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8/12/24 Monday

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Plausible Deniability: How Western Media Covers for Ukraine's Nuclear Terrorism

The International Atomic Energy Agency, which continues to monitor the Zaporozhye nuclear power plant, has refused to denounce Ukraine's strikes on the sensitive facility.
The Kiev regime has engaged in a series of periodic attacks on Europe's largest nuclear power plant for the duration of its ongoing conflict with Russia.
Russian troops moved in to safeguard the facility shortly after the country launched its special military operation in early 2022. Moscow has taken pains to prevent damage to the plant since then, which could result in a catastrophic nuclear disaster, but Ukrainian troops have continued to launch highly provocative strikes against the facility, which is currently in a state of partial shutdown.
Russia has repeatedly warned of the danger of damage to the power station, but the Kiev regime's attacks have nonetheless continued, with Western media providing cover for Ukraine's provocations. International relations expert Mark Sleboda joined Sputnik's The Final Countdown program Monday to discuss the issue within the context of the ongoing proxy war against Moscow.
"Considering it is the 'adults' in the West who are arming and facilitating [Zelensky], there are no real adults in the room in the Western political elite unless you want to count [Hungarian Prime Minister] Viktor Orban or [Prime Minister] Robert Fico in Slovakia," said the security analyst, who noted that Ukraine has seen growing unrest as the population increasingly opposes its war on Russia.
"There's already been one incident where a woman whose husband was forcibly conscripted set herself on fire outside of the conscription office in a Ukrainian city," he continued. "So things are getting desperate and there are signs of dissent. There are signs of active resistance, but those have to be, shall we say, below the radar at a certain level. The Kiev regime still has large numbers of far-right Banderite fascist militants both within its military and informal brigades that help it enforce its control of the country."
"About the Zaporozhye situation: what do you think happened there?"asked host Ted Rall, turning to the subject of the Zaporozhye plant, the continent's largest nuclear power station.
"The Zaporozhye plant is still under Russian control, right?"
"Since Russia occupied the Zaporozhye nuclear power plant in their initial thrust in the south that meant very little to no resistance in the first month of the conflict back in 2022," Sleboda recalled. "It has been under complete Russian control. That said, the Kiev regime has attacked the plant dozens and dozens of times, whether we're talking artillery shelling, drone attacks – the first drone attack was actually admitted to by the Kiev regime's Ministry of Defense in an online post – but also several attempted amphibious raids to seize control of it. All have more or less failed."
"On Sunday morning a Kiev regime kamikaze drone was sent in to attack and impacted on one of the two cooling towers inside the plant proper. This resulted in a fire which did some serious

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damage to machinery," said the analyst. "Drone attacks on a nuclear power plant are never a good thing."

Sleboda noted that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which continues to monitor the facility, has refused to denounce Ukraine's strikes on the sensitive plant. The expert claimed the organization has faced political pressure not to blame Ukraine for "what is quite obviously Kiev regime attacks." Meanwhile Ukraine has attempted to claim explosions documented by the IAEA at the power station were caused by car tires being set on fire.

Western media typically conveys the Kiev regime's version of events at the plant, Sleboda noted, allowing Ukraine to deny its strikes on the nuclear plant.

"The Russian side says one thing, the Kiev regime makes up a ridiculous Pinocchio story on the other side and the Western media invariably goes with the Pinocchio story because no matter how ridiculous it is, there is at least plausible deniability here and you can't really admit that the side that you are supporting in the war is openly repeatedly trying to commit acts of nuclear terrorism on European soil," said the analyst.

"It's completely unbelievable, but it provides that bit of plausible deniability to keep up the propaganda line. That's clearly what it is. It's propaganda… plausible deniability is all that is needed for the Western media to whitewash and provide cover for the Kiev regime. It has nothing to do with anyone in the media actually believing this feces they're trying to shovel onto you."

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'The CIA Writes Her Paycheck': Venezuela's US-Backed Opposition Flounders

The United States has taken a keen interest in the results of another foreign election, with observers noting Venezuela possesses the world's largest proven crude oil reserves.

Venezuela's Supreme Court of Justice (TSJ), the highest court in the country, is examining the results of the country's most recent presidential election as opposition leaders and their foreign backers allege fraud.

The country's National Electoral Council (CNE), the government body responsible for managing elections in Venezuela, has submitted records to the court in an attempt to resolve the ongoing dispute. The TSJ has noted its legal authority on the matter, noting that its decision will be final and binding. But the opposition has refused to take part in the process, drawing criticism over its failure to present requested evidence to the court.

"No Venezuelan party that alleges to have 40 percent more votes than President Maduro (as the opposition claims) would hesitate to present the evidence to the National Electoral Council (CNE)," said Venezuelan constitutional expert Dr. Olga Alvarez in response to the development. "Whoever cries election fraud must irrefutably prove it, the onus is on them not on the CNE to prove there wasn't."

Political activist and independent journalist Niko House joined Sputnik's The Critical Hour program Monday to discuss the issue with host Wilmer Leon.

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“She’s been operating as a foreign agent on behalf of the United States. The CIA literally writes her a paycheck,” alleged House, speaking of Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado.

“You would never see Joe Biden put in a request to audit and verify the results of the election,” he noted. “I think that speaks to the accountability and the integrity of Nicolas Maduro, which I feel like is a very important component here.”

House also noted Venezuela's robust electoral system, which includes multiple “checks and balances” and allows the opposition to monitor the counting of votes at electoral precincts.

“The most simplistic explanation is the oil, right?” House said of the United States’ interest in the election. The US and several of its allies have expressed concern over Maduro’s victory, echoing opposition claims of a fraudulent election.

The opposition has produced records it claims point to a victory for opposition candidate Edmundo Gonzalez, although the records have not been independently verified as accurate or authentic. Western media outlets have uncritically repeated the opposition’s claims, with outlets like The New York Times playing their typical role in attempting to legitimate official US foreign policy.

Plausible deniability: how Western media covers for Ukraine’s nuclear terrorism

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“It has been under complete Russian control,” said the expert, referring to the Zaporozhye power station. “That said, the Kiev regime has attacked the plant dozens and dozens of times, whether we're talking artillery shelling, drone attacks – the first drone attack was actually admitted to by the Kiev regime's Ministry of Defense in an online post – but also several attempted amphibious raids to seize control of it. All have more or less failed.”

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'The CIA writes her paycheck': Venezuela's US-backed opposition flounders

Venezuela's Supreme Court of Justice (TSJ) is examining the results of the country's most recent presidential election as the political opposition and its foreign backers allege fraud, but opposition leaders have so far refused to cooperate with the process.

"No Venezuelan party that alleges to have 40 percent more votes than President Maduro (as the opposition claims) would hesitate to present the evidence to the National Electoral Council (CNE)," said Venezuelan constitutional expert Dr. Olga Alvarez in response to the development. "Whoever cries election fraud must irrefutably prove it, the onus is on them not on the CNE to prove there wasn't."
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Palestine Blames US for Latest Slaughter of Innocent Civilians - Report

According to the UN human rights office, this weekend's attack was the 21st strike on a school - which was also serving as a shelter - in the region since July 4. In total the strikes have resulted in 274 deaths including women and children.
The office of the Palestinian Authority's president is holding the US government accountable after approximately 100 people, including at least 11 children and six women, were reportedly killed this weekend from a bombing attack in which US-provided missiles were used.
Nabih Abu Rudeineh, the spokesperson for the Palestinian presidency, condemned the attack and said the Palestinian Authority held the Biden administration "responsible for the massacre due to its financial, military, and political support for Israel," cited a report from Common

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Dreams. The spokesperson also demanded that the US pressure Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to initiate a ceasefire, and to end their own blind support of Israel.

At least 6,000 displaced Palestinians were being housed at the al-Taba'een (or Al-Tabin) school when bombs struck the school at about 4:30 AM, said Mahmoud Bassal, the Gaza civil defense spokesman. Bassal added that at least 54 people were injured in the attack and dozens went missing.

Common Dreams also reported that the bombing of the school came just hours after the US State department announced the release of $3.5 billion in military aid for Israel and also made "new weapons transfers available to help refresh the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) stockpiles."

The bombs that were used on the school weighed 2,000 pounds each, which matches the size of the MK-84 munitions that were given to the IDF from the US over the last year, Common Dreams reported, citing Qatar media which spoke to Gaza's Government Media Office. Images posted to social media show the violent impact of the bombs, as unrecognizable limbs and other charred pieces of bodies had to be collected in bags.

"U.S. funding of Israeli genocide is ballooning as the Israeli army uses ever more lethal bombs," said Francesca Albanese, the UN special rapporteur on Palestine, in an online post on Sunday. "The ones used yesterday in the Al-Tabin School massacre sliced bodies to the point of making them unrecognizable. They are now identified by weight: 70kg bag = 1 adult. Revolting."

The IDF has said the strike was meant to target Hamas and Islamic Jihad militants which it claimed were operating a command and control node from within the school. Israel's military has blamed Palestinian deaths on Hamas by claiming that they are using civilian lives as a human shield.

Western countries who support Israel have condemned the civilian death toll, but have also accused Hamas of using civilians as shields while pushing for a ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas.

On October 7, 2023, Israel was subjected to an unprecedented rocket attack from the Gaza Strip. Israeli authorities say that about 1,200 people were killed during the raid. In retaliation, the IDF launched a war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The death toll from Israeli strikes on the Gaza Strip since October 7 has exceeded 39,700, according to the enclave's health ministry.

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'Israel Itself is a War Crime': US Fans the Flames in the Middle East as Israel Runs Rampant

The US is continuing to stock the Middle East with military arsenal including additional US destroyers. Israel, which has waged a war in the Gaza Strip that has killed tens of thousands since October, has provoked Iran with attacks in April as well as recently. Iran has said it plans to retaliate, while the US has failed to put out the flames.

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 and Iran have blamed Israel for the assassination and have vowed retaliation.

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US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin met with Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, prior to the shipment of US military fare to Israel, and the two spoke about efforts to "deter aggression" by Iran and Hezbollah. According to a US media source, an anonymous Israeli official said on Monday that they believe Iran has decided to directly attack Israel.

On Monday, James Carey, the host of the Left is Dead podcast joined Sputnik's The Critical Hour to discuss these recent developments in the Middle East.

