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8/20/24 Tuesday

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Journalist Medhurst Arrest is the 'Assange Effect' Continued

On Monday, independent UK-based journalist Richard Medhurst posted a video saying that he was arrested at London's Heathrow Airport on Thursday and held for nearly 24 hours under the Terrorism Act 2000.

The arrest and detainment of Medhurst and several other journalists stems from the case against Wikileaks founder Julian Assange, activist, organizer, and commentator Misty Winston told Sputnik's The Critical Hour on Tuesday.

"This is the Assange effect. I hate to bring it back to Julian Assange, but I think that is a crucial part of this puzzle here," Winston argued. "We saw what they did to Julian Assange and we saw the way that opened up the door for this type of behavior and for other journalists to be targeted this way."

Assange's Wikileaks released a video named "Collateral Murder" in 2010, which showed US helicopters firing on Iraqi citizens and medical personnel. A few months later, Swedish prosecutors issued the first arrest warrant for Assange, accusing him of sexual assault. Assange denied the accusations and the investigation was eventually dropped but that kicked off a 14-year saga that saw the publisher be confined for over 12 years, first in the Ecuadorian embassy in London for nearly eight years and then more than four years in the UK's notorious Belmarsh Prison.

Assange was released in June of this year after signing a plea deal with the United States, which was seeking his extradition on espionage charges. By that time, according to his family, his health had seriously deteriorated. He has rarely been seen in public since.

Like Assange, Medhurst was critical of the Western empire and the military-industrial complex. As were other journalists who have recently been detained by UK authorities, including Kit Klarenberg, Craig Murray, and Vanessa Beeley, all of whom have been arrested or detained by authorities in recent months.

Journalist Glenn Greenwald's late husband and former Brazilian politician David Miranda, who was instrumental in revealing the Edward Snowden leak, was also detained in the UK under the same law that Medhurst was arrested for. Miranda successfully sued the UK government, arguing that the law did not apply to those participating in journalism. However, the law has since been amended to include "expresses an opinion or belief that is supportive of a proscribed (deemed a terrorist) 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."

"This is not the first time that this has happened, but it is going. As I said when the Assange stuff was going on, this will continue to get worse. They have opened Pandora's box," explained Winston. "They've normalized this attack on journalism. And so it is going to continue. We're going to see more and more journalists being censored, being arrested, being imprisoned, all of those things. And it'll continue until we start to stand up and say, no, thank you. We don't want this."

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Beyond simply attempting to imprison or intimidate the individual journalists being harassed, these actions have a larger goal of intimidating journalists worldwide, in what is known as the "chilling effect."

"Really, [Assange] was just the proverbial head on a stake outside the castle walls. They wanted to send a message that if you dare to criticize the empire, this is what we will do to you," explained Winston.

Earlier this month, former UN weapons inspector and frequent Sputnik radio guest and columnist Scott Ritter's house was raided by the FBI on alleged Foreign Agent Registry Act (FARA) violations. Ritter has denied the charges.

"You know, all of us need to be peeping out our windows for when we're going to see camouflaged guys come wandering up with their flashbang grenades to give us the Uhuru 3 treatment," exclaimed The Critical Hour co-host Garland Nixon, referring to member of the African People's Socialist Party, who are currently facing alleged FARA violation charges.

"It's not just about Kit. It's not just about Richard Medhurst," concluded Winston. "This is meant to send a message to all other journalists and commentators out there, that if you dare speak against Israel and the empire, this is what will happen to you. And so, it's really going to create a chilling effect across that type of journalism."

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Snoozapalooza - Cartoon

On Monday, US President Joe Biden gave the headline speech on the first day of the Democratic National Convention. Originally scheduled to take place in the middle of the event during prime time, it was pushed to the end, presumably to ensure the sitting president received headline status.

The speech was Biden's typical affair, complete with his trademark gaffes, including when he said "Women are now without electrical- not allowed- not without electric- electo-toral or political power." However, it is questionable if many people managed to stay awake for the speech, which started late into the night and did not conclude until after midnight on the East Coast.

While the hourly ratings have yet to be released (in total, 20 million people are said to have watched at least part of the convention across 13 networks monitored by Nielsen) it is not an unreasonable concern, particularly for the segment of the population Biden still appeals to. In June, before he dropped out of the presidential race, Biden was polling better than Republican candidate Donald Trump with the over 65 voting bloc, a rarity for Democratic presidential candidates.

Perhaps Biden should have been more considerate of his older fans when picking his time slot for his speech. In July, as calls for Biden to drop out reached a fever pitch, Biden reportedly told Democratic governors that he needed to get more sleep and work fewer hours, including abstaining from events after 8 pm.

Or maybe Biden was trying to do one last favor for the American people in his farewell speech. 50 to 70 million Americans suffer from some sort of sleep disorder, and a midnight Joe Biden speech could be the perfect remedy.

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Democrats Hoping Their Base 'Gullible' Enough To Fall For Ceasefire Theater

On Monday night, the Democratic National Convention officially kicked off, headlined by speeches from US President Joe Biden, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Senator Raphael Warnock and NBA coach Steve Kerr among others. Meanwhile, pro-Palestinian protesters took to the streets of Chicago, demanding an end of arms deliveries to Israel.

The Democratic Party of the United States is hoping that its base is gullible enough to fall for their claims that Biden and Harris are, as Biden claimed during his speech on Monday, "working around the clock" to "finally deliver a ceasefire and end this war," human rights lawyer and peace advocate Dan Kovalik told Sputnik's The Final Countdown on Tuesday.

"Of course [Israel] murdered Hamas' chief negotiator while he was in Iran. I mean, Israel could not make it more clear they don't want a deal," Kovalik explained. "But[...] they want at least the American people to think they want a deal. And now, they're going to say this is Hamas' fault [that] there's no deal. And again, the Democrats are going to hope that their base is gullible enough to say 'Oh, well at least you're trying, so I'll vote for you.' But, we'll see if it works."

Hamas rejected the latest proposal, noting that it does not include a ceasefire or a complete troop withdrawal from Gaza and would give Israel control of the Netzarim Corridor, which splits Gaza's north and south, the Rafah border with Egypt and the Philadelphi Corridor which also borders Egypt.

"So there's all these poison pills apparently that have been inserted by[Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu to make sure that Hamas could not accept the deal. And I think that's probably what happened."

Hamas said it wants to return to the May 31 proposal that Biden described as an "Israeli proposal" but which Israel never agreed to. Hamas has accused the United States of "merely buying time for Israel to continue its genocide."

"[The Biden administration has] announced a ceasefire deal or being close to a deal multiple times in the past months And this time as well [it] appears there is not a real deal," Kovalik recalled.

Ahead of the convention, the Democratic Party released its official platform. Obviously edited from a document originally written while Biden was still presumed to be the nominee because references to his second term were not entirely edited out, it laid out Harris' position on Palestine as perfectly in line with Biden's. Consequently, it includes a condemnation of sexual violence allegedly perpetrated by Hamas but does not condemn Israel, even as the Israeli Knesset openly debates if anal rape is an acceptable weapon of war against Palestinian prisoners after guards were caught on video allegedly gang-raping a prisoner.

"President Biden and Vice President Harris have unequivocally denounced Hamas's brutal attack on Israel on October 7, condemned the gruesome violence – including conflict-related sexual violence – demonstrated by Hamas and made clear that the United States wants to see Hamas defeated," the party platform reads.

There has yet to be a confirmed case of rape carried out by Hamas on October 7.

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Kovalik, who is currently in Chicago and attending the protests, said he hopes they push the Democrats to work harder for a peace deal, but he is not optimistic. “I fear that largely all [the protests do] is change the rhetoric. I mean to be perfectly honest, are they going to keep standing with Israel? I mean, it’s hard to think they won’t,” Kovalik explained. However, he believes it is still important to keep pressuring the Democrats as long as the genocide continues.

