage several blocks away from the Capitol building where speakers address the assembling crown.

Protesters hold Palestinian flags and carry banners such as "Ceasefire now," "Free Palestine," "Cut All US Military Aid to Israel," "End Apartheid, End Occupation." The crowd is diverse and includes many Jews.

Smaller protests have been seen throughout Washington by the Sputnik correspondent earlier on Wednesday.

Netanyahu arrived in Washington on Monday to hold a series of meetings with US officials, including with President Joe Biden and his Republican challenger Donald Trump, as well as to address a joint session of Congress.

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US Imposes North Korea-Related Sanctions on 6 Individuals, 5 Companies in China - Treasury

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - The US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) has sanctioned six individuals and five companies based in China in relation to North Korea, according to a notice on its website on Wednesday.

Four of the companies are involved in electronics manufacturing and one in metals.

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Wray Says FBI Recovered Drone Used by Trump Shooter on Day of Assassination Attempt

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - The FBI recovered a drone apparently used by the shooter who attempted to assassinate former US President Donald Trump at a campaign rally in Pennsylvania, FBI Director Christopher Wray said on Wednesday.

“We have recovered a drone that the shooter appears to have used. It’s being exploited and analyzed by the FBI lab,” Wray said during a US House Judiciary Committee hearing.

The shooter flew the drone in the area of the campaign event on the day of the assassination attempt, Wray said.

On July 13, a gunman attempted to assassinate Trump at a campaign rally in Pennsylvania, shooting him in the ear, killing one audience member and wounding two others.

The FBI is still actively investigating the assassination attempt, Wray said.

The incident prompted US Secret Service Director Kimberly Cheatle to resign from her leadership role, following criticism of the agency for not preventing the assassination attempt.

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Canadian Foreign Minister Joly to Attend ASEAN Meeting in Laos July 25-27 - Statement

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly will travel to Laos this week where she will participate in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) meeting, Global Affairs Canada announced on Wednesday.

"The Honorable Melanie Joly, Minister of Foreign Affairs, today announced that she will be in Vientiane, Lao People's Democratic Republic (Laos), from July 25 to 27, 2024, to attend the 57th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting and related meetings," Global Affairs Canada said in a statement.

Joly is scheduled to participate on Friday in the ASEAN-Canada Post Ministerial Conference co-chaired by the Canadian and Malaysian delegations to discuss the progress made in the implementation of the ASEAN-Canada Strategic Partnership, the statement said.

The minister intends to engage with ASEAN member state representatives on common priorities that could be leveraged during Canada's tenure of the Group of Seven (G7) presidency in 2025, the statement added.

Joly will attend on Saturday the 31st ASEAN Regional Forum to discuss international security issues, including the crisis in Myanmar; tensions in East and South China seas; North Korea's weapon programs; the situation in the Middle East; and Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, according to the statement.

On July 18, Joly embarked on an East Asian diplomatic tour during which she already visited South Korea, China and Japan.

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UPDATE - Bank of Canada Reduces Overnight Interest Rate by 25 Basis Points to 4.5% - Statement

(Adds details in para 4-6, background in para 7, edits para 1)

WASHINGTON, July 23 (Sputnik) - The Bank of Canada on Wednesday cut its overnight interest rate by 25 basis points for the second consecutive time, bringing it down from 4.75% to 4.5%, according to a press release.

In early June, the Bank of Canada cut the interest rate from 5% to 4,75%, marking the first reduction since 2020.

"The Bank of Canada today reduced its target for the overnight rate to 4½%, with the Bank Rate at 4¾% and the deposit rate at 4½%. The Bank is continuing its policy of balance sheet normalization," the release said.

The bank's Governing Council decided to cut the interest rate as it observed easing price pressures, the release said. However, pressures remain in some sectors of the economy, such

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as shelter, which are holding inflation levels up, it added.

Canada's 2024 GDP growth is now forecasted at 1.2% rather than the previously thought 0.8%, the release said. However, the 2025 forecast has been revised downward from 2.4% to 2.1%.

The Bank of Canada will announce its next overnight interest rate decision on September 4.

