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8/2/24 Friday

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'Uninterested in Negotiations': Israel and US Stoke the Fire as China Pursues Peace

Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh was killed Wednesday in an attack on his residence in Tehran. Hamas has blamed Israel and the US for Haniyeh's death and vowed retaliation. On Friday, Intelligence Minister Ismail Khatib said Israel ordered the strike after receiving a green light from the US.

The Global Times reported Thursday that China firmly opposed and condemned the assassination of Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh that took place on Wednesday in Tehran. Fu Cong, China's permanent representative to the United Nations, said the act was a blatant attempt to "sabotage peace efforts and wantonly trampled on the fundamental UN Charter principle of respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states."

Fu added that China is "deeply worried" the incident could trigger further upheaval in the Middle East. KJ Noh sat down with Sputnik's The Critical Hour program this week to discuss China's response to the assassination of Haniyeh. Noh, who is a political activist, writer and teacher, suggested China is open to peaceful negotiations while Israel and the US appear to be escalating tensions.

"China's approach is to settle differences through dialogue and negotiation and reconciliation and to develop, to look for win-win solutions, to have mutual respect, to build and not to bomb," Noh explained. "And what Israel has done [is] they've essentially toppled any chance of a political settlement by assassinating their interlocutor. [It] can't get any more naked than that."

"If you kill the person across the table who you're talking to, that means you're not interested in any peaceful negotiation," the writer added. "What's clear, both in the case of Ukraine and in the case of Israel, is I think the US does not want negotiation. It wants what Israel wants, which is ethnic cleansing and genocide."

On Tuesday, US Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell said the US is "far behind" China in Africa and other regions in the Global South and has "much more work to do" in competing with China. In an opinion piece, the Global Times suggested the US' call for "more work to do" in the Global South is a "strategy to manipulate and weaponize these nations, using them as tools against China."

"Kurt Campbell wants war, and he has said that he would unleash a magnificent symphony of death. That's the way he thinks, but he also knows that the US cannot fight China by itself," Noh said. "And so, everything that the US is pivoting to do right now is to weaponize as many proxies as possible, and therefore this is their strategy towards the Global South – force them into blocs and turn them into weapons against China."

"The US wants more and it wants to block confrontation and it wants win-lose relations or lose-lose relations. China wants win-win relations and it wants to develop the world on the basis of mutual benefit and equality," he added. "That's the foundational difference. And we can see that the US, by appointing Campbell and everything else they're saying and doing is doubling down on this pathway to planetary destruction."

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The US is at risk of losing in the event of multiple conflicts with adversaries due to a lack of capabilities and capacity reported Sputnik Monday, citing a report from the US Congress affiliated Commission on the National Defense Strategy.
“They want to come to a different conclusion, despite being confronted by the same facts. The facts are that the US will lose. It cannot fight a multi-pronged war against superpowers but it seems dead set on continuing to do that,” said Noh.
The report also found that the US military lacks both the capabilities and capacity required to be confident in its ability to deter and prevail in combat. It added that China remains the “preeminent challenge” to US interests and the country's most formidable military threat.
“So, once again, having come to the same conclusions, they do not suggest a way out or a reasonable accommodation with the rest of the world. They still want to double down on US supremacy. They want more war, preferably spending more money, using more proxies and more instruments of death,” the activist added.

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Wildfires Rage Across Western North America with 89 Active Fires in US – Video

According to a recent report, law enforcement is just beginning to investigate the origin of the fires, but at least one fire in Colorado is believed to have been caused by people.
More than half a million acres of the Western US has burned in the past week from a raging wildfire which has left at least one person dead. Fires have been reported in the states of Colorado, California, Oregon, Idaho, Washington and Montana.
So far this year, over 28,000 wildfires have burned more than 4.5 million acres in the US, the New York Times reported, citing the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC). And as of Saturday, there were 89 large, active fires, most of which were in the Pacific Northwest and California.
Wildfire seasons typically begin in June or July and can continue until mid-fall. But fire seasons are no longer typical as heat waves and other extreme weather events strike the US and Canada. The fires are fueled by dry conditions and high temperatures, authorities explain, as much of the US continues to face a prolonged summer heat wave.
At least four wildfires were reported in the US state of Colorado affecting the state’s densely populated Front Range, which killed one person and prompted authorities to order hundreds of residents to evacuate. The fire impacted five structures including two residences which were destroyed, a public information officer for the Boulder County Sheriff’s Office said Thursday.
"We are taking an all hands on deck approach to fight the fires burning around the state and keep communities safe," said Colorado Governor Jared Polis (D) Wednesday in a post on X.
"We’ve immediately deployed critical air and ground resources to support fire containment, response, and management in partnership with federal and local agencies. We will continue to provide necessary resources to contain fires and provide support to affected Coloradans."
“Normally we’re ramping up in July to get to that peak in August, early September,” said Alex Robertson, director of fire and aviation management for the U.S. Forest Service. “[But] we’re going into August already at our full tilt.”

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Robertson added that the US had to request additional help from the countries of Australia and New Zealand for 80 aviation and fire operations experts. And while it's "common" for countries to share fire fighting capabilities, he explained, it's rare for the US to need this much help by the end of July.

According to experts, a wet winter and spring allowed vegetation to grow quickly, followed immediately by record-breaking heat across the US which has caused quintessential fire-burning conditions.

On Thursday, the National Weather Service warned of "dangerous heat" striking much of the country with temperatures in the Western US expected to approach or exceed record highs. Temperatures across the region are forecasted to reach about 100 degrees Fahrenheit every day through the end of the week.

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Tropical Storm Debby to Bring Up to 18 Inches of Rain to US Coast

A Category 1 hurricane is typically accompanied by wind speeds of 74 to 95 mph with damage to shrubbery, tree foliage and poorly constructed items. Storm surges 4 to 5 feet above normal tide levels are also common, the US Navy said.

Tropical Storm Debby has become the fourth named storm of the Atlantic hurricane season, according to the US National Hurricane Center. The storm is likely to bring buckets of rain and cause coastal flooding to a majority of Florida's Gulf Coast by the beginning of this weekend.

Tropical Storm Debby, which began as a depression, has sustained winds of 40 miles per hour while moving northwest at 15 mph. The storm was centered about 70 miles northwest of Havana, Cuba, on Saturday afternoon and was about 100 miles southwest of Key West, Florida, the center said.

"Hurricane conditions are possible in the hurricane watch area by Sunday night, with tropical storm conditions expected to begin on Sunday," the hurricane center said. "Tropical storm conditions are expected to spread northward over the tropical storm warning areas this evening and continuing through Sunday."

By the time the storm touches down in Florida's Big Bend region it will most likely be "at or near hurricane strength" the center added. A recent forecast said the storm could intensify into a Category 1 hurricane.

The tropical storm is expected to bring 3 to 5 inches of rain, according to the Weather Prediction Center. But the storm will likely hover over parts of the US including the Georgia-Carolina coastline, and so by the middle of this coming week about 6 to 12 inches of rain could fall, although the heaviest rainfall levels could reach more than 18 inches.

"We could see a stall or a meandering motion around coastal portions of the southeastern United States," National Hurricane Center Director Michael Brennan said in a Saturday briefing. "So that's going to exacerbate not just the rainfall risk, but also the potential for storm surge and some strong winds."

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis has declared a state of emergency for 54 of the state's 67 counties as a way to engage resources in preparation for the storm.