“If you oppose this genocide, and I think people with a heart should do that, you’ve got to at least try. And I think putting pressure on the [Democrats] – this is a Democratic war, first of all. We have to be honest about that, and therefore this is probably the best moment we have to try to change their policies. So that’s all we can do, is try," explained Walz, though he said he is most likely to vote for Green Party candidate Jill Stein and he thinks a lot of the protesters in Chicago will as well, or else stay home in November.

It was an opinion reflected by protesters in Chicago. "If we continue to tell ourselves that we're stuck between the healthier of Pepsi and Coke, we will only have the healthier between Pepsi and Coke. But if we don't threaten to [not] vote, if we don't say 'no embargo, no vote, no sanctions, no vote,' right, we will never be able to leverage any real political accountability," Sana Wazwaz told the Due Dissidence podcast on Monday. "When we tell ourselves that is our standard, we will only be stuck in this bind between two options, and in years and years to come our children and grandchildren will be told they have to vote Democrat, they will have to vote for unconditional Zionism just because it's 'Not as Zionist as the other guy,' slaughter, but better slaughter."

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US Must Invest in More Small Modular Nuclear Reactors - Senator

WASHINGTON, August 21 (Sputnik) - The United States should invest in building more small modular nuclear reactors (SMRs) as part of a broader effort to produce more clean energy, Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Sen. Mark Warner told US media on the margins of the Democratic National Convention.

"I think we got to bring nuclear back in the mix," Warner said on Tuesday. "Right now, Small Modular Nuclear [Reactors] SMRs could provide a host of clean energy."

China and Russia are trying to recruit other countries to invest in small modular reactors, Warner added. The United States, Russia, and China are competing to build and sell them.

On Monday, Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump said that if he is elected to the White House, his administration would make a historic investment in small modular nuclear reactors in the United States to make energy cheaper than in China.

Small and medium nuclear reactors 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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Russia Previously Linked US Mercenaries Seen in Kursk to Chemical Provocations in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, August 21 (Sputnik) - Opaque private military group Forward Observations Group (FOG), whose militants are fighting in the Kursk region on the side of Ukraine, were believed to have been involved in preparing a provocation with toxic chemicals on the territory of Ukraine, the Russian Foreign Ministry warned more than two years ago.

A few days ago, FOG posted on social media under the nickname "gearlab.official" a photo of its members participating in the Ukrainian incursion in the Kursk region.

In the photo posted on Instagram (owned by Meta, banned in Russia for extremism), three men in military gear holding weapons and carrying blue armbands are posing in front of an armed vehicle.

"The boys in Kursk," the caption said.

Geolocation data showed that the photo had indeed been published from the Kursk region.

This is not the first time the group, which officially brands itself as a company selling tactical gear, has come into the spotlight. In March 2022, the Russian Foreign Ministry warned of a plot involving the destruction of 200-litre barrels with toxic chemicals in highly populated areas of the Donetsk region. According to the warning, Forward Observations Group was engaged in delivering and storing the toxic chemicals cargo.

On November 15, 2023, the founder of the mercenary group, Derrick Bales, published a photo on Instagram depicting a soldier walking along a snowy street somewhere in Ukraine, under which a comment from the official FOG account subsequently appeared reading "The time we brought chemical weapon on frontline."

Both the US State Department and the Pentagon have declined to provide any comments regarding the presence of American mercenaries on Russian soil.

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US Mercenary Group Seen in Kursk Region Say Ordered By Kiev Not to Comment

WASHINGTON, August 21 (Sputnik) - The alleged US private military contractor group, Forward Observations Group (FOG), told Sputnik that at the direction of Ukraine's security services, they would not be able to comment on allegations that they are participating in Kiev's offensive in Russia's Kursk Region.

"With all due respect at the direction of the Security Services of Ukraine all questions should be directed to them. We have no comment," the group responded on Tuesday when asked if they're operating in Ukraine's Kursk offensive.

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

The Forward Observations Group described as a military lifestyle brand online but there is some controversy about the status of the group as it appears they have been active in Ukraine

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based on their social media posts.

Last week, the Forward Observations Group posted on social media a photo of its members allegedly participating in the Ukrainian incursion in the Kursk Region. In the photo posted on Instagram (owned by Meta, banned in Russia for extremism), three men in military gear holding weapons and carrying blue armbands are posing in front of an armed vehicle. The caption on the post read: "The boys in Kursk." Geolocation data showed that the photo had been published from the Kursk Region.

Earlier this month, a resident of a village in the Kursk Region told Sputnik that foreign mercenaries had entered their village, including from France and Poland.

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Top Senate Intel Democrat Says Biden Should Allow Ukraine to Do Deep Strikes Inside Russia

WASHINGTON, August 21 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden should remove restrictions on Ukraine's use of US-supplied long-range weapons in order to allow Kiev to strike targets deep inside Russian territory, US Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Sen. Mark Warner told US media on the margins of the Democratic National Convention.

"I do think the administration, with some of the weapons that we've given them, need to take off some of their shackles so that the Ukrainians, in terms of hitting some of the airfields and some of the missile launching spots, can go beyond the 80 miles or 80-kilometer limit that we've got right now," Warner said Tuesday.

However, the senator mentioned that Ukraine should always be careful to avoid hitting Russia's nuclear capabilities or key national defense components that may trigger a major response from Moscow.

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

Russian President Vladimir Putin has warned NATO nations that they should realize "what they are playing with" when they allow Ukraine to use Western weapons to strike deep into Russian territory. Putin added that Russia will use all means at its disposal if its sovereignty and territorial integrity are threatened.

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US Must Invest in More Small Modular Nuclear Reactors - Senator

WASHINGTON, August 21 (Sputnik) - The United States should invest in building more small modular nuclear reactors (SMRs) as part of a broader effort to produce more clean energy, Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Sen. Mark Warner told US media on the margins of the Democratic National Convention.

"I think we got to bring nuclear back in the mix," Warner said on Tuesday. "Right now, Small

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Modular Nuclear [Reactors] SMRs could provide a host of clean energy."

China and Russia are trying to recruit other countries to invest in small modular reactors, Warner added. The United States, Russia, and China are competing to build and sell them.

On Monday, Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump said that if he is elected to the White House, his administration would make a historic investment in small modular nuclear reactors in the United States to make energy cheaper than in China.

Small and medium nuclear reactors 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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Singer J.Lo Files for Divorce from Actor Ben Affleck Without Lawyer - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 21 (Sputnik) - Singer Jennifer Lopez (J.Lo) filed for divorce from actor and filmmaker Ben Affleck in Los Angeles County Superior Court without legal representation, TMZ reported on Tuesday.

The report read that sources with knowledge indicated that Jennifer Lopez's documents do not mention a prenuptial agreement, though it was not confirmed if one exists.

Lopez waived spousal support and requested the judge to deny Affleck the same, with no custody issues since they had no children together, the report added.

According to a separate report, the couple has been negotiating a settlement for several months without reaching an agreement.

Lopez and Affleck, who were romantically involved from 2002 to 2004 and briefly engaged, rekindled their relationship 17 years later, eventually marrying in 2022.

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DNC Vendor Says Sold Over 170 Jackets With Kamala Harris’s Face

CHICAGO, August 21 (Sputnik) - A vendor at the Democratic National Convention told Sputnik he sold over 170 jackets featuring Kamala Harris's face for $100 each.

"We sold over 170 jackets today at $100," James Hickman said on Tuesday, during the second day of the convention.

When asked if it was hard for his company to make the jackets so fast given her late entry into the race, Hickman said they started working on them "the same day she started running."

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.

