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8/19/24 Monday

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Independent Journalist Arrested Under Terrorism Act in UK

Independent Journalist Richard Medhurst was arrested in the UK on Thursday under the UK's Terrorism Act 2000, according to a video he posted Monday on X recounting the experience.
"On Thursday, as I landed in London's Heathrow airport, I was immediately escorted off the plane by six police officers who were waiting for me at the entrance of the aircraft. They arrested me – not detained – they arrested me under Section 12 of the Terrorism Act of 2000 and accused me of allegedly 'expressing an opinion or belief that is supportive of a proscribed organization' but wouldn't explain what this meant," Medhurst says in the video.
Section 12 of the Terrorism Act 2000 has a clause that was added in 2019that made it illegal to "expresses an opinion or belief that is supportive of a proscribed organization" if "in doing so is reckless as to whether a person to whom the expression is directed will be encouraged to support a proscribed organization."
Medhurst's reporting has focused heavily on the Israeli-Gaza war and has spoken out against funding Ukraine. He also posted about the very act that he was arrested for.
"The fascist 'terrorism act' being used to hold activists without charge or trial because they tried to stop actual terrorism and genocide by the IDF,"Medhurst posted the same day he was arrested. Medhurst was referring to Palestinian activists who have been detained recently under the Terrorism Act.
Medhurst says he was then handcuffed and transferred to a police station where he was searched and his electronic devices seized.
"I was placed in solitary confinement, in a cold cell that smelled like urine. There was barely any light and the bed, if you can even call it a bed, was simply a small concrete ledge with a paper-thin mattress. The cell had no windows, no heating, no toilet paper. I was recorded 24/7 with audio and video, even when going to the toilet. I had to eat food with a piece of cardboard you're supposed to fold in two in order to scoop up the meal," Medhurst said, describing the conditions he was held in.
He was then held for nearly 24 hours without being allowed to contact his family and his attempts to speak to a solicitor (UK legal advisor) were hindered and possibly monitored.
"The police said that I have the right to inform someone that I'm locked up. So I said okay, I want to call my family, then they go 'Well, your calls are withheld due to the nature of the alleged offense' I tried to ask well, what's the point of a right if you can just randomly withdraw it? Why tell me that I have this right at all? And one of them said something along the lines of 'Well, it's not an absolute right, it can be waived,'" Medhurst described.
"For many hours, no one in the world knew what had happened to me or where I was. Only the police could call a solicitor for me. I had to ask four or five different guards for several hours before I finally received a call. Some of my solicitor's calls did not get through or were not answered. One of the calls -my solicitor was told- would be monitored, and so they simply

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refused to take it. I asked to speak to the solicitor afterwards when that happened but I was not allowed to."

"In total, I spent almost 24 hours in detention. At no point whatsoever was I allowed to speak to a family member or friend. After waiting 15 hours, I was finally interviewed by two detectives," Medhurst says the interview lasted 60 to 90 minutes.

Medhurst emphasized that he denies all accusations by the police, noting that his parents held Nobel Peace Prizes for their work as UN peacekeepers and he "categorically and unequivocally" condemns terrorism.

"Those like myself, who are speaking up and reporting on the situation in Palestine are being targeted. I had booked my ticket to London on the same day and yet an entire team of police were mobilized to arrest and question me. This is why I felt this was a preplanned, coordinated arrest. Many people have been detained in Great Britain because of their journalism, sometimes under the Terrorism Act, sometimes not. I think of Julian Assange, Craig Murray, Kit Klarenberg, David Miranda, Vanessa Beeley. As far as I am aware, I am the only journalist, however, to have been arrested and held for up to 24 hours under section 12 of the Terrorism Act."

Medhurst said that he now feels he has a "muzzle" put on him, and does not know if he will be charged with the crime he was arrested for or if he will be put in jail in a few months, something that makes his work more difficult. "I simply do not know if or how I can work at all during the next month.

Former UN weapons inspector and geopolitical analyst Scott Ritter, whose house was raided by the United States FBI earlier this month for alleged violations of the Foreign Agents Registry Act, called the arrest "political persecution" designed to "hamper [Medhurst's] important work as a journalist."

"Freedom of the press, freedom of speech really are under attack. The state is cracking down and escalating to try and stop people from speaking out against our government's complicity in genocide, please do not just stand with me, but with the others who are still inside," Medhurst concluded.

UK authorities have not commented on Medhurst's arrest. His website currently displays an error page but it is not clear if Medhurst removed it voluntarily, at the direction of UK authorities, or if the site was taken down by service providers. Sputnik has reached out to Medhurst for clarification and will update this space if he replies.

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War With Iran Would Bring Global Economic Collapse, Isolate The United States

On July 30, a senior leader of the Lebanese Hezbollah movement, Fouad Shukur, was assassinated in Beirut, a few hours later the political leader of the Palestinian movement Hamas and the chief negotiator for the movement in ceasefire talks with Israel, Ismail Haniyeh, was assassinated in Tehran.

Nearly three weeks after the assassination of Shukur and Haniyeh, the world is still waiting for Iran's retaliation against Israel for the attacks. It inevitably will, but the more pertinent question is what comes next.

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“The real question is not what Iran does, the question is what does the United States do?” asked Mohammad Marandi, a professor of English Literature and Orientalism at the University of Tehran on Sputnik’s Fault Lines on Monday. “If the United States gets involved in the war, then I think it’s the United States [that] will lose more than anyone else.”

Marandi explained that a war between the US and Israel on one side and Iran on the other would expand regionally and include the US-allied dictators who would be seen as complicit with the United States.