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“Floridians are encouraged to monitor weather conditions, listen to all orders from local officials, create disaster preparedness plans and stock disaster supply kits with food, water, and other necessities for their households,” the governor’s office said Friday.

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Rare 2,400-Year-Old Pot of Gold Coins Unearthed in Turkiye

This pot of gold wasn’t found by following a rainbow.
A 2,400-year-old "savings account" buried by a mercenary soldier in the late fifth century BC has been discovered in the seaside city of Notion in what is now modern-day Turkiye, although the coins were likely minted in Sardis, about 60 miles (97 kilometers) northeast of Notion.
A team of archaeologists had been working to excavate the courtyard of a home which dates to the third century BC – that’s when they discovered a much older dwelling which already existed there, The New York Timesreported.
“The coins were buried in a corner of the older building,” said Christopher Ratté, an archaeologist at the University of Michigan. “We weren’t actually looking for a pot of gold.”
The coin depicts a Persian king kneeling with a bow and spear and dressed in a long tunic.
These darics (coins) were used to pay soldiers of fortune. Therefore, archeologists believe this treasure chest once belonged to a mercenary who had buried his gold for safekeeping.
“According to the Greek historian Xenophon, a single daric was equivalent to a soldier’s pay for one month,” added Ratté, who is also the director of the Notion Archaeological Survey.
“No one ever buries a hoard of coins, especially precious metal coins, without intending to retrieve it,” he added. “So only the gravest misfortune can explain the preservation of such a treasure.”
Andrew Meadows, an archaeologist at the University of Oxford who was not involved in the study, said the find is of the “highest importance” considering the fact that no other such discovery has been made in Asia Minor or Anatolia (Anadolu).
Anatolia is where the Western world’s first state-issued coin was created, in the kingdom of Lydia around 610 BC by Lydian King Alyattes.
“The archaeological context for the hoard will help us fine-tune the chronology of Achaemenid gold coinage,” said Meadows.
In 287 BC following the Athenians' defeat by the Spartans, Notion and other cities of Ionia were incorporated into the Persian Empire. Following Alexander the Great’s conquest in 334 BC the daric was starting to be phased out of production. Instead, Alexander the Great and his successors had the coins melted down in order to bear their images.
But the burial and loss of the treasure could have happened as early as between 430 and 427 BC, when a group of Persian sympathizers and Grecians occupied Notion. It was during that time that the Athenian general Paches killed pro-Persian mercenaries, which ushered in Athenian control.

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US Sends Military Forces to Middle East as Observers Fear Catastrophic War Is Imminent

Nearly 40,000 people in Gaza have been killed since Israel's operation in Gaza began in October, according to the territory's health ministry.

Fears of an imminent regional or world war are rising as the United States sends military forces to the Middle East to safeguard Israel after its latest escalation in the region.

On Friday US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said he had ordered more ballistic missile defense-capable cruisers and destroyers to the Middle East and Europe. An additional fighter jet squadron will be sent to the Middle East as the US increases their "readiness to deploy additional land-based ballistic missile defense," it was reported.

The USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier strike group will also be moved to the Middle East as a way to "maintain a carrier strike group presence", the report added.



World

Iran Refuses to Temper Response to Assassination of Hamas Political Leader – Report

15 hours ago

Fears of a regional war in the Middle East have been growing since the assassination of Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh, who was killed in an attack on his residence in Tehran. Just hours prior, Israel also struck south Beirut and killed Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukr.

Hamas has blamed Israel and the US for Haniyeh's death and vowed retaliation. On Friday, Intelligence Minister Ismail Khatib said Israel ordered the strike after receiving a green light from the US.

Israel's provocation has resulted in Iran-backed groups in the Middle East swearing vows of vengeance. Groups from Lebanon, Yemen, Kiraq and Syria have already addressed the war in Gaza between the Palestinian group Hamas, and Israel whose military efforts have been supported by the US. The US has given Israel more aid than any other nation since World War II.

On Sunday, the Wall Street Journal reported that Iran had refused to moderate its response to the assassination of Haniyeh and was planning to launch a massive retaliatory strike against Israel, with analysts claiming Tehran's barrage could last multiple days. On Saturday, Tehran told Arab diplomats that they did not care if their response leads to war.

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Iran said on Saturday that it expects Hezbollah to strike deep within Israel and to no longer confine their attacks solely to military targets.
A Lebanese security source, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said a Hezbollah member was killed in an “Israeli drone” strike on a vehicle in south Lebanon Saturday, according to an AFP report. Late on Friday Israel carried out strikes on truck convoys entering Lebanon from Syria, the report added.

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Stunning Northern Lights Display in US, Canada Following Rare Solar Eruption

A powerful solar storm previously created spectacular and rare celestial light shows in the skies of the US, UK and Russia in May.
Auroras will light the night sky in the US this weekend following a “cannibal” coronal mass ejection that hit Earth on Tuesday. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric (NOAA) Space Weather Prediction Center (SWPC) issued a geomagnetic storm warning for August 3 and August 4, although the celestial show could be visible past August.
The lights were forecasted to reach farther south than is normal and may be visible in parts of the US including the states of Washington, Idaho, Montana, North and South Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, New York and Maine, said the SWPC.
At the same time, much more intense auroral displays will be visible in northern Canada and Alaska.
Scientists have forecasted more displays of the Northern Lights for the month of August, and even the months to follow, after it was discovered that there were more sunspots on the sun this July than any other time since December 2001. According to NASA, sunspots (magnetic disturbances on the sun’s surface) have been counted every day since 1611 to determine how magnetically active the sun is.
The celestial show that will be lighting up Earth's skies is caused by a coronal mass ejection (CME) that is associated with a powerful solar flare that erupted from the sun on August 1, Space.com explained.
CMEs carry electrically charged atoms known as ions and when they collide with Earth’s magnetosphere they can cause geomagnetic storms. The ions will interact with gasses in Earth’s atmosphere and emit energy which takes on the form of light, and this light is what we know as aurora borealis, or aurora australis in the Southern Hemisphere.

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America Will ‘Lose Everything’ if it Continues to Back Israeli Depravity – Analyst

Israel is losing “on all fronts,” claims one expert, who warns the United States will be brought down with it if it continues to back the Zionist “ethno-nationalist” project.

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As the United States has once again cast itself as the global arbiter of democracy and human rights in another sovereign country – this time Venezuela – its closest ally in the Middle East has assassinated two world leaders on foreign soil while top political figures declare the right to rape and torture prisoners of war.

“The United States has revealed itself to the world that it is a barbaric and genocidal regime,” said Professor Seyed Mohammad Marandi of the University of Tehran this week, observing the country’s ironclad defense of Israel even as Tel Aviv stokes a dangerous escalation of hostilities in the region. “The United States is destroying itself. This is a choice that they've made.”

Marandi joined host Rachel Bevins on Sputnik’s The Backstory program to discuss the rapid deterioration of Israel’s political and diplomatic position and its implications for the global standing of the US as the Biden administration continues to back the “ethno-supremacist” regime.

“I was expecting escalation,” said Marandi in response to Tel Aviv’s targeting of Palestinian leader Ismail Haniyeh in Iran and Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukr in Lebanon within the space of a few hours earlier this week. “I've been of the belief for the last two weeks that the Israeli regime can't continue the war as it is, and they're not willing to have a ceasefire. So, the only thing left would be escalation.”