"Striking the capital of Beirut, which is technically a US ally, and then, just stepping away from it. [As in], 'oh, please don't respond to this'. That's an absurd request, right? And I think the Iranian response earlier this year when the drone strike was launched, basically to mildly penetrate the Iron Dome, to show that they could do it. I think, in my opinion, that Iran could penetrate the Iron Dome, if they chose to," Carey explained.

"Israel's getting a free hand to strike, like I said, American allies like Lebanon. These are countries that are allegedly allied with the US, whether Hezbollah operates in them or not, or whether Iran is looking to strike or not. But the obvious aggression has come from Israel. So that's why I think it's very absurd to see it framed this way," he added.

"These are obvious acts of aggression by Israel. So to ask Iran to have the measured response when Israel's clearly committing international crimes, seems very absurd to me," he added. "It's very absurd to me for this to be framed as Israel is taking preemptive measures against Iran when, I'm sorry, the preemptive measures are done, and they did them."

On Sunday, Hamas released a statement calling for the hostage exchange and ceasefire deal with Israel that was initially announced by US President Joe Biden in late May and backed by the UN Security Council in a resolution that passed on June 10. While Hamas had agreed to the ceasefire deal, Israel complicated negotiations by creating new demands as a way to sabotage the deal. However, talks between the two groups have been suspended since the assassination of Hamas's political chief, Ismail Haniyeh, in Tehran.

"It's clear that [Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu doesn't want to negotiate, and we can have Yair Lapid and the war council out here saying, 'we're looking for some deal and we're willing to hop on Biden's deal from May'. But if Netanyahu refuses to do that, obviously it's clear where the holdup is," Carey explained, suggesting that Hamas has already won the "PR war".

"It's clear that Netanyahu has no plans to negotiate in good faith with Hamas as far as releasing hostages goes. And that's been apparent for months now, but now that [we're] talking about preemptive strikes against Iran for aggression done by Israel already, it's very apparent that Israel, or at least Likud led by Netanyahu, is in no position where they want to negotiate. They could negotiate, but they refuse to."

"This is a genocide, whether it's a slow one or an active one, as it's been over the last few years, or since it's been more active since October 7th. It's obviously a genocide. And I think it's ridiculous for people, especially liberals in the US or in the West to try and pretend that Israel has this sort of liberal, or even a streak that wants to negotiate with the Palestinians, or acknowledge the Palestinians' existence."

"It's clearly out the window at this point, and obviously this is where Israel had to go as a colonial power. There's nowhere to go. I mean, the Nakba started in 1948. That's how Israel has always been. It's where Israel always had to go to the point of an active genocide."

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Israel was built on the displacement of Palestinians, claims a recent article published by a US-based news service. In 1948, Israelis took part in the ethnic cleansing of “some 750,000 Palestinians from their homes” in what Palestinians now refer to as their Nakba (Catastrophe). The journalist of the article, Jonathan Cook, claims that “every Israeli knows exactly what is going on in Gaza.”

“...their children-soldiers keep posting videos online showing the latest crimes they have committed, from blowing up mosques and hospitals to shooting randomly into homes,” writes Cook. “Polls show all but a small minority of Israelis approve of the savagery that has killed many tens of thousands of Palestinians, including children.”

“It's a sort of historical whitewashing,” Carey said. “Obviously, you know, Israel doesn't want to acknowledge its roles in this and then, people say, ‘oh, well, Israel didn't take part in these war crimes’. But, Israel itself - that was point number two here - Israel itself is a war crime. It's a colonial state.”

“The Nakba, again, in 1948, saw hundreds of thousands of Palestinians evicted. We've seen thousands of Palestinians evicted from East Jerusalem. We've seen the settlements expand in the West Bank. We've seen Gaza be carpet-bombed from north to south, clean out. There's no passive agreement to these things anymore."

“This is a very genocidal state and it was always going to be. I think it's important to remember that this is what Israel was founded on and the Israeli project was always meant to be larger than it is now and it's going to continue expanding and they want to do that regardless of the cost.”

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Shocking Study Finds Australia’s Food Being Sold to Children Fails to Meet WHO Standards

The study comes after a meeting between Australian and New Zealand food ministers in July who decided to launch a probe into commercial foods for infants and children following a sharp increase in obesity-related diseases.

A new study has found that most baby and toddler foods being sold in Australian supermarkets fail to meet health standards set by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Research led by the George Institute for Global Health found that more than three-quarters of products being sold for children’s consumption failed overall nutritional requirements, while all items being sold failed to meet “promotional requirements”, a British news source wrote, citing the recent study.

“These findings should serve as an alarm bell for policymakers in Australia,” the researchers warned.

The study looked at more than 300 foods being offered to children ages six-months-old to three-years-old in Australian supermarkets and compared the children’s food to the WHO Regional Office for Europe’s nutrient and promotion profile model.

Only about a fifth of the products (22%) that they studied met all criteria for nutrient consumption with high sugar content being the main culprit.

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Because children will prefer foods that are sweet, manufacturers will add sweeteners to a range of products in the hopes of influencing more purchases in the future, said Dr. Daisy Coyle, a dietitian and author of the paper. But this proposes a problem for how the child will eat as an adult because "kids are developing taste and food preferences that set them up for life," she added.

The study also found that none of the products being sold met their "promotional requirements" meaning foods which had at least one or more claim on its packaging prohibited under the WHO model including: "free from colors and flavors", "organic" and "no added sugar". Foods with promotional claims related to allergies, religious claims and vegetarian/vegan claims are permissible.

The researchers also found one in three products to be deceiving with the name of the product not matching that of its ingredient list. If a product is called "broccoli, spinach and apple" parents grocery shopping may assume it's an equal blend when in fact it is made up of 70% apple puree which has significantly more sugar than either broccoli or spinach.

"We know these claims and messages influence what parents buy for infants and toddlers in the critical early years… the food industry is essentially setting the foundations for unhealthy eating later in life and this situation urgently requires regulation," said Coyle.

"We'd want to see a more comprehensive approach to addressing key drivers of chronic disease from infancy… the long-term health of future generations depends on it."

About 20% of children aged 5 to 17 were overweight or obese in 1995. In 2022-23 that rate increased to nearly 28% for the same age group, according to the Obesity Evidence Hub.

The study was based on the George Institute FoodSwitch database, and looked at nearly 400 products in the infant and toddler food category in that database. Eighty-six of the products were infant formula and were excluded from analysis.

Palestine blames US for latest slaughter of innocent civilians - report

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The office of the Palestinian Authority's president is holding the US government accountable after approximately 100 people, including at least 11 children and six women, were reportedly killed this weekend from a bombing attack in which US-provided missiles were used. Nabih Abu Rudeineh, the spokesperson for the Palestinian presidency, condemned the attack and said the Palestinian Authority held the Biden administration "responsible for the massacre due to its financial, military, and political support for Israel," cited a report from Common Dreams. The bombs that were used on the school weighed 2,000 pounds each, which matches the size of the MK-84 munitions that were given to the IDF from the US over the last year, Common Dreams reported citing Al Jazeera who spoke to Gaza's Government Media Office. Common Dreams also reported that the bombing of the school came just hours after the US State department announced the release of $3.5 billion in military aid for Israel and also made "new weapons transfers available to help refresh the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) stockpiles."

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US to Invest $150Mln in Technology for Effective Removal of Cancerous Tumors - White House

WASHINGTON, August 13 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will announce up to $150 million investment in developing technology that will help surgeons to more successfully remove cancerous tumors, the White House said on Tuesday.

"Today in New Orleans, the President and First Lady will announce up to $150 million in ARPA-H [Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health] awards to develop technologies that will allow surgeons to provide more successful tumor-removal surgeries for people facing cancer. These awards will support researchers from eight teams across the country who are pursuing innovative ideas as part of ARPA-H's Precision Surgical Interventions (PSI) program," the statement said.

The first awards will go to eight medical institutions. This list includes Dartmouth College in the state of New Hampshire, Johns Hopkins University in Maryland, Rice University in Texas, Tulane University in Louisiana, Cision Vision in California, and universities of California, Illinois, and Washington.

"These projects are working to improve key aspects of the surgical experience from improving surgeons' ability to visualize important structures like blood vessels and nerves throughout surgery, to developing next-generation microscopes and imaging technology that help them remove all cancerous cells in one surgery," the statement said.

Over two years, the Biden administration has invested through ARPA-H over $400 million to support progress in preventing, detecting, and treating cancer, according to the statement.

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Draft US Bill Calls for Secret Service to Focus Only on Political Protection – Reports

WASHINGTON, August 13 (Sputnik) – US House Representative Ritchie Torres has spearheaded a bill to transfer the Secret Service's mission of investigating financial crimes to the Treasury, so that the agency can focus exclusively on protecting political leaders, Axios reported on Tuesday.

The Focus on Protection Act would "transfer the investigative jurisdiction over payment and financial systems" and require the transfer of all assets and personnel involved in the Secret Service's financial crimes mission within 180 days.

The legislation comes in response to the assassination attempt against Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump last month at a Pennsylvania rally.

The idea has been floated for many years, but recently gained bipartisan support after Trump's assassination attempt.

Torres and fellow New York Representative Mike Lawler in July introduced separate bipartisan legislation to boost Secret Service protection for candidates running in presidential elections.

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Harris Leads Trump by 3 Percentage Points - Poll

WASHINGTON, August 13 (Sputnik) – US Vice President and Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris leads her Republican rival Donald Trump by three percentage points, according to a new Morning Consult poll.

"Harris leads Trump, 47% to 44%," the pollster said on Monday.

That margin is down one percentage point from Harris' record 4-point lead a week ago, it added.

"Harris has not trailed Trump in a single daily tracking survey since we first updated this page with their head-to-head matchup in late July," the survey said.

As for party preferences, 90% of both Democrats and Republicans said they would vote for their candidates. Only 5% of Democrats and 6% of Republicans expressed support for the candidate of the other party, according to the poll.

Forty-two percent of independent voters would prefer to see Harris as the president, while 37% support Trump.

The survey was conducted from August 9-11 among 11,778 registered voters.

