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First Reported Case of Mpox Outside of Africa in Sweden, WHO Declares a Global Emergency

The patient in Stockholm reportedly sought health care after having spent time in Africa.
Mpox, a virus that is closely related to chickenpox or smallpox, has been reported in Sweden as of Thursday. It is the first confirmed case of the virus outside of Africa. The report comes a day after the World Health Organization (WHO) declared mpox (or monkeypox) a global public health emergency for the second time in two years.
The new strain of mpox is believed to be wreaking havoc in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) where more than 14,000 cases and more than 500 deaths have occurred. The disease, which has primarily affected children, has also been detected in nearby countries that had not reported cases of mpox previously.
"The emergence of a new clade of mpox, its rapid spread in eastern DRC, and the reporting of cases in several neighboring countries are very worrying," said WHODirector-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who had determined that the upsurge in cases was a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC).
"On top of outbreaks of other mpox clades in DRC and other countries in Africa, it's clear that a coordinated international response is needed to stop these outbreaks and save lives."
"The current upsurge of mpox in parts of Africa, along with the spread of a new sexually transmissible strain of the monkeypox virus, is an emergency, not only for Africa, but for the entire globe," added Committee Chair Professor Dimie Ogoina, who is an infectious disease specialist.
"Mpox, originating in Africa, was neglected there, and later caused a global outbreak in 2022. It is time to act decisively to prevent history from repeating itself," the committee chair added.
The viral infection spreads through close contact, although there are two distinct groups of the virus: clade I and clade II. Clade I, which is what the patient in Sweden is sick with, causes more severe illness and deaths and could kill up to 10% of those who get sick, while more than 99.9% of those with the clade II strain - which was responsible for the 2022 outbreak - survive.
Those who are immunocompromised, suffer from chronic diseases, have a history of eczema or other experiences with lesions on the skin are considered "high risk individuals" by healthcare professionals, as well as those who were exposed during the 2022-23 outbreak.
According to the WHO, the virus can spread through close contact with infected animals, contact with infected people, and contact with contaminated materials. The JYNNEOS vaccine, a two-dose vaccine approved by the US Food and Drug Administration, is being used to prevent smallpox and mpox.

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Japan Marks 79th Anniversary of A-Bomb, But Fast Tracks to Become Third Largest Military Spender

This month, Nagasaki marks the 79th anniversary of the devastating atomic bomb attack in World War II by the United States. Hiroshima marked the anniversary as well, with Mayor Kazumi Matsui encouraging the world to not be resigned to pessimism as continued global conflicts have given rise to fears of nuclear war.

On the morning of August 6th, 1945, the Japanese city of Hiroshima was destroyed by the first atomic bomb to be used as a weapon of war, according to the Imperial War Museums. Within the first four days of the blast, roughly 120,000 people died as a result of American bombing. While some were vaporized in an instant, others suffered from their wounds or radiation. Just three days later, a second atomic bomb was used to devastate the city of Nagasaki where an estimated 73,000 people were killed by an American bomb.

The West has often referred to the attack as the "Atomic bomb that was responsible for ending World War II". But some historians believe the deaths of hundreds of thousands civilians was unnecessary, and argue that the Japanese were already prepared to surrender. One of these historians is Dr. Peter Kuznick, who joined Sputnik's The Critical Hour to discuss the use of the atomic bomb in World War II.

"The Japanese were not only close to surrendering, they were desperate to surrender. In early February 1945, former Prime Minister Prince Konoe wrote to the emperor and said, I'm sorry to inform you, but defeat is inevitable. They knew that," Kuznick explains.

"Really, after the Battle of Saipan in July of 1944, the Japanese knew that they could not win militarily," he continued. "By May, they were issuing reports effectively saying that intervention by the Soviets into the war would mean the absolute defeat of Japan. American intelligence knew that. Starting in April, the Joint Intelligence Committee, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, were saying effectively that as soon as the Soviets intervene, the war is effectively over."

"...at Yalta in February of '45, Stalin promised Roosevelt that the Soviets would be in the Pacific War three months after the end of the war in Europe," he added. "They knew the Japanese were defeated. We'd been intercepting the Japanese cables. We broke the codes early in the war. We knew what they were saying, that the only obstacle to surrender is the US demand for a complete surrender."

"And so, there were two ways to get them to end the war sooner without use of the atomic bomb. But the sad reality is the US wanted to use the atomic bomb. And they wanted to use it to send a signal to the Soviet Union that if they interfered with US plans in Europe or the Pacific, they were going to get this and worse."

On August 14 the Japanese accepted the demand of unconditional surrender, however it was not until September 2nd that the final Japanese surrender was signed. But the analyst suggested that the notion that the atomic bomb ended the war is nonsense.

"The atomic bombings were horrible and unnecessarily killed hundreds of thousands of people. But that's not what changed the war. The Japanese had known that the US had firebombed more than 100 Japanese cities already. Destruction reached 99.5% in the city of Toyama. Japanese leaders accepted that the US could wipe out their cities. What they dreaded, and we know this from all the documents, what they dreaded was the Soviet entry into the war."

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The Soviets joined the war in early August, the analyst explains, which is when the Japanese "really knew that the war was over". It was not the use of the atomic bomb that influenced the Japanese to surrender, but the Soviets decision to join the war, the analyst argued.

"It was all about the Soviet invasion, which is what US intelligence had been predicting for months and months anyway," he added. "But the lessons that the Americans learned was that the invasion was necessary and humane because it saved a half million American lives as well as millions of Japanese and other Asian lives."

US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin told a group of security officials on Saturday that war with China is "neither imminent nor unavoidable", a US news source reported. Austin's comments followed a meeting he had with Chinese Defense Minister Dong Jun in what was the first in-person meeting between the defense officials following US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to the Chinese island of Taiwan.

China condemned Pelosi's visit as a move by the US to support Taiwanese separatism.

Following a meeting in July, the US and Japan announced the strengthening of their military ties as well as reinforcing the US Forces Japan to a warfighting command, Sputnik reported.

"I think there are lessons across the board. The Japanese have forgotten all the lessons that they learned. Japan embraced Article 9 of the peace constitution during the US occupation. Now that's been effectively thrown out the window. Japan is remilitarizing," Kuznick explained. "Japan's self-defense forces, they're called, are now offensive forces that are committed to coming to the US defense if fighting breaks out over Taiwan," he added. "The US has been militarizing the region, effectively preparing for war. Not that it wants war, because the Pentagon has conducted 18 war games between the US and China over Taiwan. And China has prevailed in all 18."

This week, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida announced his plans to step down as leader of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). As an ally to the US, the prime minister was responsible for militarizing Japan - in fact, Japan is on track to becoming the world's third-largest military spender after the US and China. But he could not overcome sinking approval ratings which followed a corruption scandal surrounding the LDP, as well as rising living costs and a weakening yen, Sputnik reported.

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'Actions Speak Louder Than Words': Fed-Up With Games, Hamas Reportedly Sits Out Talks

While Hamas had previously agreed to a US-presented ceasefire deal, Israel complicated negotiations by creating new demands as a way to sabotage the deal. Iran has reportedly said that if negotiations between Hamas and Israel fail, they will attack Israel.

Ceasefire talks in the Middle East have resumed with the US, Israel, Egypt and Qatar reportedly making an appearance without representation being made from Hamas. The groups are working to secure a ceasefire for the Gaza Strip after the conflict has already claimed more than 40,000 lives, according to the Gaza Health Ministry.

Hamas has reportedly expressed that they no longer see the US as being able to bring about a deal that would solidify a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. And following the assassination of one of

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their leaders as well as attacks on Iran in April, the US has continued to support Israel indefinitely.

Dan Kovalik, a human rights activist and author joined Political Misfits on Thursday to discuss the ongoing tensions in the Middle East. Kovalik suggested that Netanyahu will not allow a ceasefire deal to go through in order to save himself from being exposed to a political downfall as well as possible consequences for his alleged war crimes. The prime minister may even allow for Israeli captives to die in order to "save his own skin" the analyst suggested.

"I think it's worth trying [for a ceasefire deal] because people's lives are hanging in the balance. I mean, what's happening in Gaza is abominable. The famine is claiming lives. The atrocities against the people of Gaza continue every single day. So, obviously, the people of Gaza need a ceasefire," Kovalik explained. "So that seems to me worth doing it for that reason alone."

"Other people have interest in it, like the Biden administration, because they're getting a lot of pressure from their base to end this thing and they know that this - as long as this war continues, it's going to drag down the [US Vice President] Kamala Harris campaign," the analyst explained, before noting that the Democratic National Convention is being held in Chicago next week where he predicts major pro-Palestinian protests to take place.

"...it's also clear, by the way, when [we] say the Israelis don't want a ceasefire that what we really mean is that [Israeli Prime Minister] Benjamin Netanyahu does not want a ceasefire," Kovalik added. "He seems to be single-handedly holding this up for his own personal reasons, trying to avoid the inevitable corruption charges that await him when this war is over."

A report from a Qatar media source revealed that Israel had launched a directive at the start of the war in the Gaza Strip that allows for the killings of captives taken by Hamas on October 7. The Hannibal Procedure, Hannibal Protocol, or Hannibal Directive allows IDF members to use any force necessary in order to prevent Israeli soldiers from being captured and even allows for captured soldiers to be killed.

Recent reports also revealed that IDF soldiers are carving their way through tunnels and buildings by using civilians to protect themselves from possible booby traps. According to one report, the practice became so common amongst Israeli soldiers that it could be considered a "protocol". The reports were first made by the executive director of Breaking the Silence, which is a group founded by Israeli combat veterans hoping to expose military abuses.

"That they will [gladly] sacrifice Israeli soldiers and civilians for the purposes of, again, not having to even negotiate with Hamas about trading prisoners, right? They know if Hamas has prisoners that's gonna open up the need for negotiations to get Palestinian prisoners back and they just don't want to do that," the analyst explained.

"So, again, I think what it shows is they don't care about their own people and that's why you see these protests in Israel because a lot of people understand that. That these lives are completely expendable and certainly for Netanyahu they're completely expendable. He, I think for him he'd be glad if they all just die so that it takes that issue away from the equation."

