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8/1/24 Thursday

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US Sen Graham Introduces Bill Authorizing Military Force in Iran

After the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran on Tuesday, Iran promised a "harsh punishment" for Israel. On Wednesday, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin declared that the United States was ready to defend Israel in the event of an attack by Iran.
US Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC) introduced legislation right before the Congress recess in August that would authorize President Joe Biden to use military force against Iran if he determines that Iran has capabilities that threaten the national security interests of the United States.
“The President is authorized to use all necessary and appropriate force against the Islamic Republic of Iran if the President determines that the Islamic Republic of Iran–
1) Is in the process of possessing a nuclear weapon that threatens the national security interests of the United States; or
2) Possesses uranium enriched to weapons-grade level, possesses a nuclear warhead, or possesses a delivery vehicle capable of carrying a nuclear warhead that threatens the national security interests of the United States.”
While the bill specifies that it is limited to Iran’s nuclear program, it is broad enough to potentially authorize Biden to strike Iran as soon as the bill passes. While Iran is not believed to possess a nuclear warhead, it already has an arsenal of missiles that would be capable of carrying a nuclear warhead if Iran were to obtain one. Biden seemingly would be authorized by the bill to strike Iran if he determines that to be a threat.
The same day, Graham also introduced a bill that would affirm any “escalation by Hezbollah” will be seen as an escalation by Iran and urges Congress and the President “to use all diplomatic tools and power projection capabilities to hold both parties accountable for their actions,” but stop short of specifically authorizing military force.
On Thursday, Graham posted on X that "it is long past time to start talking about offense when it comes to Iranian threats against Israel, the United States, and the world."
Both bills come as tensions are rising between Lebanese Hezbollah and Israel and Iran and Israel. Earlier this week, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh was assassinated in Tehran and Hezbollah leader Fouad Shukur was killed in an Israeli airstrike in southern Beirut.
Iran and Hezbollah have promised retaliation.
The Senate will go into recess on August 3rd. Unless an emergency session is called, both chambers of Congress will return to Washington on September 9.

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No Deus Ex Machina: F-16s Will Become Zelensky's 'Steiner Counterattack' Moment

The F-16s that arrived recently in Ukraine will not change the reality on the battlefield and will mark the end of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's never-ending quest to find a NATO weapon that could push the Russian army back.

Throughout the conflict in Ukraine, advocates for continuing the conflict continually pointed to the next Western weapon that would arrive in Ukraine and finally demonstrate the superiority of NATO technology over the Russians. First, it was the Javelin Weapons System. Then it was the Bradley Fighting Vehicle, then the Leopard tank, then the Leopard II tank, then the HIMARS, then the ATACMS, and finally the Abrams tank.

"Now, it's F-16s and there's really no next level up," veteran journalist Nebojsa Malic told Sputnik's Fault Lines on Thursday. "It's just been one of those [things], trying to drag the US and NATO into the war so they would ramp up their commitment to actually not back out. And unfortunately, this is sort of the final stop on that train."

Every previous alleged game-changing weapon failed to turn the tide, as Russia had an effective countermeasure for each of them. The only remaining weapon that NATO is willing to give Ukraine is the F-16 fighter jet. Promised a year ago, it took far longer than predicted to train Ukrainian pilots on the system. Now that they've finally arrived, it is suspected that Ukraine only received a handful of fighter jets. Previously, Zelensky said he would need hundreds of them to protect the skies over Ukraine.

It is unclear what the F-16s will be used for, though Ukraine has claimed they have already utilized them for air defense, it is suspected that they will be used to counter the glide bombs Russia has used to great effect on the front lines. The problem is that the glide bombs cost significantly less than the F-16's missiles and Russia can produce them domestically, while Ukraine will have to hope and wait for further weapon deliveries, assuming the F-16s survive that long.

"The problem is that the Russians have longer range, very effective standoff missiles, so that [Ukrainian pilots] would really have to get in close to lock onto the Russian planes and shoot them down with these American missiles that they don't have very much experience with, provided that they're provided in adequate quantities, which we don't know," explained Malic. Previously, Ukraine relied on MiG-29s, but those have been virtually wiped out. "A lot of them didn't even get shot down in dogfights or by air defenses. They just got plastered at airports because these airbases got hit by ballistic missiles and cruise missiles and drones," added Malic, noting that the F-16s require "pristine" runways, which are in short supply in Ukraine since Russia has been striking them across the country.

Some pro-Ukrainian pundits have claimed that it was the West inaction that led to Ukraine's inevitable defeat, that if only the West sent more Bradleys, more Leopards, more HIMARS, more Abrams and sent them quicker, then it would have been enough to overcome the odds, but that too is foolhardy, argued Malic.

"[The West] didn't have the equipment to give at any single point. That's the issue. They couldn't provide it. The logistics didn't exist. If they tried to ship all of the stuff over to Ukraine in a week, it would get destroyed on the border because Russia has missiles that [they] don't have any defense against, and this is what people fail to understand."

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The West doesn't have any more weapons to give and Ukraine doesn't have any troops to operate the weapons. The only option left for Ukraine is to sue for peace.

"But they're refusing because Zelensky's publicly-stated goal is to basically get NATO to unite behind this peace plan he proposed two years ago, which is essentially Russia surrenders and we win, which is ludicrous and is never going to happen," Malic said, noting that the sooner Zelensky gives up on his delusions, the sooner people can stop dying.

As far back as November 2023, some of Zelensky's closest allies told US media that their leader's belief in a complete Ukraine victory is "immovable, verging on the messianic," one of his closest aides went as far to say that "He's delusional. We're out of options. We're not winning. But try telling him that."

"He's got delusions of grandeur. Everybody, even his own surroundings, seems convinced of this," Malic explained, noting that Zelensky was an actor before he was President and his chief of staff was a movie producer.

"It's all a TV show for them. They live in a parallel reality, literally in a parallel reality. We think the politicians in the West are detached. My God, they've got nothing on these guys. And so, they inhabit this parallel universe in which everything is going great and everything's going to be good [and] resolved by the Steiner [counter] attack. And there's not a single Ukrainian general who's willing to tell him, like in that famous bunker scene [from the 2004 movie Downfall], that the Steiner attack is not happening. There isn't an army there."

"It's going to end when Ukraine surrenders," Malic contended. "You can quote me on that."

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US Investigators Probed Whether Trump's 2016 Campaign Took $10Mln From Egypt – Reports

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) – US federal investigators were stymied during the Trump administration from looking into an alleged $10 million bribe from Egyptian President Abdel Fatah El-Sisi to Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, The Washington Post reported on Friday, citing more than two dozen unnamed sources, government and court records, and other documents

In January 2017, five days prior to Trump's ascension to the presidency, a bank in Cairo received a request from an organization linked to Egyptian intelligence to withdraw $10 million from its account in cash.

Federal investigators had already been conducting a secret criminal investigation into whether Trump had violated federal laws against US candidates accepting foreign funds.

In 2019, they learned of the withdrawal, which appeared to corroborate US intelligence that Sisi had sought to give $10 million to Trump's campaign. They aimed to uncover whether the funds had led Trump to invest $10 million of his own money into his campaign at the last minute, with the expectation of effectively being reimbursed by Sisi.

However, federal prosecutors and FBI agents were ultimately blocked by the Justice Department from obtaining critical bank records. The attorney general at the time, William Barr, also raised doubts about the case and the prosecutor he appointed to take over the office leading the investigation closed the probe by June 2020, citing insufficient evidence.

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UPDATE - US Govt. at Forefront of Coup it Pretends to Achieve in Venezuela – Foreign Minister

(Adds details in para 4, background in paras 5-7)

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) – The government of the United States is heading an ongoing coup attempt in Venezuela following Sunday's elections, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Ivan Gil said on Friday.

On Thursday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Washington had determined it would recognize opposition candidate Edmundo Gonzalez as the winner of the Venezuelan presidential election.