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RPT: ANALYSIS - Reagan Wasn't Serious About Bombing Russia 40 Years Ago, But It's No Joke Today

WASHINGTON, August 13 (Sputnik) - US President Ronald Reagan was making a private off-the-record joke when he talked about bombing the Soviet Union 40 years ago, but his comment then could well be applied to the current grave global situation when the West has authorized Ukraine to use their weapons to strike Russian territory, international analysts told Sputnik.

August 11 marked the 40th anniversary of Reagan's notorious remark made during a mic check, "My fellow Americans, I'm pleased to tell you today that I've signed legislation that will outlaw Russia forever. We begin bombing in five minutes." His comments were not broadcast but rapidly became widely known.

TYPICAL HUMOR

Global peace activist Dr. Helen Caldicott, founder and head of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Physicians for Social Responsibility, explained that the remark was never meant as a public threat or even a private statement of wishes or threats but had to be understood in the context of the president's personality.

"The remark that 'We begin bombing soon' was almost certainly a Reagan type joke not intended to be heard by all, it was his type of humor," she said. "Nevertheless 'we begin bombing soon' could well be applied to the present global situation when [UK Prime Minister] Sir Keir Starmer announced that English weapons could be used against and within Russian

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territory."

Caldicott described Starmer's comments as "one of the scariest statements" that she has read recently and one that has not been picked up by the world's media.

"That being so, Russia could well respond militarily, which indeed could lead to WW3," she warned.

OPPOSED WARS

Ret. US Marine Corps Maj. Don Vandergriff, a political commentator and military historian, explained that Reagan, like Donald Trump, worked hard to avoid getting the United States embroiled in any new wars and was certainly opposed to escalating or reviving old ones.

"Reagan and more so Trump understood economic warfare. They both used it through strength," he said.

Trump understood there were other and often more effective ways than the direct but incompetent use of military force to achieve strategic goals and maintain security, Vandergriff stated.

Wise and determined policies were successful in preventing wars, Vandergriff emphasized.

"The worst thing to do - and believe me I hate war having been in it and suffered from it - is appeasement, but there is true peace through strength," he said.

By contrast, current US President Joe Biden and the current Democratic presidential candidate Vice President Kamala Harris have both failed to deter or end the worst conflict in Europe since World War II and the bloodiest Israeli-Palestinian war ever, which is still raging in Gaza, Vandergriff pointed out.

A continuation of Biden's policies under Harris would guarantee a global conflagration, Vandergriff warned.

"Today, the entire world is on the verge of WWIII because of the Harris-Biden weakness," he said.

However, the massive liberal internationalist and pro-Democrat bias of the US mainstream news media has kept the American public ignorant of the looming danger, Vandergriff stated.

REAGAN TRANSFORMED

American University in Moscow President Edward Lozansky also never doubted that Reagan at no point really wanted to attack the Soviet Union.

"I guess he was joking without realizing it was an open mic," he said.

Also, Reagan's own views dramatically transformed during his eight years in office, Lozansky recalled. After starting out with firebrand rhetoric about confronting Soviet communism, the president in his second term became the most radical and successful practitioner of partial US nuclear disarmament and detente in the entire history of the Cold War, he noted.

"Somehow, I followed in Reagan's steps, starting with his 'evil empire,' 'bring down the Berlin Wall' 'we win, they lose,' 'Star Wars,' and the like," he said.

Yet after this super-hawk beginning, Reagan transformed, Lozansky acknowledged.

"Ronny [Reagan] slowly changed closer to the end of his term into a pragmatist, realizing that there will be no winners in a nuclear war. I think he was influenced by Margaret Thatcher's 'We can do business with Gorbachev.'"

Reagan's dramatic change of heart was rapidly recognized in Moscow where Soviet leaders and policymakers of the time reacted forcefully and positively to it, Lozansky remembered.

"This is when I got an unexpected call in October 1988 from Gorbachev's science advisor, Yuri

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Osipyan, to come to Moscow to talk about using Track II diplomacy to start a new era in US-Soviet relations," he said.

There were some hopes during President George H. W. Bush's one term presidency that this indeed could happen when he proclaimed the vision of the "new security architecture from Vancouver to Vladivostok," Lozansky added.

However, "It was a short window of opportunity for a better world that was quickly shut down by [succeeding US president] Bill Clinton," he said.

The Soviet Union criticized the joke, as did Reagan's opponent in the 1984 presidential election, former Vice President Walter Mondale. Mondale was defeated by Reagan in a landslide.

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Musk Says 'Essential' That Trump Win 2024 US Presidential Election

WASHINGTON, August 13 (Sputnik) - It is essential for the United States that former US President Donald Trump retake the White House in the 2024 election, billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk said in a live conversation with the former president.

"I think, really, it's essential that you win – for the good of the country – this election," Musk said on Monday. "That's understating my opinion."

Musk's conversation with Trump garnered more than one million viewers on the official broadcast via social media platform X.

US Vice President Kamala Harris' 2024 campaign said that Musk is attempting to control democracy in the United States using his platform.

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Harris Campaign Says Musk Using Platform to Control US Democracy

WASHINGTON, August 13 (Sputnik) - Billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk is using his platform to impact the United States' democratic process, US Vice President Kamala Harris' 2024 presidential campaign said.

On Monday evening, Musk held a live conversation with former US President Donald Trump via social media platform X (formerly known as Twitter). More than one million users tuned into the official broadcast.

"Musk already ruined Twitter by allowing hate speech and disinformation to flood the platform. Now, Musk is using his vast fortune and broad reach to try to control our democracy," the Harris campaign said in a statement.

Musk is using social media platform X to spread Trump's "unhinged and hateful agenda" to millions of people, the statement said.

Musk is a "lackey" for Trump, the statement added.

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Trump Says 'Nuclear Warming' Biggest Threat to Planet

WASHINGTON, August 13 (Sputnik) - Nuclear war is the biggest threat to the planet, former US President Donald Trump said in an interview with billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk on X on Monday.

"The biggest threat is not global warming… the biggest threat is nuclear warming," Trump said.

Trump highlighted the growing ties between nuclear powers, including Russia, China, and North Korea.

The United States cannot allow Russia and China to align, Trump added.

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Trump Says Would Welcome Musk's Offer to Serve on Gov't Efficiency Commission

WASHINGTON, August 13 (Sputnik) - Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump told US billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk he would welcome his offer to serve on a so-called government efficiency commission that would help cut federal spending.

"I'd love it, you're the greatest cutter," Trump said when Musk offered to serve on a government efficiency commission.

Musk mentioned the idea of creating a government efficiency commission that would look into reducing US government spending.

Trump agreed with Musk's idea to establish such a commission, adding that no one negotiates prices and that lots of government spending goes to waste at present.

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Trump Says Putin Claimed He Would Hate to See Him as Enemy

WASHINGTON, August 13 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump claims that Russian President Vladimir Putin once told him that he would hate to see him as an enemy.

"[Putin] actually said to me one time, he said: 'If you're my friend, I'd hate to see you as an enemy,'" Trump said on Monday in an interview with billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk.

Trump highlighted his efforts to halt Russia's Nord Stream 2 pipeline and reiterated his claim that Russia would not have launched its special military operation in Ukraine if he were president.

Trump said that he knew Putin well and had got along with the Russian leader, adding that Putin respected him.

Putin is a "good negotiator," Trump also said.

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The United States cannot allow Russia and China to align, Trump added.

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Trump Calls Biden's Exit From Election 'Coup of President of United States'

WASHINGTON, August 13 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump called on Monday his successor Joe Biden's exit from the 2024 White House race a "coup of the President of The United States."

"Say what you want but this was a coup. This was a coup of the President of the United States," Trump said during his conversation on X with the platform's billionaire owner Elon Musk.

Democrat Biden, who had been trailing Republican Trump in polls ahead of the November 5 presidential election, stepped away from the race for the White House on July 21, nearly a month after a televised debate with his predecessor that went disastrously for the president. He has since been replaced at the top of the Democrat ticket by Vice President Kamala Harris.

Biden has said in media interviews that the decision not to seek another term was entirely his and that he wholeheartedly endorsed Harris to avoid his highly criticized acuity and 81-year-old age from becoming a "distraction" to the Democrats in the election.

But Trump, who has seen his lead in the polls vanish against Harris, insists that Biden was forced out.

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Trump, in Conversation With Musk on X, Calls Biden's Stepping Aside as Democrats' Candidate in Election 'Coup of the President of the United States'

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Musk Says Live Interview With Trump on X Disrupted by Massive DDOS Attack

WASHINGTON, August 13 (Sputnik) - US billionaire Elon Musk said in a statement that his live interview with Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump has been disrupted by a massive DDOS attack and he's working to resolve the issue.

"There appears to be a massive DDOS attack on X," Musk said on Monday. "Working on shutting it down."

Musk said the interview, which was set to begin at 8 p.m. ET, may only be available to a smaller number of live listeners but be posted online later when the conversation is over.

Many users have had issues joining the live interview on the X social media platform on Monday evening.

Over the weekend, the media reported that Iranian hackers had allegedly breached the Trump campaign's network and stole some of its information. The FBI confirmed to Sputnik that it is investigating the matter.

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Musk Says X Under 'Massive' DDOS Attack As Trump's Interview Was Set to Start

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Blinken in Call With Turkish Counterpart Discussed Hamas Joining Gaza Talks- State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 13 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in a telephone call with his Turkish counterpart Hakan Fidan discussed the importance of having Hamas participate in Gaza ceasefire talks expected to resume on Thursday, State Department deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel said in a press release.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke today with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan about the importance of Hamas' return to negotiations on August 15 to finalize the framework for achieving an immediate and durable ceasefire in Gaza and securing the release of all hostages," Vedant said on Monday.

Blinken also expressed gratitude for Turkey's support for the US-Egypt-Qatar joint statement urging the resumption of Gaza ceasefire talks.

Hamas announced on Sunday that it would not participate in the Gaza ceasefire talks on Thursday.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has largely criticized Israel's military operation in Gaza and other actions including the assassination of Hamas' political leader in Tehran. Erdogan has taken sides with Hamas on several key issues while his Western partners have been more sympathetic towards Israel.

Last week, Egypt, Qatar, and the United States called on Israel and Hamas to resume discussions on the terms of a ceasefire on August 14-15. The leaders of the three countries said they were ready to present a final proposal to reach a deal.