“The attack on Beirut, where they bombed a residential complex, and the assassination in Tehran, as well as the bombing of a civilian target in Yemen in Hodeidah were all carried out in order to bring about escalation. And now here we are. There has been escalation.”

“I think it's very clear that just as the Israeli regime has already lost the war, they've lost on the border with Lebanon, they've lost in Gaza and they've lost in the Red Sea, where the Americans have been fighting on their behalf, but to no avail,” the academic added. “They've lost on all fronts.”

Commentators within Israel have increasingly acknowledged the failure of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s stated goals in Gaza recently, ten months after he vowed to “destroy” Hamas. Almost one year later the Israeli military is still struggling to contain the group militarily and politically, with polls showing a majority of Palestinians support its armed resistance to Israeli occupation.

A pervasive smear campaign has accused the armed group of an antisemitic campaign against Jews, with netizens taking to social media to mock Western media’s attempts at social conditioning. Meanwhile Russia and China have hosted leaders of Hamas and other groups to attempt to reconcile Palestinian political factions and form a united front against Zionist settler colonialism.

“Netanyahu is not acting in the interests of the regime,” said Marandi of the controversial prime minister, who faces renewed prosecution on corruption charges if he loses his grip on power. “He's acting for his own interests, and that's why he's brought about this escalation. Netanyahu is doing it to preserve his own power, and he's sacrificing the Israeli regime for his own sake, for his own selfish interests.”

“Israel is being pushed towards destruction. I don't mean that it will collapse tomorrow or next week, or six months from now. But after losing the war and after being discredited across the world because the world sees Israeli regime as genocidal, it sees how they're raping prisoners and how they are massacring children and women day and night,” he claimed, referring to

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Israeli politicians and activists who have defended the rape of Palestinian captives on the grounds of "self defense."

"If the Americans do the stupid thing and they get involved, they will lose everything in the region. They will be expelled from Iraq, their bases in the Persian Gulf will be destroyed. And those regimes that gave those bases to the United States, they will be destroyed, too, because they'll be seen as hostile."

Recent polling shows some "notable" US allies now view the United States less favorably than in years past. "Ratings of the U.S. are… down among several key NATO allies," revealed a study by the Pew Research Center in June, which noted favorability ratings for the country have cratered in countries across the Arab world such as Turkiye and Tunisia.

A loss of economic power has accompanied the disintegration in prestige as countries across the world increasingly abandon the use of the US dollar as the de facto global reserve currency. The end of financial dominance signals that US imperialism will collapse like the British colonialism it was inspired by, and for similar reasons – consigned to the dustbin of history by its own arrogance and moral depravity.

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Hurricane Debby Hits Florida's Big Bend, Major Floods Expected – National Hurricane Center

WASHINGTON, August 5 (Sputnik) – Hurricane Debby reached inland in the Florida Big Bend region by Monday morning Eastern Standard Time, with major floods expected in the southeastern United States over the next few days, according to the National Hurricane Center.

"Debby just inland in the Florida Big Bend Region … Expected to bring major flooding over the southeastern United States during the next few days," the center's 8:00 a.m. EDT advisory stated.

Speaking at a press conference on Monday morning, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis said Hurricane Debby had made landfall around 7:00 a.m. near Steinhatchee.

He said about 143,000 Floridians were without power and about 17,000 linemen were ready to assist with restoring power. According to the poweroutage.us website, 290,649 customers in Florida were experiencing power outages as of 9:10 a.m. EST.

Desantis said Hurricane Debby was following a similar track to that of Hurricane Idalia a year ago, but was traveling more slowly at 80 miles per hour.

He said that Debby was expected to move through north-central Florida into Georgia and the Carolinas and warned that it "has produced and will likely produce significant flooding events from the Sarasota Bradenton area to northern Florida."

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Withdrawal of US Forces, Assets from Niger Complete – Joint Statement

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WASHINGTON, August 5 (Sputnik) – The United States has completed the full withdrawal of military forces and assets from its last base in Niger, according to a joint statement published by the US Africa Command on Monday.

"The U.S. Department of Defense and the Ministry of National Defense of the Republic of Niger announce that the withdrawal of U.S. forces and assets from Air Base 201 in Agadez is complete," the statement said.

The statement added that the US and Nigerien militaries will continue coordinating over the coming weeks to ensure the full withdrawal is complete.

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Homeless People Remain on San Francisco Streets Despite Authorities' Push to Resolve Issue

SAN FRANCISCO, California, August 5 (Sputnik) - Homeless people remain on the streets of San Francisco, California, even after local authorities began issuing them fines and free one-way bus tickets, but the number of such people has decreased, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

Thus, on certain streets of San Francisco within the city limits, the number of homeless people has noticeably decreased compared to just a few days ago.

At the same time, the homeless still remain in noticeable numbers on the sidewalks and streets, despite the authorities' measures to deal with the issue.

Earlier, the New York Times reported that the authorities of San Francisco had begun dealing with the homeless people's presence in public places. Mayor London Breed has now banned homeless people from sleeping on sidewalks, and police officers have been instructed to fine anyone who sits, lies, or sets up tents in pedestrian areas. At the same time, authorities have begun issuing one-way bus tickets to homeless people so that they could leave the city.

San Francisco has traditionally been popular with homeless people, who flock there because of its mild climate all year round and the local government's approach, which tolerated them until recently.

Breed previously launched a campaign to combat the drug crisis in the city. As part of the new program, San Francisco authorities will begin paying drug addicts cash rewards of $100 a week for passing negative tests for illegal substances.

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US Embassy in Israel Issues Alert, Urges Caution of Possible Sudden Attack Without Warning

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The US Embassy in Jerusalem issued a new security alert urging US citizens to be cautious of possible sudden aerial attacks due to increased regional tensions.

"Due to the increase in regional tensions, the US Embassy in Jerusalem is continuously and closely monitoring the security situation," the Embassy said in the advisory on Friday. "The US

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Embassy reminds US citizens of the continued need for caution and increased personal security awareness as security incidents, including mortar and rocket fire and unmanned aircraft system (UAS) intrusions, often take place without any warning."

The advisory added that the security environment is complex and can change quickly.

The United States assesses that Iran and its so-called proxies, including the Lebanese movement Hezbollah, will carry out a large-scale aerial attack against Israel in the coming days due to the assassination of Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran earlier this week.

Media reported that Iran could carry out its retaliatory attack in the coming hours.

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Austin Orders More US Ballistic Missile Defense-Capable Ships to Middle East - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin ordered additional ballistic missile defense-capable Navy ships to head to the Middle East amid fears of an Iranian retaliatory strike on Israel, Defense Department deputy spokesperson Sabrina Singh said in a statement.

"Secretary Austin has ordered additional ballistic missile defense-capable cruisers and destroyers to the US European Command and US Central Command regions. The Department is also taking steps to increase our readiness to deploy additional land-based ballistic missile defense," the statement said on Friday.

Austin had also ordered the Abraham Lincoln carrier strike group to replace the Theodore Roosevelt carrier strike group, which was deployed to the region to date.

The United States will also deploy additional fighter jets to the region to boost its air support capability. Moreover, Austin ordered the deployment of an additional fighter squadron to the Middle East, reinforcing our defensive air support capability.