“So there will no longer be any gas or oil installations in the Persian Gulf region and beyond that will be able to export anything. So, that would lead to a global economic collapse,” Marandi continued. “It won’t lead to a recession or a depression, it will lead to a deep depression - something that we haven’t experienced before in recent centuries, even in the 1930s.”

Iran has no choice but to respond more forcefully than it did after an Israeli airstrike struck the Iranian consulate in Damascus, Syria. That attack, in which Iran utilized hundreds of drones to overwhelm Israeli air defenses and then hit military targets with missiles, was described as restrained outside of Western and Israeli media. Still, less than four months later, Israel struck Iran again.

“By definition, [that] means it was inadequate for a permanent solution. So, the Iranians are going to have to hit harder,” explained Marandi.

Despite a letter signed by the US and a few European countries telling Iran to stand down, most of the world understands that Iran has been restrained and reasonable compared to their Israeli counterparts. That will further isolate the United States if it joins Israel in a war with Iran, which will exacerbate its economic issues if there is a global collapse.

“How would that look for the United States, when the United States is going to fight the war on behalf of a genocidal regime and then bring down the world economy? It will be devastating to the United States because no one will sympathize with it,” Marandi added.

“The point is that they are dragging the world towards a catastrophe. This genocide will have consequences. And an expanded war will have enormous consequences,” he concluded.

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US Senate Majority Leader Says Biden Not Angry at Him After Decision to End Campaign

CHICAGO, August 20 (Sputnik) - US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said that it did not appear US President Joe Biden was angry at him after Democrats pressured him to drop out of the presidential race.

"No, in fact, we spoke, he called me just the other day," Schumer told US media an interview when asked if Biden was angry at him after he was pressured to drop out of the US election.

Schumer said he and Biden had talked about the latter's decision to drop out of the presidential race.

Biden also offered his support to help Democrats win more seats in the upcoming election as well, Schumer added.

Overall, Schumer said the conversation was great, just like "the old days."

The senator also mentioned that he had talked to former President Barack Obama about

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Biden's status in the US election.

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Police Say Protesters Briefly Breached Security Fencing at DNC, But Now Mitigated

CHICAGO, August 20 (Sputnik) - Protesters briefly breached the security perimeter of the Democratic National Convention at the United Center in Chicago but the situation is now under control, a Chicago Police Department spokesperson told Sputnik.

"Currently, the situation is fully under control," the spokesperson said on Monday. "Attempts to disrupt public order and breach the barriers have been mitigated, and there is no need to increase police presence."

A Sputnik correspondent said the situation at the United Center area is calm and protesters have been pushed back to the security perimeter of the venue.

Earlier pro-Palestinian protesters broke through a portion of the security fencing at the Democratic National Convention, the Sputnik correspondent reported.

After the protesters managed to climb over the first layer of the metal barriers, they were immediately confronted by law enforcement officers.

Tens of thousands of protesters are expected to demonstrate outside the DNC event all week to call for an end to US support for Israel's war in Gaza.

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Missile Defense Agency Orders New Research, Evaluation on Missile Kill Webs - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 20 (Sputnik) - The US Missile Defense Agency (MDA) has ordered more experimentation and continued evaluations on developing missile defeat kill webs (MDKW) from Modern Technology Solutions, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"Modern Technology Solutions [of] Alexandria, Virginia is being awarded a ...$73,568,329 [contract," the release stated on Monday.

Under the terms of the contract, Modern Technology Solutions (MTS) will work to advance current state-of-the-art technology and evaluate current proposed systems and operational systems of interactive missile defense, the Defense Department explained.

"The contractor will create a digital engineering ecosystem that enables experiments and evaluations of MDKW including left-through-right of launch," the release said.

Work on the project will be funded over the next five years, ending on August 18, 2029, the Defense Department said.

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CORRECTION - US Navy Orders $1.4Bln More Work on Nuclear Propulsion From Fluor Marine - Pentagon

(corrects headline to Bln)
WASHINGTON, August 20 (Sputnik) - The US Navy has awarded Fluor Marine Propulsion an almost $1.4 billion contract extension to continue its work on naval nuclear propulsion at the Naval Nuclear Laboratory, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.
"Fluor Marine Propulsion [of] Arlington, Virginia is awarded a $1,396,995,054 ...modification ...contract to exercise fiscal 2025 options for naval nuclear propulsion work at the Naval Nuclear Laboratory," the release said on Monday.
Most of the work on the ongoing project will be performed in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (52%) and Schenectady, New York (39%), the Defense Department said.
The Naval Sea Systems Command in Washington, DC, will oversee the work as its contracting activity, the Defense Department said.

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UPDATE- Neither Harris Nor Trump Can Solve Ukraine Conflict, But Trump is More Willing-US Activist

(adds additional paras 5-6)
CHICAGO, August 20 (Sputnik) - CHICAGO, August 20 (Sputnik) - Neither US presidential candidate can resolve the Ukraine conflict, however Republican candidate and former US President Donald Trump has more willingness to do so, Sean Reynolds, an activist in the Foreign Policy Working Group of Chicago Area Peace Action, told Sputnik.
“I don't believe that any President can stop the Ukraine war, although Trump has more willingness to do so,” Reynolds said on Monday.