On Monday, the latest MNP Consumer Debt Index conducted by the polling agency Ipsos revealed that close to 60% Canadian believe they would be in financial trouble in the event of a significant interest rate increase, whereas two-thirds said they "desperately need" interest rates to further decrease in order to not. Close to half (47%) would still be concerned about their ability to remain solvent if rates decreased.

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UPDATE: Dozens of Democrats Expected to Skip Netanyahu Speech to US Congress – Reports

(Updates with Pelosi in para 3)

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - Approximately 80 Democratic lawmakers in the House of Representatives and at least six in the Senate are expected to skip Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech to the US Congress, CNN reported on Wednesday, citing public statements and unnamed sources.

The House Democratic leaders have left it up to representatives to decide whether to attend Netanyahu's speech, with a few publicly condemning the Israeli leader, the report said.

Separately, Politico reported that former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is among those who plan to skip Netanyahu's speech before the joint session of Congress. She will instead meet with Israeli citizens whose families have suffered in the wake of the October 7 events.

Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib, the only Palestinian American member of Congress, will also skip the event and called Netanyahu "a war criminal committing genocide against the Palestinian people," CNN reported.

Two other lawmakers, Ayanna Pressley and Greg Casar, will host a Zoom news conference with a coalition of progressives to pressure the Biden administration and Congress to stop supplying arms to Israel.

The United States supplies an estimated 69% of Israel's arms.

According to Gaza's health ministry, more than 39,000 people have been confirmed killed and more than 90,000 injured in the 10 months of Israel's military operations in the Palestinian enclave.

However, The Lancet recently issued an estimate that the death toll may increase to more than 186,000 people or about 8% of Gaza's pre-war population of 2.3 million.

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US Wants to Boost Philippines Capabilities to Operate Lawfully in Its Waters - White House

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WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - The United States seeks to bolster the Philippines' capabilities to operate lawfully in its territorial waters, White House National Security Council Senior Director for East Asia and Oceania Mira Rapp-Hooper said on Wednesday.

"What we are looking to do is to bolster our Philippines allies' capabilities and ability to continue to operate lawfully in its waters, and to stand up to detect challenges that it faced in recent months," Rapp-Hooper said during a discussion at the American Enterprise Institute.

Rapp-Hooper said the US-Philippines mutual defense treaty applies with respect to the South China Sea and public vessels, and the applicability of the treaty is clear.

The Philippine Foreign Ministry said earlier that the Philippines and China have agreed on principles to de-escalate the situation in the South China Sea regarding delivering personnel and cargo to a grounded Philippine warship on the disputed Ayungin Shoal.

The territorial affiliation of a number of islands and reefs in the South China Sea has been the subject of disputes between the Philippines, China and several other countries.

In 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague ruled in the case brought about by the Philippines that China has no grounds for territorial claims in the South China Sea. The court ruled that the islands are not a disputed territory and do not constitute an exclusive economic zone. China refuses to recognize or accept the ruling.

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AFRICOM Commander Visits Algeria to Discuss Military Collaboration - Statement

WASHINGTON, July 24 (Sputnik) - US Africa Command (AFRICOM) head Gen. Michael Langley visited Algeria to discuss expanding bilateral military collaboration, AFRICOM said on Wednesday.

"During the visit, Gen Langley met with Algerian Chief of Defense, General Said Chanegriha to discuss how the two nations could expand military collaboration," AFRICOM said in a statement.

Langley also met with Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune to continue discussions on regional security issues, the statement said.

In addition, Langley also discussed with the Algerian officials the importance of continuing the talks on how to jointly work toward greater regional security, stability and prosperity, and a more robust bilateral relationship, the statement said.

The AFCRICOM chief characterized the meetings as being "productive," the statement added.

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Bank of Canada Reduces Overnight Interest Rate by 25 Basis Points to 4.5% - Statement

WASHINGTON, July 23 (Sputnik) - The Bank of Canada announced in a release on Wednesday that it has decided to cut for a second consecutive time the overnight interest rate by 25 basis points, bringing it down from 4.75% to 4.5%.

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"The Bank of Canada today reduced its target for the overnight rate to 4½%, with the Bank Rate at 4¾% and the deposit rate at 4½%. The Bank is continuing its policy of balance sheet normalization," the release said.

In early June, the Bank of Canada cut the interest rate from 5% to 4,75%, marking the first reduction since 2020.

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