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Ex-US Envoy to Russia Says Expects Putin to Respond Decisively to Kursk Offensive

WASHINGTON, August 13 (Sputnik) - Former US Ambassador to Russia John Sullivan said in an interview with CNN that he expects Russian President Vladimir Putin will take decisive action to push Ukraine out of the Kursk region.

"Putin will respond as decisively as he can to push the Ukrainians out," Sullivan said on Monday regarding Ukraine's offensive in Russia's Kursk region.

Last week, Ukrainian forces crossed the border into Russia and launched an offensive in the Kursk region. Commenting on the attack, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Ukraine had carried out another large-scale provocation, firing indiscriminately at civilian targets.

Earlier in the day, acting regional governor Alexei Smirnov said that 28 settlements in the region had come under Ukrainian control.

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US Navy Gives Boeing $264Mln Contract to Repair Wing Panels on F/A-18 Force - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 13, Sputnik) - Boeing has received a more than $264 million US Navy contract to make modifications and repairs to its fleet of F/A-18 E/F fighters and EA-18G Growler aircraft, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"The Boeing Company [of] Jacksonville, Florida is awarded a $264,069,575 contract ... [for] inspections, modifications, and repairs to the F/A-18 E/F and EA-18G aircraft," the release said on Monday.

The repairs and upgrades will include inner wing panel repairs to restore their service life projections, the release said.

Work on the upgrades will be carried out in Jacksonville, Florida (65%); Saint Louis, Missouri (10%); Lemoore, California (10%); Whidbey Island, Washington (10%), and El Segundo, California (5%), the release added.

The project is scheduled to take just over four years and is expected to be completed by September 2028, according to the release.

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Trump Team Tells EU to Stop Trying to Meddle in US Election After Opposing Musk Interview

WASHINGTON, August 13 (Sputnik) - Trump campaign spokesperson Steven Cheung said in a statement that the European Union (EU) should stop trying to meddle in the US elections after it put out a statement attempting to censor an upcoming interview between US billionaire Elon Musk and Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump.

Earlier on Monday, European Commissioner for Internal Market and Services Thierry Breton published a letter warning Musk ahead of his interview with Trump to censor anything considered hate speech under EU law.

"The European Union should mind their own business instead of trying to meddle in the US Presidential election," Cheung said in a statement via X. "Only in Joe Biden and Kamala Harris' America can an un-Democratic foreign organization feel emboldened enough to tell this country what to do."

Cheung further said that the European Union is an enemy of free speech and has no authority of any kind to dictate how the Trump team campaigns.

"They know that a President Trump victory means America will no longer be ripped off because he will smartly utilize tariffs and renegotiated trade deals that puts America First," Cheung said.

Trump and Musk are scheduled to hold an interview X on Monday at 8:00 p.m. ET. Trump's campaign team said it would be "the interview of the century" while Musk said it would be entertaining.

The EU will be extremely vigilant to find any evidence that breaches its Digital Services Act and is prepared to "make full use of our toolbox" to impose possible penalties on the X social media company, according to Breton.

The European Union sent its warning letter to Musk in light of the recent anti-immigration riots that broke out in the United Kingdom that were allegedly sparked by disinformation that spread on X and other social media platforms falsely identifying the perpetrator of attacks on children attending a dance class in an English town as a Muslim asylum-seeking migrant.

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Northrop Grumman Displays New Solid Rocket Motor With More Flexible Tooling - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 13 (Sputnik) - Northrop Grumman has successfully demonstrated its new solid rocket mortar design with revolutionary tooling that can more easily change length and diameter settings, the US defense contractor announced in a press release.

"Northrop Grumman demonstrated the design and build of its 2024 Solid Motor Annual Rocket Technology Demonstrator (SMART Demo) solid rocket motor case using an innovative modular tooling approach for manufacturing large composite solid rocket motor (SRM) cases," the release said on Monday.

The advanced equipment and hardware used to manufacture the case is known as modular mandrel tooling and it can be adjusted to different settings in shape and size to allow flexibility in length and diameter, the release said.

"Implementation of modular tooling, which is the first use of this technology on large SRMs of

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this scale, could reduce SRM development costs and lead times by more than 50% through eliminating the procurement of long lead tooling and enabling rapid progression from design to manufacturing," the release added.

The new hardware can produce multiple designs with different dimensions creating new options for rapid implementation of new configurations and modifications to permit necessary changes as the engineering design process develops, according to the release.

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Construction Begins on New Quick Reaction Alert Facility at CFB Bagotville - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 13 (Sputnik) - Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence Marie-France Lalonde announced that construction has commenced on a new Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) facility at Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Bagotville, the Canadian National Defence said in a statement.

"Marie-France Lalonde, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, on behalf of the Honourable Bill Blair, Minister of National Defence, announced the beginning of construction on a new Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) facility at Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Bagotville," the statement said on Monday.

According to the statement, the new QRA facility is intended to allow CAF personnel to prepare and deploy the incoming fleet of CF-35A fighter jets, this deployment is in support of North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) operations.

"The new 7,400 m2 QRA facility at CFB Bagotville will include aircraft hangar bays, office space and sleeping quarters for personnel, and a 17,000 m2 secure fenced compound surrounding the facility. Once completed, it will help CAF personnel support Canada and the NORAD mission and quickly respond to any threats in North American airspace," the statement read.

The statement added that construction is estimated at approximately $120 million and is expected to sustain more than 600 jobs in the region. The facility is projected to be completed in 2027, and the design and construction contract has been awarded to one of Canada's largest construction companies, Pomerleau Inc.

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Space Norway, Northrop Grumman Launch 2 Broadband Satellites Over Arctic - Release

WASHINGTON, August 13 (Sputnik) - Space Norway in tandem with Northrop Grumman and SpaceX has launched two satellites to ensure stronger, reliable broadband transmission across the Arctic region, Northrop Grumman announced.

"Space Norway's two-satellite Arctic Satellite Broadband Mission (ASBM) constellation, built by Northrop Grumman successfully launched onboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from Vandenberg Space Force Base, California, Northrop Grumman said in the press release on Monday.

In a new partnership between Space Norway and the US Space Force, the ASBM mission was

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the first time that any operational US military payload was carried on an international commercial space mission, the release said.

"Northrop Grumman contributed critical components, including two US Space Force Enhanced Polar System – Recapitalization (EPS-R) secure communication payloads, the Control and Planning Segment (CAPS) ground system, X-band and Ka-band payloads, two GEOStar-3 satellite buses, ground system for the GEOStar-3 satellites, systems integration and launch site integration operations," the release said.

The successful launch was Northrop Grumman's 48th mission using GEOStar space vehicles, the release added.

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Biden Plans Massive Expansion of US Nuclear Arsenal to Fight Multiple Wars - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 13 (Sputnik) - Starting in 2026, the Biden administration is planning to dramatically expand the US arsenal of strategic nuclear weapons after many decades of reducing them, the Economist said in a report.

The massive new nuclear weapons rearmament program is scheduled to start in February 2026 when the New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) with Russia runs out, the report said on Monday.

The decision to expand the arsenal was made following the conclusion by US nuclear policymakers that the US armed forces may be called upon to confront challenges from several nuclear-armed powers ranging from Russia and/or China to Iran and North Korea at the same time, the report said.

Moreover, the report noted that under a series of previous arms control treaties with Russia and other nations, the world's nuclear stockpile declined from 70,000 warheads in 1986 to around 12,000 today. However, China is now rapidly expanding its nuclear arsenal from a few hundred warheads in 2020 to an estimated 1,000 by 2030 and 1,500 by 2035, the report said.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, August 13 (Sputnik) –

SITUATION IN RUSSIA'S KURSK REGION

* A five-man assault group of the 80th separate airborne assault brigade of the Ukrainian armed forces has been captured on the territory of Russia's Kursk Region, Russian law enforcement forces told Sputnik on Monday.

* Anti-tank ditches 40 kilometers long (24.5 miles) have already been dug in the Kursk Region, acting governor Alexei Smirnov said.

* Russian President Vladimir Putin said there could be no peace talks with those who indiscriminately target civilians and civilian infrastructure, commenting on negotiations prospects

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with Kiev.

* Kiev's action in Russia's Kursk Region aims to stop the offensive of Russian troops along the front line, Putin said.

* Twelve civilians have been killed in Russia's Kursk Region and 121 others have been injured, including 10 children, after the Ukrainian attack, Smirnov said.

* The fight against Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance groups is one of the main tasks of work in the Kursk Region, Putin said.

MIDDLE EAST

* The United States expects Gaza deal negotiations to resume on Thursday even though Hamas announced it would not participate in the meeting, White House National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby said.

* US President Joe Biden held a call with counterparts from the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Italy to discuss tensions in the Middle East, Kirby said.

* The United States has to be ready for a significant set of attacks in the Middle East amid growing expectations in Israel of an Iran response to the killing of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, Kirby said.

* Haniyeh was killed with the assistance of the United States, using the airspace of one of the regional countries, Al-Alam broadcaster reported on Monday, citing a source.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* The Russian Armed Forces have built up their offensive in the Donetsk direction, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Monday.

* Ukraine has lost up to 260 soldiers and 31 armored vehicles, including three tanks, in the Kursk direction in the past day, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

* The Ukrainian prisoner of war stated in a video published by the FSB on Monday that after the attack on the Kursk region, the Ukrainian military set the task to reach Kursk and Belgorod.

* Ukraine has lost up to 570 personnel in the area of operations of Russia's Yug (South) group of forces in the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

UKRAINE'S ATTACK ON ZNPP

* The Ukrainian armed forces strike on the cooling tower of the Zaporozhye (also known as Zaporizhzhia) nuclear power plant (ZNPP) means that Kiev has reached the level of targeted aggression against nuclear power facilities, Russian state nuclear corporation Rosatom head Alexey Likhachev said on Monday.

* The international community must take urgent measures against Ukraine amid the recent attack on the ZNPP, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

GLOBAL ENERGY MARKETS

* Gas futures prices in Europe exceeded $480 per 1,000 cubic meters for the first time since December on Monday, which is an almost 6% increase day-on-day, according to data from the London-based ICE exchange.

* OPEC has slightly downgraded its forecast for the US's oil and condensate production in 2024 to 13.2 million barrels per day, according to the organization's fresh report.