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NASA Officials Still Worried About Boeing Starliner Safety in Returning Crew - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - Senior NASA officials are still worried about whether the troubled Boeing Starliner moored to the International Space Station (ISS) will be safe to return US astronauts Barry Gilmore and Sunita Williams to Earth two months later than originally planned, CNBC reported.

NASA Commercial Crew Program managers and engineers have held what was described as deep discussions this week about whether they should just send the two astronauts home on a regularly used, reliable SpaceX Dragon spacecraft, the report said on Friday.

The CST-100 Starliner was supposed to provide a second manned space vehicle to shuttle astronauts to and from the space station. But when it finally launched on June 5, many years behind schedule and over $1.5 billion over budget, five of its 28 thrusters failed to operate and

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five separate helium leaks were recorded.
Nearly two months after launch, NASA and Boeing engineers have still not identified the reason the thrusters failed when the Stalriner was docking with the space station.
After nearly seven weeks of investigatIons, NASA officials still lack full confidence that the Starliner is safe to carry the astronauts home. They are therefore looking at returning them on a SpaceX Dragon spacecraft and bringing back the Boeing vehicle separately, unmanned by remote control. The Starliner capsule Calypso has now been in space 59 days on a mission that was scheduled to last only nine days.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) -

SITUATION IN VENEZUELA
* The US government is leading an ongoing coup attempt in Venezuela following Sunday's election in the country, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Ivan Gil said on Friday.
* Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro has received an invitation to attend the next BRICS summit, which will take place in Kazan, Russia, in October, Gil said.
* Argentina considers Venezuelan opposition candidate Edmundo Gonzalez as the winner of the presidential election in Venezuela, Argentine Foreign Minister Diana Mondino said.

US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION
* Vice President Kamala Harris has received enough delegate votes to officially become the Democratic party's nominee for president, Democratic National Committee Chair Jaime Harrison said on Friday.
* President Joe Biden said that he has spoken with Harris about choosing her running mate in the 2024 election.
* 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, US corporate media reported, citing more than two dozen unnamed sources, government and court records as well as other documents.

MIDDLE EAST TENSIONS
* Upcoming changes to the United States' force posture in the Middle East could involve deploying additional capabilities and soldiers to the region, Pentagon deputy spokesperson Sabrina Singh said on Friday.
* US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin spoke with Israeli Minister of Defense Yoav and affirmed the strong US support for Israel's security as well as detailed current and planned defensive force posture changes, Singh said.
* The Israeli navy carried out a successful interception test using the LRAD long-range interceptor missile this week, the Israel Defense Forces said.

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* 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, citing US officials.

OIL MARKETS

* Slovakia has received an offer from Croatia for oil supplies, but the price and possible volumes were not specified, Slovak Foreign Minister Juraj Blanar said on Friday.
* Hungary has conveyed to the European Commission that Croatia is an unreliable oil transit country and expects the European institution to stand up for the interests of the EU member states against Kiev, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* Ukraine has lost up to 4,020 personnel in the area of operations of Russia's Yug (South) group of forces in the past week, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Friday.
* Experts from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) continue to observe military activity and smoke around the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (NPP), the agency said
* The Ukrainian government has terminated a 1998 deal that established government communication with Russia, a Ukrainian cabinet spokesperson in parliament said.
* The Russian military has destroyed a rocket launcher in the suburbs of the city of Kharkov (Kharkiv), which had been being used by the Ukrainian armed forces to shell Russia's Belgorod Region, the coordinator of the pro-Russian underground network in Nikolaev (Mykolaiv), Sergei Lebedev, told Sputnik.

US-RUSSIA PRISONER EXCHANGE

* The negotiation process on the exchange of prisoners and the Ukrainian issue are different areas of work, there are different principles, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.
* Moscow's tough position on the possibility of prisoner exchanges has yielded results and Russians have returned to their homeland, Peskov said.
* Accusations that Moscow is allegedly replenishing the "prisoner exchange pool" in order to bargain with the West are absurd and unjustified, Peskov said.
* The United States tried to influence an imprisoned intelligence officer of the Russian armed forces General Staff's Main Directorate through his father, but his son did the right thing, Peskov said.

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US Pauses Migrant Flight Program After it Discovered Significant Cases of Fraud - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration temporarily paused the issuing of advance travel authorizations for a federal migrant flight program that grants up to 30,000 eligible migrants from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela access to the United States per month, Fox News reported on Friday, citing the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).
The report said DHS suspended the program after it found a significant amount of fraud in the

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program.
DHS made the decision to halt the program "out of an abundance of caution," the report added.
A congressional source had told Fox News Digital the pause was imposed in mid-July after an internal report revealed large amounts of fraud in applications for those sponsoring the migrant applicants.
DHS is currently reviewing cases in the program during this temporary pause.

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UPDATE - Wall Street Has Worst Week Since April Despite Jobs Report Suggesting Sept. Rate Hike

(Updates with more details in paras 2-4)
NEW YORK, August 2 (Sputnik) - Wall Street finished with its biggest weekly loss since April as a softer-than-forecast US jobs report for July triggered worries over the economy instead of a rally expected from rate cut hopes.
At Friday's close, the S&P 500 Index, which tracks stocks of the top 500 US companies, fell 2% on the day and 2.1% on the week. That marked the biggest drop since a 3% weekly tumble in mid-April.
The technology-heavy Nasdaq Composite Index, which comprises stocks such as Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google, finished down 2.5% for the session and 3.4% for the week.
The Dow Jones Industrial Average, the broadest indicator for US equity markets, slid nearly 1.6% for Friday and 2.2% on the week.
The United States added 114,000 jobs in July, its smallest since the jobs boom that began after the pandemic, while unemployment rose to two-and-a-half year highs, the US Labor Department said Friday in laying out one of the most compelling data sets for an interest rate cut in September.
The jobs report came a day after the release of unexpectedly soft US manufacturing data that triggered more worries about the economy than optimism over a potential rate cut that would also be good overall for business. The last time the Federal Reserve cut US rates was four-and-a-half years ago.
Wall Street is now "wondering if the Fed is too late in transitioning monetary policy," Quincy Krosby, chief global strategist at LPL Financial, said in comments carried by CNBC.
The cooler-than-anticipated US labor situation for July prompted money market bets for a 50-basis point, or 0.5% percentage point, rate cut when the Fed's policy-makers meet on September 18. Prior to that, bets had at best been for a 25 basis point, or 0.25% percentage point cut.

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US, European Lawmakers to Hold Maduro Accountable If He Doesn't Down - Joint Statement

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WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - US and European lawmakers in charge of foreign affairs matters issued a joint statement on Friday claiming opposition leader Edmundo Gonzalez won Venezuela's presidential election and vowing to hold Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro accountable if he refuses to relinquish power.

"Our governments are closely monitoring the situation in Venezuela, and will work together to hold Maduro accountable should he continue to disregard the democratic will of Venezuelan voters to steal yet another election," the statement said.

US Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Ben Cardin and US House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul joined their counterparts in Armenia, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania and Ukraine in issuing the joint statement rejecting Maduro's reelection and arguing that the electoral victory should go to Gonzalez.

The lawmakers claimed that the election was a fraud and that there is allegedly enough evidence to support claims that Gonzalez won the presidential election on Sunday.

The joint statement also urged Maduro and Gonazales to begin negotiations on a peaceful transition of power.

On Thursday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the United States would recognize the opposition candidate as the winner of Sunday's elections in Venezuela. Argentina and Ecuador also recognized Gonzalez as the winner.