Tensions in the Middle East are growing as Israel anticipates a retaliatory attack from Iran in response to the assassination of Hamas political chief Ismail Haniyeh. The US has expressed their full support of Israel, and approved an $18.82 billion sale of 50 F-15IA multirole fighter jets and other related equipment to the Israeli government, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Tuesday.

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Roughly 100 people were killed this weekend from a bombing attack in which US-provided missiles were used. At least 6,000 displaced Palestinians were being housed at the al-Taba'een (or Al-Tabin) school when bombs struck the school in the early hours of the morning on August 10, said Mahmoud Bassal, the Gaza civil defense spokesman. 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 and weighed in order to make a best guess as to who the remains may have belonged to.

"...what they're calling arms sales to Israel, but they'll never pay for those arms. It's gonna be a grant of arms to Israel even after these horrible videos have come out about gang rape by Israelis of Palestinian prisoners, and the terrible bombing of that school over the weekend that killed 100 to 150 people where they're only knowing how many people died by the weight of the remains that they collected. I mean, that's how horrible this thing is," Kovalik said.

"Actions speak louder than words and if you keep arming these atrocities, you're gonna keep getting atrocities. That's what it comes down to," said Kovalik of the US arms sales to Israel.

"Israel doesn't learn lessons and they don't listen to reason. Again, you have a country that is founded on many myths and when you have that situation, when you base your strategies on myths you don't end up with good results," the labor attorney and human rights activist explained.

Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has vowed to retaliate for the assassination of Hamas negotiator Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran whom he referred to as a "dear guest in our home", though speculation about how or when Iran will strike continues.

A senior Iranian security official warned that if Israel's ceasefire talks with Hamas fall through then Iran will attack Israel, an American news source reported on Tuesday. Iran also threatened retaliation on the suspicion of Netanyahu delaying negotiations with Hamas. US President Joe Biden acknowledged the influence that the ceasefire deal will have on Iran's threats and admitted that the process to a ceasefire deal is "getting harder" but said he is "not giving up".

"...let's state the obvious. Iran is the grown-up in the room here," said Kovalik, regarding the ongoing tension between Israel and Iran. "Even the US and Europe recognized this by trying to convince them not to retaliate, right, because they know that actually there's a chance they could convince them of that. So, we have to start with that. And, as you say, they haven't flown off the handle. They haven't done something rash. They're waiting."

"It appears - it doesn't just appear - what they're saying is they would gladly not retaliate if Israel agrees to a ceasefire with Hamas. So, they are willing to trade their own right to retaliate in order to end this genocide in Gaza, which I give Iran a lot of credit for. Now, I think there are discussions that are being had along those lines. So they're not going to retaliate till they exhaust those discussions," Kovalik explained.

"Again, Iran acts in very constrained ways. I think they have to do something, and they have to do something fairly dramatic that the world can see because they just can't allow these provocations to continue without a serious response or the provocations will continue," he added. "So, I think you'll see something rather serious, but I think still Iran wants to signal in whatever they do that they do not want a wider conflict because they don't."

'They need a scapegoat': US favored Japanese leader to step down

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has announced his plans to step down as leader of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The move comes after Kishida's sinking approval

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ratings, which follow a corruption scandal surrounding the party, as well as rising living costs and a weakening yen, Sputnik reported. “Japan has been a one-party state since that period. And so, to casually dismiss that is nonsense. But, what it does show is that they do need a scapegoat. Japan's economy is crashing. It's going the way of Germany or the UK. And so, they need a scapegoat,” said peace activist, writer, and teacher, K.J. Noh who joined Sputnik's The Critical Hour on Wednesday. In November, Kishida had reportedly taken drastic action to replace top members of his cabinet following voter anger in response to a fundraising proceeds scandal. Lawmakers in Japan’s ruling party had been accused of underreporting funds with over 100 million yen ($680,000) of fundraising proceeds failing to be officially reported on. “And then on top of that, when the US forced Japan, as a member of the G7, to stop importing oil and natural gas from Russia, that put an even greater impact on an already ailing economy. And so, they need a scapegoat for this economic collapse. And so, Kishida is on his way out,” Noh added. “He's going to fall on his sword and they're going to put in somebody who's essentially a clone.” “Japan is yet another sacrifice zone in the US global economic war against China. It's essentially a bumper, a crash test dummy,” the educator said.

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"Actions speak louder than words": Fed-up with games, Hamas reportedly sits out talks Ceasefire talks in the Middle East have resumed with the US, Israel, Egypt and Qatar reportedly making an appearance without representation being made from Hamas. The groups are working to secure a ceasefire for the Gaza Strip after the conflict has already claimed more than 40,000 lives, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. “[Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu] seems to be single-handedly holding [negotiations] up for his own personal reasons, trying to avoid the inevitable corruption charges that await him when this war is over,” said Dan Kovalik, a human rights activist and author who joined Political Misfits. While Hamas had previously agreed to a US-presented ceasefire deal, Israel complicated negotiations by creating new demands as a way to sabotage the deal. Iran has reportedly said that if negotiations between Hamas and Israel fail, they will attack Israel. “...what [the US is] calling arms sales to Israel, but they'll never pay for those arms. It's gonna be a grant of arms to Israel even after these horrible videos have come out about gang rape by Israelis of Palestinian prisoners, and the terrible bombing of that school over the weekend that killed 100 to 150 people where they're only knowing how many people died by the weight of the remains that they collected. I mean, that's how horrible this thing is,” the analyst added. “Actions speak louder than words and if you keep arming these atrocities, you're gonna keep getting atrocities. That's what it comes down to," Kovalik emphasized.

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Bombshell: Blair, UK Government Warned Over NATO War Crimes in Belgrade

Thousands were killed or injured in NATO's aggression against the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999 as the alliance was fully unmasked as a tool of Western militarism.

As NATO aggression in the former Yugoslavia fully unmasked the alliance as a tool of Western imperialism, newly-released documents reveal controversial former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair was warned of the possible legal consequences of the bombing of a state-owned broadcaster in Belgrade.

"Twenty five years ago, NATO bombed the main studio of Yugoslavia's state-owned broadcasting company, Radio-Television Serbia (RTS),"writes the independent outlet Declassified UK. "The attack at 2am on 23 April 1999 came amid Bill Clinton and Tony Blair's 'humanitarian intervention' in Kosovo."

"16 media workers were killed and 19 injured in the strike on RTS, which remains the single most controversial event in NATO's 78-day military campaign," notes journalist John McEvoy.

The UK and allied NATO forces claimed to be acting in the interest of protecting ethnic Albanians as ethnic violence broke out on all sides during the breakup of the former socialist Yugoslav republic. But President Slobodan Milošević remained a conspicuous holdout as newly-independent states deregulated their economies in line with neoliberal economic policy advocated by Western governments.

The United States would back numerous "color revolutions" after the fall of the Eastern Bloc, with wealthy donors like George Soros encouraging and standing to benefit from economic liberalization enforced by Western-led institutions like the International Monetary Fund.

The case of Milošević demonstrates a scenario during which the United States was willing to employ substantial military force to seek regime change, paving the way for NATO aggression in countries like Libya and Afghanistan.

Blair claimed the destruction of the RTS headquarters and other civilian targets was justified in the name of dismantling the "dictatorship" of Milošević. Sixteen media workers were killed during the bombing, which Amnesty International labeled a "war crime."

"Killing journalists does not stop censorship, it only brings more repression," claimed the International Federation of Journalists in a statement.

"We do not see how the suppression of news sources can serve any useful purpose," said European Broadcasting Union president Albert Scharf. "Over and beyond the deaths involved, the EBU is concerned about any attempts to limit the rights of audiences to full news services."

Declassified files now reveal that UK Prime Minister Tony Blair was warned against the depraved attack at the time by British attorney general John Morris, who questioned how the destruction of the broadcast headquarters was related to NATO's purported cause in ensuring "relief of humanitarian need in Kosovo."

The UK and the United States launched the illegal act of aggression in Belgrade without a required UN Security Council resolution,demonstrating the lengths NATO was willing to go to to ensure Western hegemony after the end of the Cold War.

"We are moving towards a situation where our aim will become removing Milosevic," admitted Blair in a note at the time, revealing that regime change was the ultimate motive of the assault. "Plainly Milosevic will threaten the stability of the region as long as he remains."

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NATO forces would go on to strike a number of other civilian targets including Belgrade's Hotel Jugoslavija and Montenegro's main airport, with little apparent concern for the climbing death toll. Thousands were killed or wounded by the end of the campaign while elevated rates of cancer and birth defects are still observed due to NATO's highly controversial use of depleted uranium.

The UK would become the first of multiple Western countries to recognize the disputed breakaway territory of Kosovo in 2008. Future leader of the territory Hashim Thaci, who played a key role during the NATO aggression via his leadership of the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army, is currently on trial on war crimes charges at The Hague.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, under intense pressure from the United States, would controversially decide against investigating the bombing of the RTS as a war crime.

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Scott Ritter: Russia Obliterates NATO Fighters, Weaponry as Ukraine Mounts Desperate Attack in Kursk

Kiev's incursion has given Moscow the opportunity to destroy strategic reserves of troops and weapons.

Ukraine was forced to expend some of their most well-trained soldiers and advanced technology in a failed effort to capture the Kursk nuclear power plant, highlighted former US Marine intelligence officer Scott Ritter.

Such was the former UN chief weapons inspector's analysis on Sputnik's The Critical Hour program Thursday, where Ritter discussed the latest desperate maneuver of the failing Western proxy war.

"A NATO-created, trained, equipped and directed force of not just Ukrainians, but Polish, French, Americans [and] British has invaded Russia," said the American dissident, who faced persecution in Washington after challenging the George W. Bush administration's claims of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction during the runup to the United States' disastrous war on the Middle Eastern country.

"This force could be up to 20,000-strong," Ritter noted. "It looks like the Ukrainians are seeking to reinforce it as we speak with thousands of more people drawn from the Zaporozhye front. It's an invasion of Russia. And that should scare the heck out of everybody who just heard that statement."