In July, Biden said he was withdrawing from the 2024 election in the best interest of the Democratic Party and the US. He endorsed Harris as the Democratic nominee, which she

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accepted. The Democratic National Convention is taking place in Chicago from August 19-22, where delegates will officially appoint their candidate to face Trump in the November 5 election.

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US Rep. Himes Says No Intelligence Concerns Over Biden's Capability as Commander in Chief

WASHINGTON, August 21 (Sputnik) - There is no intelligence reason to question US President Joe Biden's capability as commander in chief, US Representative Jim Himes told US media on the sidelines of the Democratic National Convention.

"So there's no intelligence reason in the sense of, you know, is President Biden capable of being commander in chief," Himes said on Tuesday.

The remarks were in response to a reporter's question about whether there is an intelligence reason for Joe Biden to step down from the presidency.

Himes, however, added that a national security reason exists for wanting the Democrats to win, saying that a Donald Trump presidency could lead to diminished commitments to NATO, reduced support for Ukraine, and actions that might hearten authoritarian regimes in Russia, China, and Iran.

In July, Biden said he was withdrawing from the 2024 election in the best interest of the Democratic Party and the US. He endorsed Harris as the Democratic nominee, which she accepted. The Democratic National Convention is taking place in Chicago from August 19-22, where delegates will officially appoint their candidate to face Trump in the November 5 election.

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US Navy Pays $848Mln For Software Subscription Operating Licenses - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 21 (Sputnik) - The US Navy has awarded three high-tech companies - Carahsoft Technology, TD Synnex, and EC America - an $848.4 million US contract for Red Hat subscription software licenses allowing its personnel to operate them on-premises and in cloud environments, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"Carahsoft Technology Corporation [of] Reston, Virginia; TD Synnex [of] Greenville, South Carolina, and EC America [of] Mclean, Virginia are awarded a[n] ...agreement (BPA), with an estimated value of $848.4 million," the release said on Tuesday.

Under the agreement, "the Department of Defense Enterprise Software Initiative (DOD ESI) BPAs will provide Red Hat subscription software licenses for on-premises and cloud environments," the Defense Department said.

"Red Hat software products are required by the [Defense Department] to support warfighting operations and missions, protect against network vulnerabilities, ensure compatibility across network systems, and reduce costs," the release explained.

The ordering period will be for five years, base ordering period of three years and one option

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period of two years, the Defense Department said.

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US Navy Orders $113Mln in Electronic Warfare System Upgrades From Lockheed - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 21 (Sputnik) - Lockheed Martin, Rotary and Missions Systems has received a more than $113 million contract extension from the US Navy to make more Surface Electronic Warfare Improvement Program, including additional ones for Japan, the Defense Department announced.

"Lockheed Martin, Rotary and Missions Systems [of] Liverpool, New York is awarded a $113,643,908 ... modification contract for ... full rate production Surface Electronic Warfare Improvement Program AN/SLQ-32(V)6 and AN/SLQ-32C(V) six systems," the Defense Department said in a press release on Tuesday.

The contract combines purchases for the US Navy (80%) and for Japan (20%), under the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program, the release said.

Work on the systems will be performed in Liverpool, New York (78%) and Lansdale, Pennsylvania (22%) over the next two years and is expected to be completed by October 2026, the release added.

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Blinken Discusses Gaza Talks, Ukraine Aid With UK Counterpart - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 21 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in a telephone call with his UK counterpart David Lammy discussed important regional issues, including ongoing efforts to help broker a ceasefire and hostage release deal in Gaza, State Department deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel said in a press release.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke with UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy today," Patel said in the release on Tuesday. "The Secretary discussed the importance of completing the ceasefire and hostage release deal in Gaza, bringing the hostages home, and increasing the flow of humanitarian assistance."

Blinken and Lammy highlighted the need to de-escalate tensions in the Middle East region.

Earlier, Lammy said the United Kingdom is working in lockstep with the United States to help facilitate a Gaza ceasefire agreement.

Lammy was in Israel last week to discuss ongoing tensions in the region, but Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu refused to meet with him because of the new Labour government's decision to withdraw British objections to the International Criminal Court's arrest warrants for Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant.

The two top diplomats also talked about providing support for Ukraine amid Russia's special military operation.

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Canadian Ambassador Says Ottawa Never Imposed Conditions on Weapons Sent to Ukraine

WASHINGTON, August 21 (Sputnik) - Canada has never imposed conditions on the weapons provided to Ukraine, Canadian Ambassador to the United States Kirsten Hillman told US media on the sidelines of the Democratic National Convention.

"Canada actually has never put conditions on the weapons that we've been providing for Ukraine during the conflict," Hillman said on Tuesday.

The remarks were in response to a reporter's question about the Canadian government's recent statement that Ukrainians can use Canadian-supplied weapons inside Russia as they see fit, asking whether this signifies a change in policy and if there are any limits to that.

Hillman added that Canada has consistently provided weapons to Ukraine, emphasizing that the decision on their use should be determined by the Ukrainians themselves.

Last week, the Canadian Department of National Defense said Ukraine can use the tanks and armored vehicles donated by Canada inside Russia.

The Russian Embassy in Ottawa told Sputnik on Friday that Canada has reaffirmed it is waging an undeclared war against Russia - together with the rest of the collective West - by allowing Ukraine to use Canadian-supplied military equipment in Russia's Kursk region.

The thugs, foreign mercenaries and all the Western-supplied weaponry and equipment will be destroyed and the Kiev regime is doomed to collapse, the Russian Embassy said.

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US Army Orders $1.54Bln in More Heavy Tactical Vehicles From Oshkosh - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 21 (Sputnik) - Oshkosh Defense has received a more than $1,54 billion US Army contract to build more heavy tactical vehicles, the Defense Department announced.

"Oshkosh Defense [of] Oshkosh, Wisconsin was awarded a $1,541,861,429 ... contract for the Family of Heavy Tactical Vehicles," the Defense Department said in a press release on Tuesday.

Work on the contract is scheduled to take five years with an estimated completion date of August 19, 2029, the release said.

The US Army Contracting Command located in the Detroit Arsenal in the state of Michigan will oversee work on the project as its contracting activity, the release added.

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Harris Will Engage With Press More Moving Forward - Democratic Strategist

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WASHINGTON, August 21 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Kamala Harris will begin to engage more with the press as her campaign proceeds, Democratic political strategist Anita Dunn told US media on the sidelines of the Democratic National Convention.

"I am sure that as we move forward, we will see her engaging in all kinds of different ways, I'm sure with the press," Dunn said on Tuesday.

Harris has received criticism for her lack of interviews, after replacing President Joe Biden as the Democratic Party's nominee.

The circumstances of Harris' campaign are "dramatically different" from previous campaigns, having had to assemble a team, select a running mate and attend the convention in a matter of weeks, Dunn said.

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Venezuelan Man Pleads Guilty to Illegally Exporting Aircraft Parts From US - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 21 (Sputnik) - A Venezuelan national has pleaded guilty to playing a role in an illicit scheme to export millions worth of aircraft parts in violation of sanctions on Petroleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA), the US Justice Department said in a press release.

"George Semerene Quintero, 60, of Venezuela, pleaded guilty today to conspiring to violate the International Emergency Economic Powers Act for his role in a scheme to evade USsanctions imposed on Petroleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA), a Venezuelan state-owned oil company," the release said on Tuesday.

It is alleged that between January 2019 and December 2021, the defendant and his co-conspirators came up with a scheme to export a range of US-made aircraft parts, including bearings, rudder parts, joint slide flexes, and actuators, to service PDVSA's aircraft fleet in Venezuela by concealing that the end user would be a company under US sanctions, the release said.

Semerene and his nine co-conspirators used companies in Costa Rica and Spain to redirect the aircraft parts to PDVSA in Venezuela, the release added.