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Moreover, Reynolds stated that the US wanted the Ukrainian conflict more than Russia.
"I think the US wanted this far more than Russia did," Reynolds said. "We ousted a democratically elected government in order to use that country to drag Russia into war, in order to threaten it with an expansion of NATO to a proximity to Moscow that no one in Russia was able to tolerate."
The peace activist added that he believes Russia will win the war in Ukraine but the United States needs to be restrained in order to achieve peace and save the human race.
"We can restrain the worst excesses of the United States even in-between the election so that when Russia wins this war, as they are obviously going to … we don't lose the species," Reynolds said.
Reynolds also noted that Washington was using Ukraine to weaken an "international rival" with no regard for Ukrainian lives.
Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Russian President Vladimir Putin said its goal was "the protection of people who have been subjected to abuse and genocide by the Kiev regime for eight years." He noted that the special operation was a forced measure, Russia "was left with no chance to act differently, the security risks were such that it was impossible to respond by other means."

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US Intelligence Community Confirms Iran Recently Hacked Trump Campaign - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 20 (Sputnik) - The US intelligence community (IC) confirmed in a statement that Iran recently breached the Trump campaign's network as part of a broader effort to allegedly meddle in the US presidential election.

"We have observed increasingly aggressive Iranian activity during this election cycle, specifically involving influence operations targeting the American public and cyber operations targeting presidential campaigns," the FBI and other federal agencies said in the statement on Monday. "This includes the recently reported activities to compromise former President Trump's campaign, which the IC attributes to Iran."

The US intelligence community is confident that Iran has sought access to individuals with direct access to the presidential campaigns of both Republicans and Democrats, the statement said.

Iran's alleged activity, including theft and disclosures, is intended to influence the US election process, the statement added.

Last week, US media reported that the Biden campaign was also targeted by Iranian hackers in July.

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Crude Prices Tumble 3% As Oil's Renewed Slump Heightens August Volatility

NEW YORK, August 20 (Sputnik) - Crude prices tumbled with renewed force on Monday, tumbling almost 3%, amid a potential ceasefire deal in the Gaza war, which had been a major support to this year's rally in oil.

West Texas Intermediate (WTI), the benchmark for US crude, settled down $2.28, or 3%, at $74.37 per barrel. It hit a one-week low of $73.45 earlier in the session. With less than two weeks left until the end of August, WTI is already down almost 4% on the month after a near 5% drop in July. Year-to-date, the US crude benchmark is up around 3%.

UK-origin Brent finished the New York session down $2.02, or 2.5%, at $77.66 per barrel, after an intraday low at $78.64. It hit a two-week low of $77.50 earlier in the session. For August thus far, WTI is down almost 4%, adding to July's 6.5% plunge. Year-to-date, the global crude benchmark is up less than 1%.

Negotiations for a Gaza cease-fire and hostage release deal, framed by the United States as a "final stage" bid to end the 10-month-long war that has caused several disruptions to crude shipments from the Middle East. Peace in the region, while welcome, could significantly ease the geopolitical support for oil, traders say.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Monday said the latest push by Washington to achieve a ceasefire deal in Gaza was "probably the best, maybe the last opportunity" and urged all stakeholders to get the agreement done.

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Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in a statement released by his office, said he "reiterated Israel's commitment to the latest American proposal regarding the release of our hostages - taking into account Israel's security needs."

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US Reaches Deal With Philippines on Transit of Afghan Nationals - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) - Washington and Manila have concluded an agreement to permit some Afghan citizens to transit to the Philippines in order to complete the processing of their immigrant visas to resettle in the United States, the US State Department announced on Monday.

"The United States and the Philippines have reached an agreement on allowing a limited number of Afghan nationals to transit to the Philippines to complete their visa processing for Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs) and resettlement to the United States," the State Department said in a press release.

The United States is providing the necessary services for Afghan nationals who are temporarily residing in the Philippines such as food, housing, security, medical care and transportation.

The Taliban came to power in Afghanistan in August 2021 after it toppled the US-backed government as US and NATO troops were leaving the country after being present there for almost 20 years.

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Thousands of Pro-Palestine Supporters March Near Democratic National Convention

CHICAGO, August 20 (Sputnik) - Thousands of pro-Palestine supporters are gathering in Chicago and marching towards the Democratic National Convention to show their support for Palestine, a Sputnik correspondent reported on Monday.

The protestors gathered in Union Park near the United Center, where the convention is being held. While they are marching around the vicinity of the forum, they are prohibited from gathering directly in front of it.

The protesters are chanting different slogans and holding signs demanding an end to support for Israel.

Many protesters expressed dissatisfaction with both Trump and Harris, stating they would prefer not to vote in the upcoming presidential election.

"… somebody like Kamala Harris or Joe Biden, you know, I don't ever expect Trump to make any sort of change, but these people who claim to be representatives of democracy, they could end this with a phone call," Ryan Hamann, one of the participants, told Sputnik.

According to news media, about 150 organizations are participating in this protest and it is expected that even more protestors will attend.

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Local police officers and a helicopter are present to maintain peace and ensure everything runs smoothly.

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Trump Says His Admin. to Make Historic Investment in Small Modular Nuclear Reactors

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) – Former US President Donald Trump said on Monday that if he is elected, his administration would make a historic investment in small modular nuclear reactors in the United States to make energy cheaper than in China.

"We will make a historic commitment to bring in advanced Small Modular nuclear reactors online," Trump said in his remarks during a campaign event in York, Pennsylvania.

According to Trump, Chinese factories pay 50% less for electricity than American ones. He added that his administration will make energy low cost, including by more oil drilling and small modular nuclear reactors.