"This is how you trigger nuclear war. Now, fortunately, the Russians aren't panicking… the incursion has been contained. Not only that, it's been blunted."

Ritter noted that Moscow quickly responded to the attack, taking the opportunity to destroy Ukrainian supply lines running from the Sumy region.

Russia has also neutralized some of the regime's most well-trained troops and high-tech NATO weaponry, such as a British Challenger tank, US M1 Abrams tanks and Bradley infantry fighting vehicles. The ongoing conflict against the Western client state has served as a showcase for

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Russian defense technology, which has fared well against Ukraine's dwindling supplies of expensive NATO weaponry.

"They gave it to us. They handed it to us," said Ritter of Kiev's strategic reserves of troops and armaments. "The Russians are winning. The Ukrainians are dying. And there's nothing Ukraine will have to replace these troops."

"These troops have been trained and prepared for well over a year and a half. These are NATO equivalent troops. Many of them are NATO troops, sheep-dipped Polish troops, sheep-dipped French troops, American mercenaries recruited as soon as they leave the active duty of the United States Armed Forces… This is a NATO unit, literally a NATO unit that was sent into Ukraine and the Russians are destroying it. That's the reality of what's going on in Kursk right now."

Ritter claimed Moscow had uncovered Ukrainian troops' plans to seize a nuclear power plant in the Kursk region, essentially holding it hostage in exchange for the return of territory in Crimea, Kherson or Zaporozhye. The Kiev regime would "threaten Russia and the world with a nuclear catastrophe if Russia wouldn't come to the negotiating table," the analyst claimed, calling the gambit "an insane plan."

The former intelligence officer compared Ukraine's plan to the Battle of the Bulge, during which a weakened Nazi regime desperately attempted to cut British and American troops off from a supply base at the port of Antwerp.

"I think most people, when the Kursk battle is evaluated, would say that the capture of the Kursk nuclear power plant was always a bridge too far," Ritter claimed. "It wasn't going to happen. But that appears to be the actual operational battle plan and goal and objective of the Ukrainian forces."

The analyst claimed Ukraine's repeated intransigence would force Moscow to capture more territory, noting Russia's repeated attempts to reach a diplomatic solution with Kiev both before and after it launched its special military operation in early 2022.

"Ukraine is going to lose another 30 percent or more of its territory when this is done because Russia has basically determined that Ukraine can't be trusted, the West can't be trusted, that Russia can never believe in the notion of a Ukraine willing to live in peace with its Russian neighbor," Ritter claimed.

"So Russia is going to destroy Ukraine. And, sadly, that is probably the way this war is going to end."

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Western Governments Sell Farfetched Nord Stream Tale to Wary Public

Host Ted Rall doubted German officials' claim that an amateur diver could have been responsible for the pipeline's sabotage, noting the difficulty of the operation.

Two-thirds of European Union citizens remain concerned over the lack of clarity surrounding the 2022 Nord Stream pipeline explosion, recent opinion polling reveals.

A survey conducted in May found large numbers of Europeans were troubled by the lack of results from recent investigations into the matter, including 75% of Greeks, 74% of Hungarians,

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and 72% of Portuguese people who were still worried over the state of affairs. In Germany, perhaps Ukraine's most important European backer, a full 71% of people said they were concerned over the lack of an explanation for the incident.

It was in this context that German officials revealed a surprising break in the case this week, claiming a Ukrainian diving instructor known as Volodymyr Zhuravlev was responsible for the pipeline's sabotage.

"My feeling is that this is a cover for something, whether for Kursk or something else that they're planning," said Serbian-American journalist Nebojsa Malic on Sputnik's The Final Countdown program Thursday. The columnist joined hosts Steve Gill and Ted Rall to break down the latest developments in the case.

"They're trying to wrap up the Nord Stream stuff because maybe the Germans arrested this guy on suspicion of something," Malic speculated. "Maybe the story is unraveling. Nobody's really yet offered a rebuttal to Seymour Hersh's allegations from last year that pretty much conclusively point a finger to either the British or the Americans."

"He says Americans. Other people have put his information together and pointed a finger to the British. But it definitely wasn't the Russians blowing up their own pipeline."

Host Ted Rall doubted German officials' claim that an amateur diver could have been responsible for the sabotage, noting the difficulty of the operation.

"The Nord Stream 2 pipeline explosion took place at a depth of 260 feet," Rall said, noting the pipeline was twice as deep as the 130-foot depth limit for recreational divers. "We're being told that these are not professional [divers]... You think about the logistical challenge. You have to go to 260 feet. It's pitch dark. It's freezing cold. It's freezing cold in the Caribbean at 260 feet. But this is the Baltic Sea, so it's bitter."

"Then, you have to locate this thing. You have to break through the external casing of the thing. You have to plant the bomb. And you have to get away from it, you know, before it blows up and kills you and the rented pleasure craft that you got from Poland or wherever… this is not only not true, this cannot be true. At least not using the laws of physics as they exist on our planet. So, why on earth are they so lame at their cover story?"

"They're counting that most people are idiots," said Malic. "When you've been deceiving the public for so long, you don't have to bother to try very hard. And this is what these Western media have become basically, victims of their own success. They don't have to be very creative with their deceptions because they rarely get challenged."

Malic speculated that pinning the blame on a Ukrainian diver could serve as a way to further discredit Volodymyr Zelensky, "whose legitimacy has expired in May" after his previous mandate as president ended, he noted.

UK Prime Minister Tony Blair was warned of possible legal consequences of bombing of state-owned broadcaster in Belgrade

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Scott Ritter: Russia obliterates NATO fighters, weaponry as Ukraine mounts desperate attack in Kursk

Ukraine was forced to expend some of their most well-trained soldiers and advanced technology in a failed effort to capture the Kursk nuclear power plant, highlighted former US Marine intelligence officer Scott Ritter.

"A NATO-created, trained, equipped and directed force of not just Ukrainians, but Polish, French, Americans [and] British has invaded Russia," said the former UN weapons inspector, who recently faced political persecution in the US.

"This is how you trigger nuclear war. Now, fortunately, the Russians aren't panicking… the incursion has been contained. Not only that, it's been blunted," Ritter emphasized.

Ritter noted that Moscow quickly responded to the attack, taking the opportunity to destroy Ukrainian supply lines running from the Sumy region.

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Russia has also neutralized some of the regime's most well-trained troops and high-tech NATO weaponry, such as a British Challenger tank, US M1 Abrams tanks and Bradley infantry fighting vehicles. The ongoing conflict against the Western client state has served as a showcase for Russian defense technology, which has fared well against Ukraine's dwindling supplies of expensive NATO weaponry.

The analyst claimed Ukraine's repeated intransigence would force Moscow to liberate more territory, noting Russia's repeated attempts to reach a diplomatic solution with Kiev both before and after it launched its special military operation in early 2022.

"Ukraine is going to lose another 30 percent or more of its territory when this is done because Russia has basically determined that Ukraine can't be trusted, the West can't be trusted, that Russia can never believe in the notion of a Ukraine willing to live in peace with its Russian neighbor," Ritter stressed.

"So Russia is going to destroy Ukraine. And, sadly, that is probably the way this war is going to end," the analyst concluded.

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Western governments sell farfetched Nord Stream tale to wary public

Two-thirds of European Union citizens remain concerned over the lack of clarity surrounding the 2022 Nord Stream pipeline explosion, a survey by a Hungarian-based thinktank in May revealed. It was in this context that German officials unveiled a surprising break in the case this week, claiming a Ukrainian diving instructor known as Volodymyr Zhuravlev was responsible for the pipeline's sabotage.

"My feeling is that this is a cover for something, whether for Kursk or something else that they're planning," said Serbian-American journalist Nebojsa Malic on Sputnik's The Final Countdown program. "Nobody's really yet offered a rebuttal to Seymour Hersh's allegations from last year that pretty much conclusively point a finger to either the British or the Americans."

Host Ted Rall doubted German officials' claim that an amateur diver could have been responsible for the sabotage, noting the difficulty of the operation.

"The Nord Stream 2 pipeline explosion took place at a depth of 260 feet," Rall said, noting the pipeline was twice as deep as the 130-foot depth limit for recreational divers. "You think about the logistical challenge. You have to go to 260 feet. It's pitch dark. It's freezing cold… This is the Baltic Sea, so it's bitter."

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“Then, you have to locate this thing. You have to break through the external casing of the thing. You have to plant the bomb. And you have to get away from it, you know, before it blows up and kills you and the rented pleasure craft that you got from Poland or wherever… this is not only not true, this cannot be true… So, why on earth are they so lame at their cover story?”

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FBI Says Raid at US Home of Journalist Dimitri Simes 'Court Authorized', Gives No Details

WASHINGTON, August 16 (Sputnik) - An FBI spokesperson told Sputnik on Friday that the raid at the home of the prominent Russian-American journalist Dimitri Simes was court authorized but provided no further details of its investigation.

"The FBI conducted court-authorized law enforcement activity. We have no further comment as this is an ongoing matter," the spokesperson said in a statement.

Earlier, Simes, a journalist and presenter of Channel One, told Sputnik that he had not been to the United States since 2022, and had not been notified ahead of time that FBI agents would be conducting a search of his property in Rappahannock County, Virginia, this week.

According to Simes, there were "no available items or information of interest" in the family home.

Dimitri Simes Jr., son of Dimitri Simes, told Sputnik that he does not know the purpose of the FBI's investigation but suspected it could be an intimidation tactic.

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Biden Designates Site of 1908 Springfield Race Riot as National Monument - White House

WASHINGTON, August 16 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden will designate on Friday the site of the 1908 Springfield race riot as a national monument, the White House said.

"Today, during the 116th anniversary of the Springfield Race Riot, which occurred August 14-16, 1908, President Biden will sign a proclamation establishing the Springfield 1908 Race Riot National Monument in Springfield, Illinois," the statement said.

The new national monument will tell the story of a "horrific attack by a white mob on a black community," it added.