"Venezuela rejects the grave and even more ridiculous statements attributed to the United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken, in which he pretends to assume to role the Venezuelan Electoral Power, demonstrating that the Government of the United States is at the forefront of the Coup d'Etat that is intended against Venezuela, promoting a violent agenda against the Venezuelan people and their institutions," Gil said via the X platform.

The US has tried for 25 years, without success, to topple the Venezuelan government, said a statement shared by Gil. Washington has not and will not succeed as its attempts are doomed to fail in the face of popular resolve, it added.

The July 28 presidential election saw Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro win a third term in office. The announcement of the results sparked protests in the capital of Caracas and beyond, with clashes reported between the police and opposition supporters. The Venezuelan government accused several countries of election meddling.

Maduro's victory has been questioned by the US, Canada and several Latin American countries. The presidents of Argentina, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Dominican Republic and Uruguay issued a joint statement to demand a vote recount by independent electoral observers.

In response, the Venezuelan government recalled its diplomats from the Latin American countries that did not recognize the results of the vote and told their diplomats to leave Venezuela.

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Half of Americans Call Migrants Coming Into US 'Critical Threat' – Poll

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) – Half of US adults consider the growing number of migrants entering the United States a critical threat to the country, a new poll by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs showed on Friday.

"The 2024 Chicago Council Survey finds that half of Americans (50%) say the prospect of large numbers of immigrants and refugees coming into the United States represents a critical threat to the country," the council said in a summary of the poll's findings.

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Such a big share of those concerned about immigration has not been seen since 2010, it added.

The poll showed that Republicans are most concerned over the issue, while increasing numbers of Democrats and independent voters are also expressing growing fears.

"Eight in 10 Republicans (83%) now view large numbers of immigrants and refugees coming into the United States as a critical threat, a record high in Chicago Council Surveys since the Council first asked the question in 1998," the survey found.

Almost two-thirds of Republicans (61%) also believe that immigrants negatively impact American society, while the same portion of the entire population expressed the opposite opinion.

"A majority of Americans (65%) oppose the mass detention of undocumented immigrants in camps while a majority of Republicans (57%) support such a policy," the council said, adding that 50% of Republicans think legal immigration into the United States should be decreased.

More than 60% of those surveyed supported a path to citizenship for unauthorized immigrants working in the United States, the poll found.

The survey was conducted June 21–July 1, 2024, among 2,106 adults living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia.

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US Govt. at Forefront of Coup it Pretends to Achieve in Venezuela – Foreign Minister

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) – The government of the United States is heading an ongoing coup attempt in Venezuela following Sunday's elections, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Ivan Gil said on Friday.

On Thursday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Washington had determined it would recognize opposition candidate Edmundo Gonzalez as the winner of the Venezuelan presidential election.

"Venezuela rejects the grave and even more ridiculous statements attributed to the United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken, in which he pretends to assume to role the Venezuelan Electoral Power, demonstrating that the Government of the United States is at the forefront of the Coup d'Etat that is intended against Venezuela, promoting a violent agenda against the Venezuelan people and their institutions," Gil said via the X platform.

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US Adds Lowest Number of Jobs in Month Since 2021, Boosting Rate Cut Hopes

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The United States added 114,000 jobs in July, its smallest since the jobs boom that began after the pandemic, while unemployment rose to 2-½ year highs at 4.3%, the Labor Department said Friday in laying out one of the most compelling data sets for an interest rate cut in September.

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Wall Street economists had forecast payrolls to grow by 175,000 instead for last month versus June's 206,000, and the jobless rate to stay at 4.1%.

The update on the US jobs situation propelled money market bets for a 50-basis point, or 0.5% percentage point, rate cut when the Federal Reserve's policymaking Federal Open Market Committee meets on September 18. Prior to that, bets had been at best been for a 25 basis point, or 0.25% percentage point, cut.

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US to Send More Combat Aircraft to Middle East in Response to 'Iranian Threats' – Reports

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) – The United States will dispatch additional combat aircraft to the Middle East to counter "threats from Iran" and Iranian-allied groups in the region, the New York Times reported on Friday, citing US officials.

The US seeks to address what it sees as threats from Iran and pro-Iranian groups in Gaza, Lebanon and Yemen who have expressed the intent to launch retaliatory attacks on Israel to avenge the death of Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh, the report said.

US forces in the region are taking "necessary measures" to increase their combat readiness and protect American troops and allies alike against Iran or Iran-backed groups, the report said citing a military official.

On Wednesday, Hamas confirmed that Haniyeh was killed in an Israeli attack on his residence in Tehran after he took part in the inauguration of newly elected Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian. The movement blamed Israel and the United States for Haniyeh's death and said the attack would not go unanswered.

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RPT - us preparing to send additional combat aircraft to middle east in response to threats from iran, Its Allies - New york times

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RPT: ANALYSIS - Trump Facilitated Collapse of US-Russia Arms Control by Scrapping INF Treaty

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - Then-President Donald Trump made a "stupid mistake" by deciding to scrap the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, as the consequences of that fateful decision have been the collapse of strategic arms control policies between the United States and Russia, analysts told Sputnik.

The INF treaty, signed between the Soviet Union and the US in 1987, banned the countries from developing and possessing ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges from

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500-5,500 kilometers. In 2019, Trump withdrew the US from the treaty. In response to the US decision, Russia suspended its participation in the Cold War-era accord.

August 2 marks the fifth anniversary of the US's formal withdrawal from the INF Treaty.

RESTRAINT ABANDONED

"The consequences have been that strategic arms control policies between Russia and the US/NATO have largely been abandoned and both sides have developed nuclear capable intermediate range missiles that raise the likelihood that they will be resorted to in a potential escalating conflict like in Ukraine," former CIA analyst, founder and chair of the Council for the National Interest Philip Giraldi said.

There were sharp differences of opinion in the Trump administration on whether to retain the treaty, in spite of both sides' claims that there was "cheating," Giraldi recalled.

"The neocons predictably won the argument," he said.

Back in the 1980s, despite hawkish governments in London and Bonn, popular sentiment across Europe, especially in Germany overwhelmingly favored creating the treaty, Giraldi emphasized.

"Interestingly enough, I was in the CIA German station in Hamburg 1982-5 when the whole issue of intermediate range missiles, which theoretically allowed for no warning devastating nuclear capable attack, was being debated," he said.

"There were huge demonstrations in all German cities against the deployment and in favor of an agreement," Giraldi reported. "The US Consulate General was located near Hamburg's central lake, the Alster and thousands of demonstrators would gather along the lakefront and storm the front of the building by crossing the access road that surrounded the lake."

ATTEMPT TO SHOW HE IS 'TOUGH' ON RUSSIA

American University in Moscow President Edward Lozansky, a former Soviet nuclear physicist, noted that Trump had heeded his two most influential advisers at the time, CIA chief and then secretary of state Mike Pompeo and national security adviser John Bolton, both of whom were determined to kill the treaty.

"One has to look at Trump's two critical foreign policy and security advisors at the time, Pompeo and Bolton. Trump foolishly appointed them to prove he is tough on Russia. He made many other stupid mistakes for the same reason," Lozansky said.

One can excuse Trump for being a "political novice who miraculously won in 2016 and found himself in an ocean of sharks," he added.

The recent events show that "the Deep State learned the 2016 lessons" and the chances of Trump repeating the miracle of that year are quickly decreasing, at least for now, according to Lozansky.

"Almost each of the next 100 days till November 5 elections might bring unexpected events, not all of them bright for America and mankind," the expert concluded.

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US Looks to New Weapon Markets by Returning Nukes to Europe - Ex-Pentagon Analyst

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WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The sudden but in reality long-planned reintroduction of US nuclear weapons into Europe is designed to ensure European submission to Washington's demands and to re-energize the funding for US nuclear weapons and missile delivery industries, veteran Defense Department analyst and retired US Air Force Lt. Col. Karen Kwiatkowski told Sputnik.