* OPEC has kept its forecast for the oil production growth in 2024 outside the organization at 1.23 million barrels per day and expects an increase to 53 million barrels per day, the organization said.

RUSSIA-BELARUS COOPERATION

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* Belarusian Defense Minister Viktor Khrenin and Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov discussed the current military and political situation, the Belarusian Defense Ministry said on Monday.
* Belarusian servicepeople of the air force and air defense forces are traveling to Russia to participate in a joint operational and tactical exercise with live fire, the Belarusian Defense Ministry said.

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US Senators Says Will Introduce Bill to Codify Bilateral Security Agreement With Ukraine

WASHINGTON, August 12 (Sputnik) - US Senators Lindsey Graham and Richard Blumenthal said on Monday that they will introduce legislation next month to codify a bilateral security agreement between the United States and Ukraine.
"We will introduce the Stand With Ukraine Act, led by Senator Blumenthal, when the Senate reconvenes in September. This bipartisan piece of legislation will codify the bilateral security agreement reached by the Biden Administration and Zelensky's government this past July [sic]," the senators said in a statement.
In June, US President Joe Biden and Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed a 10-year bilateral security agreement to bolster Ukrainian defense and deterrence capabilities, accelerate Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration and consult in the event of a future Russian operation in Ukraine.
Graham and Blumenthal issued the statement following a visit to Kiev. Bipartisan support for Ukraine is critical to US interests, the statement said.
Moreover, the senators believe that Ukraine's incursion into the Kursk region is "bold and brilliant," the statement said.
The statement also urged NATO to issue a membership invitation to Ukraine this year and urged the Biden administration to lift restrictions on US weapons provided to Ukraine.

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EU Warns Elon Musk Ahead of His Interview With Donald Trump – Letter

WASHINGTON, August 12 (Sputnik)—The European Commission has issued a warning to US billionaire Elon Musk ahead of his interview with former President Donald Trump, urging him to follow EU laws and, in this way, avoid possible punitive measures, according to a letter published by Internal Market Commissioner Thierry Breton on Monday.
"My services and I will be extremely vigilant to any evidence that points to breaches of the DSA [the Digital Services Act] and will not hesitate to make full use of our toolbox, including by adopting interim measures, should it be warranted to protect EU citizens from serious harm," Breton said.
More specifically, Breton asked Musk to ensure that broadcasting his interview with Trump

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would not "generate detrimental effects on civic discourse and public security" like those that recently took place in the United Kingdom, where thousands of angry Britons took to the streets to protest against the lawlessness of migrants.

In his letter, Breton clarified that he turned to Musk as the owner of one of the largest social networks with over 300 million users worldwide, which is capable of swinging the pendulum of public unrest through the amplification of certain content.

Musk responded to the letter with an obscene image from the famous American film Tropic Thunder, which underscored that he would not give in to threats from the EU.

US senator Mike Lee did not like the warning and wrote "Go to hell" under Breton's post with the letter on X.

Trump and Musk are scheduled to hold an interview X on Monday at 8:00 p.m. ET.

On Sunday, Trump's campaign team said it would be "the interview of the century."

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FBI Says Investigating Hack of Trump Campaign Allegedly Carried out By Iran

WASHINGTON, August 12 (Sputnik) - The FBI is investigating the hacking of the Trump campaign that was allegedly carried out by the Iranian government, an FBI spokesperson said in a statement to Sputnik on Monday.

"We can confirm the FBI is investigating this matter," the spokesperson said.

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fbi investigating hack of trump campaign allegedly carried out by iran - spokesperson to sputnik

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Gold Nears New Record High As Wall Street Vexes Over US Inflation Update

NEW YORK, August 12 (Sputnik) - Gold has neared new record highs as some investors turned away from risky assets and towards safe havens before an update later this week on the US inflation situation in July.

Gold’s run above $2,500 an ounce on Monday came as stocks on Wall Street turned negative again after last week’s rollercoaster ride and ahead of Wednesday’s release of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) update for last month.

The CPI grew 3% per annum in June versus 3.3% in May, its previous update showed. A consensus of forecasts by economists on Wall Street projects no change for July. But risk-takers are hoping for a further retreat in the inflation gauge towards the Federal Reserve’s 2% per year target.

If the CPI does drop further, stocks on Wall Street are likely to see a new wave of rallies as the

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Fed might be encouraged to cut interest rates in September for the first time since 2020. If the inflation barometer rises instead, gold prices could see a new peak headed towards $2,550 an ounce, those following the precious metal say.

"Overall, inflation data pose a two-way risk: a high reading could prompt fears of stagflation, while a low print could give more breath to the hard landing narrative" for the economy, analysts at Morgan Stanley said in a note that highlighted the predicament for risk-takers.

Benchmark US gold futures for delivery in December were last at $2,511.70 an ounce, up $38.30, or 1.6%. Monday's session high for gold futures was $2,512.30 — less than $10 beneath the previous record high of $2,522.20.

The spot price of gold, which reflects real-time trades in bullion, hovered at just over $2,470 an ounce on Monday, up almost $40, or 1.5%. Spot gold previously reached an all-time high of $2,477.

Some analysts noted that the latest run-up in gold prices came amid a rally in crude oil spurred by higher risk appetite and the drop in inflation-sensitive US Treasury yields.

"The precious metals are being supported in part by bullish daily outside market elements that include higher crude oil prices and a slight down-tick in US bond yields," Jim Wyckoff wrote in a blog posted on the website of bullion trader Kitco.

Gold is the third biggest winner among commodities this year, rallying about 20% on average in both futures and spot trading, versus orange juice and lean hogs, which are up more than 30% each, and sector leader coffee, which has jumped more than 40%.

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Majority of US Voters Believe Non-Citizens Illegally Registering to Vote - Poll

WASHINGTON, August 12 (Sputnik) - A majority of likely voters in the United States believe that non-citizens are illegally registering to vote in the state where they live, a new Rasmussen Reports poll revealed on Monday.

Most respondents, 55%, believe non-citizens are likely registering to vote in their state, including 32% who believe it is very likely, the poll report said.

Thirty-seven percent (37%) of respondents do not believe that non-citizens are registering to vote in their state, including 14% who do not believe it is likely at all, the poll report added.

It is illegal for non-citizens to vote in federal elections and no state currently allows non-citizens to vote in statewide races. However, some municipalities and the District of Columbia allow non-citizens to vote in certain local elections.

In July, the US House of Representatives passed legislation to require proof of citizenship to register to vote in federal elections. The Senate has yet to pass the legislation ahead of US elections in November.

The poll surveyed 1,069 likely US voters from August 4-6. The poll has a margin of error of plus-or-minus three percentage points with a 95% confidence level.

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Magnitude 4.4 Earthquake Strikes Near California's Highland Park - US Geological Survey

SAN FRANCISCO, August 12 (Sputnik) - The US Geological Survey (USGS) said on Monday that a magnitude 4.4 earthquake occurred 2.4 miles (4 kilometers) south-southeast of Highland Park, California.

"M 4.4 - 4 km SSE of Highland Park, CA," the USGS said in a statement.

In a separate statement, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPDHQ) warned residents about a significant earthquake that had just been felt across the metro area.

The LAPDHQ added that residents should be prepared for aftershocks and to use emergency services responsibly.

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White House Says US Had No Involvement in Ex-Bangladesh Prime Minister's Ouster

WASHINGTON, August 12 (Sputnik) - The United States had no role in the ouster of Bangladesh's former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and her claims that the US was behind it are false, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Monday.

"We have had no involvement at all, any reports or rumors that the United States government was involved in these events is simply false," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing. "That is not true. This is a choice for and by the Bangladeshi people."

Hasina recently accused the United States of orchestrating her ouster after she refused to give up the sovereignty of the strategic island of St. Martin.

She stated in a letter obtained by The Economic Times that she could have remained in power if she had surrendered the sovereignty of Saint Martin Island and allowed the United States to hold sway over the Bay of Bengal.

Hasina said last summer that Bangladesh would not lease the island, without specifying the details or the interested party.

Deadly protests recently erupted across Bangladesh after the announcement of a multi-day "non-cooperation action" with the authorities by the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement. Clashes between students, police, and government supporters escalated into riots that reportedly left more than 440 people dead. Hasina resigned amid the unrest.

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White House Says US Has Not Offered Amnesty to Maduro, Others Since Venezuela's Election

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WASHINGTON, August 12 (Sputnik) - White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Monday that the United States has not offered amnesty recently to Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro or others in his circle if he gives up the presidency.

"Since the July 28 elections, we have not made any specific offers of amnesty to Maduro or others," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing.

On Sunday, The Wall Street Journal reported that the United States offered Maduro an "amnesty" on charges brought against him by the Department of Justice in 2020 in exchange for leaving the presidential office.

The United States negotiated an amnesty for Maduro and his top aides and expressed readiness to provide guarantees that it would not seek their extradition or prosecution, according to the report. The talks have so far been held between the Venezuelan National Assembly chief, Jorge Rodriguez, and former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for the Western Hemisphere at the US Department of Defense, Daniel Erickson, in a remote format.

Venezuelans voted in a presidential election on July 28, which was won by incumbent President Maduro with over 51% of the vote. The opposition claimed a landslide victory, citing tally sheets they obtained from polling centers nationwide. This led to mass opposition protests. Over 2,000 people were detained on charges of causing damage to state infrastructure, incitement of hatred, and terrorism.

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UPDATE - Oil Prices Back Above $80 Per Barrel, Rebuilding 2024 Rally

(Updates with more details in paras 6, 7; modifies headline and lede)

NEW YORK, August 12 (Sputnik) - Crude prices rose again Monday, picking up from where they left off last week and reaching above the $80 per barrel mark critical to market bulls, as tensions in oil-rich Middle East and fewer chances of a US recession put the 2024 oil rally back on track.

Prior to last week, crude prices fell for four straight weeks amid a spike in unemployment and rise in gasoline and distillate stockpiles in top oil consumer the United States, as well as weak economic data in number two economy China.

Analysts also cited a technical rebound in oil since late last week after hedge funds and other large investors drove down the US benchmark for crude, the West Texas Intermediate (WTI), to six-month lows and UK-origin Brent crude to a 2024 bottom.