In August 1908, two Black men – 17-year-old Joe James and 36-year-old George Richardson – were being held in the Sangamon County Jail in Springfield based over claims of white accusers, including one who later recanted, the White House said. On August 14, a crowd of largely young, white men gathered around the county jail demanding that the two men be released in order to be lynched, according to the statement.

The violence continued for several days and led to the destruction of dozens of homes where African Americans lived.

"By establishing the Springfield 1908 Race Riot National Monument, President Biden is recognizing the significance of these events and the broader history of Black community

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resilience in the face of violent oppression," the White House said.
The Springfield 1908 Race Riot National Monument will protect 1.57 acres of federal land in Springfield, Illinois, and will be managed by the Department of the Interior's National Park Service, it added.

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Lack of US Reaction to NS2 Attack Reports Gives 'Carte Blanche' for More Actions - Antonov

WASHINGTON, August 16 (Sputnik) - The lack of a response by US officials to reports with details of the sabotage attack on Russia's Nord Stream 2 pipeline provide a blank check for Ukraine to undertake similar actions in the future, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said in a statement.
"The refusal of officials to speak out on a high-profile topic is quite indicative," Antonov said on Thursday. "In fact, we are talking about the implicit legitimization of terrorism, even when it comes to the territory of allies. Indeed, America gives 'carte blanche' for similar crimes in the future."
The United States wants the world to forget about statements by US leadership about the importance of destroying gas pipelines, Antonov said.
The United States seeks to shift all responsibility to their Ukrainian "puppets," Antonov added.
On Wednesday, the Wall Street Journal reported that the German investigation into the Nord Stream 2 attack is focused on the alleged involvement of former Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief of Armed Forces Valerii Zaluzhnyi.
Zaluzhnyi proceeded with the attack despite Volodymyr Zelenskyy's order to call off the operation at the request of the CIA, the report said.

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US Air Force Orders More Tools to Boost Production of Anti-Ship Missiles - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 16 (Sputnik) - Lockheed Martin Missiles and Fire Control has received an almost $130 million US Air Force contract extension to provide tooling and test equipment to boost production of Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile and Long-Range Anti-Ship Missiles, the Defense Department announced.
"Lockheed Martin Missiles and Fire Control [of] Orlando, Florida has been awarded a $129,977,066 modification [contract] ...to procure tooling and test equipment needed to increase production quantities of Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile and Long-Range Anti-Ship Missile," the Defense Department said in a press release on Thursday.
Work on the project will be performed in Orlando, Florida over the next 40 months and is expected to be completed by December 15, 2027, the release said.
The Air Force Life Cycle Management Center at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida will oversee

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work on the project as its contracting activity, the release added.

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lack of response from US officials on new reports about sabotage of Nord Stream pipelines means 'carte blanche' for similar actions in future- antonov

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Northrop Wins $378Mln Contract Boost to Maintain Infrared System for Allies - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 16 (Sputnik) - Northrop Grumman has received an almost $380 million US Air Force contract extension to continue providing sustainment services for the AN/AAQ-24(V) Infrared Countermeasure System for Canada, India, Bahrain, NATO, Saudi Arabia, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, and the United Arab Emirates, the Defense Department announced.

"Northrop Grumman Systems Corporation [of] Warner Robins, Georgia has been awarded a $378,983,000 ... requirements contract [extension] ... for repair services," the Defense Department said in a press release on Thursday.

The contract will fund the 408th repair sustainment of the AN/AAQ-24(V) Large Aircraft Infrared Countermeasure System, the release said.

"This contract involves Foreign Military Sales to Canada, India, Bahrain, NATO, Saudi Arabia, Japan, New Zealand, [South] Korea, and The United Arab Emirates," the release added.

Work on the project will be performed in Warner Robins, Georgia over the next seven and a half years and is expected to be completed by February 15, 2032, according to the release.

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US, Australia Order $132Mln More Lockheed Martin Infrared Missile Receivers - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 16 (Sputnik) - The US Navy has ordered more than $132 million worth of additional Lockheed Martin infrared missile detection receivers, including six for Australia, the Defense Department announced.

"Lockheed Martin Missiles and Fire Control [of] Orlando, Florida is awarded a $132,433,504 order ... [for] 37 infrared receivers ... and six for the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF)," the Defense Department said in a press release on Thursday.

The purchase will also include 3,000 Texas Instruments chips to protect against obsolescence, the release said.

Most of the work on the project will be performed in Orlando, Florida (71.4%); Santa Barbara, California (17.8%) and Ocala, Florida (8.3%) over the next three and a half years and is

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expected to be completed in April 2028, the release added.

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Trump Says Expects to Speak With Netanyahu Soon, Encourages Him to End Gaza War

WASHINGTON, August 16 (Sputnik) - Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump told reporters that he expects to speak with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu soon and encourages him to immediately wrap up his military operation in Gaza.

"The last time I saw him was at Mar-a-Lago [July 26]... I expect I might be talking to him, but I haven't since then," Trump said during a press conference in Bedminster, New Jersey.

Trump also said that he has encouraged Netanyahu to get the conflict in Gaza over with immediately, adding that the killing must stop.

On Wednesday, US media reported that Trump held a telephone conversation with Netanyahu, during which the two discussed the Gaza ceasefire deal.

Trump reportedly pushed the Israeli prime minister to conclude a deal when negotiations resumed this week, the report said, without providing any further details of the conversation.

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Trump Says Doesn't Seek to Be 'Bad' to Iran if Elected, But Won't Let it Acquire Nukes

WASHINGTON, August 16 (Sputnik) - Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump said during a press conference that he does not intend to be bad toward Iran but he will not let it acquire nuclear weapons.

"I'm not looking to be bad to Iran," Trump said on Thursday. "We're going to be friendly I hope with Iran, but maybe not...I hope we're going to be friendly, but they can't have a nuclear weapon."

Trump added that if Iran is able to develop a nuclear weapon, it would change the geopolitical landscape of the world and make any potential negotiations more challenging.

Trump's campaign recently confirmed it was allegedly targeted by Iranian hackers who stole sensitive documents.

Iran is reportedly seeking to hurt Trump's chances of winning in the US presidential election.

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US Clears Major Hurdle to Provide Australia Submarines Under AUKUS Deal - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 16 (Sputnik) - The United States has cleared a major hurdle in the AUKUS trilateral security pact to move plans forward to provide Australia nuclear-powered attack submarines and other advanced weapons such as hypersonic missiles, the US State

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Department said in a press release.

"Today, the Department of State submitted to the Congress a determination that Australia and UK export control systems are comparable to those of the United States and have implemented a reciprocal export exemption for US entities," the release said on Thursday.

The United States needed this approval to share closely guarded technology associated with this AUKUS deal, the release noted, adding that the exemptions for these export licenses will be effective September 1.

The State Department explained that the changes implemented by this rule will maximize innovation and mutually strengthen the three defense industrial bases by facilitating billions of dollars in secure license-free defense trade.

AUKUS is a trilateral defense partnership announced by the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia in September 2021. The first pillar of the partnership concerns the creation of an Australian fleet of nuclear submarines using US and UK technology. The second pillar involves the development of a range of technologies, including underwater robotics, quantum electronics, cybersecurity and electronic warfare capabilities, hypersonic weapons and defense mechanisms against them.

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ExxonMobil, Shell to Supply 1.5Mln Barrels of Latest Purchases for US Oil Reserve

WASHINGTON, August 16 (Sputnik) - ExxonMobil Oil Corporation and Shell Trading are to supply a total of 1.5 million barrels of crude for the latest round of purchases by the Biden administration to refill the heavily-drawn US Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR).

Exxon will supply 1 million barrels and Shell the balance of 500, 000 that ought to be delivered to the SPR Bayou Choctaw site in Iberville Parish, Louisiana, the Department of Energy announced on Thursday.

The ExxonMobil and Shell supply contracts "represent a fully subscribed solicitation for January 2025 delivery to the Bayou Choctaw site," the Department of Energy said.

The Department of Energy said it has purchased nearly 45 million barrels for the SPR at an average price of $77 per barrel over the past two years.

"This is per barrel lower than the $95 average sales price for 2022's emergency sales, meeting the administration's commitment to secure a good deal for taxpayers," it said.

The SPR had seen an outflow of more than 200 million barrels of oil under the Biden 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, particularly by his political 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, i.e., making oil available in times of critically-short supply.

Biden 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. Oil released from the

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SPR has succeeded in keeping gasoline at the pump at below $3.50 per gallon for most of the past two years.

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'Hard to Buy' US Media Reports on Nord Stream 2 Sabotage - Russian Deputy Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, August 16 (Sputnik) - It is difficult to believe reports by US media on the sabotage attack on Russia's Nord Stream 2 pipeline, Russian First Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy said in a conversation via the social media platform X.

" Frankly, it's very hard to buy it, and it looks very much like an attempt to deviate attention and to shift the spotlight from the real perpetrators of this crime," Polyanskiy said on Thursday.

On Wednesday, the Wall Street Journal reported that the German investigation into the Nord Stream 2 attack is focused on the alleged involvement of former Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief of Armed Forces Valerii Zaluzhnyi.

Zaluzhnyi proceeded with the attack despite Volodymyr Zelenskyy's order to call off the operation at the request of the CIA, the report said.

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Russia's UN mission on recent Nord Stream sabotage report by WSJ says It's hard to buy it,Seems like attempt to shift spotlight from real perpetrators

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, August 16 (Sputnik) -

MIDDLE EAST TENSIONS

* Iran's retaliatory attack against Israel can take place with little or no warning, including in the coming days, as the United States continues to adjust its force posture in the region in anticipation of it, White House National Security Communications Advisor Joh Kirby said on Thursday.

* The White House said Thursday that the framework of a potential ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas is generally accepted, with the remaining gaps left in the execution of it.

* The United States does not anticipate a deal coming out of ceasefire talks that have just begun in Doha, Qatar with high chances the talks will continue into Friday, Kirby said.

* Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said he intends to visit the Gaza Strip.

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* Palestine welcomes Turkey's decision to join South Africa's lawsuit against Israel, and considers Ankara's trade embargo against Tel Aviv as support for Palestinians, Abbas said.