The July 28 presidential election saw Maduro win a third term in office. The announcement of the results sparked protests by the US-supported opposition in the capital of Caracas and beyond. The Venezuelan government accused several countries of election meddling.

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UPDATE - Gold Hits Record High As US Rate Cut, Softer Economy Beckons

(Updates with settlement prices in paragraphs 2-5)

NEW YORK, August 2 (Sputnik) - Gold hit record highs and finished with its biggest weekly gain since May despite a slight dip on Friday as US unemployment hit two-and-a-half year highs, triggering an investor run to the precious metal and other safe-havens.

Benchmark US gold futures for delivery in December settled at $2,469.80 per ounce, down $11, or 0.4%, on the day. It also hit a record high of $2,522.20 before the dip.

For the week, December gold finished up 2.7% — its most since a 3.3% rally during the week ended May 5.

The spot price of gold, which reflects real-time trades in bullion, hovered at just over $2,437 an ounce, down just over $9, or 0.4%, late Friday afternoon in New York.

For the week, spot gold rose 2.1%, its most since the week ended June 30, when it rose 2.8%. It also hit an all-time high above $2,477 this week.

The US Labor Department reported on Friday that non-farm payrolls grew by 114,000 jobs in July, the smallest growth since the jobs boom that began after the pandemic. Unemployment, meanwhile, rose to 4.3%, the highest since December 2021.

The cooler-than-anticipated US labor situation prompted money market bets for a 50-basis

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point, or 0.5% percentage point, rate cut when the Fed's policy-makers meet on September 18. Prior to that, bets had been at best been for a 25 basis point, or 0.25% percentage point, cut.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell himself said this week that the central bank's policy-making Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) was closing in on its first rate cut in 4-½ years and that it could come as early as September.

"On the whole, there is little in this [July jobs] report that is likely to dissuade the FOMC from delivering this cycle's first 25 bp cut at the next meeting in September," said Michael Brown, senior research strategist at Pepperstone.

Prospects of an impending Fed rate reduction also sent the dollar and US bonds lower and gold higher.

Gold, an alternative play, benefitted as the Dollar Index hit a two-week low against the combined strength of the euro, Japanese yen, British pound, Canadian dollar, Swedish krona and Swiss franc, while the yield on the benchmark 10-year US Treasury note fell to November's bottom.

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Republican Senators Urge Biden to Lift Partial Arms Embargo on Israel - Letter

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) – Some 48 Republican senators signed a letter to US President Joe Biden on Friday to demand his administration lift a partial embargo on arms deliveries to Israel.

"We write once again to protest your administration's partial arms embargo against Israel," the letter reads. "Your actions also violate the will of Congress as expressed in the recent supplemental that funded emergency military support to Israel."

The Biden administration refuses to supply Israel with 120mm tank ammunition, 120mm mortar ammunition, light tactical vehicles, air-to-air missiles, F-15s, F-35 engines, joint direct attack munition kits, 2,000-pound bombs, rifles, and guided missile systems, the letter said.

Senator Rand Paul was the only Republican who did not sign the letter to Biden.

Axios reported on Friday that Biden warned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu earlier this week that he should not expect the United States to keep bailing him out if he continues to escalate tensions in the region.

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.

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UPDATE - Oil Market Stares at Worst Week Since April as US Unemployment Spikes

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(Updates with settlement prices for crude in paragraphs 2-3)

NEW YORK, August 2 (Sputnik) - Crude oil prices had their biggest weekly slump since April after US unemployment hit two-and-a-half year highs, triggering worries about the health of the world's largest economy despite excitement over the first potential Federal Reserve rate cut since the pandemic.

With three hours to Friday's settlement, US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude settled at $73.52 per barrel, down $2.79, or 3.7%, on the day. For the week, WTI was off by 4.7%. That was its biggest weekly drop since the 6.9% decline in the week ended April 26 and comes after three prior back-to-back weekly declines of 3.7% 2.5% and 1.1%.

UK-origin Brent crude finished Friday's New York session settled at $76.81 per barrel, down $2.71, or 3.4%, on the day. Brent's weekly decline of 5.3% was also the biggest since the week ended April 26. Like WTI, it comes after three consecutive weekly losses - in the UK benchmark's case, that being 1.8%, 2.8% and 1.7%.

"This is a … market with another shot lower coming," said Scott Shelton, energy futures broker and commentator at ICAP in Durham, North Carolina.

Crude prices tanked after the US Labor Department reported on Friday that non-farm payrolls grew by 114,000 jobs in July, the smallest growth since the jobs boom that began after the pandemic. Unemployment, meanwhile, rose to 4.3%, the highest since December 2021.

The jobs report came a day after the release of unexpectedly soft US manufacturing data that triggered more worries about the economy than optimism about a potential September Fed rate cut that would also be good for business. The last time the Fed eased rates was in March 2020.

Just on Wednesday, both WTI and Brent jumped 3% each or more after tensions rose in oil-rich East Middle 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.

Oil traders had chased crude prices up anticipating a heightened Iran-Israel war after Tehran vowed revenge. But until Friday, the response had not come, resulting in tensions easing again.

In the meantime, worries about the economy in top oil importer China and OPEC+'s decision to stick to predetermined production began weighing again on crude prices.

OPEC+, the global oil producing alliance which groups the 13-member Saudi-led Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries with ten other countries including Russia, announced this week it will make no new cuts despite worries over the Chinese economy.

The alliance 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.

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Florida Man Pleads Guilty to Trying to Bomb Chinese Embassy in US - Justice Department

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - A 45-year-old man from Florida pleaded guilty to trying to bomb the Chinese Embassy in the United States and damaging a sculpture of communist

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leaders, the US Justice Department said on Friday.

"Christopher Rodriguez, 45, of Panama City, Florida, pleaded guilty today to a three-count superseding information charging him in the September 2023 attempted bombing outside the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Washington, DC, and a November 2022 bombing of a sculpture depicting communist leaders Vladimir Lenin and Mao Zedong in San Antonio, Texas," the Justice Department said in a statement.

In September 2023, Rodriguez placed a backpack with 15 pounds of explosive materials near the Chinese embassy and attempted to detonate it by shooting the backpack with a rifle, the statement said. However, Rodriguez missed and failed to detonate the explosives, the statement said.

In November 2022, Rodriguez successfully bombed a satirical steel sculpture of Mao and Lenin in Texas by placing two canisters of explosive materials at the base of the artwork and detonating them with a rifle shot, the statement said. The explosion caused significant damage to the sculpture, the statement added.

Rodriguez pleaded guilty to damaging property occupied by a foreign government, explosive materials – malicious damage to federal property, and receipt of possession of an unregistered firearm (destructive device), the statement said.

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Severe Weather Damages Multiple Military Aircraft at Base in Colorado - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - A severe storm damaged multiple US military aircraft at the Fort Carson military installation in the state of Colorado, the Fort Carson public affairs office said on Friday.

"At approximately 8 p.m. August 1, a significant weather event occurred at Butts Army Heliport. Initial reports indicate the event caused damage to multiple aircraft belonging to the 4th Combat Aviation Brigade, 4th Infantry Division," the base said in a press release.

The release noted that the weather damaged a variety of aircraft including Apaches, Chinooks, and Black Hawks.

Military officials continue to assess the damage, the release added.