Semerene is expected to be sentenced on November 5 and faces a maximum of 20 years in prison, according to the release.

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Pentagon, State Dept. Can't Verify $3Bln in Ukraine Military Aid Was Delivered - GAO

WASHINGTON, August 21 (Sputnik) - Some $3 billion in US-made weapons and ammunition has been donated by American allies to Ukraine over the past two and a half years, yet neither the Departments of State nor Defense can verify that any of them have even been delivered yet, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) said in a new report.

"The State Department approves these transfers, and the Defense Department is required to

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monitor the items," the report said. "However, State hasn't consistently shared approval information with [the Defense Department] and neither [the Defense Department] or State [can] verify the delivery of these transfers. [The Defense Department] can't effectively monitor these items."

At least 30 countries have pledged over $148 billion in security assistance to Ukraine since Russia's invasion in 2022, the GAO noted. This includes $2 billion worth of defense items of US origin including missiles and ammunition that foreign donors requested to transfer to Ukraine, the report said.

The Defense Department "is required to conduct end-use monitoring on these defense articles; however, [the Defense Department] is limited in its ability to do so," the report documented.

The GAO found that State and Defense's inconsistent communication of authorized third-party transfers (TPT) details make it difficult for the Defense Department to track them. Of the $72 billion in U.S. security assistance, $6.33 billion is obligated for foreign military financing (FMF), the report said.

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Trump Says Crime in US 'Out of Control' Under Biden Administration

WASHINGTON, August 20 (Sputnik) – Republican nominee and former US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that crime in the United States has gotten "out of control" since the Biden administration, including his Democrat rival Vice President Kamala Harris, took office.

“Since comrade Kamala Harris took office, her own administration’s crime statistics show she has presided over a 43% increase in violent crime — including a 58% increase in rape, 89% increase in aggravated assault, and a 56% increase in robbery. Crime in America is out of control,” Trump said during a campaign speech in Detroit.

He warned Americans against supporting Harris during the upcoming presidential elections, saying she would bring more crime, chaos, destruction and death to the country.

“I will deliver law, order, safety, and peace,” Trump said.

According FBI data, both homicides and rapes declined by roughly 26% in the first quarter of 2024. Violent crime overall was down by more than 15% after spiking during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The presidential elections in the US will take place on November 5.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, August 21 (Sputnik) –

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* Colonel of the armed forces of Ukraine Fyodor Yaroshevich, accused in absentia of a missile attack on Kramatorsk, * Colonel of the armed forces of Ukraine Fyodor Yaroshevich, accused in

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absentia of a missile attack on Kramatorsk, which killed at least 50 people, has been included in the list of terrorists and extremists in Russia, the Russian Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) said on Tuesday.

* Russia's Yug (South) group of forces has repelled two counterattacks and eliminated more than 680 Ukrainian servicepeople over the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

* Ukrainian Ombudsman, Dmytro Lubinets, visited Russian servicepeople captured in Kursk and sent a video with them, Russian Ombudswoman Tatiana Moskalkova said.

SITUATION ON RUSSIA'S BORDER

* Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov said on Tuesday that he personally solves the most difficult tasks of military security in the Kursk, Bryansk and Belgorod regions.

* The Russian Defense Ministry announced the creation of the "Belgorod," "Kursk," and "Bryansk" group of forces.

* The Russian Foreign Ministry said that it had summoned US Charge d'Affaires Stephanie Holmes to express a protest in connection with the actions of US journalists who illegally entered the Kursk Region.

* The Ukrainian armed forces have lost more than 4,130 servicepeople since the beginning of the operation in the Kursk direction, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

UKRAINE'S LAW AGAINST CANONICAL CHURCH

* The Ukrainian parliament has adopted a bill that allows the banning of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), which is recognized as canonical by the Russian Orthodox Church, Ukrainian lawmaker Yaroslav Zhelezniak said on Tuesday.

* The implementation of the Ukrainian law allowing the ban of the canonical UOC will lead to violence against millions of worshipers, the spokesman for the Russian Orthodox Church, Vladimir Legoyda, said.

* The purpose of banning the UOC, recognized as canonical by the Russian Orthodox Church, in Ukraine was to destroy the "true Orthodoxy" and create a false church, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

US PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

* Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s independent US presidential campaign is considering dropping out of the 2024 race and working with Republican nominee Donald Trump, running mate Nicole Shanahan said on Tuesday.

* The Democratic Party's draft political platform was prepared before President Joe Biden announced his decision to withdraw his candidacy from the 2024 US presidential election and the absence of references to Vice President Kamala Harris as the new candidate is not out of the ordinary, according to organizers of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

* US Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris is open to debating Trump a second time if he actually shows up for their first scheduled debate on September 10, her campaign manager said.

MIDDLE EAST

* The UN Security Council's visit to Gaza remains on the agenda and has yet to happen despite strong interest from Russia and many other Council members, Russian First Deputy Representative to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Tuesday.

* At least 113 journalists and media workers have died since the onset of hostilities between Israel and Gaza, marking the deadliest period on record since 1992, the Committee to Protect

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Journalists (CPJ) said.
* An Israeli attack on a school building in the western part of the Gaza city killed at least 12 people, the Palestinian Civil Defense that operates in the Gaza Strip said.
* The text of the bridging ceasefire proposal contains a very clear schedule and the locations of the Israeli armed forces withdrawal from Gaza, and Israel has agreed to that, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.
NORD STREAM
* Russia will not be misled by the latest media reports alleging that the Nord Stream pipelines were blown up by a small crew of Ukrainian divers and will continue to push for an international investigation under UN auspices, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Tuesday.
* Germany must share with the UN Security Council the information it has on the investigation into the Nord Stream 2 attack, Polyanskiy told reporters.
* Russia will raise Germany's latest allegations about the Nord Stream attack at the UN Security Council, Polyanskiy told reporters.
ANNIVERSARY OF GENEVA CONVENTION
* The Swiss Foreign Ministry invited the Russian mission to the UN to make an informal visit to Geneva on August 25-26 on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Geneva Convention, but the Russian mission declined the invitation, Swiss Foreign Ministry Communications Head Nicolas Bideau told RIA Novosti on Tuesday.
* The Russian mission to the United Nations has declined an invitation to visit Switzerland as it deems such a trip inappropriate given current events in the world, with UN Security Council members having "much more important things to do," First Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy said.

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Trump Media Stock Hits Record Low As Ex-President Returns To 'Tweeting'

NEW YORK, August 20 (Sputnik) - The media stock associated with former US president Donald J. Trump has sunk to record lows as he returns to posting — or "tweeting," as it is known — on the X social media platform previously called Twitter.
Trump Media & Technology Group Corp, which trades on the New York Stock Exchange under the DJT symbol that takes after Trump's initials, hit an all-time low of $21.33 on Tuesday. That compares to its debut as a publicly traded stock on March 26 at a high of $79.38.
DJT often swings in value as Trump's supporters view it as a proxy for the presumptive nominee of the Republican Party for the November 5 US presidential election, while objective investors see it merely as a financially struggling stock.
DJT, linked to Trump's Truth Social app, reported a net loss of $327.6 million on a revenue of $770,500 for the first quarter of 2024.
Trump returned to posting on X last week after being banned in 2020 from the then-Twitter site controlled by its former chief executive Jack Dorsey. The new owner of X, billionaire Elon Musk, allowed the former president back into the platform in 2022.

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Analysts say DJT's already hurting stock price could plummet further if Trump prioritizes the more popular X over his own Truth Social site.

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US Cancels Sterlingov Sentencing, Schedules Confiscation Hearing- Lawyer

WASHINGTON, August 20 (Sputnik) - A US court has canceled tomorrow's scheduled sentencing hearing for Russian-Swedish national Roman Sterlingov, convicted of money laundering conspiracy, and has instead scheduled a confiscation hearing, the defendant's lawyer Maksim Nemtsev told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"They canceled the sentencing hearing and scheduled a confiscation hearing at the same time. Confiscation must accompany the verdict, but there are legal issues that must be resolved first," Nemtsev said.