NORD STREAM 2

* The European Commission considers the investigation of the attack on the Nord Stream pipeline to be the responsibility of EU member states and refuses to comment on it, a source in the Commission told RIA Novosti on Thursday.

* White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby declined to comment on a Wall Street Journal report outlining new details on the 2022 Nord Stream attack.

* The German Public Prosecutor General's Office refused to answer RIA Novosti's question about whether they had contacted Ukraine regarding the possible extradition of a suspect in the Nord Stream gas pipeline bombing, as well as the possibility of a request to Interpol.

* Geert Wilders, the leader of the Dutch right-wing Party for Freedom (PVV), said that he had asked the Dutch government to clarify the Ukrainian role in the Nord Stream pipeline bombing.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* Ukraine lacks the capacity and munitions to overcome Russia’s air and ground advantages and is suffering heavy casualties, the Department of Defense Office of the Inspector General (OIG) said on Thursday.

* US Congress has authorized more than $174 billion in funds for Ukraine and strengthening NATO in Europe since February 2022, the Department of Defense OIG said.

* Ukraine has lost up to 650 personnel in the area of operations of Russia's Yug (South) group of forces in the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

* Pentagon deputy press secretary Sabrina Singh told reporters that the United States reserves the right to provide Ukraine with different weapon capabilities amid its attack on Russia's Kursk region.

SITUATION IN RUSSIA’S KURSK REGION

* Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov held a meeting on the safety of the population and infrastructure in the border areas in the Kursk, Bryansk, and Belgorod regions, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

* The Ukrainian armed forces have lost up to 340 soldiers and 19 armored vehicles, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

* The situation around the Kursk nuclear power plant (NPP) remains stable amid Ukrainian attacks on Russia's border region, with the plant operating normally, acting governor Alexei Smirnov said.

* The Russian Defense Ministry announced the establishment of the Coordination Council for Military Security of Border Regions, adding that its first meeting had been held by Belousov.

MOLDOVA DEVELOPMENTS

* Moldova is intensifying repression against the opposition and all those who disagree with the actions of the leadership, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Thursday.

* Moldova's energy company Moldovagaz has suspended its purchases of natural gas due to a sharp spike in prices in the European gas market, its head Vadim Ceban said.

US CITIZENS' COURT CASES IN RUSSIA

* A Moscow District court has arrested US citizen Joseph Tater for two months in a case of violence against a government official, the court's press service told Sputnik on Thursday.

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* The Sverdlovsk Regional court sentenced Ksenia Karelina, a citizen of the United States and Russia, accused of treason for transferring money to the Ukrainian military, to 12 years in a general penal colony, a Sputnik correspondent reported from the courtroom.
* The decision by Russia's Sverdlovsk regional court to sentence Karelina to 12 years in prison for treason is vindictive and cruel, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said. *

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Pentagon Says US Has 40k Military Personnel in CENTCOM Area of Responsibility

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) – The United States has about 40,000 troops in its Central Command area of responsibility, or 6,000 more than usual, as Washington braces for a potential Iranian retaliatory attack on Israel, Pentagon spokesperson Tom Crosson said on Thursday.
"There are approximately 40,000 U.S. personnel in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility. Routinely, there are approximately 34,000 in the region," Crosson said in a statement.
Iran and Lebanon's Hezbollah have announced plans to retaliate against Israel after it carried out dual assassinations of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran and Hezbollah's Fuad Shukr in Beirut.
The United States and its allies have repeatedly called on Iran to stop its alleged escalation in the region but refuse to condemn the Israeli killing of Hezbollah and Hamas leaders.
The United States has bolstered its military presence in the Middle East amid tensions between Israel and Iran, including deploying additional F-22 Raptor jets and naval ships to the region.

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US Secret Service to Shield Trump With Bulletproof Glass at Outdoor Rallies - Official

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) - The US Secret Service approved a plan for Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump to resume outdoor campaign rallies surrounded by bulletproof glass, a law enforcement official familiar with the planning confirmed to Sputnik on Thursday.
The law enforcement official said previous reports about this plan are "accurate."
US media reported earlier that this measure is usually reserved for US presidents serving in office but the US Secret Service is making an exception after the attempted assassination on Trump's life during a campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, on July 13.
Earlier this week, Trump said he would return to Butler to hold another campaign rally in October but provided no date or location for the event.
Since the assassination attempt, Trump has only held campaign rallies in indoor venues across the country.

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US Secret Service Approves Plan for Trump to Resume Outdoor Campaign Rallies Surrounded by Bulletproof Glass - Law Enforcement Official to Sputnik

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US Approves Sale of Six MQ-9 Block 5 Drones to Italy in $738Mln Deal - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) – The US State Department has approved a possible $738 million sale of six MQ-9 Block 5 drones and related equipment to Italy, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Thursday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Italy of MQ-9 Block 5 Aircraft and related equipment for an estimated cost of $738 million," DSCA said in a statement.

The potential sale will include six MQ-9 Block 5 drones and three mobile ground control stations, among others, the statement added.

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US State Department Approves $5Bln Sale of Patriot Missiles to Germany - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) - The US State Department has approved a potential $5 billion sale of Patriot missiles to Germany, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Thursday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Germany of PATRIOT Advanced Capability-3 Missile Segment Enhancement Missiles and related equipment for an estimated cost of $5.0 billion. The Defense Security Cooperation Agency delivered the required certification notifying Congress of this possible sale today," DSCA said in a statement.

The German government has requested to acquire up to 600 PATRIOT Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3) Missile Segment Enhancement (MSE) missiles, along with associated support and equipment, the statement said.

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Pentagon Says Worried That Supply of Longer Range Arms to Kiev Would Escalate Conflict

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WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) - The United states is always mindful and concerned that providing Ukraine with longer range weapons could escalate the conflict, Pentagon deputy press secretary Sabrina Singh told reporters on Thursday.

"Of course we're worried about escalation, so just because Russia hasn't responded to something doesn't mean that they can't or won't in the future, and that's something that the administration is always weighing," Singh said regarding the risk of Ukraine having the capability to conduct deeper strikes on Russian territory.

In June, Russian President Vladimir Putin warned that Russia's response to supplies of long-range weapons to Ukraine may be "asymmetrical." Russia has the right to supply its weapons to those regions of the world that could strike sensitive facilities of the Western nations that have been arming Ukraine, Putin said.

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pentagon when asked about providing longer range weapons to kiev says us worried about escalation of ukraine conflict

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UPDATE - Five Charged in Connection With Actor Matthew Perry Fatal Overdose - US Attorney's Office

(Updates with more details in paras 1-6; edits throughout)

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) - Five people, including two doctors, have been charged in connection with the fatal ketamine overdose of US actor Matthew Perry on October 28, the Central District of California US Attorney's Office said in a statement on Thursday.

“Today, we announce charges brought against the five individuals who, together, are responsible for the death of Matthew Perry. We allege each of the defendants played a key role in his death by falsely prescribing, selling, or injecting the ketamine that caused Matthew Perry’s tragic death. Matthew Perry’s journey began with unscrupulous doctors who abused their position of trust because they saw him as a payday, to street dealers who gave him ketamine in unmarked vials," DEA Administrator Anne Milgram said in the statement.

Two of the individuals - Dr. Salvador Plasencia of Santa Monica and Jasveen Sangha of North Hollywood - were arrested in Southern California early on Thursday and are facing an 18-count indictment for their roles in the offending distribution of ketamine, the statement said.

Also named in the indictment are Eric Fleming of Hawthorne; Kenneth Iwamasa of Toluca Lake; and Dr. Mark Chavez of San Diego, the statement said.

If found guilty, each of the defendants face between ten and 25 years in prison.

Last year, the Los Angeles County Medical Examiner said that Perry died by accident due to “acute effects of ketamine."

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Perry had been undergoing ketamine infusion therapy as part of a larger treatment for depression and anxiety, but his last session took place more than a week before his death, making it impossible for the actor's death to have resulted from therapeutic practice.

The medical examiner found the levels of ketamine in Perry's body to be very high; the amount of the drug in his system was equivalent to the amount used during general anesthesia.

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US Reserves Right to Provide Ukraine Different Capabilities When Possible - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) - Pentagon deputy press secretary Sabrina Singh told reporters on Thursday that the United States reserves the right to provide Ukraine different weapon capabilities amid its attack on Russia's Kursk region.

"In terms of weapons that we're providing Ukraine, in the immediate it doesn't impact what we're providing them, but you've seen us change the types of weapons and systems that we've given over the course of time ... you've seen us modify and give different capabilities over time and we reserve that right to continue to do that," Singh said when asked if Ukraine has asked for new weapons amid the Kursk offensive.

Earlier on Thursday, US media reported, citing US officials, that President Joe Biden is "open" to supplying Ukraine with the long-range cruise missile known as the Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile (JASSM).

In June, Russian President Vladimir Putin warned that Russia's response to supplies of long-range weapons to Ukraine may be "asymmetrical." Russia has the right to supply its weapons to those regions of the world that could strike sensitive facilities of the Western nations that have been arming Ukraine, Putin said.

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Biden Says He Supports New Elections in Venezuela

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Thursday that he wants to see Venezuela hold new elections, after Washington disputed the official outcome of the presidential race and called for a "peaceful transition of power."

"I do," Biden told reporters when asked if he supports new elections in Venezuela.

US media reported earlier on Thursday that Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva called on President Nicolas Maduro to organize a new vote "if he has good sense" and added that he does not recognize him as the election winner.

Venezuelans voted in the presidential election on July 28, which incumbent President Maduro won 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 to hatred, and terrorism.

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In early August, the United States said it would recognize opposition candidate Edmundo Gonzalez as the winner of the Venezuelan presidential election.

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Pentagon Says Unaware Biden Mulling Deployment of Long-Range Cruise Missiles to Ukraine

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) - A US Defense Department spokesperson told Sputnik on Thursday that they are unaware that President Joe Biden is considering supplying long-range cruise missiles to Ukraine.

"I am unaware of that decision," the spokesperson said when asked of reports that Biden may send long-range cruise missiles to Ukraine.