"NATO has merged intellectually and militarily with the US defense acquisition and military system," Kwiatkowski said.

The United States announced earlier that it planned to once again deploy missiles in Germany, 37 years after Washington agreed to remove them in the 1987 Intermediate Forces in Europe (INF) Treaty, which President Donald Trump refused to renew in 2019.

Kwiatkowski noted that NATO leadership and member countries' populations have "historically grated" under US dominance.

To deal with this, and to ensure compliance and subordination, the United States has fashioned a superficial team approach with NATO, building it up as "independent" while in reality integrating even more deeply into its leadership, decision-making and even into the national politics and economics of European member states, she said.

"In short, we see a US militarization of politics in Europe, using energy policy, domestic policy, and intelligence operations to ensure European governments stay subordinate to US demands," Kwiatkowski said.

Consequently, instead of US-Russia treaties that could engage and limit war preparation, Western nations had been locked into NATO expansion, including an attempt to NATO-ize former INF signatory Ukraine, she said.

"After two post-Cold War batch accessions in 1999 and 2004, the accessions of six new member countries since 2009 have created a larger border between Russia and the US/NATO," Kwiatkowski said.

They have also created a larger NATO "buyers' club" for US materials and energy, and increased risk for a European-centered war - with no diplomatic vehicle for bilateral or multilateral discussion, she said.

"This was recently demonstrated by the uniformly, hysterically pro-war NATO and EU reaction over Hungarian leader Viktor Orban's talking to the Russian leadership about regional issues and policy," Kwiatkowski said.

Consequently, peace and diplomacy have not only been forbidden but in the five years since the INF Treaty was allowed by Washington to die, they have been institutionally impossible in Europe, thanks in part to the elimination of the treaty and the abnormally weak and intellectually impoverished US and NATO leadership over the same time frame, she said.

Since then, "the US-NATO-EU militarization unleashed by the ending of the INF Treaty, among other things, is not working to benefit European economies or helping them deal with their own domestic challenges," Kwiatkowski said.

The US leadership often talks about stability and transparency, but the reality is very different, she said.

"The lack of an existing treaty to limit US-driven militarization of Europe has vastly increased instability, reduced transparency, impoverished and agitated the populations of many NATO member countries, including that of the United States," Kwiatkowski said.

According to UK media reports, the United Kingdom has partnered up with Germany to develop

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and deploy a new intermediate-range missile designed to target Russia's nuclear arsenal.
UK Defense Secretary John Healey spoke to his German counterpart in Berlin on Wednesday about a plan to jointly develop a new strategic missile with a 3,200 km range, the reports said.

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INF Treaty Stood in Way of Plans to Militarize Europe, Hold Russia Back - Ex-DoD Analyst

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The United States scrapped the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty five years ago with the aim of expanding NATO further eastward, pressing Russia economically and militarily, and cementing America's global hegemony, veteran Pentagon analyst and retired US Air Force Lt. Col. Karen Kwiatkowski told Sputnik.
August 2 marks the fifth anniversary of the US's formal withdrawal from the INF Treaty.
"This [the pullout from the treaty] was due to the US desire (led by neoconservatives in the State Department and elsewhere in the Obama, Trump and Biden administrations) to expand NATO eastward, as well to engage militarily on Russia's European border with both conventional and nuclear arms, specifically via Ukraine," Kwiatkowski said.
The military and economic rise of China, a neoconservative theme for the past 30 years, required in the eyes of hawkish US military planners a nuclear offensive line in Eastern Europe to hold Russia "captive," Kwiatkowski explained.
"The INF Treaty always stood in the way of this," she said.
Russia had formally complained of continual US violations of the INF Treaty since 2014, but this was information most Americans and Europeans never saw, and most were not even interested in, Kwiatkowski noted.
"The consequences have been straightforward and dangerous. First, both the United States and Russia are now actively engaged in an expensive competition in the INF field and other new missile technology arenas," she said.
Unlike in 1987, Russian technological and economic capabilities in this space now exceed those of the United States, Kwiatkowski assessed.
"Instead of US-Russia treaties that could engage and limit war preparation, we have NATO expansion, including an attempt to NATO-ise former INF signatory Ukraine," she said.
After two post-Cold War batch accessions to the NATO alliance in 1999 and 2004, the accessions of six new member countries since 2009 have created a larger "border" between Russia and NATO, Kwiatkowski cautioned.
"Peace and diplomacy were now not only verboten, or forbidden but for five years have been institutionally impossible in Europe, thanks in part to the elimination of the INF Treaty and abnormally weak and intellectually impoverished US and NATO leadership over the same time frame," she concluded.
The INF treaty, signed between the Soviet Union and the US in 1987, banned the countries from developing and possessing ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges from 500-5,500 kilometers. In 2019, then-President Donald Trump withdrew the US from the treaty, accusing Russia of non-compliance. In response to the US decision, Russia suspended its

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participation in the Cold War-era accord.

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Discussions Ongoing on Release of US National Marc Fogel From Russian Prison - White House

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The United States is in discussions with Russia about the release of convicted US citizen Marc Fogel from Russian prison, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said in an interview with Fox News.

"There are ongoing conversations right now… [We are] in discussions with the Russians to see what we can do to try to get Mr. Fogel home," Kirby said on Thursday.

Fogel was detained in Russia in August 2021 and sentenced to 14 years in prison for the possession of cannabis. Fogel's family has claimed that a doctor recommended the cannabis to treat his spinal pain.

Earlier on Thursday, the United States and Russia announced a historic prisoner exchange involving 26 detainees from both countries, as well as several US allies.

Among those released from Russia were Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich and US marine veteran Paul Whelan.

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White House Was Not Aware of Plea Deal Discussions With September 11 Defendants - Kirby

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The White House was not aware of the plea deals with three of the 9/11 defendants until Wednesday and will reach out to the Department of Defense to discuss the issue, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said in an interview with Fox News.

"The White House wasn't aware of this deal or the process leading up to it until yesterday," Kirby said on Thursday. "There's no change to the President's policy and opinion that Guantanamo should be closed, but in this particular case with these plea deals, we're going to be reaching out to the Department of Defense as appropriate to have discussions about it."

On Wednesday, the Department of Defense announced that it entered into pre-trial plea agreements with three of the defendants accused of having a role in the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, including Khalid Shaikh Mohammad, who is claimed to have masterminded the attacks.

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US Navy Orders $447Mln in Nuclear Tech Components From Bechtel Corporation - Pentagon

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WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The Bechtel Corporation has received a nearly half a billion dollar contract extension to provide the US Navy with more components for nuclear propulsion, the Defense Department announced.

"Bechtel Plant Machinery [of] Monroeville, Pennsylvania is awarded a $447 million ...modification ...contract for naval nuclear propulsion components," the Defense Department said in a press release on Thursday.

Work on the program will be performed in Monroeville, Pennsylvania, over the next nine years and is expected to be completed by September 2033, the release said.

The US Naval Sea Systems Command in Washington will oversee the project as its contracting activity, the release added.

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US Army Orders $132Mln More Hardware for Air Missile Defense System - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - Dynetics has received a more than $132 million contract extension from the US Army to provide for hardware for the Integrated Air and Missile Defense system, the Defense Department announced.

'Dynetics [of] Huntsville, Alabama was awarded a $132,557,864 modification ...contract for hardware assets in support of the Army's Integrated Air and Missile Defense architecture," the Defense Department said a press release on Thursday.

Work on the contract will be performed in Huntsville, Alabama; Tucson, Arizona; Dallastown, Pennsylvania; and Chanhassen, Minnesota, over the next 16 months with an estimated completion date of November 30, 2025, the release said.

The US Army Contracting Command at Redstone Arsenal, Alabama will oversee the work as its contracting activity, the release added.

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Dozens of Russians Remain in US Prisons, Moscow to Do All to Secure Their Release -Embassy

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - Dozens of Russian nationals remain in US prisons and Moscow is set to do the utmost to secure their release, the Russian embassy in the United States said in a statement.