Nemtsev further clarified that the sentencing hearing will likely be rescheduled as soon as the court decides on confiscation of the property.

On March 12, a federal jury in Washington, DC, convicted Sterlingov for his operation of Bitcoin money laundering service on the darknet.

The Justice Department stated that court documents and trial evidence revealed Sterlingov operated Bitcoin Fog from 2011 to 2021.

According to the DOJ, Bitcoin Fog was a "go-to money laundering service" for criminals, moving over 1.2 million bitcoins worth around $400 million at the time.

Most of the cryptocurrency came from darknet marketplaces and concerned illegal narcotics, computer crimes, identity theft, and child sexual abuse material, the DOJ said.

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Biden Approved New Nuclear Strategy in March Refocusing on Chinese Threat - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 20 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden approved a classified nuclear strategy earlier this year that directed US forces to refocus on potential threats from China, the New York Times reported on Tuesday, citing US officials.

The report said Biden approved the new strategy in March, which refocuses on China's growing nuclear arsenal but also addresses concerns of potential coordinated nuclear challenges by China, Russia, and North Korea against the United States.

An unclassified report is expected to be given to Congress before Biden leaves office.

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US Lawmaker Says Zelenskyy's Forced Mobilization Wiping Out Generation of Ukrainian Men

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WASHINGTON, August 20 (Sputnik) - US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene said on Tuesday that Volodymyr Zelenskyy's forced mobilization is wiping out an entire generation of Ukrainian men and called on her colleagues to push for a peace deal between Russia and Ukraine amid the ongoing conflict.

"Washington's obsession with funding war with Russia in Ukraine is going to wipe out an entire generation of Ukrainian men. We should be pushing for a peace deal between Russia and Ukraine, not paying for them to be slaughtered," Greene said via X. "When will all of my colleagues join me in calling for peace in Ukraine?"

Zelenskyy has gone as far as to forcibly conscript men with one leg while young women have to go deep underground to work in dangerous mines, she said.

The congresswoman's comment came in response to a New York Times article describing how young Ukrainian women must now replace their mobilized men in heavy industry jobs amid a record labor shortage caused by heavy battlefield casualties among Ukrainian men.

Martial law was introduced in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, and the following day Zelenskyy signed a decree on general mobilization. Ukrainian men aged 18 to 60 are prohibited from leaving the country for the duration of martial law. Evasion of military service during mobilization in the country is punishable by imprisonment for up to five years.

Russia has been conducting a special military operation in Ukraine since February 24, 2022. President Vladimir Putin has said that the operation aims to "protect people subjected to genocide by the Kiev regime for eight years." Putin said that it is necessary to remove military forces and Nazi elements from Ukraine to achieve these goals.

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Bridging Ceasefire Agreement Contains Clear Schedule of IDF Withdrawal From Gaza - Blinken

WASHINGTON, August 20 (Sputnik) - The text of the bridging ceasefire proposal contains a very clear schedule and the locations of the Israeli armed forces' withdrawal from Gaza, and Israel has agreed to that, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday.

"The United States does not accept any long-term occupation of Gaza by Israel. More specifically, the agreement is very clear on the schedule and the locations of IDF withdrawals from Gaza and Israel has agreed to that," Blinken told reporters.

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biden approves nuclear strategy refocusing on Chinese threat - new york times

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Polyanskiy Says Only Child Could Believe That 3 Amateur Divers Caused Nord Stream Sabotage

UNITED NATIONS, August 20 (Sputnik) - Only a child or a very naive person could believe the narrative that three amateur divers were responsible for the attacks on the Nord Stream 2 pipelines, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Tuesday.

"It looks like those who drafted them were initially making up a scenario that only a child or a very naive person could believe," Polyanskiy said during a media stakeout.

Earlier on Tuesday, Polyanskiy said Russia would not be misled by the latest Western media reports alleging that the Nord Stream pipelines were blown up by a small crew of Ukrainian divers and would continue to push for an international investigation under United Nations auspices.

The explosions on the Russian gas pipelines took place on September 26, 2022. Russia has said it considers the explosions an act of international terrorism and the country's Prosecutor General's Office has initiated a terrorism case.

Pulitzer Prize-winning US investigative journalist Seymour Hersh published a report in February 2023, alleging that the explosions had been organized by the United States with the support of Norway. Washington has denied any involvement in the incident.

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US State Dept. Approves $110Mln Sale of SAFE Archangel Boats to Tunisia - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 20 (Sputnik) - The US State Department approved a potential $110 million sale of 65-foot SAFE Archangel boats to Tunisia, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Tuesday.

The government of Tunisia requested to buy additional non-Major Defense Equipment (MDE) 65-foot SAFE Archangel boats and additional non-MDE articles and services that will be added to a previously implemented case, DSCA said in a statement.

The proposed sale would support US foreign policy and national security objectives by helping to improve the security of a major non-NATO ally that plays an important role in regional security and peacekeeping operations in Africa, the statement said.

The Tunisian Navy uses 65-foot SAFE boats for search and rescue, maritime law enforcement and other maritime-related operations to ensure security in the country and region, the statement added.

SAFE Boats International would serve as the principal contractor for the sale, according to the statement.

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UNSC Gaza Visit Still on Agenda, Yet to Happen Despite Strong Interest - Russian Mission

UNITED NATIONS, August 20 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council's visit to Gaza remains on the agenda and has yet to happen despite a strong interest from Russia and many other Council members, Russian First Deputy Representative to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Tuesday.

"For now, this visit has not been discounted; it remains on the agenda, but it has not yet been possible to carry it out. We continue to remind the UN Security Council of it at almost every meeting. We are saying that we would be interested in such a trip to take place. And not only us [Russia] but also the vast majority of members of the Security Council and members of the UN, in general, are interested in this," Polyanskiy told reporters.

Polyanskiy added that close interaction with the host side is crucial and that security guarantees from Israel and Palestine are necessary, however "there are issues with them."

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US State Dept. Approves $121Mln Sale of Excalibur Projectiles to Denmark - DSCA

WASHINGTON, August 20 (Sputnik) - The US State Department has approved a potential $121 million foreign military sale to Denmark for Excalibur Projectiles and related logistics and program support, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Tuesday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible foreign military sale to the government of Denmark of Excalibur projectiles and related elements of logistics and program support for an estimated cost of $121 million," the DSCA said in a statement.

Denmark has requested to purchase 339 Excalibur tactical projectiles along with related equipment and support, with an estimated cost of $121 million, the statement said.

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Crude Prices Fall Again as Gaza Talks Erode Tensions That Helped Oil Rally

NEW YORK, August 20 (Sputnik) - Crude prices fell for a third day in a row on Tuesday as US and others' efforts to end the ten-month-long Gaza war weighed on the 2024 oil rally that had benefited previously from Middle East tensions.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Egypt and was en route to Qatar to stop hostilities between Israeli forces and the Palestine movement Hamas, media reports said.

But one of Blinken’s main goals - securing the release of Jewish captives held by Hamas - was complicated by the Israeli army’s discovery of the bodies of six hostages apparently captured during the conflict that reignited on October 7.

The Gaza war was initially a boon to the oil market. Crude prices rallied with little stop between

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January and March from Israel's bombardment of Hamas territories and retaliation by the Palestinian group and its allies, including Iran and Lebanon's Hezbollah, that sometimes disrupted shipments in the oil-rich Middle East.

From the end of June, however, the run-up in crude began to unravel as the United States and other peacekeepers pushed for a ceasefire in Gaza.