The White House National Security Council did not immediately respond to Sputnik's request for comment on this matter.

Earlier on Thursday, US media reported, citing American officials, that Biden is "open" to supplying Ukraine with the long-range cruise missile known as the Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile (JASSM).

No final decision has been made but Biden administration officials continue to review issues such as the transfer of sensitive technologies and making sure that Ukraine's fighter jets are capable of carrying the missile, according to the reports.

In June, Russian President Vladimir Putin warned that Russia's response to supplies of long-range weapons to Ukraine may be "asymmetrical." Russia has the right to supply its weapons to those regions of the world that could strike sensitive facilities of the Western nations that have been arming Ukraine, Putin said.

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UN Says Opposed to 'All Signs of Nazism" as Ukraine Soldiers Use Nazi Helmets in Kursk

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) - The United Nations rejects all signs of Nazism or racial bigotry, UN spokesperson Farhan Haq told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"We are opposed to all signs of Nazism or racial bigotry," Haq said in comments regarding the latest video evidence of Ukrainian soldiers using Nazi symbols such as helmets with SS signs on them during their attack on Russia's Kursk region.

Russian military correspondent Alexander Kots published a video on the social media platform Telegram showing Ukrainian military personnel in the Kursk region wearing helmets with SS signs on them. The soldiers, who videoed the interaction, tried to mimic a German accent while mocking a local pensioner they met, calling him "Russian Ivan" and "Russian pig" while telling him to "drink vodka."

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US Economy Seen Growing 2.4% in 3rd Quarter - Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) - The US economy is expected to grow 2.4% per year in the third quarter of 2024, slower than in the second quarter though faster when compared to a year ago, the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta said on Thursday.

"The GDPNow model estimate for real GDP growth (seasonally adjusted annual rate) in the third quarter of 2024 is 2.4% on August 15th, down from 2.9% on August 8th," the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta said on its website.

US real GDP expanded by 2.8% per year in the second quarter between April and June, according to the latest estimates by the Commerce Department. In 2023, third quarter GDP grew at an annual rate of 2.1%.

The Atlanta Fed says the 2.4% growth rate it assigned to the current quarter was a mathematical estimate that did not take into account on-the-ground variables.

"In particular, it does not capture the impact of COVID-19 and social mobility beyond their impact on GDP source data and relevant economic reports that have already been released," the Atlanta Fed said. "It does not anticipate their impact on forthcoming economic reports beyond the standard internal dynamics of the model."

The US Commerce Department will finalize its growth number for the second quarter on August 29.

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Harris Campaign Says Presidential Debates Secured With Trump in September, October

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) - Two debates are set between Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris and Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump, and only one debate will be scheduled between their running mates, the Harris campaign said on Thursday.

"Donald Trump's campaign accepted our proposal for three debates - two presidential and a vice presidential debate," the Harris campaign said in a press release.

One presidential debate will take place on September 10 and a second sometime in October, the release noted.

The Harris campaign further said that the vice presidential debate between Minnesota Governor Tim Walz and Republican Senator JD Vance will take place on October 1.

Earlier in the day, Vance said he wanted to debate Walz on September 18 as well.

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Multiple Charged in Connection with Actor Matthew Perry's Overdose - Reports

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WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) - Multiple people have been charged in connection with the accidental overdose of famous American actor Matthew Perry, NBC news reported on Thursday.

At least one person was arrested in Southern California early on Thursday, it was reported, and federal prosecutors are expected to unseal the relevant indictment later in the day.

Authorities in Los Angeles have been working with federal agencies to investigate the death of the star, who was best known for his role on the TV series Friends. Last year, the Los Angeles County Medical Examiner said that Perry died by accident due to “acute effects of ketamine."

Perry had been undergoing ketamine infusion therapy as part of a larger treatment for depression and anxiety, but his last session took place more than a week before his death, the report added, making it impossible for the actor's death to have resulted from therapeutic practice.

Rather, the medical examiner found the levels of ketamine in Perry's body to be very high; the amount of the drug in his system was equivalent to the amount used during general anesthesia, the report said.

Matthew Perry was pronounced dead on October 28 afternoon after he was found in a jacuzzi bathtub at his house in Los Angeles, California. The police discovered no drugs at the scene and later stated that no foul play was involved.

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Trump Will Have Bulletproof Glass Shield Around Podium For Outdoor Rallies - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) - The US Secret Service will install a bulletproof glass shield around former president Donald Trump's podium for outdoor campaign rallies, ABC News reported on Thursday, citing multiple sources.

This measure is usually reserved for US presidents serving in office but US Secret Service is making an exception in light of the attempted assassination on Trump's life during a campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, on July 13, the report said.

The Secret Service declined to comment on this matter.

Earlier this week, Trump said he will return to Butler in October to hold another campaign rally but provided no date for the event.

Since the assassination attempt in July, Trump has only held campaign rallies in indoor venues across the United States.

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US Imposes $5.8Mln Penalty on Company for Shipments Tied to China Military Programs - BIS

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) - The US government has imposed a $5.8 million penalty on a company from the state of Pennsylvania and its subsidiary in Hong Kong for sending low-level items to parties linked to China’s military programs, the Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) said on Thursday.

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"Today, as part of a settlement agreement to resolve alleged violations of US export controls, the Department of Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) imposed a $5.8 million civil penalty against TE Connectivity Corporation (TE), located in Middletown, Pennsylvania, and TE Connectivity HK Limited, located in Kwai Chung, New Territories, Hong Kong, for shipments of low-level items to parties tied to the People's Republic of China's (PRC) hypersonics, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), and military electronics programs," the statement said.

The US government alleges that the company sent items like wires, printed circuit board connectors and pressure and temperature scanners to parties previously placed on the BIS Entity List for supporting the China's military modernization efforts in the fields of hypersonics, drones and electronics, the statement said.

"BIS's investigation determined that TE, through the actions of its China-based business units and distributors, from December 2015 through October 2019, violated the EAR [Export Administration Regulations] on 79 occasions by exporting $1.74 million worth of EAR99 items to Chinese parties on the BIS Entity List and/or by exporting EAR99 items for restricted UAV end uses without the requisite license or other authorization from BIS," the statement added.

TE voluntarily disclosed the conduct to BIS, cooperated with the investigation and took all necessary measures, according to the statement.

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US House Panel Chair McCaul Subpoenas State Dept. Over Funding to Promote Atheism Overseas

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) - US House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul subpoenaed the US State Department after it failed to provide documents related to a grant award to promote atheism overseas, the committee said in a press release on Thursday.

"Yesterday, House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul issued a subpoena to Secretary of State Antony Blinken due to the State Department's failure to provide all documents central to the committee's investigation into a State Department grant promoting atheism overseas," the release said.

The committee's investigation concerns a $500,000 grant the State Department gave to an international pro-atheism organization, Humanists International, to promote atheism and religious freedom in Nepal and Asia.

On July 29, McCaul requested the State Department to provide all relevant correspondence between the department and Humanists International by no later than August 6.

On August 8, McCaul also issued a subpoena against Humanists International for failing to provide key documents related to the grant promoting atheism abroad.

Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs Naz Durakoglu reportedly acknowledged in April that the State Department did not possess enough information about the nature of Humanists International's atheism activism.

The State Department now must provide the required documents by 5:00 p.m. on September 4,

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according to the release.

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Lockheed Martin Buys Terran Orbital Robotics, Satellite Company for $450Mln - Release

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) - Lockheed Martin is purchasing the robot manufacturing company Terran Orbital for close to half a billion dollars, the giant US defense contractor announced in a press release on Thursday.

"Lockheed Martin today announced the signing of a definitive agreement to acquire Terran Orbital, a global leader of satellite-based solutions primarily supporting the aerospace and defense industries," the release said.

Terran Orbital specializes in a high throughput, robotic manufacturing capacity and high-performing modular space vehicle designs, the release said.

"The enterprise value of the transaction is approximately $450 million. Lockheed Martin will acquire Terran Orbital for $0.25 in cash for each outstanding share of common stock and retire its existing debt," the release added.

As part of the deal, Lockheed Martin and other current Terran Orbital creditors are establishing a new, $30 million working capital facility that has already been put in place as of signing, according to the release.

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Harris To Propose US Ban On Price Gouging As Her Presidential Run Heats Up

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Kamala Harris is to propose a nationwide ban on price gouging as she narrows her focus on the economy in her 2024 race for the White House, her campaign said.

A majority of the 50 states and territories in the United States bar corporations from setting excessive prices but no such law exists at the federal level, her campaign noted in a text distributed on Thursday.

According to the statement, Harris will tell a campaign rally in North Carolina on Friday that she will empower the Federal Trade Commission and US state attorneys-general to “impose stiff penalties in the food industry” if she were to win as the Democratic Party’s nominee in the November 5 presidential election.

“On Friday, in an economic policy speech in North Carolina, Vice President Harris intends to announce a plan to prevent corporations in the food and grocery industries from unfairly jacking up prices on consumers by imposing the first-ever federal ban on corporate price gouging in these industries,” the text said.

It said Harris is expected to “call out meat-processing middlemen as particularly egregious examples [of price-gouging] and propose plans to increase competition to lower the cost of meat.”

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Harris' focus on the meat-processing industry comes amid record profits for companies in the industry. One chicken processor, Pilgrim's Pride, has seen its stock soar 65% this year while another in the game, Tyson Foods, has seen a 15% gain.

MarketWatch, in a report, said Harris intends to direct her administration to closely scrutinize proposed mergers between big food companies that eliminate competition and focus their enforcement on investigating and prosecuting price fixing.

The vice president also intends to target price-gouging in prescription drugs and housing, her campaign said.

Harris is running against former president Donald Trump, the Republican Party nominee, in the election. She became a headliner in the race after incumbent President Joe Biden dropped out of the election three weeks ago, naming her as his replacement on top of the Democratic Party ticket. Initially trailing Trump's campaign in pre-election polls, the Democrats have pulled ahead since Harris became their standard bearer.