Footage on social media showed Apache and Black Hawk helicopters tipped over on their side during the severe storm on Thursday at Fort Carson.

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Secret Service Takes Responsibility for Trump Incident, Pursues Accountability - Director

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The US Secret Service takes full responsibility for the failure to prevent an assassination attempt on former President Donald Trump on July 13 and will pursue accountability for its personnel, Acting United States Secret Service Director Ronald

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Rowe said on Friday.

"The Secret Service takes full responsibility for the tragic events on July 13. It was a mission failure," Rowe said during a press briefing. "I am committed to pursuing accountability for the Secret Service's failure in Butler, Pennsylvania. Let me be clear, if policy violations by Secret Service personnel are identified … those individuals will be held accountable … to our fair and thorough disciplinary process."

Rowe added that the US Secret Service will continue cooperating with pending investigations, including by Congress, the Department of Homeland Security's Office of the Inspector General, and the independent review directed by President Joe Biden.

On July 13, Trump suffered a gunshot wound to his right ear and was briefly hospitalized following an assassination attempt at his rally in Butler. The 20-year-old shooter, Thomas Crooks, killed a member of the audience and injured two others in the crowd before the Secret Service neutralized him.

The FBI continues to investigate the assassination attempt. US Secret Service Director Kimberly Cheatle was forced to resign following criticism of the agency for not preventing the assassination attempt.

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Ecuador Considers Venezuelan Opposition Candidate Gonzales as President-Elect - Presidency

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The government of Ecuador has recognized Venezuelan US-supported opposition candidate Edmundo Gonzales as the country's legitimate president, the Ecuadoran presidency said on Friday.

"In respect of the Venezuelan people's popular will, Ecuador recognizes Edmundo Gonzales as the winner of the presidential elections of that country," the presidency said in a statement via X.

Ecuador calls on the international community to respect the sacrifice of the Venezuelan people and join the efforts to preserve the country's will to be free once again, the statement added.

Earlier on Friday, Argentinean Foreign Minister Diana Mondino said that Buenos Aires considers Gonzalez to be Venezuela's president-elect.

Similarly, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Thursday that the United States would recognize the opposition candidate as the winner of Sunday's elections in Venezuela.

The July 28 presidential election saw Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro win a third term in office. The announcement of the results sparked protests by the US-supported opposition in the capital of Caracas and beyond. The Venezuelan government accused several countries of election meddling.

The presidents of Argentina, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and the Dominican Republic 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

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Venezuela.

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Hunter Biden Sentencing Set for November 13 - Court Document

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The sentencing of Hunter Biden is scheduled to take place on November 13, the United States District Court for the District of Delaware said in a court document on Friday.

"Sentencing in this matter is scheduled for Wednesday, November 13, 2024, at 10:00 AM (EST) in Courtroom 4A, on the fourth floor of the J. Caleb Boggs Federal Building, 844 King Street, Wilmington, Delaware," the court document said.

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US Sues TikTok Over Child Privacy Violations - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The United States has sued the video hosting service TikTok over violations related to child privacy, the US Justice Department said in a statement on Friday.

"The Justice Department, together with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), today filed a civil lawsuit in the US District Court for the Central District of California against TikTok Inc., ByteDance Ltd., and their affiliates (together, TikTok) for violations of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act and its implementing regulations (COPPA) in connection with the popular TikTok app," the statement said.

COPPA prohibits website operators from knowingly collecting, using, or disclosing personal information from children under the age of 13 unless they provide notice to and obtain consent from their parents, the statement said.

However, TikTok knowingly permitted children to create regular accounts and to create, view, and share short-form videos and messages with adults and others on the regular TikTok platform, the statement said.

"The defendants collected and retained a wide variety of personal information from these children without notifying or obtaining consent from their parents," the statement added.

The United States insisted that these violations impacted millions of children and seeks civil penalties and injunctive relief, according to the statement.

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Chinese Embassy Says Hopes Athletes' Rights Will Be Protected, Sports Not Politicized

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WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The Chinese Embassy in the US told Sputnik on Friday that it hopes athletes' rights will be protected and that sports will not be politicized, following reports that the United States might attempt to frame Chinese Olympic athletes for doping.

"As a principle, we hope sporting events will not be politicized and athletes' lawful rights will be protected to uphold the fairness, justice and purity of international sports games," embassy spokesperson Liu Pengyu said in a statement.

Earlier on Friday, China Daily reported, citing an informed source, that the US might frame Chinese athletes for doping by planting evidence around their dormitories. The source also reportedly said that the US may resort to extraterritorial measures to persecute members of China's Olympic delegation.

The Chinese Embassy in the US said that they are not aware of the specifics mentioned in the report.

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US Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy Allen Steps Down - Blinken

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - US Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy Liz Allen is leaving her post, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement on Friday.

"Today, after traveling to dozens of countries and meeting with countless world leaders, students, advocates, and academics to advance our policies and reinvigorate our partnerships, she leaves as Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy," Blinken said.

Allen's team managed to complete over 20 bilateral agreements to fight information manipulation; launch new people-to-people networks in Latin America, the Pacific, and South and Central Asia as well as support independent media and media literacy, he said.

"A tireless advocate for the almost 5,000-person strong global public diplomacy team, she has equipped and empowered them to navigate an increasingly complex media environment, including through enhanced training opportunities, emerging technology, and the use of artificial intelligence," Blinken said.

More broadly, Allen has helped infuse a public diplomacy perspective across our entire workforce, Blinken added.

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Gold Shines Most in Week Since March as US Interest Rate Cut, Softer Economy Beckons

NEW YORK, August 2 (Sputnik) - Gold shone its most for a week since March, rallying 4% over a five-day stretch despite a slight dip on Friday, as US unemployment hit two-and-a-half year highs, triggering an investor run to the precious metal and other safe havens.

With 30 minutes to Friday's close, benchmark US gold futures for delivery in December was at $2,474.20 per ounce, down $6.60, or 0.3%, on the day.

For the week, December gold rose 4.2% - its most since a 4.8% rally during the week ended

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March 31. Equally significant was gold futures' rally to a record high of $2,522 this week.

The spot price of gold, which reflects real-time trades in bullion, hovered at just over $2,430 an ounce, down almost $15, or 0.6%, for Friday.

For the week, spot gold rose 2.1%, its most since the week ended June 30, when it rose 2.8%. It also hit an all-time high above $2,477 this week.

The US Labor Department reported on Friday that non-farm payrolls grew by 114,000 jobs in July, the smallest growth since the jobs boom that began after the pandemic. Unemployment, meanwhile, rose to 4.3%, the highest since December 2021.

The cooler-than-anticipated US labor situation prompted money market bets for a 50-basis point, or 0.5% percentage point, rate cut when the Fed's policy-makers meet on September 18. Prior to that, bets had been at best been for a 25 basis point, or 0.25% percentage point, cut.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell himself said this week that the central bank's policy-making Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) was closing in on its first rate cut in 4-½ years and that it could come as early as September.

"On the whole, there is little in this [July jobs] report that is likely to dissuade the FOMC from delivering this cycle's first 25 bp cut at the next meeting in September," Michael Brown, senior research strategist at Pepperstone, said.

Prospects of an impending Fed rate reduction also sent the dollar and US bonds lower and gold higher.