"There are still dozens of Russians in US dungeons who look with hope at their fatherland and wait for their hour of liberation," the statement said on Thursday. "There is no more important task for us than the well-being of our compatriots who find themselves in American dungeons as a result of the 'hunt' for them by US intelligence services around the world. We embrace the hardships of those unjustly imprisoned in the United States as our own. We will make every effort to continue their liberation and to ease the fate of all compatriots who have fallen into the millstones of local justice."

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Earlier on Thursday, the Russian Federal Security Service said eight Russians detained and held in custody in a number of NATO countries had returned to Russia.

The Russian diplomatic mission said it congratulates the compatriots on their return to the homeland and on their reunification with family and friends.

"We are sincerely glad that the efforts to rescue you were crowned with success," the statement said.

The embassy pointed out that it is difficult for the average person to imagine what the liberated Russians went through.

"We know firsthand what kind of perseverance and courage you showed under constant psychological pressure and sometimes in unimaginable conditions of detention. At the same time, you retained patriotism and love for Russia," the statement said.

A source in one of the competent Russian agencies said earlier on Thursday that the list of Russians who were returning home included Artem Dultsev, Anna Dultseva, Pavel Rubtsov, Vadim Konoshchenok, Mikhail Mikushin, Roman Seleznev, Vladislav Klyushin and several minor children. A Russian citizen Vadim Sokolov, also known as Krasikov, who had been serving a life sentence in Germany, was also returning back to Russia, the source said.

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Biden in Call With Netanyahu Commits to New US Military Deployments to Region -White House

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden in a phone call with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu discussed additional efforts to support the ally's defense capabilities and committed new US military deployments to the region amid raised tensions between Israel and Iran, the White House said.

"President Biden spoke today with Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel," the White HOuse said in a press release on Thursday. "The President discussed efforts to support Israel's defense against threats, including against ballistic missiles and drones, to include new defensive U.S. military deployments."

On Wednesday, Hamas confirmed that its political leader, Ismail Haniyeh, had been killed in an Israeli attack on his residence in Tehran after he took part in the inauguration of newly elected Iranian president Masoud Pezeshkian. Hamas has blamed Israel and the United States for Haniyeh's death and vowed to retaliate.

Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin said he had nothing to say about Haniyeh's death or Israel's alleged role in it. The Jerusalem Post reported that the Israeli government had instructed ministers not to comment on Haniyeh's assassination.

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Biden in call with Netanyahu discussed efforts to support Israel's defense, committed new defensive US military deployments in region - white house

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Biden Thanked Leaders of Turkey, Poland, Germany, Slovenia on Prisoner Swap - White House

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden spoke by telephone with his counterparts in Turkey, Norway, Poland, Slovenia and Germany to thank them for their partnership in carrying out the historic prisoner swap with Russia, the White House Press Office said in a readout of the conversations.

"This afternoon, the president spoke individually with Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan, Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store, Polish President Andrzej Duda, Slovenian Prime Minister Robert Golob and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz to thank them for their partnership on today's historic deal that brought home Americans and others detained in Russia," the readout said on Thursday.

The White House said Biden thanked the leaders for their support during the negotiations and active engagement throughout the process to bring the prisoner swap to fruition.

Earlier on Thursday, the Russian Federal Security Service said eight Russians detained and held in custody in a number of NATO countries had returned to Russia.

A source in one of the competent Russian agencies said on Thursday that the list of Russians who were returning home included Artem Dultsev, Anna Dultseva, Pavel Rubtsov, Vadim Konoshchenok, Mikhail Mikushin, Roman Seleznev, Vladislav Klyushin and several minor children.

Russian citizen Vadim Sokolov, also known as Krasikov, who had been serving a life sentence in Germany, was also returning back to Russia, the source said.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORY OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) -

PRISONER EXCAHNGE

* The largest operation in recent years to exchange 26 prisoners from seven countries took place in Ankara, Turkey, the Turkish National Intelligence Organization said in a statement on Thursday.

* An aircraft of the Special Flight Squad "Russia" carrying Russians who were released in the prisoner swap in Turkey landed at Moscow's Vnukovo Airport, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

* Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed decrees to pardon 13 Russian and foreign citizens to effectuate the exchange, including Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich

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and US Marine veteran Paul Whelan, the Kremlin said.
* Russia is fully satisfied with the prisoner exchange, a source in one of the competent Russian agencies told Sputnik.
* US President Joe Biden did not talk with Putin about the prisoner exchange deal that took place earlier, a White House National Security Council spokesperson told Sputnik.
* The United States and Russia did not exchange money or provide sanctions relief as part of the recent prisoner swap deal, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said.

MIDDLE EAST TENSIONS
* The Israeli air force carried out a strike in southern Lebanon, killing three people and wounding several others, a Lebanese field source told Sputnik on Thursday.
* More than ten people were killed by an Israeli strike on a temporary refugee camp in a school in Gaza City, Mahmoud Basal, a representative of the Palestinian Civil Defense in Gaza, said.
* The response of Lebanese Shia movement Hezbollah to Israel's actions will be real and well-weighed, Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah said.
* Israel will respond to any aggression and is prepared for any scenario, both defensive and offensive, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said.
* Lebanese Shia movement Hezbollah has fired a salvo of missiles at the Israel Defense Forces' (IDF) military positions near the southern border of Lebanon, a source told Sputnik.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE
* Russian troops hit Ukrainian air defense positions with the Kh-35 long-range anti-ship missile, destroying an ST-68 radar station, a combat control cabin, a vehicle, a diesel power plant and up to 25 Ukrainian soldiers, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Thursday.
* Russia plans to hold a UN Security Council meeting in August to discuss the United States' decision to equip F-16 fighter jets sent to Ukraine with missiles and other modern weapons, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said.
* Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said that the escalation with the F-16 jets and the fact that there are no restraints left pose a problem.

ARMS CONTROL
* The United States believes that Russia will return to arms control negotiations following the New START Treaty because unrestrained nuclear competition is not in Moscow’s interests, Acting US Assistant Secretary of Defense Vipin Narang said on Thursday.
* The Unites States must continue to persuade Russia, China and North Korea that managing nuclear rivalry is better than engaging in unrestrained nuclear competition, Narang said.
* The United States does not seek an unrestrained nuclear posture as it is in the process of re-evaluating ways to deter its peer adversaries, Narang said.
* The United States will continue to abide by the limits of the New START treaty for the duration of the accord as long as it assesses that Russia continues to do the same, Narang said.
* The United States must prepare itself to live in a world devoid of constraints on nuclear weapons and arsenals by modernizing its own capabilities, Narang said.

GLOBAL ENERGY MARKETS

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* The OPEC+ Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee has confirmed its commitment to the current parameters of the deal to reduce oil production, OPEC said on Thursday.
* The current level of world oil prices at $80-$85 per barrel is comfortable for the Russian budget, it is important that the balance of supply and demand is maintained, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said.

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ANALYSIS - Trump Facilitated Collapse of US-Russia Arms Control by Scrapping INF Treaty

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - Then-President Donald Trump made a "stupid mistake" by deciding to scrap the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, as the consequences of that fateful decision have been the collapse of strategic arms control policies between the United States and Russia, analysts told Sputnik.

The INF treaty, signed between the Soviet Union and the US in 1987, banned the countries from developing and possessing ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges from 500-5,500 kilometers. In 2019, Trump withdrew the US from the treaty. In response to the US decision, Russia suspended its participation in the Cold War-era accord.

August 2 marks the fifth anniversary of the US's formal withdrawal from the INF Treaty.

RESTRAINT ABANDONED

"The consequences have been that strategic arms control policies between Russia and the US/NATO have largely been abandoned and both sides have developed nuclear capable intermediate range missiles that raise the likelihood that they will be resorted to in a potential escalating conflict like in Ukraine," former CIA analyst, founder and chair of the Council for the National Interest Philip Giraldi said.