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US Sanctions Houthi-Linked Network Over Iranian Oil Shipments to Yemen, UAE - Treasury

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed sanctions on a network associated with the Houthis for allegedly facilitating Iranian oil and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) shipments to Yemen and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the US Treasury Department said in a statement on Thursday.

"Today, the Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned several companies, individuals, and vessels for their involvement in the shipment of Iranian commodities, including oil and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), to Yemen and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on behalf of the network of Iran-based, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF)-backed Houthi financial official Said al-Jamal," the statement said.

According to the statement, revenue from al-Jamal's network has been connected to financing the Houthis' attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and civilian infrastructure, resulting in serious regional and international impacts.

Besides targeting Said al-Jamal's network, the Treasury has designated Hong Kong-based Kai Heng Long Global Energy Limited for allegedly facilitating the shipment of Iranian LPG, valued at tens of millions of dollars, to Lebanese Hezbollah, and identified four vessels owned and managed by the company as blocked property.

Iran has repeatedly rejected accusations from Western countries over Tehran's alleged involvement in Houthi attacks on merchant ships in the Red Sea. In November, Houthi rebels began attacking what they say are ships associated with Israel in response to its military actions in the Gaza Strip.

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Trump Asks Court to Delay Sentencing in Hush Money Case Until After US Election - Letter

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) - Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump is requesting New York Supreme Court Judge Juan Merchan postpone his sentencing in the so-called hush money case until after the US election in November, the former US president's defense team revealed in a letter obtained by Sputnik on Thursday.

"Setting aside naked election-interference objectives, there is no valid countervailing reason for the Court to keep the current sentencing date on the calendar," the letter said. "There is no basis for continuing to rush. Accordingly, we respectfully request that any sentencing, if one is needed, be adjourned until after the Presidential election."

Trump's lawyers stated that the delay would allow him to assess state and federal appellate options in response to any adverse ruling.

The sentencing date in the case was initially set for September 18.

In late May, a jury found Trump guilty on 34 charges of falsifying business records related to payments made to adult film actress Stormy Daniels and others.

Trump has maintained that the payments to Daniels, former Playboy model Karen McDougal, and a former doorman at Trump Tower were all made as part of standard non-disclosure agreements and is seeking to appeal his conviction.

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US Charges Jordanian Citizen With Attacking Energy Facility - Justice Department

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) - The United States charged a Jordanian citizen with attacking an energy facility and threatening to use explosives in other attacks, the US Justice Department said on Thursday.

“Hashem Younis Hashem Hnaihen, 43, a Jordanian citizen residing in Orlando, Florida, is charged with four counts of threatening to use explosives and one count of destruction of an energy facility,” the Justice Department said in a statement.

Hnaihen allegedly threatened to carry out “hate-fueled” mass violence motivated by a desire to target businesses for their perceived support for Israel, the statement said.

Beginning around June 2024, Hnaihen allegedly targeted and attacked businesses for their perceived support for Israel, including smashing the glass front doors of businesses, the statement said.

Hnaihen also allegedly left warning letters, which made political demands and threatened future attacks with explosives, the statement said.

Prosecutors allege that Hnaihen broke into a solar power generation facility and systematically destroyed solar panel arrays, causing more than $700,000 in damage, the statement said.

Law enforcement officials identified Hnaihen as a suspect and arrested him on July 11, the statement said.

Hnaihen faces up to 10 years in prison for each threat offense and up to 20 years in prison for the destruction of an energy facility charge, according to the statement.

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Ukraine's Military Mission in Kursk Unclear - White House

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) - The White House said Thursday it is unclear what Ukraine's military mission is, amid reports that Ukraine has moved some forces into Russia's Kursk region.

"All I can tell you is that we have seen some units being reapplied and sent to that area, but it's not clear right now how many are eventually going to go and what their military mission is going to be," White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said at a press briefing.

Last week, Ukrainian troops launched a ground offensive in Russia's Kursk region and reportedly seized several settlements.

It marked Ukraine's most significant direct attack in Russia since the war began in February 2022.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Ukraine had carried out another large-scale provocation, firing indiscriminately at civilian targets. The enemy will receive a proper response in the border regions of Russia, Putin added.

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Western Collation's Strikes in Red Sea Could Lead to Spiral of Escalation - Russian Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, August 15 (Sputnik) - The unlawful military actions of Western countries in the Red Sea could provoke an unprecedented escalation of the situation in the region, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Thursday.

"Strikes of the so-called Western coalition from the Red Sea basin are not only a gross violation of international law, including the UN Charter, but also could trigger a spiral of escalation with the most unpredictable consequences," Polyanskiy said during a UN Security Council meeting on Yemen.

At the same time, the actions of Ansar Allah, also known as the Houthi movement, are not being taken in a vacuum, he added.

The Ansar Allah movement controls North Yemen and most of Yemen's Red Sea coast. The group vowed in November 2023 to attack any ships linked to Israel until it halts military action in Gaza. The attacks prompted the United States to form a multinational coalition, which includes the United Kingdom, to protect shipping in the Red Sea area and strike Houthi targets on the ground.

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No Signs That Hezbollah Wants War With Israel - White House

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) - The White House said on Thursday it has not seen signs that Hezbollah wants to start a war with Israel.

"We still haven't seen signs that Hezbollah wants to jump in with both feet here and start a new war on the second front at this time," White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said during a press briefing.

Kirby added that the White House was monitoring if Hezbollah would participate in Iran's planned retaliatory attack against Israel for assassinating Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran last month.

Amid another round of ceasefire talks in Doha this week, there remain heightened fears of further escalations toward a full-scale war in the Middle East after Israel carried out provocative dual assassinations of Hezbollah and Hamas leaders in Beirut and Tehran, respectively, at the end of July.

Both Iran and Hezbollah have stated that they will launch retaliatory attacks on Israel.

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Violence in Yemen Remains Relatively Contained Compared to 2022 - UN Special Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, August 15 (Sputnik) - Levels of violence along the frontlines of Yemen seem to be contained unlike before the 2022 truce, United Nations Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg said on Thursday.

"While levels of violence along the frontlines remain relatively contained compared to the period before the 2022 truce, we are continuing to witness military preparations and reinforcements accompanied by continuous threats of a return to war," Grundberg said during a UN Security Council meeting on Yemen.

The parties were able to halt a cycle of escalation that was badly impacting Yemen's banking and transport sectors and threatened to ignite again the military conflict, Grundberg said.

In addition, the Gaza conflict has spilled into the region and has affected places like Yemen, Grundberg added.

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Mpox Risk in Canada 'Remains Low,' Gov't Closely Monitoring Situation - Health Authority

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) – The risk to people from clade I monkeypox virus "remains low" in Canada, but the government is closely monitoring the situation amid an outbreak in Africa, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) said.

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On Wednesday, World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus declared the mpox outbreak in Africa a public health emergency of international concern.

"There have been no cases of clade I mpox virus to date in Canada. Although the risk to people in Canada from clade I mpox remains low at this time, the Government of Canada is closely monitoring the mpox situation in the DRC and neighboring countries, while working with domestic and international partners to determine opportunities for support," PHAC said in a statement issued Wednesday.

The health agency nonetheless noted that there has been an ongoing outbreak of clade II mpox in Canada since 2022, with some recent upticks in Toronto. However, reports suggest that the previous strain is less severe than the latest one, it added.

In addition, Ottawa has procured sufficient supplies of mpox vaccines to support both provincial and territorial programs for disease prevention and control, PHAC said.

Mpox, also known as monkeypox, is a rare infectious disease that is also transmitted between people. It is usually a mild disease that most people recover from within a few weeks, but some may have complications. The initial symptoms of mpox include fever, headache, muscle aches, back pain, enlarged lymph nodes, chills and fatigue. A rash may develop, often starting on the face and then spreading to other parts of the body.

The number of reported cases of mpox increased significantly in 2023. In 2024, more than 14,000 cases and 524 deaths have been reported, surpassing last year's numbers.

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White House's Kirby Declines to Comment on WSJ Report on Nord Stream Attack

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) – White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby on Thursday declined to comment on a Wall Street Journal report outlining new details on the 2022 Nord Stream attack.

"I'm not going to comment on the Wall Street Journal report," Kirby said during a press briefing.

On Wednesday, the WSJ reported that the German investigation into the attack on the Nord Stream pipelines is now focusing on former Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief of Armed Forces Valerii Zaluzhnyi. The investigators allegedly have no evidence that could be presented in court.

Zaluzhnyi went ahead with the operation to blow up the Russian pipelines, despite Volodymyr Zelenskyy's order to call it off at the CIA's request, the newspaper reported.

The explosions at two Russian gas export pipelines to Europe, Nord Stream and Nord Stream 2, occurred on September 26, 2022. Germany, Denmark, and Sweden have not ruled out targeted sabotage. The Russian Prosecutor General's Office opened an investigation into an act of international terrorism.

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White House Says Russia's 12-Year Treason Sentence for Karelina 'Vindictive Cruelty'

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WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) - The decision by Russia's Sverdlovsk regional court to sentence US and Russian dual citizen Ksenia Karelina to 12 years in prison for treason is vindictive and cruel, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Thursday.

"I think the way we would describe this sentence of 12 years is vindictive cruelty," Kirby said during a press briefing.

The United States will continue to seek consular access to Karelina, Kirby added.

On Thursday, the Russian court sentenced Karelina to 12 years in a general penal colony after she pleaded guilty to treason for transferring money to the Ukrainian military. The court also fined Karelina 300,000 rubles ($3,360).

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US Imposed Sanctions on 4,800 Russian Individuals, Companies - Pentagon Inspector General

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed nearly 4,800 sanctions on individuals and entities linked to Russia, but the effectiveness of these measures has been undermined by complex evasion tactics, the US Defense Department Office of Inspector General (OIG) said in a report on Thursday.

"The quarter's additions brought the total number of war-related individuals and entities under sanctions to nearly 4,800, whether in Russia or elsewhere," the report said.

However, the effectiveness of sanctions has been challenged as the sanctioned entities and their associates used evolving trade networks and complex, circuitous routes to bypass the imposed restrictions.