Small and medium nuclear reactors (SMR) are nuclear fission reactors that are significantly smaller than traditional nuclear reactors and can be built at one location and then transferred to another. In 2018, the International Atomic Energy Agency said SMRs are among the most promising emerging nuclear power technologies

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UPDATE- Former US Congressman Santos Pleads Guilty to Wire Fraud, Identity Theft - US Attorney

(changes source in headline, lede; adds quote in para 2; edits throughout)

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) - Former US Congressman George Santos pleaded guilty to wire fraud and aggravated identity theft, the US Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of New York said on Monday.

"Earlier today, in federal court in Central Islip, former Congressman George Anthony Devolder Santos pleaded guilty to committing wire fraud and aggravated identity theft," the office said via social media platform X.

Santos faces a two-year mandatory minimum sentence, although the judge in the case estimated that Santos could serve six to eight years, CBS News reported.

The plea agreement also calls on Santos to pay at least $373,749.97 in restitution, the report added.

Santos was expelled from the US House of Representatives following allegations of his criminal conduct. The House Ethics Committee said that it found "substantial" evidence of wrongdoing by Santos.

Prosecutors accused Santos of stealing campaign donor information to make fraudulent payments and filed a 23-charge superseding indictment against him.

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Trump Says US to Pay Off Over $35 Trillion in National Debt Under His Leadership

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) – Former US President and Republican candidate Donald Trump said on Monday that under his leadership, the United States will be able to pay off its huge national debt amounting to more than $35 trillion.

"We're going to pay off the debt of our country because this country owes $35 trillion, but that rapidly can come down," Trump said in his remarks during a campaign event in York, Pennsylvania.

Trump added that he would use oil to reduce the deficit, pay off the record debt, and cut taxes.

According to data from the US Treasury Department, the US budget deficit during the presidency of Joe Biden has hit an all-time high of $6.6 trillion.

The United States has been in a state of chronic excess of expenditures over income for almost a century; the last time there was a long period of surplus was from 1920 to 1930. The only US leader after World War II with a budget surplus was Harry Truman (1946-1950), and the largest government spending surplus was under Ronald Reagan at $1.34 trillion. The US finances such a gigantic budget deficit from the national debt, which in July for the first time exceeded the $35 trillion mark, and just two weeks later grew by another $160 billion.

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Trump Says He Will Revoke China's Trade Status, Create Reciprocal Tariff Act in Next Term

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) - US former President Donald Trump said on Monday that in his next term, he plans to revoke China's most favored nation trade status and introduce a reciprocal trade act.

"My next term, I will revoke China's most favorite nation trade status," Trump said during a rally.

Trump added he would pass the Trump Reciprocal Trade Act, ensuring the US imposes equal tariffs on any country or group that levies taxes of 100% or 200% on American goods.

In recent years, the United States has been actively accusing China of misusing the "developing country" designation in relation to itself, as this allows the Asian country to gain certain advantages under global trade rules despite already being sufficiently advanced economically, as claimed by critics.

Beijing, for its part, rejects such accusations, claiming in a 2021 white paper that "China is the largest developing country in the world."

The US presidential election is scheduled to be held on November 5.

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Harris Proposes Raising US Corporate Tax Rate to 28% - Campaign Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Kamala Harris is proposing raising the corporate tax rate in the United States to 28% if she is elected as the next president, NBC News reported on Monday, citing a campaign spokesperson.

Harris wants to raise the tax rate in order to help fund expensive projects she plans to work on if she wins the White House in November, the report said.

Her proposal would rescind a major part of the Trump administration's 2017 legislation that cut the corporate tax rate from 35% to 21%.

Harris campaign spokesman James Singer was cited as saying the proposal would be a fiscally responsible way to put money back in the pockets of working people and ensure billionaires and big corporations pay their fair share.

The bipartisan Congressional Budget Office has said that increasing the corporate tax rate by one percentage point would generate nearly $100 billion in fiscal revenues over 10 years.

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Trump Says Once President Will Stop Japan From Buying US Steel

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) – Former US President and Republican candidate Donald Trump vowed on Monday to block Japan from buying US Steel once he is back at the White House.

“Upon taking office, I will invoke the Defense Production Act wherever it's necessary to very quickly ramp up capacity of essential products, and I will stop Japan from buying United States Steel,” Trump said in his remarks during a campaign event in York, Pennsylvania.

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US Clean Water, Waste System Needs $630Mln Overhaul in Coming Decades - GAO Report

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) - The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that over $630 billion will be needed to overhaul clean water and wastewater infrastructure over the next 20 years but the real figure could be even higher, a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report said on Monday.

"The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that over $630 billion will be needed to overhaul clean water and wastewater infrastructure over the next 20 years," the report stated.

EPA's Clean Water State Revolving Fund gives states grants to build or replace such infrastructure, the GAO acknowledged.

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"However, we found that this money is allocated using a formula from 1987—which does not reflect states' current population and clean water needs. We convened experts who developed a new formula that is largely based on states' clean water needs," the report said.

The GAO suggested that Congress consider revising the formula for this program, the report said.

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Former US Congressman Santos Pleads Guilty to Wire Fraud, Identity Theft - Reports

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White House Says Not Engaged in Any Aspect of Kiev's Attack on Kursk Region

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) - The White House said on Monday that the United States is not part of any aspect of the attack by Ukraine on Russia's Kursk region.

"I am not going to get into the military operations of the Ukrainians," spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said when asked whether the incursion was the right decision by Ukraine. "I am going to let them speak to their military operations. I am going to say and what I've said before is that we are not engaged in any aspect or the planning or preparation of this operation. That is something, again, for them to speak to."