There were sharp differences of opinion in the Trump administration on whether to retain the treaty, in spite of both sides' claims that there was "cheating," Giraldi recalled.

"The neocons predictably won the argument," he said.

Back in the 1980s, despite hawkish governments in London and Bonn, popular sentiment across Europe, especially in Germany overwhelmingly favored creating the treaty, Giraldi emphasized.

"Interestingly enough, I was in the CIA German station in Hamburg 1982-5 when the whole issue of intermediate range missiles, which theoretically allowed for no warning devastating nuclear capable attack, was being debated," he said.

"There were huge demonstrations in all German cities against the deployment and in favor of an agreement," Giraldi reported. "The US Consulate General was located near Hamburg's central lake, the Alster and thousands of demonstrators would gather along the lakefront and storm the front of the building by crossing the access road that surrounded the lake."

ATTEMPT TO SHOW HE IS 'TOUGH' ON RUSSIA

American University in Moscow President Edward Lozansky, a former Soviet nuclear physicist, noted that Trump had heeded his two most influential advisers at the time, CIA chief and then secretary of state Mike Pompeo and national security adviser John Bolton, both of whom were determined to kill the treaty.

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"One has to look at Trump's two critical foreign policy and security advisors at the time, Pompeo and Bolton. Trump foolishly appointed them to prove he is tough on Russia. He made many other stupid mistakes for the same reason," Lozansky said.

One can excuse Trump for being a "political novice who miraculously won in 2016 and found himself in an ocean of sharks," he added.

The recent events show that "the Deep State learned the 2016 lessons" and the chances of Trump repeating the miracle of that year are quickly decreasing, at least for now, according to Lozansky.

"Almost each of the next 100 days till November 5 elections might bring unexpected events, not all of them bright for America and mankind," the expert concluded.

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Sierra Leone to Hold Debate on Reforming UN Security Council - Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, August 1 (Sputnik) - Sierra Leone during its presidency of the United Nations Security Council this month will hold a debate on reforming the UN body, the country's Ambassador Alie Kabba said on Thursday.

“This first is a focused debate on United Nations Security Council reform,” Kabba said during a briefing at the UN.

The meeting will mark the first time that the council holds a discussion on the topic, he said

He added that the debate would focus specifically on unfair representation of the African continent at the council.

The debate will be one of the signature events of Sierra Leone's presidency of the Security Council for the month of August.

Sierra Leone took over the council's rotating presidency from Russia, which held the post for the month of July.

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US Preparing to Help Israel Counter Retaliatory Attack by Iran in Coming Days - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The United States is preparing to help counter a potential retaliatory attack Iran is expected to carry out against Israel in the coming days in response to the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran earlier this week, Axios reported, citing three US officials.

The report said that Iran and its proxies in the region are expected to take several days to prepare the retaliatory attack on Israel.

The US military is making preparations to counter the attack with military assets in the Persian Gulf, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Red Sea.

The United States expects Iran to conduct another aerial campaign similar to the April 13 attack on Israel, but this time the attack may potentially be larger and in coordination with the

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Lebanese movement Hezbollah.

According to the report, a US official said the Biden administration is expecting a "few rough days," but there's also a concern that it might be more challenging to get the same level of international and regional cooperation from countries that helped repel the previous attack in April.

A Defense Department spokesperson declined to comment on this matter.

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Klyushin's Lawyer Says His Release Came as Surprise for Him

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The lawyer of Russian businessman Vladislav Klyushin told Sputnik on Thursday that discussions about a possible exchange of prisoners between the United States and the Russian Federation had been going on for a long time, but the release of his client still came as a surprise to him.

"Vlad and I are very happy that the deal went through and that he returned home. The deal has been prepared for a long time, or at least the conversation was ongoing about it. But I don't think anyone knew about it, that it would happen today," Maksim Nemtsev said over the phone, sharing that the news of Klyushin's release "came as a surprise to him."

The lawyer said the US prosecutor's office contacted him only on Thursday morning, when the deal on the exchange of prisoners between Russia and the United States had already been concluded and his client had been transferred from prison.

"It was a formality, because they didn't need anything from me to make this deal," he said.

Earlier in the day, the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) said that eight Russians detained and held in custody in a number of NATO countries had returned to Russia.

A credible source in one of the competent Russian agencies said on Thursday that the list of Russians who were returning back home included Artem Dultsev, Anna Dultseva, Pavel Rubtsov, Vadim Konoshchenok, Mikhail Mikushin, Roman Seleznev, Vladislav Klyushin and minor children. A Russian citizen Vadim Sokolov, also known as Krasikov, who had been serving a life sentence in Germany, was also returning back to Russia, the source said.

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Blinken, Saudi Counterpart Discuss Middle East Tensions During Phone Call – State Dept

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken had a phone call with his Saudi counterpart Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud to discuss the ongoing tensions in the Middle East amid Israel's military operation in Gaza, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Thursday.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke today with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud about ongoing tensions and developments in the Middle East. The Secretary emphasized the importance of reaching a ceasefire in Gaza that secures the release of

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hostages and reiterated the importance of preventing the escalation or spread of the conflict," Miller said in a statement.

The two diplomats also discussed the need for the two warring parties in Sudan to participate in ceasefire talks in August to bring the ongoing Sudanese conflict to an end, the statement said.

On Wednesday, Hamas confirmed that its political leader, Ismail Haniyeh, had been killed in an Israeli attack on his residence in Tehran after he took part in the inauguration of newly elected Iranian president Masoud Pezeshkian. Hamas has blamed Israel and the United States for Haniyeh's death and vowed to retaliate.

Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin said he had nothing to say about Haniyeh's death or Israel's alleged role in it. The Jerusalem Post reported that the Israeli government had instructed ministers not to comment on Haniyeh's assassination.

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US Senate Stalls Bipartisan Tax Reform Bill Ahead of August Recess

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The US Senate rejected a motion to advance a bipartisan tax reform bill on Thursday, ahead of the August recess for senators.

Senators rejected a motion to invoke cloture on a motion to proceed to the bill in a vote of 48 in favor and 44 opposed, with 60 votes required to advance.

The legislation, dubbed the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act, was introduced by Democratic Senator Ron Wyden and Republican Congressman Jason Smith. The US House of Representatives passed the bill in January.

The bill is "pro-growth, pro-jobs, and pro-America," Smith said in a statement.

The legislation changes calculations used to determine the maximum refundable child tax credit. Under current law, the credit is calculated by multiplying a taxpayer's earned income by 15%. The bill modifies the calculation by also multiplying the amount by the number of qualifying children.

The bill also raises the maximum refundable amount per child to $2,000 by tax year 2025.

Moreover, the legislation expands the low-income housing tax credit to increase the supply of affordable housing in the United States by more than 200,000 units.

The bill also removes double taxation for businesses and workers with a presence in both the US and Taiwan, provides tax relief to people impacted by disasters and restores the value of tax incentives for research and development.

On Thursday, the White House Office of Management and Budget issued a statement in support of the bill and called on the Senate to pass it. The legislation represents a "fair bipartisan compromise," the statement said.

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Sullivan Says Biden, Harris to Greet Returning Americans at Andrews Air Force Base

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WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris will greet Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich, former Marine Paul Whelan and Alsu Kurmasheva, who are returning to the United States as part of a prisoner exchange, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Thursday.

"They'll be landing at Andrews Air Force Base. The president and the vice president will be out there to greet them," Sullivan said during a press briefing at the White House.

Earlier on Thursday, 26 prisoners from seven countries were exchanged in Ankara, Turkey - a move reportedly facilitated by the Turkish National Intelligence Organization.

Ten of the prisoners exchanged in Turkey, including two minors, will be sent to Russia; 13 to Germany; and the aforementioned three to the United States.

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Exchanged Russian Citizen Seleznev Very Ill, Needs Medical Care - Lawyer

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - Russian national Roman Seleznev is very sick and would not have lasted long in US prison because he needs medical care, his lawyer Igor Litvak told Sputnik on Thursday.