“What better time to squeeze shorts after a large selloff and [funds] looking the most bearish in terms of positioning in a decade?” Scott Shelton, crude futures broker at ICAP in Durham, North Carolina, wrote in his daily outlook.

WTI setted up $3.22, or 4.2%, at $80.06 per barrel in New York trading, recapturing the $80 perch for the first time since July 18. Monday’s surge in WTI came on top of last week’s rise of almost 5%. In four prior weeks, the US crude benchmark had lost a cumulative 12%.

Year-to-date, WTI is up around 9%, after rallying as much as 18% earlier.

UK-origin Brent crude ended the New York session up $2.64, or 3.2%, at $82.30. The last time

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Brent traded above $80 was on August 1. Last week, the value of Brent rose 3.7% - after it had lost 12% in four previous weeks, just like WTI. A global benchmark for crude, Brent is up almost 5% for 2024, after an earlier rally of almost 20%.

August has been a volatile month for the oil trade. Global markets initially tanked on fears of a US recession and potential contagion effects around the world, sending WTI to a six-month low of $71.69 and Brent set a new 2024 bottom of $76.16. Oil prices began recovering late last week on signs of receding US inflation and increasing odds for the Federal Reserve to cut interest rates in September in what would be its first reduction since 2020.

Healthy weekly consumption numbers for crude reported by the US Energy Information Administration have also helped the recovery. US inventories for crude dropped by some 30 million barrels over the past six weeks in spite of builds in gasoline and distillates.

Crude prices also benefited from the likelihood of a greater war in the oil-rich Middle East as Israel's foes, including Iran, seek to avenge the killing of senior leaders from the militant units of Palestine's Hamas and Lebanon's Hezbollah.

"The market is still waiting for Iran's response," Warren Patterson, ING's head of commodities research, said on Monday. Separately, IG markets analyst Tony Sycamore noted there was a "great deal of anxiety about when Iran might look to avenge Israel's assassination of key Hamas and Hezbollah leaders", adding that a counterstrike "feels like a matter of when, not if."

The Hamas-Israel conflict has worsened after an airstrike last week on a Palestinian school compound that killed at least 90 people. Hamas has since said it might not attend ceasefire talks scheduled this weekend.

The stock market has further aided the recovery in crude prices. Wall Street's three key stock indexes - the S&P 500, the Nasdaq Composite and the Dow Jones Industrial Average - ended last week only slightly lower after an epic selloff at the start.

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US Court Releases Russian Citizen Kublitskii on Bond Amid Cybercrime Charges - Filing

WASHINGTON, August 12 (Sputnik) - A US court released Russian citizen Pavel Kublitskii on bond with conditions after arresting him on cybercrime charges, according to a court document filed Monday.

Kublitskii was released on a $100,000 bond after a pretrial detention and removal hearing on Friday, the filing said.

The court required Kublitskii to surrender all passports and travel documents, banned him from using a smartphone, and imposed location monitoring and home detention, with exceptions for medical treatment, legal matters and religious services, the filing said.

Kublitskii was arrested last week and charged with conspiracy to traffic in unauthorized devices and conspiracy to possess 15 or more unauthorized access devices, alongside Kazakh national Alexandr Khodyrev.

Both defendants arrived in the United States in 2022 and applied for asylum. The two men settled in Florida, where they lived a luxurious lifestyle without official employment, according to

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court documents.

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US Ramps Up Oil Reserve Refill With New 6Mln Barrel Crude Purchase

WASHINGTON, August 12 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is not letting up on its bid to refill the heavily-drawn US Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR), announcing on Monday plans to buy a further six million barrels as market prices for crude oil remain below the $80-per-barrel it has targeted for purchases.

The Department of Energy (DoE), acting under the administration's authorization, has already bought some 43 million barrels over the past two years to replenish the SPR, including a 3.5-million-barrel procurement announced last week.

Both that procurement and the upcoming one will be sent to the SPR's Bryan Mound site in Freeport, Texas, which had undergone significant repairs to take delivery of oil that the department extensively channeled in the past to the SPR's Bayou Choctaw site in Iberville Parish, Louisiana.

The DoE "has a requirement to conduct a purchase of approximately six million barrels of United States-produced sour crude oil for January, February and March 2025 delivery to Bryan Mound at a price no higher than $79.99 per barrel," the department said in a statement posted on the SPR's website.

In futures trading of oil on Monday, benchmark US West Texas Intermediate crude for delivery in September hovered at slightly above $79.50 per barrel.

The SPR had seen an outflow of more than 200 million barrels of oil under the Biden-Harris administration, which came to office in January 2021. The administration had relied heavily on the reserve to offset squeezes in oil supply that led to high fuel prices.

President Joe Biden's use of the SPR had been criticized by his rivals, who accused him of turning the reserve into a political tool to subdue fuel prices in order to boost his standing with American voters. Their contention is that the reserve was created for emergency needs to make oil available in times of critically-short supply.

Biden, who has prioritized clean energy resources versus fossil fuels like oil, said he used the SPR precisely in times of emergency - when pump prices of gasoline hit record highs above $5 per gallon, sending inflation soaring for Americans. To the president's credit, oil released from the SPR has succeeded in keeping gasoline at the pump at below $3.50 per gallon for most of the past two years.

Biden's vice-president Kamala Harris has also indicated she might be friendlier to the fossil fuel industry to further reduce costs for Americans if elected as president in the November race for the White House.

The DoE said it has purchased approximately 43 million barrels for the SPR at an average of $77 per barrel - versus the $95 average it received for a barrel sold in 2022 - representing what it called a "good deal for taxpayers."

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US, Allies Call on Iran to Abandon Plans of Retaliation Strike on Israel - Joint Statement

WASHINGTON, August 12 (Sputnik) – The leaders of the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Italy issued a joint statement on Monday calling on Iran to abandon its plans of a retaliation strike against Israel.

"We, the leaders of the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Italy discussed the situation in the Middle East," the statement said. "We called on Iran to stand down its ongoing threats of a military attack against Israel and discussed the serious consequences for regional security should such an attack take place."

The leaders also called on Israel and Hamas to "live up to their responsibilities" in reaching a ceasefire agreement in Gaza, adding that "there is no further time to lose," the statement said.

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US House Trump Shooting Panel Chair Says Asked Justice, Homeland Security Chiefs for Info

WASHINGTON, August 12 (Sputnik) - The US House panel tasked with investigating an assassination attempt against former President Donald Trump is requesting information from the heads of the US Justice and Homeland Security Departments, panel chairman Mike Kelly said on Monday.

“Today, the task force sent a pair of letters to the Justice and Homeland Security departments requesting all information and records related to the Trump assassination attempt,” Kelly said via social media platform X.

The first letter is addressed to US Attorney General Merrick Garland and FBI Director Christopher Wray.

In addition to requesting records and information, the letter also requests a staff briefing no later than August 16.

The second letter is addressed to Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and acting US Secret Service Director Ronald Rowe.

The letter likewise requests a staff briefing no later than August 16.

The US House of Representatives established the task force following the July 13 assassination attempt against Trump at a campaign rally in Pennsylvania.

The US Secret Service has come under scrutiny in the wake of the shooting, which wounded Trump’s ear, killed one audience member and injured two others. The criticism prompted the resignation of the director of the Secret Service, Kimberly Cheatle, who characterized the incident as the agency’s most significant operational failure in decades.

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ANALYSIS - Reagan Wasn't Serious About Bombing Russia 40 Years Ago, But It's No Joke Today

WASHINGTON, August 12 (Sputnik) - US President Ronald Reagan was making a private off-the-record joke when he talked about bombing the Soviet Union 40 years ago, but his comment then could well be applied to the current grave global situation when the West has authorized Ukraine to use their weapons to strike Russian territory, international analysts told Sputnik.

August 11 marked the 40th anniversary of Reagan's notorious remark made during a mic check, "My fellow Americans, I'm pleased to tell you today that I've signed legislation that will outlaw Russia forever. We begin bombing in five minutes." His comments were not broadcast but rapidly became widely known.

TYPICAL HUMOR

Global peace activist Dr. Helen Caldicott, founder and head of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Physicians for Social Responsibility, explained that the remark was never meant as a public threat or even a private statement of wishes or threats but had to be understood in the context of the president's personality.

"The remark that 'We begin bombing soon' was almost certainly a Reagan type joke not intended to be heard by all, it was his type of humor," she said. "Nevertheless 'we begin bombing soon' could well be applied to the present global situation when [UK Prime Minister] Sir Keir Starmer announced that English weapons could be used against and within Russian territory."

Caldicott described Starmer's comments as "one of the scariest statements" that she has read recently and one that has not been picked up by the world’s media.

"That being so, Russia could well respond militarily, which indeed could lead to WW3," she warned.

OPPOSED WARS

Ret. US Marine Corps Maj. Don Vandergriff, a political commentator and military historian, explained that Reagan, like Donald Trump, worked hard to avoid getting the United States embroiled in any new wars and was certainly opposed to escalating or reviving old ones.

"Reagan and more so Trump understood economic warfare. They both used it through strength," he said.

Trump understood there were other and often more effective ways than the direct but incompetent use of military force to achieve strategic goals and maintain security, Vandergriff stated.

Wise and determined policies were successful in preventing wars, Vandergriff emphasized.

"The worst thing to do - and believe me I hate war having been in it and suffered from it - is appeasement, but there is true peace through strength," he said.

By contrast, current US President Joe Biden and the current Democratic presidential candidate Vice President Kamala Harris have both failed to deter or end the worst conflict in Europe since World War II and the bloodiest Israeli-Palestinian war ever, which is still raging in Gaza, Vandergriff pointed out.

A continuation of Biden's policies under Harris would guarantee a global conflagration, Vandergriff warned.

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"Today, the entire world is on the verge of WWIII because of the Harris-Biden weakness," he said.

However, the massive liberal internationalist and pro-Democrat bias of the US mainstream news media has kept the American public ignorant of the looming danger, Vandergriff stated.

REAGAN TRANSFORMED

American University in Moscow President Edward Lozansky also never doubted that Reagan at no point really wanted to attack the Soviet Union.

"I guess he was joking without realizing it was an open mic," he said.