On August 6 at 5:30 a.m. local time, Ukrainian troops crossed the border into Russia and launched an offensive in the Kursk region, capturing several villages.

Ukrainian forces have lost up to 3,800 soldiers and 54 tanks in the Kursk direction as of August 19, the Russian Defense Ministry reported.

Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that the Kiev regime had carried out a provocation and was firing indiscriminately, including at civilian targets. Putin said that the enemy would receive a worthy response, and all of Russia's goals would be achieved.

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Sikorsky Delivers Last of New Presidential Helicopter Fleet to US Marine Corps - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) - Sikorsky has delivered the last of its current order of new generation presidential helicopters to the US Marine Corps, the helicopter maker's parent corporation Lockheed Martin announced on Monday.

"The US Marine Corps formally accepted the 23rd and final next-generation VH-92A presidential helicopter built by Sikorsky," Lockheed Martin said in a press release.

Sikorsky helicopters have flown every US president since 1957, the release said.

"This delivery represents a significant milestone and new chapter in the rich, 67-year history of Marines providing helicopter transport [for] the president of the United States. The VH-92A Patriot brings increased capabilities for this no-fail mission," the release added.

The program was carried out and completed under budget and within the planned delivery schedule, according to the release.

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US State Dept. Approves $100Mln Sale of Javelin Missiles to Australia - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) - The US State Department has approved a potential $100 million sale of Javelin missiles and related equipment to Australia, the US Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Monday.

Australia requested to purchase 350 Javelin FGM-148F missiles, as well as technical support and repair and return services, DSCA said in a statement.

The prime contractors for the sale would be RTX Corporation and Lockheed Martin, the statement said.

The State Department also approved a potential $70 million sale of Precision Guidance Kits and related equipment to Finland, for which Northrop Grumman Innovation Systems would serve as the principal contractor, the statement said.

Additionally, the US State Department approved a possible $305 million sale of CH-47 and AH-64 Helicopter Training services and equipment for the Netherlands, the statement added.

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US Approves $3.5Bln Sale of 36 Apache Helicopters to South Korea - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) – The US State Department has approved a potential $3.5 billion sale of 36 AH-64E Apache attack helicopters and related equipment and services to the government of South Korea, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency said on Monday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to

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the Republic of Korea of AH-64E Apache Helicopters and related elements of logistics and program support for an estimated cost of $3.5 billion," the agency said in a press release.
The government of South Kore has also requested to purchase up to 76 T700-GE-701D engines, up to 456 AGM-114R2 Hellfire missiles, up to 152 AGM-179A Joint Air-to-Ground missiles, among other equipment, the release said.

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Fly High Polaris Mission to Cross Van Allen Belt, Study Radiation Effects - SpaceX

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) - The ambitious manned Dragon Polaris Dawn mission to launch next week is planned to traverse the Van Allen radiation belt surrounding the Earth and more deeply measure its effects as well as testing a new space suit in extravehicular activities (EVAs) or space walks that can be mass produced in the future to aid in the colonization of Mars, SpaceX announced on Monday.
"This Dragon mission will take advantage of Falcon 9 [reusable booster] and Dragon's maximum performance, flying higher than any Dragon mission to date and endeavoring to reach the highest earth orbit ever flown," SpaceX said in a press release. "Orbiting through portions of the Van Allen radiation belt, Polaris Dawn will conduct research with the aim of better understanding the effects of spaceflight and space radiation on human health."
At 420 miles, or 700 kilometers above the Earth, the Polaris Dawn crew will carry out the first ever commercial space walk (EVA) using their new, SpaceX designed spacesuits, the release said.
"Building a base on the Moon and a city on Mars will require thousands of spacesuits; the development of this suit and the execution of the EVA will be important steps toward a scalable design for spacesuits on future long-duration missions." the release said.
Polaris Dawn will be the first of four private flights that Shift 4 founder and billionaire Jared Isaacman purchased from SpaceX, the release added.
The crew of four will consist of Isaacman, who led a previous private SpaceX crewed mission in 2001, his longtime colleague Scott Poteet as pilot and SpaceX officials Anna Menon and Sarah Gillis as flight medical officer and mission specialist, according to the release.

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Houthis Hand Back UN Human Rights Office in Sanaa - UN Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, August 19 (Sputnik) - Houthis have returned control over the premises of the UN Human Rights Office in Sanaa to the United Nations, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Monday.
"The Houthis handed the office back to the UN resident humanitarian coordinator for Yemen today," Dujarric said during a briefing.
On August 3, the rebel Ansar Allah movement, also known as the Houthis, took over the UN

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Human Rights Office's premises in Sanaa, after forcing its staff to hand over belongings, including documents, furniture and vehicles, the UN said.

In the wake of the attack, Yemen's internationally recognized government has called on the United Nations to move their offices in the country to Aden.

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Washington Council Member Arrested on Bribery Charges - Justice Dept

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) - A Washington Council member has been arrested on charges of accepting bribes to aid contract renewals for an initiative against gun violence, the Justice Department said on Monday.

Trayon White Sr., a 40-year-old Council member who represents Ward 8 in the US capital, agreed to receive $156,000 in cash payments to pressure government employees to extend contracts he was in a position to influence, the Justice Department said in a statement.

The contracts at issue were valued at $5.2 million and were for two companies to provide "violence intervention" services - a codename for the initiative against gun violence.

The companies were trying to renew their work with the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement and the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS). White was also chair of the DYRS.