“Roma is very sick, his health is getting worse, so for this reason he also had to be sent home to receive normal medical care so that he could continue to live,” Litvak said. “My opinion is that if it had stayed in America, he would not have lasted long.”

Earlier in the day, the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) said that eight Russians detained and held in custody in a number of NATO countries had returned to Russia.

The largest operation in recent years to exchange 26 prisoners from seven countries took place in Turkey's Ankara on Thursday with the mediation of the Turkish National Intelligence Organization, the intelligence agency said in a statement.

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US Had Extensive Engagement with Russian Officials on Prisoner Swap - White House

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - US officials did not have any direct contact with President Vladimir Putin during their recent prisoner exchange talks but did engage extensively with other Russian officials, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Thursday.

"No engagement directly with Vladimir Putin. There was extensive engagement with Russian officials over the course of this," Sullivan said during a White House press briefing.

Sullivan added that he would divulge details about the talks so as to maintain the confidentiality of communications channels that were crucial for achieving successful outcomes.

Earlier on Thursday, US President Joe Biden said during a press conference about the prisoner exchange that he does not need to speak with Putin following the swap.

Today 26 prisoners from seven countries were exchanged in Ankara, Turkey - a move reportedly facilitated by the Turkish National Intelligence Organization. Ten of the prisoners

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exchanged in Turkey, including two minors, were sent to Russia; 13 to Germany; and three to the United States.

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US Needs Cybersecurity Strategy to Protect 170,000 Water Supply Systems - Report

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) needs to develop a national cyber security strategy to protect almost 170,000 largely automated water delivery systems across the United States from hostile attacks, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) said in a report on Thursday.

"Nations, cybercriminals, and others have targeted some of the nearly 170,000 US water systems, which are increasingly automated," the report said. "However, EPA hasn't identified and prioritized the greatest risks sector-wide."

The EPA currently relies on water systems to voluntarily agree to improve cybersecurity, the report said.

"We recommended that EPA develop a national cybersecurity strategy, assess whether it needs more authority, and more," the report added.

EPA leads national US water cybersecurity efforts and has worked with the water sector to improve cybersecurity, according to the report.

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Islamic State Still Has Up to $20Mln in Resources Despite US Efforts - Pentagon Report

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The Islamic State terror group (ISIS, outlawed in Russia) still enjoys access to up to $20 million in financial resources and can draw on more tribute and protection money from communities across Syria and Iraq, a new Defense Department Inspector-General said in a new report on Thursday.

"ISIS leaders maintain access to significant funds, estimated between $10 million and $20 million, which are mostly held in cash and other liquid assets," the report said. "Regional ISIS networks also continue to extort local populations as part of their effort to exert influence in parts of Iraq and Syria."

The Islamic State has also been using its continuing financial resources to attempt a new form of media outreach both in the Middle East and across Africa, the report said.

"[The Islamic State] debuted a new form of propaganda during the quarter to broadcast its activities, creating artificial intelligence-generated news anchors and graphics designed to imitate CNN and Al-Jazeera," the report added.

The videos presented reports in multiple languages on the Islamic State's expansion in Africa and the ongoing conflict in Syria, and touted claimed attacks by the movement, according to the report.

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UPDATE - Russia's Vinnik Not Included in Prisoner Swap Because Not Sentenced Yet - Lawyer

(Updates with comments from Vinnik's mother and lawyer in paras 4-5, background in para 6)
WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) – Russian national Alexander Vinnik, jailed in the US, was not included to a prisoner swap between the two countries because he has not been sentenced yet, Vinnik's lawyer Arkady Bukh told Sputnik on Thursday.
"There is a pattern that the US government and the Russian government almost never release people who were not sentenced, and he was not sentenced yet. So, there is a low possibility that he will be released [before his sentencing]," Bukh said.
Bukh said he spoke with Vinnik earlier in the day and there were no signs that he would be transferred. Bukh emphasized that Vinnik remains in the Almeda County jail in California, and his health condition is good.
Vinnik's mother separately told Sputnik that his name could not be found on a federal prison database for unknown reasons.
Bukh explained that Vinnik's attorneys found his name in the county jail's system where he is being held until trial.
Vinnik's sentencing has been set for January 17, 2025, according to the court's database.
The US government accuses Vinnik of enabling criminal activity through the cryptocurrency exchange BTC-e by obscuring and anonymizing transactions and sources of funds.

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No Change in US-Russia Relationship After Historic Prisoner Swap - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The successful prisoner swap between Russia and the United States does not mean there has been any reset or change in the bilateral relationship between the two countries, US State Department deputy principal spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Thursday.
"This is not some sort of reset of any kind of relationship. It is not. There has been no change. This is a good day because American citizens are able to come home and we're incredibly proud of the work that has happened to get that done," Patel said during a press briefing.

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US Air Force Expects $18Bln Boost in Weapons Sales Around World This Year - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The US Air Force is anticipating an arms export bonanza this year with global sales projected to soar by 60% to more than $46 billion in Fiscal Year (FY)

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2024 compared to $28.7 billion in FY 2023, the Air Force Times said on Thursday.
The boost in sales was coming mainly from allies purchasing larger numbers of F-35 Joint Strike Fighters and F-16 Fighting Falcons, the report said.
US Air Force Foreign Military Sales officials announced the figures on Tuesday at the Life Cycle Industry Days conference in Dayton, Ohio.
US Air Force Brig. Gen. Jeffrey Geraghty, who heads the Air Force Security Assistance and Cooperation Directorate, was reported as saying US allies were concerned about growing global instability and therefore wanted to expand their military capabilities.
Turkey is expected to buy as many as 40 F-16 jets in Fiscal Year 2024 and modernize another 79 fighters in a $23 billion deal.

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Navalny Expected to Be Part of US-Russia Prisoner Swap Prior to Dying - White House

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The United States planned to work with its partners to include Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny in a prisoner exchange deal, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Thursday.
"We had been working with our partners on a deal that would have included Alexei Navalny, and unfortunately, he died," Sullivan said during a press briefing.
Russian President Vladimir Putin told reporters in March that a few days before Navalny's death, colleagues, and not members of his administration, talked about the idea of exchanging Navalny for some people who are imprisoned in the West. Putin said he agreed to this, but only on one condition: that Navalny not return to Russia after the exchange.
On February 16, 2021, the Russian prison service said Navalny died while incarcerated, adding that an investigation into the cause of death was underway.
Biden said that the United States does not know how Navalny died, but nevertheless blamed Russian President Vladimir Putin for it.
The Kremlin has called the statements by Biden and other Western politicians outrageous and unacceptable.

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Russia's Vinnik Not Included in Prisoner Swap Because Not Sentenced Yet - Lawyer

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transferred. Bukh emphasized that Vinnik remains in the Alameida County jail in California, and his health condition is good.

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Oil Price Slides After Big Midweek Pop as OPEC+ Sticks to Agreed Production Cuts

NEW YORK, August 1 (Sputnik) - Crude prices were back in the red on Thursday as the decision of producers within OPEC+ to stick to agreed cuts instead of making deeper ones negated a midweek rally sparked by an escalation of tensions in the oil-rich Middle East.

Soft manufacturing data out of the United States also raised questions about the economy in the world's largest oil consumer as the Federal Reserve prepares to cut US interest rates for the first time in four-and-a-half years. The US ISM manufacturing index for July came in at 46.8, below the forecast reading of 48.2.

Just two days ago, benchmarks for both US oil and UK Brent crude jumped 3% or more after Israel killed two senior officials of the Palestinian Hamas and Lebanese Hezbollah groups in retaliation for an attack that took the lives of a dozen Israeli children and teenagers.

In the latest session, the crude market meandered again in negative territory, reacting to the output policy of OPEC+ — the global oil producing alliance which groups the 13-member Saudi-led Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries with 10 other countries including Russia.