Also, Reagan's own views dramatically transformed during his eight years in office, Lozansky recalled. After starting out with firebrand rhetoric about confronting Soviet communism, the president in his second term became the most radical and successful practitioner of partial US nuclear disarmament and detente in the entire history of the Cold War, he noted.

"Somehow, I followed in Reagan's steps, starting with his 'evil empire,' 'bring down the Berlin Wall' 'we win, they lose,' 'Star Wars,' and the like," he said.

Yet after this super-hawk beginning, Reagan transformed, Lozansky acknowledged.

"Ronny [Reagan] slowly changed closer to the end of his term into a pragmatist, realizing that there will be no winners in a nuclear war. I think he was influenced by Margaret Thatcher's 'We can do business with Gorbachev.'"

Reagan's dramatic change of heart was rapidly recognized in Moscow where Soviet leaders and policymakers of the time reacted forcefully and positively to it, Lozansky remembered.

"This is when I got an unexpected call in October 1988 from Gorbachev's science advisor, Yuri Osipyan, to come to Moscow to talk about using Track II diplomacy to start a new era in US-Soviet relations," he said.

There were some hopes during President George H. W. Bush's one term presidency that this indeed could happen when he proclaimed the vision of the "new security architecture from Vancouver to Vladivostok," Lozansky added.

However, "It was a short window of opportunity for a better world that was quickly shut down by [succeeding US president] Bill Clinton," he said.

The Soviet Union criticized the joke, as did Reagan's opponent in the 1984 presidential election, former Vice President Walter Mondale. Mondale was defeated by Reagan in a landslide.

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US Talks With Ukraine on Military Operations Continue, No New Updates at Present - Kirby

WASHINGTON, August 12 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby said on Monday that there are no new updates as discussions with Ukraine on that country's military operations continue.

"No updates for you on Ukraine. We're continuing to speak to our Ukrainian counterparts about these operations," Kirby said.

Last week, Ukrainian forces crossed the border into Russia and launched an offensive in the

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Kursk region, capturing several villages.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Ukraine had carried out another large-scale provocation, firing indiscriminately at civilians.

Russian Investigative Committee spokeswoman Svetlana Petrenko said that investigatory cases into the terrorist attacks and murders had been initiated after Ukraine's assault.

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Oil's 2024 Rally Rebuilds as Crude Prices Witness Rise Upon Rise After Free-Fall

NEW YORK, August 12 (Sputnik) - Crude prices increased again on Monday, picking up from where they left off Friday, as tensions in the oil-rich Middle East and growing comfort among investors that the United States might avert a recession put the 2024 oil rally back on track.

Prior to last week, crude prices fell for four straight weeks amid a spike in unemployment and rise in gasoline and distillate stockpiles in top oil consumer the United States, as well as weak economic data in China.

Analysts also cited a technical rebound in oil since late last week after hedge funds and other large investors drove down the US benchmark for crude, the West Texas Intermediate (WTI), to six-month lows and UK-origin Brent crude to a 2024 bottom.

"What better time to squeeze shorts after a large selloff and [funds] looking the most bearish in terms of positioning in a decade?" Scott Shelton, crude futures broker at ICAP in Durham, North Carolina, wrote in his daily outlook.

With two hours to Monday's settlement, WTI was up $2.01, or 2.6%, to $78.85 per barrel in New York trading, adding to last week's 5% gain. In four prior weeks, WTI lost a cumulative 12%. Year-to-date, the US crude benchmark is up around 9%, after rallying as much as 18% earlier in the year.

UK-origin Brent crude rose $1.67, or 2.1% to $81.33, back above the key $80 per barrel mark that's vital for oil bulls. Last week itself, Brent rose 3.7% - after losing 12% in four previous weeks like WTI. A global benchmark for crude, Brent is up almost 5% for 2024, after an earlier rally of almost 20%.

August has been a spectacular month for the oil market as global markets tanked as the month opened on fears of a US recession and potential contagion effects around the world.

WTI hit a six-month low of $71.69 and Brent set a new 2024 bottom of $76.16 before recovering on receding US inflation pressure and increasing odds for the Federal Reserve to cut interest rates in September for the first time since 2020.

Weekly healthy weekly consumption numbers for crude reported by the US Energy Information Administration have also boosted crude prices. The US stockpile of crude has dropped by some 30 million barrels over the past six weeks in spite of builds in gasoline and distillates.

Crude prices also rose as traders speculated on the likelihood of a greater war in the oil-rich Middle East as Israel's foes, including Iran, seek to avenge the killing of senior leaders from Palestine's Hamas and Lebanon's Hezbollah.

Iran and Hezbollah have vowed to retaliate for the assassinations of Hamas leader Ismail

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Haniyeh and Hezbollah military commander Fuad Shukr.

"The market is still waiting for Iran's response," Warren Patterson, ING's head of commodities research, said. IG markets analyst Tony Sycamore noted the "great deal of anxiety about when Iran might look to avenge Israel's assassination of key Hamas and Hezbollah leaders," adding that the retaliation "feels like a matter of when, not if."

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict worsened after an Israeli airstrike on a Palestinian school compound killed at least 90 people, according to the Gaza authorities. Israel said the death toll was magnified to gain global sympathy for Hamas, which now says it may not attend ceasefire talks scheduled for later this week.

The stock market has further aided the recovery in crude prices. Wall Street's three key stock indexes - the S&P 500, the Nasdaq Composite and the Dow Jones Industrial Average - ended last week only slightly lower after an epic selloff at the start.

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US Expects Gaza Deal Talks to Resume on Thursday Despite Hamas Pulling Out - White House

WASHINGTON, August 12 (Sputnik) - The United States expects Gaza deal negotiations to resume on Thursday even though Hamas announced it would not participate in the meeting, White House National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby said.

"Meeting still scheduled for Thursday the 15th," Kirby said on Monday. "We expect that those talks are going to move forward, and they need to move forward, all negotiators to return to the table and bring this deal to a close."

Kirby also said Hamas must show up to the meeting regardless of its public statements that it will not send any representatives to participate.

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US, Ukraine Privately Discuss Use of ATACMS for Strikes in Russia - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 12 (Sputnik) - The United States is conducting private talks with Ukraine about green-lighting the use of the long-range Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS) for strikes inside Russia, US State Department deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Monday.

"I'm not going to get into private diplomatic conversations with our Ukrainian partners beyond just saying that our policy hasn't changed," Patel said during a press briefing.

The Washington Post reported last week that Ukrainians have asked Washington to allow them to strike inside Russia using US-supplied ATACMS.

In July, White House National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby said that the United States must think very carefully about potential consequences before allowing Ukraine to use US-supplied missiles to strike military targets deeper inside Russian territory.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has warned NATO nations that they should realize "what they

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are playing with" when they allow Ukraine to use Western weapons to strike deep into Russian territory. Putin added that Russia will use all means at its disposal if its sovereignty and territorial integrity are threatened.

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Biden Holds Call With European Allies to Discuss Tensions in Mideast - White House

WASHINGTON, August 12 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden held a call with counterparts from the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Italy to discuss tensions in the Middle East, White House National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby said on Monday.
"President Biden spent a little bit of time this morning speaking to his counterparts from the UK, from France, from Germany and Italy," Kirby told reporters. "That call took place mid-morning, largely to discuss these tensions in the Middle East, largely for all the leaders to repeat what they have said before in terms of reaffirming Israel's defense, and the need to get a ceasefire in place."

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US Has to be Prepared for Significant Set of Attacks in Middle East - White House

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - The United States has to be ready for a significant set of attacks in the Middle East amid growing expectations in Israel of an Iran response to the killing of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Monday.
"We have to be prepared for what could be a significant set of attacks, which is why, again, we have increased our force posture, and capabilities in the region," Kirby told reporters.
The US continues to watch the situation very closely, Kirby added.

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Reformed UN Security Council Must Stay Effective With Limited Membership- Russian Mission

UNITED NATIONS, August 12 (Sputnik) - Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Monday that to preserve the UN Security Council's authority, its membership must remain limited.
“At the same time, I think we all agree that a reformed Security Council must remain effective and authoritative,” Polyanskiy said in the UN Council meeting on Africa’s inclusion.”For this, its membership should not be too broad.”
He further explained that a UN Security Council with 25 to 30 members would struggle to function effectively.

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Earlier today, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that the UN Security Council needs a "permanent voice" for Africa among its ranks. Guterres called it unacceptable that the body in charge of the world's security "lacks a permanent voice for a continent of well over a billion people," which makes up 28% of the membership of the United Nations.

Africa is under-represented in global governance structures, but over-represented in the challenges these structures are designed to address, Guterres said.

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White House Says Increasingly Likely Iran, Proxies Will Attack Israel in Coming Days

WASHINGTON, August 12 (Sputnik) - It looks increasingly likely that Iran and its so-called proxies will carry out a retaliatory attack against Israel in the coming days, White House National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby said on Monday.

"It's increasingly likely that there will be an attack by Iran and or its proxies, and perhaps in the coming days," Kirby told reporters.

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Goodyear Investing $418Mln in Ontario Tire Plant - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 12 (Sputnik) - Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company is investing CA$575 million (approximately US$418 million) to improve its tire plant in Ontario, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's office said on Monday.

"Today, the Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, and the Premier of Ontario, Doug Ford, joined representatives from the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company to announce the company's more than $575 million project to modernize and expand its plant in Napanee, Ontario. This investment will help Goodyear create an energy-efficient, end-to-end manufacturing process and increase its production capacity, including of electric vehicle and all-terrain tires," the office said in a statement.

The project will create 200 manufacturing jobs by 2027 and more than 1,000 jobs overall in Napanee, the statement said.

Goodyear Canada will receive up to $44.3 million CAD in federal funding from the Strategic Innovation Fund, the statement said.

Moreover, the Government of Ontario will contribute $20 million CAD to support key components of the project, including skills training programs and implementing innovative technologies, the statement said.

The project will help the plant achieve net-zero emissions by 2040, the statement added.

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white house's kirby says we have to be prepared for what could be a significant attack in middle east

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Biden Holds Call With Counterparts from UK, France, Germany, Italy to Discuss Tensions in Middle East - White House

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Kart LLC. Additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

UN Chief Condemns Continued Loss of Life in Gaza After Israel's Latest Strike on School

WASHINGTON, August 12 (Sputnik) - The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in a statement on Monday that he condemns the continued loss of life in Gaza following the most recent attack by Israel on a school in Gaza City.