"Because the investigation into the alleged bribery scheme involved contracts that could soon be awarded and other potential official acts that could be taken, our Office took swift steps to address the alleged crimes we were investigating," US Attorney for the District of Columbia Matthew Graves said in the statement.

The Washington Council performs legislative research, bill drafting, budget review, program and policy analysis, as well as constituent services. Thirteen members make up the body with a representative elected from each of the city's eight wards.

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DNC Chair Says Harris, Clinton Have Each Other on 'Speed Dial' Amid 2024 Campaign

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Kamala Harris and former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton have each other on speed dial amid Harris' 2024 presidential campaign, Democratic National Convention (DNC) Committee Chair Minyon Moore said on Monday.

"[Clinton] Has been an incredible partner to Vice President Harris," Moore said, as quoted by The Washington Times. "They have a great friendship. You know, they're on speed dial with each other."

The Democratic Party is holding its national convention in Chicago this week. Clinton is set to speak at the convention on Monday.

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Clinton's speech will likely focus on Harris' status as a woman of color running for president, Moore said.

Harris is scheduled to deliver her acceptance speech for the party's presidential nomination on Thursday.

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Canada to Contribute Extra C$1Mln to WHO Mpox Response in Africa – Foreign Ministry

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) – The Canadian Government will provide an additional C$1 million ($733,000) in funding assistance to support the World Health Organization's response to the mpox outbreak in Africa, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) said on Monday.

"The Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Foreign Affairs … today announced additional funding to the World Health Organization (WHO) for mpox response in Africa," GAC said in a statement. "Today's announcement … will provide an additional $1 million contribution to the WHO specifically for urgent mpox response efforts on the African continent."

The funds will be directed toward the WHO's Contingency Fund for Emergencies, the statement said and will be in addition to the C$2 million already deployed in support of the entity's response to the mpox outbreak, it added.

The funds will notably support improving systems to quicken the pace of detection as well as information sharing about mpox cases, increasing laboratory diagnostic capacity, and speeding up research on the virus' epidemiology, the statement said. It will also enhance community engagement to help control the outbreak.

The World Health Organization (WHO) had previously declared the monkeypox outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.

Mpox is a rare viral infection that can be especially dangerous for those with weakened immune systems. The disease typically manifests with fever, swollen lymph nodes, and a rash that progresses from spots to blisters, eventually forming ulcers and scabs.

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Blinken After Stop in Israel Says Will Travel to Egypt, Qatar for Gaza Ceasefire Talks

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken following meetings in Israel on Monday said he is traveling to Egypt and Qatar to consult with their leaders on steps needed to secure Hamas' support for the recent bridging proposal on a Gaza ceasefire.

"From here, I'm going on to Egypt, and Qatar ... I look forward to consulting with President Sisi [Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Sisi], with the Emir Sheik Tamim [Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani] with other critical colleagues in both countries on the immediate steps ahead, and in particular, what needs to be done to ensure that Hamas comes along," Blinken said during a press briefing.

Blinken added that the next crucial step is for Hamas to agree to the ceasefire proposal, noting

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that negotiators will then work on the details of the deal.

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Blinken Says Netanyahu Accepted Bridging Proposal on Gaza Ceasefire

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has accepted the recent bridging proposal on reaching a ceasefire in Gaza.

"In a very constructive meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu today, he confirmed to me that Israel accepts the bridging proposal," Blinken told reporters following a meeting with Netanyahu as part of his trip to Israel.

According to Blinken, it is now incumbent on Hamas to agree to the new proposal and then both parties and mediators, including the United States, Egypt, and Qatar, will complete the process of reaching clear understandings about how they will implement the commitments that they have made under this agreement.

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US Democratic Party Platform References Second Biden Term 19 Times - Document

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) - The US Democratic Party's 2024 platform references a potential second term for US President Joe Biden despite him having dropped out of the race, according to a copy of the document released Monday.

The platform repeatedly mentions what Biden would do in a second term as president, including his plans to support abortion access, reform the immigration system and advocate for the safe development of artificial intelligence.

However, Biden is not running for a second term in office, having ended his reelection bid after a poor debate performance against Republican nominee Donald Trump. Biden threw his support behind US Vice President Kamala Harris, who secured the party's nomination.

The references to Biden in the party's platform could be a reflection of Harris' quick path to the nomination in the wake of Biden's departure from the race.

Delegates to the Democratic National Convention in Chicago are set to vote on the platform later on Monday.

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One Person Dead in Offshore Gas Pipeline Explosion in Louisiana - Police

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) - One person is dead after an offshore gas pipeline exploded over the weekend, Louisiana State Police said on Monday.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 08/20/2024 1:03:11 PM

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"On Saturday, August 17, 2024, shortly after 8:00 p.m., the Louisiana State Police Emergency Services Unit was informed of an offshore explosion, fire, and report of a missing person in a marsh area near Venice in Plaquemines Parish," the police said in a press release. "The explosion resulted in the death of 40-year-old Joshua Nichols of Lake Charles."

A preliminary investigation by law enforcement revealed that Nichols was operating a mud boat near a natural gas pipeline, but for reasons still under investigation, an explosion and fire occurred while he was believed to be working on the pipeline, the release said.

Nichols died as a result of his injuries from the explosion, but no other individuals were injured, the release added.

The pipelines in the area of the incident have been blocked, but one remains on fire to burn the remaining natural gas in the line. Air monitor readings were conducted, and there is no threat to the public, according to the release.

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Chicago Police Says Expecting Large Protests During Democratic Convention This Week

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) - Chicago law enforcement is expecting to deal with large protests during the Democratic National Convention this week, Chicago Police Department Superintendent Larry Snelling said on Monday.