Since the start of July, crude prices have fallen about 10% combined, almost wiping out the 2024 rally. Analysts said they expect the rut to continue, pushing the market into negative territory if fighting stops altogether in Gaza.

"Risks are that Hamas says 'no' on the [ceasefire] deal and forces a short covering rally even though it shouldn't," Scott Shelton, crude oil broker at ICAP in Durham, North Carolina, said. "But the greater likelihood was for crude prices to continue tumbling, he said. "Oil's performance versus other commodities has been weak. The energy space is trending lower… This suggests that oil should continue to drop."

In Tuesday's session, West Texas Intermediate (WTI) settled down 33 cents, or 0.4%, at $74.04 per barrel, adding to the 5% decline over the past two sessions. Earlier in the day, WTI hit a two-week low of $72.56. Year-to-date, the US crude benchmark is up around 2%, after rallying 22% at one point.

UK-origin Brent finished the New York session down 46 cents, or 0.6%, at $77.20 per barrel, after a two-week low at $76.56. Year-to-date, the global crude benchmark was up 0.4%, after running up some 20% earlier.

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Russia's UN Mission on Declining Geneva Trip: We Deem It Inappropriate Given World Events

UNITED NATIONS, August 20 (Sputnik) - The Russian mission to the United Nations has declined an invitation to visit Switzerland as it deems such a trip inappropriate given current events in the world, with UN Security Council members having "much more important things to do," First Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Tuesday.

The Swiss Foreign Ministry invited the Russian mission to the UN to make an informal visit to Geneva on August 25-26 on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, but the Russian mission declined the invitation, Swiss Foreign Ministry Communications Head Nicolas Bideau told RIA Novosti earlier in the day.

"We believe that the UN Security Council has much more important things to do than just traveling to Geneva. There are many hot spots that require our attention. We have repeatedly said that our visit would be much more appropriate to some hot spot where, for example, a political settlement in that country could really depend on the presence of the Security Council [representatives]," Polyanskiy told reporters.

The Russian mission believes that such a trip "is not very appropriate given the events that are happening in the world," the diplomat added. He described the visit as an initiative by a group of permanent representatives who decided to "have a good time in Geneva."

"To be honest, we have no idea of what would be accomplished in Geneva. This is a waste of money, resources and, in general, a waste of time ... We believe that the Security Council

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should be doing more important things than traveling around Europe," Polyanskiy stated.

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US Views Netanyahu's 'Maximalist' Remarks at Not Constructive to Gaza Deal Talks - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 20 (Sputnik) - A senior US official told the French news outlet AFP on Tuesday that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has made some remarks that do not help the ongoing Gaza deal negotiations.

The US official said that maximalist statements by Netanyahu regarding maintaining control of the Gaza-Egypt border are not constructive to getting a ceasefire deal finalized.

The State Department did not immediately respond to Sputnik's request for comment on this matter.

Earlier, the Times of Israel reported, citing an Israeli official, that the United States agrees with Israel's position that it cannot completely withdraw from the Philadelphi corridor on the border between the Gaza Strip and Egypt.

These details reportedly emerged from the Monday meeting between Netanyahu and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

The official emphasized that Israel could not leave the Philadelphi corridor entirely because it could not be sure that it would be able to return if necessary due to international pressure.

The official said that the United States accepts Israel's approach to the Philadelphi corridor and that efforts will continue this week to find a solution that will protect Israel's security interests, according to the report.

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Situation in Ukraine Redolent of Bolsheviks' Campaign to Split Russian Church - Priest

WASHINGTON, August 20 (Sputnik) - Ukraine's crackdown on the canonical Orthodox church resembles the Soviet government's 1920s policy of seeking to split and weaken the Russian Orthodox Church by supporting a reformist offshoot, Russian Church Abroad (ROCOR) Synod of Bishops Chancellor Archpriest Serafim Gan told Sputnik.

On Tuesday, the Ukrainian parliament passed a bill paving the way for a ban of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) on Ukrainian territory over its historic links to the Moscow Patriarchate. The implementation of the Ukrainian law will unleash violence against millions of worshipers, Russian Orthodox Church spokesman Vladimir Legoyda said.

"The situation in which His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufriy, the archipastors, pastors, monastics and flock of the UOC find themselves reminds me of the 1920s, when the schismatic 'Living Church' in the Soviet Union rejected the canonical Church that served the majority of Orthodox in the country," Gan said.

The priest pointed out that the "Living Church," with the support of foreign religious representatives, rejected Patriarch Tikhon of Moscow (Bellavin), who is now glorified as a saint.

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He highlighted that the memory about the schismatics and its supporters has disappeared, while St. Tikhon is venerated by the whole Orthodox world and is praying for us among other saints.

"In this case, unfortunately, history repeats itself, and the persecutors and their henchmen have learned nothing from their predecessors. The memory and example of St. Tikhon expose them, and may the persecuted be strengthened in their stand for God's truth," Gan said.

Gan expressed his sympathies to the Orthodox people in Ukraine who have remained faithful to the persecuted UOC and its primate, Metropolitan Onufrii.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Tuesday that the purpose of banning the UOC was to destroy the "true Orthodoxy" and create a false church.

Tensions between the Ukrainian government and the UOC escalated after Russia launched its military operation in Ukraine in February 2022. For example, UOC monks were ordered to leave the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra, a historic Eastern Orthodox Christian monastery whose jurisdiction is divided between a Ukrainian cultural organization and the UOC, for allegedly violating the terms of the lease.

The UOC has historic links with the Russian Orthodox Church but it announced its full independence from the Moscow Patriarchate in May 2022. The Russian Orthodox Church has not recognized changes to its relationship with the UOC.

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JD Vance Says Trump Admin. Will Support Death Penalty for Drug Dealers, Protect Police

WASHINGTON, August 20 (Sputnik) – Republican vice-presidential nominee Sen. JD Vance said on Tuesday that a potential second Trump administration would support the introduction of the death penalty for drug dealers because they kill way more people than violent criminals.

"We are going to support the death penalty for drug dealers, because they kill far more people than some of the most violent and vicious criminals," Vance said in his remarks during a campaign event at Kenosha, Wisconsin. "We've got to have real penalties for people who are killing our kids and poisoning our communities."

As part of his fight against crime in the US, Vance has promised to protect police from frivolous lawsuits that allegedly prevent them from doing their job.

The Republican Party held their national convention last month in Milwaukee, where they nominated former US President Donald Trump and Sen. JD Vance as their 2024 ticket.

Voters across the United States will cast their votes in the 2024 presidential election and other races on November 5.

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Russia Refutes Accusations of Violating Libya Sanctions Regime - Deputy Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, August 20 (Sputnik) - Russia rejects the accusations that it has violated the

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sanctions regime on Libya, Russian First Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Tuesday.

A UN Security Council resolution imposed a sanctions regime on Libya, including introducing restrictions on oil exports, an arms embargo and asset freezes.

"I would like to recall here that the traditionally friendly cooperation between Russia and Libya is conducted while taking into account all international obligations and is in line with special resolutions of the Security Council," Polyanskiy said during a meeting of the UN Security Council.

The Russian diplomat expressed confidence that those who seek to use existing internal differences to sow discord between Russia and Libya would not succeed.

Polyanskiy also called on the United States to provide information about the activity of the US private military company Amentum in Libya.

"According to Libyan reporters, Amentum has intensified its activities in Tripoli. That is, indeed, a topic for the Sanctions Committee to consider, but our American colleagues, who think themselves the masters of the world, will probably not allow the experts to investigate that issue," Polyanskiy added.

Libya has been ruled by rival governments in the west and in the east of the country since 2014. The United Nations-backed Government of National Unity is based in Tripoli, while the east is governed by the Libyan army-backed Government of National Stability. The country's south has been overrun by tribal armed groups.