"The Secretary-General condemns the continued loss of life in Gaza, including women and children, as we witness yet another devastating strike by Israel on the Al-Taba'een school in Gaza City, sheltering hundreds of displaced Palestinians families, with scores of fatalities, amidst continued horror, displacement, and suffering in Gaza," Guterres in a statement.

Guterres also reiterated an urgent appeal for an immediate ceasefire and the unconditional release of all hostages.

On August 10, the Palestinian authorities reported that an Israeli plane had fired three missiles at the Al-Taba'een School in Gaza, killing some 100 people who were mostly refugees engaged in morning prayers. Israel said that Hamas fighters had set up a military headquarters there. Algeria has requested a UN Security Council meeting in connection with the deadly attack.

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US Prepared to Respond Swiftly if Iran Transfers Ballistic Missiles to Russia - State Dept

WASHINGTON, August 12 (Sputnik) - The United States is prepared to respond swiftly if Iran transfers ballistic missiles to Russia, US State Department deputy principal spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Monday.

"We are deeply concerned by reports that Iran is planning to deliver hundreds of ballistic missiles to Russia," Patel said during the press briefing. "We are prepared to deliver a swift and severe response if Iran were to move forward with the transfer of ballistic missiles."

Patel also said that the United States continues to communicate with its European allies and partners regarding implementing potential measures.

Tehran and Moscow have repeatedly denied Western claims about Iran's alleged arms supplies

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to Russia.

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Trump Makes Post to Social Media Platform X Ahead of Interview With Elon Musk

WASHINGTON, August 12 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump on monday made his first post to the social media platform X since August 2023, ahead of an interview with billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk.

Trump posted a two-and-a-half minute campaign advertisement to his official account on X, which has largely been inactive since January 2021.

In January 2021, X (then Twitter) suspended Trump's account in the wake of the January 6 US Capitol riot. However, Musk lifted the ban after taking control of the platform.

Nevertheless, Trump remained inactive on the platform, only posting a picture of his mugshot from his Georgia election interference case in August 2023.

Trump and Musk are scheduled to hold an interview via X on Monday at 8:00 p.m. ET.

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UN General Assembly Engaged in Enhancing Africa's Role in UN Security Council - President

UNITED NATIONS, August 12 (Sputnik) - UN General Assembly (UNGA) President Dennis Francis said on Monday that the UNGA is actively engaged in addressing historical injustice and enhancing Africa's representation within the UN Security Council.

"The General Assembly is actively engaged in this important issue," Francis said during a meeting of the UN Security Council.

Francis said it is wrong that Africa continues to be underrepresented on the UN Security Council as it contradicts the principles of equity, inclusion and sovereign equality.

The situation necessitates urgent reform to align the institution with the modern world rather than that of 80 years ago, Francis added.

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US Partially Lifts Russian-Related Sanctions on Hong Kong Company – Treasury

WASHINGTON, August 12 (Sputnik) – The US Treasury partially lifted sanctions on VPower Finance Security (Hong Kong) Limited on Monday that were related to alleged violations of sanctions on Russia's metals and mining sector, according to a notice from the Office of Foreign Assets control.

"Except as provided in paragraph (c) of this general license, all transactions prohibited by Executive Order (E.O.) 14024 that are ordinarily incident and necessary to the transportation,

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delivery, or storage of currency; cash processing services; or maintenance of automated teller machines (ATMs) within Hong Kong involving VPower Finance Security (Hong Kong) Limited are authorized through 12:01 a.m. eastern standard time, November 12, 2024," the notice stated.

The exceptions include the transportation, delivery, or storage of gold; transactions prohibited by Directive 2 under E.O. 14024 (Prohibitions Related to Correspondent or Payable-Through Accounts and Processing of Transactions Involving Certain Foreign Financial Institutions); transactions prohibited by Directive 4 under E.O. 14024 (Prohibitions Related to Transactions Involving the Central Bank of the Russian Federation, the National Wealth Fund of the Russian Federation, and the Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation); or transactions otherwise prohibited by the Russian Harmful Foreign Activities Sanctions Regulations, 31 CFR part 587.

In June, the Treasury sanctioned VPower Finance Security (Hong Kong) Limited, which was alleged to be involved in transporting Russian-origin gold for sale.

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Guterres Pushes for 'Permanent Voice' for Africa in UNSC

UNITED NATIONS, August 12 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Monday that the UN Security Council needs a "permanent voice" for Africa among its ranks.

"African participation must be brought to bear across the council's deliberations and actions," Guterres said during a UN Security Council meeting on Africa's representation. "This is not just a question of ethics and justice. It is also a strategic imperative that can increase global acceptance of the Council's decisions — benefitting Africa and the world."

Guterres called it unacceptable that the body in charge of the world's security "lacks a permanent voice for a continent of well over a billion people," which makes up 28% of the membership of the United Nations.

Africa is under-represented in global governance structures, but over-represented in the challenges these structures are designed to address, Guterres said.

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US Treasury Says Authorizing Transactions Tied to PDVSA 8.5% Bond Starting November 12

WASHINGTON, August 12 (Sputnik) - The US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control said in a general license released Monday that it is authorizing transactions related to Petroleos de Venezuela, SA (PDVSA) 8.5% bonds on or after November 12, 2024.

The license authorizes transactions related to, the provision of financing for, and other dealings in the PDVSA 8.5% bond that would be prohibited by a May 2018 executive order.

The license does not authorize any transactions or activities otherwise prohibited by Venezuela Sanctions Regulations.

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The license is effective August 12 and replaces an April 2024 license.

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Pro-Ukraine Members of Congress Seek to Avoid Lapse in Aid to Kiev in January - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) – Pro-Ukrainian Republicans in the US Congress have begun thinking about ways to avert a potential lapse in funding for Kiev when the new Congress assembles in January after the elections, Punchbowl reported on Monday.

The congressmen expect that the most recent US aid package of more than $60 billion will start to dry up by that time, so they are considering different ideas on how to keep funds flowing regardless of who wins the presidential election, the report said

"What we don't want to have is a lapse," Republican Senator Thom Tillis from North Carolina said, as quoted by the report. He expressed confidence that Republican nominee Donald Trump would win the election and would continue supporting Ukraine.

However, Tillis acknowledged that he and his colleagues still have some work to do in order to guarantee ongoing US support under a Republican administration, according to the report, which noted that Trump has been hostile to the idea of maintaining US aid for Ukraine and instead seeks to broker a peace deal to end the conflict.

Passing a new funding package for Ukraine before the end of the year would be almost impossible because House Republicans would oppose it, according to the report.

However, the goal of extending the current package could be met by sneaking new authorities into existing must-pass legislation, such as the National Defense Authorization Act, to give the White House additional flexibility to continue sending weapons to Ukraine, the report said.

On April 20, US Congress passed a $95 billion bill containing approximately $61 billion in Ukraine-related funding, after which the US Senate approved it on April 23. US President Joe Biden signed the bill into law on April 24. The US Department of Defense later unveiled a $1 billion military aid package for Kiev, including cluster munitions and air defense supplies.

Western countries have provided hundreds of billions of dollars worth of aid to Ukraine since the start of Russia's special military operation in February 2022. Aid shipments began in 2022 with artillery munitions and training and have escalated to include tanks, advanced air-defense systems, missiles and cluster munitions. The Kremlin has consistently warned against the West's continued arms deliveries to Ukraine, saying that they only prolong the conflict.

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US Issues License Authorizing Certain Transactions Involving VPower Finance Security Limited Through November 12 - Treasury

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US House Freedom Caucus Says Opposes Omnibus, Backs Stopgap With Election Integrity Bill

WASHINGTON, August 12 (Sputnik) - The US House Freedom Caucus said on Monday that it opposes the passage of an omnibus spending bill this autumn but would support a continuing resolution with the inclusion of an election integrity bill.

House Republicans should return to Washington to continue work on passing 12 appropriations bills that cut spending and advance policy priorities, the Freedom Caucus said in a statement.

"If unsuccessful, in the inevitability that Congress considers a Continuing Resolution, government funding should be extended into early 2025 to avoid a lame duck omnibus that preserves Democrat spending and policies well into the next administration," the statement said.

Moreover, the continuing resolution should include the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility (SAVE) Act, which requires proof of US citizenship to register to vote in federal elections, the statement added.

The legislation would prevent non-citizens from voting in an effort to preserve free and fair elections, after the Biden administration "imported" millions of illegal aliens into the United States, according to the statement.

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FBI Investigates Explosive Devices Found Across Hawaiian Island of Maui - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 12 (Sputnik) - The FBI is investigating explosive devices that have been found in random places across the Hawaiian island of Maui, ABC7 reported on Monday.

The report said the FBI and local police are warning people to avoid approaching such devices if the see them.

One such bomb has already damaged a vehicle, having exploded when the vehicle drove past it.

There are currently no known suspects in connection with these incidents.

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Trump to Demand $100Mln in Compensation From Justice Dept. Over Mar-a-Lago Raid - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 12 (Sputnik) – Donald Trump is set to sue the US Justice Department and demand a $100 million compensation for the 2022 raid at his Florida residence, Mar-a-Lago, Fox News reported on Monday, citing the former president's memo.

Trump's lawyers argue that the raid amid the classified documents investigation had a "clear intent to engage in political persecution," the report said.

According to the report, Trump's attorney, Daniel Epstein, has filed a notice to sue the Justice

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Department, which has 180 days to resolve the case or argue it in federal court in the Southern District of Florida.

The notice says that "tortious acts against the president are rooted in intrusion upon seclusion, malicious prosecution, and abuse of process resulting from the August 8, 2022 raid of his and his family's home at Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach Florida."

"The entire special counsel investigation was about interfering with his ability to get elected," the report quoted Epstein's notice as saying. "For these harms to President Trump, the respondents must pay punitive damages of $100 million."

In November 2022, Attorney General Merrick Garland appointed Jack Smith as Special Counsel in the case. Smith charged the former president with 37 counts related to his alleged mishandling of classified materials and later filed a superseding indictment adding three more counts.

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

Later in July, Smith filed an appeal to overturn the dismissal of the classified documents case against Trump.

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