"We're expecting large protests throughout the city for the rest of the week, we're prepared for that," Snelling said during a press conference. "We hope for the exact same outcome for every protest that everyone gets to express their First Amendment rights, that we don't have any incidents."

Snelling said he hopes they will not have any clashes between law enforcement and protesters, any acts of vandalism or violence, and that they can avoid making any arrests, but no acts of violence or intimidation will be tolerated.

Moreover, Snelling said that some of the protests have done a very good job so far policing themselves and the department does not plan to send police officers out in riot gear.

The US Democratic Party is holding its national convention from August 19-22 in Chicago to rally support behind their 2024 ticket of Vice President Kamala Harris and Minnesota Governor Tim Walz.

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Ten More US States Join Bid to Break Up Concert 'Monopoly' by Live Nation-Ticketmaster

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) - Another ten US state Attorneys General have joined the existing 30 working with the Justice Department to break up the concert promotion alliance Live Nation-Ticketmaster, which has created a monopoly in the global market for live performances,

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 08/20/2024 1:03:11 PM

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the Justice Department said in a statement on Monday.

"Today, the attorneys general of Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Mexico, South Dakota, Utah and Vermont joined a civil antitrust lawsuit filed by the Justice Department," the statement said.

Twenty-nine other states, along with the District of Columbia, were part of the lawsuit filed earlier against Live Nation-Ticketmaster for monopolization and other allegedly unlawful conduct.

Live Nation and Ticketmaster were rivals before merging into a single entity in 2010.

Over the past 14 years, their alliance has grown into a global monopoly that has squeezed out competitors, forced fans to pay more for tickets and left artists with less earnings, the statement said, adding that Live Nation-Ticketmaster also uses outdated ticketing technology.

The plaintiffs seek to restore competition in the live concert industry, provide better choices at lower prices for fans and open venue doors for working musicians and other performance artists, the statement also said.

Live Nation-Ticketmaster said the claim that the company is wielding monopoly power is absurd as its fees are no higher - and are often lower - than those charged by competitors.

The alliance also accused President Joe Biden and his administration of pandering to the populist notion that companies that have grown large enough to dominate markets should be subjected to antitrust legislation.

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Biden, Harris to Raise Issue of Ukraine During DNC - Chair

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris will raise the issue of Ukraine during their addresses at the Democratic National Convention (DNC) this week, DNC chair Minyon Moore said on Monday.

"Obviously, the President will cover a lot of this tonight in his speech. I am sure the Vice President will cover it in her speech," Moore told reporters, when asked about whether the Democratic convention will feature a discussion on Ukraine.

Ukraine will also be discussed during a foreign policy panel at the DNC later this week, she added.

"You will hear a lot about Ukraine. You will hear a lot about all the things that we are working towards finding the solution," Moore said, adding that the situation in Gaza will be a part of those conversations as well.

The US Democratic Party is holding its national convention from August 19-22 in Chicago to rally support behind their 2024 ticket of US Vice President Kamala Harris and Minnesota Governor Tim Walz.

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Biden Holds Mixed Emotions About Departure From 2024 US Presidential Race - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden holds mixed emotions about the way in which he was ousted from the 2024 US presidential election, Axios reported on Monday.

Biden is set to deliver a keynote address on Monday night at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, where Vice President Kamala Harris will formally accept the party's nomination as their presidential candidate for the 2024 race.

Harris replaced Biden as the Democratic presidential nominee after Biden dropped out of the race, following a poor debate performance against Republican nominee Donald Trump.

Biden is feeling relieved and nostalgic heading into his speech on Monday, the report said, citing friends of Biden.

However, Biden is also shocked and angry about how he was pushed out of the 2024 race, the report added.

Biden will not attend Harris' acceptance speech on Thursday, according to White House schedules.

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US, China Held Fifth Financial Working Group Meeting in Shanghai - US Treasury

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) - Senior US Treasury Department and China central bank officials have convened during the fifth Financial Working Group (FWG) meeting in Shanghai on August 15-16, the Treasury Department said on Monday.

"The United States and the People's Republic of China held the fifth meeting of the Financial Working Group (FWG) in Shanghai on August 15-16," the Treasury Department said in a statement.

The meeting began with a review of the outcomes from technical exchanges held bilaterally in June and July on central bank climate scenario testing, financial sector operational resilience, cross-border supply of financial services and hypothetical global systemically important banks resolution, the statement said.

The cooperation and exchange on anti-money laundering group meeting took place for the second time since US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen announced its launch in April and discussed updates on potential revisions of China's anti-money laundering law as well as other topics, the statement said.

Other meeting sessions covered macroeconomic and financial stability, international financial institutions, cross-border payments, sustainable finance and capital markets issues, the statement added.

The meetings concluded with the exchange of letters to enhance coordination during financial stress, improve information sharing and reduce uncertainty about crisis management and recovery frameworks, according to the statement.

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Biden Set to Skip Harris' Acceptance Speech at Democratic Convention - Schedule

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden appears set to skip Vice President Kamala Harris' acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention this week, according to an official schedule released by the White House.

On Monday night, Biden will deliver a keynote address at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. However, Biden will leave Chicago later that night, the schedule said.

The White House's weekly schedule for Biden does not have another event listed until Sunday.

Harris is set to give her acceptance speech as the Democratic presidential nominee for the 2024 race on Thursday. Harris replaced Biden as the party's nominee after Biden withdrew from the race, following a poor debate performance against Republican nominee Donald Trump.