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Army, Police Missed Opportunities to Prevent Maine Mass Shooting- Investigative Commission

WASHINGTON, August 20 (Sputnik) -The Army Reserve and local police missed numerous opportunities to prevent shooter Robert Card from taking the lives of 18 and injuring 13 more in October of last year, a Commission tasked with investigating the deadliest shooting in the US State of Maine's history said in its final report on Tuesday.

While the report acknowledges that Card was solely responsible for his actions, lapses on the part of law enforcement and the US Army reserves played a role in the tragedy.

"Although [Card] might still have committed a mass shooting even if someone had managed to remove Card’s firearms before October 25, 2023, there were several opportunities that, if taken, might have changed the course of events," said Commission chairman and former Maine Supreme Court Chief Justice Daniel E. Wathen in the report.

First, the commission confirmed an earlier finding from March accusing the local Sheriff's Office of failing to take Card into custody and initiate a petition to confiscate his firearms under Maine's Yellow Flag Law, which allows authorities to temporarily remove guns from people deemed to pose a threat to themselves or others.

Second, Wathen said in the report that the leaders of Card's Army Reserve (AR) unit failed to act on their knowledge of Card's auditory hallucinations, aggressive behavior, and comments about his intentions. The report also finds the AR unit guilty of ignoring suggestions from Card's mental health providers to take steps to remove weapons from his home. The AR unit also

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failed to share information with the Sheriff's office.

"Had they presented a full and complete accounting of the facts, the [Sheriff's Office] might have acted more assertively in September. While the AR leaders correctly point out that their authority over a reservist like Card is not as broad as the authority the military has over their active-duty service members, they failed to take advantage of the available opportunities to exercise their authority over him," Wathen added.

The commission, made up of former state judicial and legal officials and medical experts, held more than a dozen hearings, gathering testimony from local law enforcement, military members, survivors of the shooting, families of those killed, and the family of the gunman. As stated in the report, it was tasked by Maine Governor Janet Mills with its fact-finding mission to reduce the risk of similar tragedies occurring in the future.

On October 25, 2023, Robert Card killed 18 people and injured 13 others in two local Lewiston, Maine, establishments. Card, an army reservist, was found dead in a storage trailer in the nearby town of Lisbon two days later. His death was later ruled a suicide. Maine governor Janet Mills launched the investigative commission one month later in November 2023.

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Russia to Raise Germany's Latest Nord Stream Attack Allegations at UNSC- Russian Mission

WASHINGTON, August 20 (Sputnik) - Russia will raise Germany's latest allegations about the Nord Stream attack at the UN Security Council, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy told reporters on Tuesday.

"At some point, we will bring it to the attention of the Security Council. Most likely, the open briefing," Polyanskiy said.

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Germany Must Share Findings of Nord Stream 2 Probe With UNSC - Russian Deputy Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, August 20 (Sputnik) - Germany must share with the UN Security Council the information it has on the investigation into the Nord Stream 2 attack, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy told reporters on Tuesday.

"Germany should share what it has so far with the Security Council. It's its obligation and it's something that we expect to be done in the nearest future," Polyanskiy said.

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Russia Won't Be Misled by Latest Claims on Nord Stream Sabotage - Mission to UN

WASHINGTON, August 20 (Sputnik) - Russia will not be misled by latest media reports alleging that the Nord Stream pipelines were blown up by a small crew of Ukrainian divers and will continue to push for an international investigation under UN auspices, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Tuesday.

"Russia will not be misled and will not drop its efforts to ensure accountability for those who are behind this terrorist act," Polyanskiy told reporters. "We will also continue to insist on international transparent investigation under the auspices of the UN Security Council."

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Austin Discussed Battlefield Dynamics with Ukraine's Defense Minister- Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 20 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Tuesday spoke with Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov about battlefield dynamics, ongoing operations, and Ukraine’s reconstitution and training efforts, the Pentagon said in a statement.

"Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III spoke with Ukrainian Minister of Defence Rustem Umerov yesterday regarding battlefield dynamics, Ukraine’s ongoing operations, and Ukrainian reconstitution and training efforts," the statement said.

The statement added that Minister Umerov gave an update on Russia's impact in Ukraine, and Secretary Austin and Minister Umerov discussed the upcoming Ukraine Defense Contact Group meeting to address Ukraine’s urgent military needs.

It was not mentioned in the release whether the two discussed Ukraine's offensive in Russia's Kursk region.

At 5:30 a.m. on August 6, Ukrainian Armed Forces units launched an offensive to seize territory in the Kursk region, and their advance was stopped, Russian Chief of General Staff Valery Gerasimov said. He emphasized that the operation in the Kursk region would be completed by defeating the enemy and reaching the state border. The Russian Defense Ministry reported on August 16 that during the fighting in the Kursk direction, the Ukrainian Armed Forces had lost up to 2,860 soldiers and 41 tanks.

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.

A counter-terrorism operation (CTO) regime is in effect in the Kursk, Belgorod, and Bryansk regions to ensure the safety of citizens.

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US Can Not Track All Unaccompanied Migrant Children After Release From Custody - Report

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WASHINGTON, August 20 (Sputnik) - US federal immigration agencies are unable to keep track of all unaccompanied migrant children after they're released from US custody, the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Inspector General said in a report released on Tuesday.

Unaccompanied migrant children are those who come into the United States without any parents or guardians. A majority have come through the US southern border over the last several years since the Trump administration.

"This alert informs you of an urgent issue we discovered during an ongoing audit and the actions ICE has taken to address the issues. Specifically, we found ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] cannot always monitor the location and status of unaccompanied migrant children who are released from DHS and HHS custody," the report said.

The report underscored that without an ability to track unaccompanied migrant children, US immigration agencies have no way to ensure that they are safe from trafficking, exploitation, or forced labor.

The DHS watchdog learned that the federal government has released more than 448,000 unaccompanied migrant children into the United States from 2019 to 2023, but not all of them have been able to be located and others have not appeared as scheduled to immigration court proceedings, according to the report.

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russia will not be misled by germany's claim about nord stream attack, will continue to seek investigation under UN auspices - mission to un

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Pro-Palestinian Activists Disrupt Walz's Speech at DNC - Sputnik Correspondent

CHICAGO, August 20 (Sputnik) - A number of pro-Palestinian protesters have tried to disrupt the speech of Minnesota Governor and Democratic Vice Presidential candidate Tim Walz at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago on Tuesday, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

Walz spoke to the public for the first time since the start of the convention and his speech was about the challenges facing women in the United States.

At the height of the event, Walz's speech was interrupted by the shouts of pro-Palestinian activists who had entered the venue with banners calling on an end to the supply of weapons to Israel and the protection of the rights of Palestinian citizens.

The security service quickly responded to the incident and took the activists outside the hall where Walz was speaking, while the politician himself continued his speech.

A few minutes later, a Sputnik correspondent noticed that more than ten US Secret Service officers headed to the place where the protesters were taken. They refused to provide the

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agency any comments regarding the incident.

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Kennedy Campaign Considering Dropping Out, Joining Forces With Trump - Running Mate

(Updates with more details in para 4)
WASHINGTON, August 20 (Sputnik) - Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s independent US presidential campaign is considering dropping out of the 2024 race and working with Republican nominee Donald Trump, running mate Nicole Shanahan said on Tuesday.
"There's two options that we're looking at, and one is staying in, forming that new third party, but we run the risk of a Kamala Harris and Tim Walz presidency because we draw votes from Trump... or we walk away right now and join forces with Donald Trump," Shanahan said in an interview with the Impact Theory podcast.
The decision is not easy, Shanahan said, adding that the campaign would have to explain their move to their voter base.
Kennedy said via social media platform X on Tuesday that he is willing to speak to any political party to further his goals, including reversing the chronic disease epidemic, ending the war machine, cleaning corporate influence out of government, protecting freedom of speech and ending the politicization of enforcement agencies.