Gold, an alternative play, benefitted as the Dollar Index hit a two-week low against the combined strength of the euro, Japanese yen, British pound, Canadian dollar, Swedish krona and Swiss franc, while the yield on the benchmark 10-year US Treasury note fell to November's bottom.

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Harris Gains Support of Enough Delegates to Become Democratic Presidential Nominee - DNC

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Kamala Harris has received enough delegate votes to officially become her party's nominee for president, Democratic National Committee Chair Jaime Harrison said on Friday.

"I am so proud to confirm that Vice President [Kamala] Harris has earned more than a majority of votes from all Convention, delegates and will be the nominee of the Democratic Party, following the close of voting on Monday," Harrison said during a virtual roll call.

Later, Harris joined the event via phone and said she would officially accept the nomination next week, once the virtual voting period closes, but added that she was happy to know she had enough delegates to secure it.

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Biden Says Netanyahu Should Not Count on US Anymore if He Continues Escalating - Reports

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WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden has warned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu earlier this week that he should not expect the United States to keep bailing him out if he continues to escalate tensions in the region, Axios reported on Friday, citing US officials.

Biden warned Netanyahu that if he escalates tensions in the Middle East again following the Israeli strikes in Tehran and Beirut, he should not count on the United States to bail him out, the report said.

Biden made clear to Netanyahu that he does not want to see any further escalatory actions from Israel and instead progress toward a ceasefire deal in the coming weeks.

Earlier in the week, Israeli assassinated Hezbollah's military commander Fuad Shukr and Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh.

On Thursday, Biden told reporters that he had a very direct conversation with Netanyahu, adding that Israel's assassination of Haniyeh had set back Gaza ceasefire talks that were underway.

Biden and Netanyahu also discussed US-Israeli joint military preparations for retaliations by Iran and Hezbollah.

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US Middle East Force Posture Changes Could Involve More Capabilities, Soldiers - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - Upcoming changes to the United States' force posture in the Middle East could involve deploying additional capabilities and soldiers to the region, Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said on Friday.

"It certainly could mean additional capabilities and people in the region," Singh said during a press briefing. "If the secretary decides to include more defensive capabilities, they're going to need to be operated by additional people."

However, there is no timeline for the force posture changes, Singh said.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin will have to decide on the specifics of the force posture changes, Singh said.

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Austin Updates Gallant on US Force Posture in Middle East to Support Israel-Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin spoke with Israeli Minister of Defense Yoav and affirmed the strong US support for Israel's security as well as detailed current and planned defensive force posture changes, Defense Department deputy spokesperson Sabrina Singh said on Friday.

"Austin spoke with Israeli Minister of Defense Gallant this morning about the destabilizing threats posed by Iran, its partners and proxies. The Secretary reiterated ironclad support for Israel's security and informed the minister of additional measures to include ongoing and future

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defensive force posture changes," Singh said during a press briefing.
Singh added that Austin will be directing multiple forthcoming force posture moves to bolster protection for US forces across the region, support Israel's defense and ensure the United States is prepared for the evolving crisis.

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us force posture changes could involve additional capabilities, people in region - pentagon

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No timeline on US force posture changes in middle east, Austin will have to decide specifics, but there is commitment - pentagon

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Biden Says Discussed Potential Vice President Picks With Harris

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Friday that he has spoken with Vice President and presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris about choosing her running mate in the 2024 election.
"Yes," said Biden when asked if he'd spoken to Harris about her pick for vice president.
Earlier this week, US media reported that Harris is slated to announce her pick for vice president by August 7.
The list of candidates could reportedly be narrowed down to Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear, Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro and Minnesota Governor Tim Walz.
Earlier in July, Biden announced his withdrawal from the presidential race and endorsed Harris to be the Democratic Party's nominee for US president.
Former President Donald Trump secured the Republican Party’s nomination earlier this month and picked Ohio Senator JD Vance as his running mate.
The US presidential election is scheduled to be held on November 5.

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IMF Board of Governors Adds Extra Seat for Sub-Saharan Africa - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) announced on Friday that it has added one seat on its Executive Board to represent Sub-Saharan Africa.
"On July 16, 2024, the IMF Board of Governors, the highest decision-making body of the IMF,

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issued a new resolution to increase the number of Executive Directors on the IMF's Executive Board by adding a 25th chair intended for Sub-Saharan Africa," the statement said.

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said this "important step" increases Sub-Saharan Africa's representation in the IMF's decision-making process and reflects the region's role in the global economy.

The new Executive Board of 25 Executive Directors will take office on November 1, 2024, the statement said.

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Oil Market Stares at Worst Week Since April as US Unemployment Spikes

NEW YORK, August 2 (Sputnik) - Crude oil prices were on track to their biggest weekly slump since April after US unemployment hit two-and-a-half year highs, triggering worries about the health of the world's largest economy despite excitement over the first potential Federal Reserve rate cut since the pandemic.

With three hours to Friday's settlement, US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude was at $73.55 per barrel, down $2.76, or 3.6%, on the day. For the week, WTI was off by 4.9%. That would be its biggest weekly drop since the 6.9% decline in the week ended April 26 and comes after three prior back-to-back weekly declines of 3.7% 2.5% and 1.1%.

UK-origin Brent crude finished Friday's New York session at $76.95 per barrel, down $2.57, or 3.2%, on the day. Brent's weekly decline of 5.2% was also the biggest since the week ended April 26. Like WTI, it comes after three consecutive weekly losses - in the UK benchmark's case that being 1.8%, 2.8% and 1.7%.

"This is a … market with another shot lower coming," said Scott Shelton, energy futures broker and commentator at ICAP in Durham, North Carolina.

Crude prices tanked after the US Labor Department reported on Friday that non-farm payrolls grew by 114,000 jobs in July, the smallest growth since the jobs boom that began after the pandemic. Unemployment, meanwhile, rose to 4.3%, the highest since December 2021.

The jobs report came a day after the release of unexpectedly soft US manufacturing data that triggered more worries about the economy than optimism about a potential September Fed rate cut that would also be good for business. The last time the Fed eased rates was in March 2020.

Just on Wednesday, both WTI and Brent jumped 3% each or more after tensions rose in oil-rich East Middle 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.

Oil traders had chased crude prices up anticipating a heightened Iran-Israel war after Tehran vowed revenge. But until Friday, the response had not come, resulting in tensions easing again.

In the meantime, worries about the economy in top oil importer China and OPEC+'s decision to stick to predetermined production began weighing again on crude prices.

OPEC+ - the global oil producing alliance which groups the 13-member Saudi-led Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries with ten other countries including Russia - announced this week it will make no new cuts despite worries over the Chinese economy.

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The alliance 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.

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Trump Says US National Defense Strategy Commission Report Puts Military in 'Bad Position'

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The Commission on the National Defense Strategy's report highlighting potential problems faced by the United States' armed forces puts the military in a bad position, former US President Donald Trump said on Friday.

Last month, the congressionally established commission said that the US risks losing in the event of conflicts across multiple theaters with peer and near-peer adversaries.

"Can you imagine having a commission of military officers and others say a thing like that? Even if it's true, why would you ever release a report like that? It puts us in such a bad position and a bad light," Trump said in an interview with Fox Business, when asked about the commission's report.

The United States has a "great military," Trump said, citing its ability to defeat the Islamic State terrorist group (banned in Russia) under his administration.

The commission recommended that the US Congress pass a supplemental appropriations bill to begin a multiyear investment in the industrial base and national security innovation.