OPEC+ committed in June to gradually phase out between October this year and September 2025 production cuts of some 2.2 million barrels per day. It had also agreed separately to reduce another 3.66 million barrels daily till the end of 2025.

A spate of weak economic data out of China, the number one oil importer, has made crude traders queasy about demand from that country, raising pressure on OPEC+ to possibly do more with its cuts.

"The fact that OPEC+ didn't do more at its meeting today became a bummer instead for the market," John Kilduff, partner at New York energy hedge fund Again Capital, said. "The soft US manufacturing numbers are also weighing on crude prices."

With 90 minutes to Thursday's settlement, US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude was at $77.24 per barrel, down 67 cents, or 0.9%. WTI hit a 10-day high of $78.88 in the previous session, rebounding from the near two-month low of $74.59 it reached earlier in the week.

UK-origin Brent crude stood at $80.31 per barrel, down 53 cents, or 0.7%. Brent hit a one-week high of $81.79 on Wednesday, soaring from the near two-month bottom of $78.43 reached earlier in the week.

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vinnik's lawyer tells sputnik spoke with him today, he remains in us prison

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Money, Sanctions Relief Not Part of US-Russia Prisoner Swap Deal - White House

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The United States and Russia did not exchange money or provide sanctions relief as part of the recent prisoner swap deal, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Thursday.

"Yes, I can confirm that," Sullivan said during a White House press briefing when asked to confirm that no money was exchanged or sanctions loosened as part of the deal.

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US Military Forces Cannot Prevent Islamic State Rising Again - Pentagon Report

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The top US commander in the region has warned that US and coalition forces operating in Syria and Iraq are incapable of stopping the growth of the Islamic State terror group (ISIS, outlawed in Russia), the Defense Department Inspector-General said in a new report released on Thursday.

"In a media interview, the CJTF-OIR [Coalition Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve] Commanding General Major General Joel Vowell, said that the conditions that helped ISIS rise in 2014 remain in Syria and Iraq," the report said.

Vowell said that coalition and partner forces can disrupt the Islamic State's capabilities but cannot resolve the underlying causes of instability, the report said.

"Security forces continued to conduct patrols and operations at the al-Hol displaced persons camp, but lacked sufficient resources to curb ISIS smuggling into and out of the camp," the report added.

Repatriation of residents from the al-Hol camp to their home countries or communities continued; but approximately 41,000 people remained in the camp, according to the report.

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Sullivan Says US Working to Secure Release of Marc Fogel From Russia

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The United States is working to secure the release of American citizen Marc Fogel from detention in Russia, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Thursday.

Earlier on Thursday, the US and Russia announced a prisoner exchange involving detainees from both countries, as well as several US allies.

"Today was a very good day, and we're going to build on it, drawing inspiration and continued courage from it for all of those who are held hostage or wrongfully detained around the world, and that includes Marc Fogel, who we are actively working to get his release from Russia as

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well," Sullivan said during a White House press briefing.
Fogel was detained in Russia in August 2021 and sentenced to 14 years in a penal colony for possession of cannabis. Fogel's family has claimed that the cannabis was recommended by a doctor to treat spinal pain.

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Texas Juvenile Justice Dept. Abused, Discriminated Against Children - US Official

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) has engaged in a pattern of abuse, depriving children of essential services and discriminating against those with disabilities, US Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Kristen Clarke said on Thursday.
"Our investigation provides reasonable cause to believe that far from achieving those objectives, TJJD engaged in a pattern of abuse, deprivation of essential services, and disability-related discrimination that seriously harms children and undermines their rehabilitation, all in violation of their rights under the Constitution, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the American with Disabilities Act," Clarke said during a press briefing.
The US Justice Department has completed an investigation into five Texas juvenile facilities, revealing that staff members frequently used excessive force, including physical violence and pepper spray, resulting in injuries to children.
"We found that staff pepper-sprayed children as a first response to behavior that should have been addressed without force, such as when a staff member pepper sprayed a child for slamming a washing machine door, and when other staff members goaded a child, and then pepper sprayed her for threatening to harm herself," Clarke said.
Furthermore, the Texas Juvenile Justice Department staff were involved in numerous incidents of sexual abuse and failed to provide children with necessary mental health and special education services, Clarke added.

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Biden Did Not Speak With Putin About Prisoner Swap Deal - White House

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden did not talk with Russian President Vladimir Putin about the major prisoner exchange deal that took place earlier, a White House National Security Council spokesperson told Sputnik on Thursday.
"No," the spokesperson said when asked whether Biden had made contact with Putin as the prisoner swap deal was being put together.
Biden said during a press conference about the prisoner exchange that he does not need to speak with Putin following the swap.
Earlier on Thursday, 26 prisoners from seven countries were exchanged in Ankara, Turkey - a move reportedly facilitated by the Turkish National Intelligence Organization. Ten of the

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prisoners exchanged in Turkey, including two minors, were sent to Russia; 13 to Germany; and three to the United States.

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US Senate Confirms Dorothy Camille Shea to Serve as Deputy UN Representative

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The US Senate on Thursday confirmed the nomination of Dorothy Camille Shea to serve as Deputy Representative of the United States to the UN, Deputy Representative of the US to the UN Security Council and Representative of the US to the UN General Assembly.

Senators confirmed Shea's nomination in a vote of 59 in favor and 34 opposed.

Biden nominated Shea to the roles in January 2023. Shea's previous experience includes serving as the US Ambassador to Lebanon, Deputy Chief of Mission at the US Embassy in Cairo and Deputy Principal Officer at the then-US Consulate General in Jerusalem.

Shea also served as Director for Democracy and Human Rights on the National Security Council and Special Assistant to the Special Envoy for War Crimes Issues at the US State Department.

Shea holds a Bachelor's degree from the University of Virginia, a Master's degree from Georgetown University and a second Master's degree from the National War College. Shea speaks English, French and Arabic.

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Musician Johnny Cash to Be Honored With Statue in US Capitol - Letter

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - Musician Johnny Cash will be honored with a statue in the US Capitol, congressional leaders said in a letter announcing the dedication ceremony.

"Please join us at a ceremony commemorating the dedication of a National Statuary Hall Collection Statue in honor of Johnny Cash of Arkansas," the letter said on Wednesday.

The dedication ceremony will take place on September 24 at 11:00 a.m. ET (15:00 GMT).

Cash was born in Kingsland, Arkansas in 1932 and passed away in 2003. Cash's award-winning music career spanned multiple genres, including country, rockabilly, folk and blues.

The National Statuary Hall in the US Capitol is located in the former chamber of the House of Representatives and features statues donated by states to honor notable persons.

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Biden Called Slovenian Prime Minister to Secure Pardon in Spy Swap Deal - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden contacted Slovenian Prime Minister Robert Golo an hour before withdrawing from the 2024 US presidential race in order to arrange a pardon for two Russians convicted of espionage and a prisoner swap, the Wall Street Journal reported on Thursday.

The report said CIA Director William Burns visited Turkey last week to coordinate the final logistics of the prisoner exchange.

Earlier on Thursday, 26 prisoners from seven countries were exchanged in Ankara, Turkey - a move reportedly facilitated by the Turkish National Intelligence Organization.

Ten of the prisoners exchanged in Turkey, including two minors, will be sent to Russia; 13 to Germany; and three to the United States.

Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich and US Marine veteran Paul Whelan are among those exchanged in Ankara.

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China on Trajectory to Become US Nuclear Peer in Near Future - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - China is not a nuclear peer of the United States but it is on a trajectory to become one in the near future, Acting US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy Vipin Narang said on Thursday.

"Meanwhile, the PRC [China] is not yet a nuclear peer, but the growth in its nuclear arsenal size and diversity, accompanied by posture changes such as regional employment to launch on warning, places it on a trajectory to soon become one," Narang said in remarks during an event hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

Unlike Russia, China will also be a US peer in virtually every military and economic domain soon, Narang said.