Trump has claimed that Biden feels like he made a mistake by "handing over" the presidency to Harris and wants to take it back. Trump has characterized the political maneuver as a coup against Biden.

Nevertheless, Biden has publicly thrown his support behind Harris' campaign.

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US Car Maker General Motors Lays Off 1,000 Workers Amid Technology Push

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) - General Motors (GM) is laying off more than 1,000 workers as the iconic US car maker embraces new technology that creates redundancies, media reports said Monday.

"As we build GM's future, we must simplify for speed and excellence, make bold choices, and prioritize the investments that will have the greatest impact," a GM spokesman said in remarks carried by CNBC. "As a result, we're reducing certain teams within the Software and Services organization. We are grateful to those who helped establish a strong foundation that positions GM to lead moving forward."

The network said GM declined to be specific with the exact number of impacted people but that a source with knowledge of the matter confirmed with CNBC that over 1,000 salaried employees would be laid off.

This includes 600 positions at GM's technology campus near Detroit, the headquarters for both the company and other carmaking pioneers in America that include Ford and Chrysler.

The layoffs come amid technology embraces by GM that ironically involve the same people it was letting go. Reports said the carmaker is attempting to reduce costs as it spends billions of dollars on software-defined services that give GM vehicles their competitive edge in the market.

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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 08/20/2024 1:03:11 PM

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Renowned US TV Host Phil Donahue Dies at 88 - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) - Renown US TV talk show host Phil Donahue, who used to have show with Russian journalist and presenter Vladimir Pozner, died on Sunday night at the age of 88, US media reported on Monday.

The Donahue family said that he passed away peacefully and surrounded by family members, including his wife of 44 years, after a long illness.

Donahue is considered to be a pioneer of talk show in the United States, having started The Phil Donahue Show in 1967 and hosted it for 29 years until 1996.

In 1985, Donahue and Pozner initiated dialogues via satellite between US and Russian audiences.

The weekly "Pozner and Donahue" talks were broadcast on CNBC and served as a platform for discussing controversial issues on various topics.

Donahue visited Russia many times, the last time in 2019, and participated in the Pozner show aired on the country's Channel 1.

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Canada's Joly to Visit Ivory Coast, South Africa August 19-22 - Foreign Ministry

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) - Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Melanie Joly will travel to the Ivory Coast and South Africa from August 19-22 to discuss a range of regional and international issues, Global Affairs Canada said on Monday.

"The Honorable Melanie Joly, Minister of Foreign Affairs, today announced that she will visit Côte d'Ivoire on August 19 to 20, followed by South Africa from August 21 to 22," Global Affairs Canada said in a statement.

In the Ivory Coast, Joly will meet with Vice-President Tiemoko Meyliet Kone and Defense Minister Tene Birahima Ouattara to discuss counterterrorism and ways of improving regional security, the statement said.

Joly will also participate in a bilateral meeting with her counterpart Ouattara Wautabouna, to address bilateral issues of mutual interest, GAC said. The Minister will also reaffirm Ottawa's commitment to La Francophonie, the statement said.

In South Africa, Joly visit Pretoria and Johannesburg, where she will meet with her counterpart International Relations and Cooperation Minister Ronald Lamola to discuss the two countries' economic partnership, common environmental priorities, development cooperation as well as international peace and security, the statement added.

Joly's visit will also be in observance of the 30th anniversary of the end of apartheid in South Africa, according to the statement.

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Netanyahu Tells Blinken Israel Will Send Negotiators to Next Round of Talks – Reports

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) – Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told US Secretary of State Antony Blinken that he intends to send his negotiators to Cairo later this week to participate in the next round of the Gaza ceasefire talks, Axios reported on Monday.

Netanyahu informed Blinken about his decision during their meeting earlier in the day as part of the top US diplomat's trip to the region to press for reaching a ceasefire deal in Gaza, according to the report.

Blinken said on Monday that the current talks between Israel and Palestinian movement Hamas may be the last opportunity to return Israeli hostages from the Gaza Strip and reach a ceasefire agreement.

On Thursday, representatives of the United States, Qatar, Egypt, and Israel arrived in Doha to participate in talks to reach an agreement on a ceasefire and the release of hostages in Gaza. Hamas refused to attend, citing the lack of specifics on the terms of the ceasefire.

After the talks, the US, Egypt, and Qatar said in a joint statement that their mediators had presented to both parties a bridging proposal on a ceasefire and the release of hostages based on the relevant UN Security Council resolution and the principles laid out by US President Joe Biden in May.

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Harris Campaign Joins WhatsApp to Reach Latino Voters - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 19 (Sputnik) – The Kamala Harris and Tim Walz presidential campaign started on Monday a broadcasting channel on WhatsApp to reach more US Hispanic voters.

"Welcome! Join the official Team Harris-Walz channel to get important announcements, exclusive content, and much more from our campaign," the campaign said in an announcement in both English and Spanish languages.

Campaign Director Julie Chavez Rodriguez said in the first video message that this channel will provide followers with "behind-the-scene" information about the campaign and what Harris and Walz are doing for Latino families.

"We really want to make sure that no one is left out of this campaign, and everyone has a chance to get involved on our WhatsApp channel," she added.

Campaign officials described the channel as the first of its kind in a presidential election, according to The New York Times. Latino staff members will post videos, messages, and notes related to Hispanic voters and provide users with the latest news about the campaign, the report said.

The campaign will also use the channel as a tool to combat misinformation, it added.

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