Sanctions imposed by the Treasury Department targeted more than 80% of Russia's banking system, limiting their access to the global financial network, the report said.

The US sanctions necessitated the State Department's engagement with a growing number of countries susceptible to Russian evasion tactics, the report added.

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Iran's Retaliatory Attack Could Come With Little or No Warning – Kirby

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) – Iran's retaliatory attack against Israel can take place with little or no warning, including in the coming days, as the United States continues to adjust its force posture in the region in anticipation of it, White House National Security Communications Advisor Joh Kirby said on Thursday.

"That [Iranian attack] could come with little or no warning and certainly could come in coming days, and we have to be ready for it," Kirby said during a press briefing.

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Nearly Half of Canadians Struggling to Meet Daily Expenses Due to Rising Prices - StatCan

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) - Close to half of Canadians (45%) have reported that rising prices have affected their ability to meet daily expenses, Statistics Canada (StatCan) said on Thursday.

The data come from the latest cycle of the Canadian Social Survey, collected from April 19 to June 3, Statistics Canada said in the latest edition of its "The Daily" bulletin.

"In spring 2024, nearly half (45%) of Canadians reported that rising prices were greatly affecting their ability to meet day-to-day expenses, 12 percentage points higher than what it was two years earlier (33%)," Statistics Canada said.

Close to four in ten Canadians (38%) said they are "very concerned" about their ability to either afford a home or rent due to rising prices - an 8% increase from two years ago, Statistics Canada said.

In addition, nearly a fourth of Canadians reported their households as being very or somewhat likely, respectively 8% and 15% to obtain meals from community organizations in the past six months - a 3% surge over a two-year period.

In mid-June, Food Banks Canada reported that more than one in four Canadians might currently be living under the Material Deprivation Index poverty-level standard.

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Gaps in Israel-Hamas Ceasefire Deal Lie in Execution – White House

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) – The White House said Thursday the framework of a potential ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas is generally accepted, with the remaining gaps left in the execution of it.

"We're at a point now where the framework is generally accepted and where the gaps are in the execution of the deal, the individual muscle movements that go with putting the deal in place," White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby told a briefing.

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US Labor Puzzle Grows as Jobless Claims Dip Again From Year-High

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) - Weekly jobless claims filed by Americans have fallen a second week in a row after reaching one-year highs, US Labor Department data showed on Thursday, adding to the puzzle over the US employment situation as being a key to a potential interest rate change.

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The Federal Reserve is watching multiple economic data to decide whether it should embark on the first US interest rate cut in four years after the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak. Weekly filings for unemployment insurance would be one important number.

Labor Department records for the week that ended on August 10 showed initial jobless claims at 229,000, prior to any revision. The Labor Department said on Wednesday that filings during the previous week to August 3 were little changed at 234,000, versus the 233,000 it reported initially.

Prior to that, the Labor Department said jobless claims hit a one-year high of 250,000 during the week that ended on July 27.

Economists say the decline in filings since the spike two weeks ago is likely to make the Fed think about the job market.

The US central bank's main reason for lowering interest rates would be to acknowledge less inflation pressure from a slackening job market and economy. But if employment is picking up again, it could keep inflation where it is, discounting the need for a rate intervention.

"The [jobless] data bears watching for signals about a more material weakening in the labor market going forward, which would have implications for [Fed] policy," Carl Weinberg, chief economist at High Frequency Economics, said in comments carried by MarketWatch. "Right now, they signal modest economic slowing at worst, not contraction. There is no call for emergency or massive Fed rate cuts in today's outcome."

The last time the Fed did a rate cut was in March 2020, when it instituted a 100 basis-point, or full percentage point, reduction to bring US rates to an all-time low of between zero and 0.25% as the economy began to grapple with the COVID-19 outbreak.

Following that, the Fed hiked rates by 525 basis, or a 5.25 percentage points, between March 2022 and June 2023 to bring rates to a two-decade high of between 5.25% and 5.5%.

The central bank will decide on September 18 on whether a pivot in rates will be needed. Most Wall Street economists argue that a cut is certainly warranted with inflation crashing over the past two years from COVID-era highs.

Inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index, grew by 2.9% in the year to July, versus its four-decade high of 9.1% in June 2022. But it remains above the Fed's annual inflation target of 2%.

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US Does Not Anticipate Reaching Gaza Ceasefire Deal Today – Kirby

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) – The United States does not anticipate a deal coming out of ceasefire talks that have just begun in Doha, Qatar with high chances the talks will continue into Friday, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Thursday.

"We do not anticipate coming out of these talks today with a deal. In fact, I'd expect the talks to continue into tomorrow," Kirby said during a press briefing.

Representatives of the United States, Qatar, Egypt, and Israel arrived in Doha earlier in the day to participate in talks to reach a deal on a ceasefire and release of hostages in Gaza. The

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Palestinian movement Hamas said earlier this week that it will not take part in the negotiations. According to Kirby, the talks will focus on the implementation of the agreement announced by President Joe Biden at the end of May.

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Republican Vice President Contender JD Vance Agrees to Two Official Debates

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) - Republican vice presidential nominee JD Vance said Thursday that he would participate in official debates with his Democratic counterpart Tim Walz on September 18 and October 1.

"The American people deserve as many debates as possible … Not only do I accept the CBS debate on October 1st, I accept the CNN debate on September 18th as well," Vance posted on social media in response to Walz.

The debate hosted by CBS News, which had proposed several dates just the day earlier, is scheduled to be held in New York City. Walz had first posted on social media, "See you on October 1, JD."

Presidential nominees Donald Trump and Kamala Harris have agreed to a debate on September 10.

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framework of gaza ceasefire deal generally accepted by parties, gaps remain in execution of deal - white house's kirby

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gaza ceasefire talks have just begun in doha - white house's kirby

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US Congress Has Authorized Over $174Bln in Funds for Ukraine, NATO Since 2022 - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) – US Congress has authorized more than $174 billion in funds for Ukraine and strengthening NATO in Europe since February 2022, the Department of Defense Office of Inspector General said in a report released on Thursday.

"As of the end of this quarter, since February 2022 the U.S. Congress had appropriated more than $174.19 billion in supplemental funding for the U.S. response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine," the report said.

This amount includes security, direct budget, development, and humanitarian assistance to

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Ukraine, along with security assistance for NATO allies and other partner nations, and funding to support enhanced US military presence and activity in Europe, the report added.
Russia has consistently warned against the West's continued arms deliveries to Ukraine, saying that they only prolong the conflict without changing its outcome.

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Russia's S-400, Integrated Air Defense System One of Most Advanced in World - Pentagon IG

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) - Russia's S-400 system and its integrated air defense system remain one of the most advanced in the world, the US Defense Department Office of the Inspector General (OIG) said in a new quarterly report published on Thursday.
"Russia's S-400 and overall integrated air defense system remains one of the most advanced in the world," the report said.
According to the report, Russia has moved several S-400 systems from Crimea to the Belgorod region to protect from Ukrainian strikes using US-supplied High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS).
At the same time, Russia has deployed its most advanced S-500 system to Crimea to protect the Kerch Bridge, the report added.
In May, President Joe Biden lifted the ban on the use of US-supplied arms by Ukraine to strike Russia for counter-fire purposes in the Kharkov region, but has not authorized the use of long-range missiles inside Russia.

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US Congress Has Authorized More Than $174 Billion in Funds for Ukraine, Strengthening NATO in Europe - Pentagon IG

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Ukraine Lacks Capacity, Munitions to Overcome Russia's Advantages - Pentagon Watchdog

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) – Ukraine lacks the capacity and munitions to overcome Russia's air and ground advantages and is suffering heavy casualties, the Department of Defense Office of the Inspector General (OIG) said in a new quarterly report published on Thursday.
"The UAF [Ukrainian Armed Forces] continued to suffer heavy attrition rates and lack sufficient capabilities and munitions—particularly artillery, air defense, and long-range strike capabilities—to overcome Russia's air and ground advantages," the report said.
Despite US supplies of munition that began arriving in June, Ukraine will not be able to overcome Russia's daily fire rate of 10,000 artillery rounds or conduct a large-scale offensive

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operation for at least six months, the report added.

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Despite US supplies of munition that began arriving in June, Ukraine will not be able to overcome Russia's daily fire rate of 10,000 artillery rounds or conduct a large-scale offensive operation for at least six months, the report added.

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India Lobbied US to Ease Pressure on Ex-Bangladeshi Prime Minister Before Ouster - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 15 (Sputnik) – India began privately asking the United States to ease their criticism of Sheikh Hasina a year before she was ousted amid student riots last week, The Washington Post reported on Thursday, citing US and Indian officials.

The US had publicly accused Hasina of imprisoning thousands of her opponents and sanctioned a Bangladeshi police unit under her command for allegedly carrying out extrajudicial abductions and killings, the report said.

Indian officials in a series of meetings called on their US counterparts to cool down the rhetoric. They argued that Bangladesh would become a breeding ground for Islamist groups if the opposition were allowed to gain power in the country in open election, according to the report.

"You approach it at the level of democracy, but for us, the issues are much, much more serious and existential," an Indian government adviser was quoted as saying in the report. "There were a lot of conversations with the Americans where we said, 'This is a core concern for us, and you can't take us as a strategic partner unless we have some kind of strategic consensus.'"

One US official emphasized that in such places as Bangladesh, where the situation on the ground is complicated, there is a need to find a balance between what partners want and the expectations of the American government. Other US officials said there was little to be gained from further alienating Hasina, according to the report.

"The U.S. approach to Bangladesh was always one that tried to both be consistent with our values - and we spoke about those publicly on many occasions - but also pragmatic about the reality that the situation in Bangladesh was very complicated and that there were a number of interests that we had there and that other countries had there," one US official said.

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Protests against the Bangladeshi government's quota system for public jobs erupted in June and escalated at the beginning of August. Clashes between students, police, and government supporters reportedly left more than 500 people dead. Hasina resigned amid the unrest. Muhammad Yunus was sworn in as interim prime minister on August 8, followed by a purge of government officials appointed by Hasina and her supporters.

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