The commission also found that the US' deficit poses national security risks and recommended additional taxes and reforms to entitlement spending.

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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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US Stocks in for Worst Week Since April Despite Jobs Report Suggesting Sept. Rate Hike

NEW YORK, August 2 (Sputnik) - US stocks were headed for their worst week since April as a weaker-than-forecast jobs report for July triggered worries over the economy instead of a rally expected from rate cut hopes.

An hour after Friday's open, the S&P 500 Index, which tracks stocks of the top 500 US companies, tumbled 1.8% on the day while heading for a 2.7% slump on the week. If the losses hold to the close, they would be the most since a 3% weekly tumble in mid-April.

The technology-heavy Nasdaq Composite Index, which comprises stocks such as Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google, was down 3.3% for the session while showing a 4% loss for the week.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average, the broadest indicator for US equity markets, slid nearly 2% for Friday and 2.5% on the week.

The United States added 114,000 jobs in July, its smallest since the jobs boom that began after the pandemic, while unemployment rose to two-and-a-half year highs, the US Labor Department said Friday in laying out one of the most compelling data sets for an interest rate cut in September.

The jobs report came a day after the release of unexpectedly soft US manufacturing data that triggered more worries about the economy than optimism over a potential rate cut that would also be good overall for business. The last time the Federal Reserve cut US rates was four-and-a-half years ago.

Wall Street is now "wondering if the Fed is too late in transitioning monetary policy," Quincy Krosby, chief global strategist at LPL Financial, said in comments carried by CNBC.

The cooler-than-anticipated US labor situation for July prompted money market bets for a 50-basis point, or 0.5% percentage point, rate cut when the Fed's policy-makers meet on September 18. Prior to that, bets had at best been for a 25 basis point, or 0.25% percentage point, cut.

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US Approves Wind-Down Transactions With Moscow Exchange Until October 12, 2024 - Treasury

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The United States has authorized certain wind-down transactions related to the Moscow Exchange, the National Clearing Center and the National Settlement Depository through October 12, 2024, the Treasury Department said in a notice on its website on Friday.

"The Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) is issuing Russia-related General License 99A - 'Authorizing the Wind Down of Transactions and Certain Transactions Related to Debt or Equity of, or Derivative Contracts Involving, MOEX, NCC, or

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NSD;' and Russia-related General License 100A - 'Authorizing Certain Transactions Related to Debt or Equity or the Conversion of Currencies Involving MOEX, NCC, or NSD,'" the notice said.

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

(Adds comments, details and context in paragraphs 4-17)

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.

Wall Street economists had forecast payrolls to grow by 175,000 instead for last month versus June's revised 179,000, and the jobless rate to stay at 4.1%.

The cooler-than-anticipated US labor situation propelled money market bets for a 50-basis point, or 0.5% percentage point, rate cut when the Federal Reserve's policymakers meet on September 18. Prior to that, bets had been at best been for a 25 basis point, or 0.25% percentage point, cut.

The dollar and US bond yields — two of the most indicative measures for a Fed rate change — tumbled after the release of the July jobs report.

The Dollar Index hit a two-week low of 104.02 against the combined strength of the euro, Japanese yen, British pound, Canadian dollar, Swedish krona and Swiss franc. The yield on the benchmark 10-year US Treasury note momentarily hit 3.783, matching November's bottom.

"This [jobs] report … [is] implying a 70% chance of 50 basis points [rate cut]," economist Adam Button wrote on the Forex Live forum. "For year-end, [the] pricing [for rate cuts] is at 109 bps."

Fed Chair Jerome Powell himself said this week that the central bank was closing in on its first rate cut in 4-½ years and that it could come as early as September.

"We think that the time is approaching," Powell told reporters on Wednesday. "And if we do get the data that we hope that we get, then you know a reduction in our policy rate could be on the table at the September meeting."

The last time the Fed cut rates was in March 2020 when it slashed 100 basis points, or a full percentage point, in March 2020 as the pandemic began to peak.

Runaway inflation it encountered after that forced the central bank to hike rates 11 times, between March 2022 and July 2023. The current 5.25-5.5% range for rates is the highest in two decades and in force for a year now.

The Fed has the unique responsibility of ensuring enough jobs for all Americans while keeping inflation affordable.

It excelled in its first mandate as the United States experienced over the past two years its best labor market since the 1960s, despite losing an initial 20 million jobs to the pandemic. Proof was the jobless rate, which consistently remained at below 4% per month from March 2022 till May 2024 — qualifying for what the Fed would call maximum-employment.

Inflation, on the other hand, had been an incredible challenge. The Fed's target for inflation is a

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mere 2% per annum. At their last reading, two key US inflationary measures remained above the central bank's threshold. The Personal Consumption Expenditures Index (PCE) expanded 2.5% in the year to June while the Consumer Price Index (CPI) grew 3%. Both hit four-decade highs at one point of the pandemic, with the PCE reaching 6.1% and the CPI 9.1%.

The cooler jobs situation in July will likely add to the chorus of economic watchers that the Fed should no longer view the labor market and wages as prime movers of inflation. Like jobs, the growth in US salaries has also slowed, with private payrolls processor ADP reporting this week a 4.8% year-on-year growth in the private sector — the slowest in three years.

"If inflation goes back up, it won't be because of labor," ADP chief economist Nela Richardson said.

Powell seemed to concur with that, saying on Wednesday: "I don't think it [the labor] needs to, you know, cool off any more for us to get the inflation results that are related."

If the Fed skips a rate change on September 18, it has two more chances to make amends before the year ends — at its November 7 and December 18 meetings.

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More Than One-Third of US Voters Believe Trump Gunman Had Help - Poll

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - More than one-third of likely voters in the United States believe that the man who attempted to assassinate former US President Donald Trump had help from other people, a new Rasmussen Reports poll revealed Friday.

Thirty-four percent (34%) of respondents believe that the shooter, Thomas Crooks, had help from others, the poll report said.

A majority of respondents, 53%, believe that Crooks acted alone and 12% are unsure, the poll report said.

US law enforcement officials have said that they believe Crooks acted alone but the investigators have also yet to find a clear motive for the assassination attempt.

On July 13, Crooks shot Trump at a rally in Pennsylvania, hitting him in the ear, killing one audience member and wounding two others.

The poll surveyed 1,089 likely US voters on July 25, 28-29. The poll has a margin of error of plus-or-minus three percentage points with a 95% confidence level.

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Ottawa, Washington Ink Deal to Allow Use of US Space Launch Tech in Canada - Ministry

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) – Ottawa and Washington have inked a deal that would allow the use of US space launch technology for commercial purposes in Canada, the Canadian foreign ministry said on Friday.

"Canada and the United States have concluded substantive negotiations for a Technology Safeguards Agreement (TSA)," Global Affairs Canada said in a statement.

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Once the TSA comes into force, it will establish the legal and technical safeguards required to allow the use of US space launch technology, expertise and data in Canada, the statement said. The framework will further allow for the proper handling of sensitive US tech, it added.

The agreement will support the growth of the commercial space industry in Canada, provide new opportunities for the sector, and encourage both innovation and research, the statement said.

Canada and the US will now proceed with a final review of the negotiated text and seek to obtain the necessary domestic approvals for the ratification of the agreement, the statement said.

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us authorizes wind-down transactions related to moscow exchange, other blocked russian entities through October 12, 2024 - treasury

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