Russia remains the only US peer adversary in the nuclear domain but is not a peer in any other domain, Narang also said.

The United States needs to keep channels of communication with Russia open on arms control and risk reduction, Narang added.

In March, National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) Principal Deputy Administrator Frank Rose said that the agency was examining very closely whether it would adjust the US nuclear arsenal in response to the perceived nuclear challenges posed by Russia and China.

US President Joe Biden asked Congress to unlock $20 billion in fiscal year 2025 to modernize the country's nuclear weapons.

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US Believes Russia to Return to Arms Control Talks Following New START Treaty – Official

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) – The United States believes that Russia will return to arms control negotiations following the New START Treaty because unrestrained nuclear competition is not in Moscow's interests, acting US Assistant Secretary of Defense Vipin Narang said on Thursday.

"I think Russia will return to arms control talks, akin to whatever following New START will be, when it realizes that an unrestrained sort of nuclear competition is not in its interest," Narang said during a conversation at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

He pointed out that he firmly believes unrestrained competition is not in Russia's interest.

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US Does Not Seek Unrestrained Nuclear Posture - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The United States does not seek an unrestrained nuclear posture as it is in the process of re-evaluating ways to deter its peer adversaries, Acting US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy Dr. Vipin Narang said on Thursday.

"We're not talking about unrestrained [nuclear] posture. We are thinking carefully about what it takes to deter and it is not an unlimited posture," Narang said in remarks during an event hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

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Trump Holds 5-Point Lead Over Harris in 2024 US Presidential Election - Poll

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump holds a five-point lead over Vice President Kamala Harris in the 2024 presidential race, a new Rasmussen Reports poll revealed on Thursday.

Forty-nine percent (49%) of likely voters in the United States would vote for Trump and 44% would vote for Harris in a two-way matchup, the poll report said.

The margin between the two candidates has narrowed since last week, when Trump held a seven-point lead over Harris, the poll report added.

The poll surveyed 2,163 likely US voters on July 24-25 and July 28-31. The poll has a margin of error of plus-or-minus two percentage points with a 95% confidence level.

However, a Bloomberg/Morning Consult poll released earlier this week found that Harris holds a lead over Trump in four so-called swing states, whereas Trump previously held a lead over US President Joe Biden in seven swing states.

Harris replaced Biden as the Democratic Party's presumptive nominee, after Biden withdrew from the 2024 race.

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US Must Prepare for World Without Nuclear Constraints, Modernize Its Arsenal – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) – The United States must prepare itself to live in a world devoid of constraints on nuclear weapons and arsenals by modernizing its own capabilities, Acting US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy Vipin Narang said on Thursday.

"We must prepare for a world where constraints on nuclear weapons arsenals disappear entirely," Narang said. "Modernizing US nuclear capabilities today, preparing for future posture adjustments may help incentivize our adversaries to engage in strategic arms control discussions."

Narang however warned that if adversaries continue to chose making the world "less safe," the US must be prepared to do what it needs to compete and deter aggression against itself and its allies.

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US Must Convince Rivals That Arms Control Better Than Nuclear Competition - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The Unites States must continue to persuade Russia, China and North Korea that managing nuclear rivalry is better than engaging in unrestrained nuclear competition, Acting US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy Vipin Narang said on Thursday.

"Unilateral cuts by the United States are not an effective approach to reducing nuclear risks. We should continue to try to persuade our adversaries [Russia, China, North Korea] that managing rivalry through arms control is preferable to unrestrained nuclear competition," Narang said in remarks during an event hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

However, Narang alleged that the United States' nuclear rivals have chosen the path of competition or of outright conflict over cooperation.

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US May Adjust Nuclear Size, Posture in Absence of Changes by Russia, China - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The United States might be forced to reconsider its nuclear size and posture in the absence of a change in the nuclear trajectories of Russia, China and North Korea, Acting US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy Vipin Narang said on Thursday.

"Absent a change in the nuclear trajectories of the PRC [China], Russia and North Korea, we may reach a point where a change in the size or posture of our current deployed forces is

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necessary," Narang said in remarks during an event hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

Narang said that currently there is no needs to grow the US nuclear stockpile but adjustments to the number of deployed capabilities may be necessary if adversaries continue down their path.

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US Considering Increasing Future Launcher Capacity, Number of Deployed Warheads - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The United States is reviewing ways to adjust its nuclear posture, including by increasing future launcher capacity and the number of deployed warheads, Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy Vipin Narang said on Thursday.

"We're also reviewing and prioritizing other ways we might adjust US posture. We have begun exploring options to increase future launcher capacity or additional deployed warheads on the land, sea, and air legs that could offer national leadership, increased flexibility if desired and executed," Narang said in remarks during an event hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

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Good Chances Seleznev Part of The Exchange But No Official Info Yet - Lawyer

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The lawyer for Russian national Roman Seleznev told Sputnik on Thursday that there is a good chance that his client is part of the ongoing prisoner swap, however he still has not gotten any official information.

“Unfortunately, I don’t have any official information about the exchange, but since yesterday Roman disappeared from the US prison database base, this has never happened before,” Igor Litvak said. “Considering all the rumors that are circulating on the Internet, of course, there is a good chance that Roman will be included in this exchange, but again I don’t have information yet,”

Litvak shared that he called the prison last night to talk to Roman. They promised to call back, but never did.

“Of course, I think Roman is an ideal candidate to be exchanged,” he added.

Earlier in the day, the US news channel reported that a total of 24 prisoners including eight Russian nationals would be freed as part of a historic prisoner swap deal among six countries, including Russia the United States and Germany.

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US to Abide by New START Limits for Duration of Treaty as Long as Russia Does – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) – The United States will continue to abide by the limits of the New START for the duration of the treaty as long as it assesses that Russia continues to do the same, Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy Dr. Vipin Narang said on Thursday.

"We will also abide by the central limits of New START for the duration of the treaty as long as we assess that Russia continues to do so," Narang said in his remarks during an event hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

The New START treaty between Russia and the United States is set to expire in 2026. Russian Security Council Deputy Chairman Dmitry Medvedev said that extending the treaty is possible only after the United States stops supplying weapons to Ukraine and blocks that country's accession to NATO.

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us may reach point where it changes nuclear size or posture absent a change in nuclear trajectories of china, russia, north korea - defense official

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Hamas' Haniyeh Believed Killed by Bomb Smuggled Into Tehran Guesthouse - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh was assassinated by a bomb smuggled into his guesthouse in Tehran two months prior, the New York Times reported on Thursday, citing an unnamed US official, two Iranian officials and five other Middle East officials.

Haniyeh was assassinated in the early hours of Wednesday inside his room at a guesthouse run by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) while visiting Tehran for the presidential inauguration ceremony. One of his bodyguards was also killed in the blast.

The bomb was detonated remotely, according to five officials, and shook the building, shattered some of its windows and partially collapsed an exterior wall, according to two IRGC officials.

While Israel typically does not publicly acknowledge responsibility for assassinations it carries out in Iran, Hamas, Iranian officials, and several US officials confirmed that Israel was responsible for Haniyeh's killing.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday that the United States did not have advance knowledge of the plot to kill Haniyeh.

Two Iranian officials said they did not know how or when the bomb was planted in Haniyeh's room. They said the Palestinian Islamic Jihad leader Ziyad al-Nakhalah was staying in the next room, which was not badly damaged, suggesting that Haniyeh was very precisely targeted.

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White House Invites Families of US Prisoners Held in Russia – Reports

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) – The White House has invited the families of US prisoners who were held in Russia and reportedly included in an ongoing prisoner exchange, including Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich and Marine veteran Paul Whelan, CBS News reported on Thursday.

Earlier in the day, the US news channel reported that a total of 24 prisoners including eight Russian nationals will be freed as part of a historic prisoner swap deal among six countries, including Russia the United States and Germany.

Bloomberg reported earlier in the day that Gershkovich and Whelan, who were jailed in Russia on espionage charges, are now en route to destinations outside of Russia.

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