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Chicago Police Say Arrested 13 Protesters Monday Outside DNC, No Major Injuries

WASHINGTON, August 20 (Sputnik) - Chicago law enforcement officers arrested 13 protesters during demonstrations that took place on Monday outside the Democratic National Convention held at the United Center, Chicago Police Department Superintendent Larry Snelling said on Tuesday.
"There were 13 arrests made, but not [all] in relation to that particular event," Snelling said during a press conference.
The arrests that were made ranged from criminal trespass to resisting and obstruction, to aggravated battery against police officers, among others, Snelling said.
Some protesters threw objects at the police officers and pepper sprayed them as well, he said.
Snelling also said that the authorities expect more protests throughout the week.
The protesters briefly breached a section of the security perimeter barrier but police officers were able to get the situation under control immediately, Snelling added.

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US Justice Dept. Says Launches Human Rights Probe of Tennessee's Correction Center

WASHINGTON, August 20 (Sputnik) - The US Justice Department said in a release on Tuesday that it opened an investigation into potential human rights abuses at Trousdale Turner Correction Center in Tennessee.

"The Justice Department announced today that it has opened an investigation into the conditions at Trousdale Turner Correctional Center, a Tennessee Department of Correction facility operated by the private correctional management company CoreCivic," the release said.

US prosecutors will look into publicly available information about numerous cases of physical violence and sexual abuse at the largest correctional facility in Tennessee which, the release said.

Past state audits revealed dangerous understaffing and safety concerns at the facility which opened in 2016, the release added.

The Trousdale Turner Correctional Facility is a medium-security prison for men with a maximum capacity of 2,672 inmates. It is located on the site of a former nuclear plant near the city of Nashville.

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Democrats Did Not Change Political Platform Having Drafted It Before Biden Left Race - DNC

CHICAGO, August 20 (Sputnik) - The Democratic Party's draft political platform was prepared before President Joe Biden announced his decision to withdraw his candidacy from the 2024 US presidential election and the absence of references to Vice President Kamala Harris as the new candidate is not out of the ordinary, according to organizers of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago on Tuesday.

Sputnik learned on Monday that the current text of the platform still contains references to a "second term" for Biden, largely focuses on differences in economic and social policies between Biden and Republican challenger Donald Trump and barely mentions any reform initiatives by Harris.

"The draft political platform of the US Democratic Party was prepared before President Joe Biden announced his decision to withdraw from the race for re-election, and therefore the absence of references to Kamala Harris as a new candidate in the document is not something out of the ordinary," a representative of the Organizing Committee told reporters.

The comment came in response to a question about why the Democrats did not consider it necessary to update the party's political platform for the next four years after replacing Biden with Harris in the election race.

The representative said Harris has spent a lot of time in recent weeks detailing to the public her vision of reforms, which she intends to implement if she wins in November.

The Democratic Party platform reflects the Democrats' key priorities for the next presidential term. The document is expected to be formally approved following the results of the party's

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national convention, taking place August 19-22 in Chicago. Harris is expected to be officially approved as the party's presidential candidate.

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Kennedy Campaign Considering Dropping Out, Joining Forces With Trump - Running Mate

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"There's two options that we're looking at, and one is staying in, forming that new third party, but we run the risk of a Kamala Harris and Tim Walz presidency because we draw votes from Trump... or we walk away right now and join forces with Donald Trump," Shanahan said in an interview with the Impact Theory podcast.

The decision is not easy, Shanahan said, adding that the campaign would have to explain their move to their voter base.

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At Least 113 Media Workers Killed in Gaza Marking Deadliest Period Since 1992 – CPJ

WASHINGTON, August 20 (Sputnik) – At least 113 journalists and media workers have died since the onset of hostilities between Israel and Gaza, marking the deadliest period on record since 1992, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said on Tuesday.

"As of August 20, 2024, CPJ's preliminary investigations showed at least 113 journalists and media workers were among the more than 41,000 killed since the war began, making it the deadliest period for journalists since CPJ began gathering data in 1992," CPJ said in its most recent and preliminary account of journalists in war.

CPJ said that those killed included 108 Palestinians, two Israelis and three Lebanese. In addition, 32 journalists have been injured, two are missing, and 52 have been deported or arrested. Correspondents are often victim of assaults, cyberattacks, and censorship among others, it added.

Earlier on Tuesday, the media office of the Gazan government said that according to its own count, some 170 journalists have died in the conflict zone due to Israeli strikes. The latest victim is journalist Hamza Abd Ar-Rahman Mutarja, who worked in the enclave with a number of media outlets.

On October 7, 2023, Israel was subjected to an unprecedented rocket attack from the Gaza Strip in which Hamas fighters infiltrated the border areas, opened fire on military and civilians and took hostages. Israeli authorities say that about 1,200 people were killed during the raid.

The Israel Defense Forces launched Operation Iron Swords in the Gaza Strip and announced a complete blockade of the enclave. The enclave's health ministry says that the death toll from Israeli strikes on the Gaza Strip since October 7 has exceeded 40,000.

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US House Oversight Panel Asks NSC About Efforts to Address Chinese 'Warfare' - Letter

WASHINGTON, August 20 (Sputnik) - US House Oversight Committee Chairman James Comer sent a letter to White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on Tuesday, requesting information on whether the National Security Council (NSC) is taking steps to address so-called political warfare by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

The panel initiated a government-wide investigation into alleged political warfare against the United States by the CCP. The investigation found that the US is in urgent need of a cohesive strategy to identify, counter and defeat CCP activity, according to the letter.

"The NSC is uniquely qualified to lead this challenge for America based on its essential duties designed to ensure collaboration across federal agencies for national security purposes. These duties, if acted upon and implemented properly, would leave no room for CCP interference and influence in the US government and throughout America," the letter said.

Serious questions remain about whether the NSC fully understands or has a coordinated plan to defeat the CCP's "unrestricted warfare" against the US government, communities and sectors, the letter said.

The letter requests a briefing from the NSC with committee staff no later than August 27. The briefing should address the NSC's efforts to counter CCP activity and advice to the president about messaging to the American people regarding the CCP, the letter said.

Chinese officials have on multiple occasions said that Beijing has no interest in interfering in US internal affairs.

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Harris Open to Second Debate with Trump – Campaign Manager

WASHINGTON, August 20 (Sputnik) – US Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris is open to debating Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump a second time if he actually shows up for their first scheduled debate on September 10, her campaign manager said on Tuesday.

"Vice President Harris committed to debate on the 10th. We are excited to be there, and we are excited to do more if Donald Trump shows up on the 10th and participates in that debate," Harris campaign chair Jen O'Malley Dillon said at the Road to 2024 Breakfast event in Chicago.

She said there had been a lot of "hedging" from Trump's campaign about participating in the first debate, while Harris was prepared to debate him without hesitation.

The September 10 debate is set to take place at the National Constitutional Center in Philadelphia, hosted by ABC News.

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Majority of US Voters Do Not Consider Harris Best Possible Democratic Nominee - Poll

WASHINGTON, August 20 (Sputnik) - A majority of likely voters in the United States do not think that Vice President Kamala Harris is the best possible Democratic presidential nominee for the 2024 race, a new Rasmussen Reports poll revealed on Tuesday.

Fifty-two percent (52%) of respondents do not think Harris is the best possible presidential candidate for the Democratic Party, the poll report said.

However, 39% of respondents think that Harris is the best possible Democratic presidential candidate, the poll report said.

Harris replaced President Joe Biden as the Democratic Party's nominee after Biden dropped out of the race, following a poor debate performance against Republican nominee Donald Trump.

Harris is set to deliver her acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago later this week.

The poll surveyed 1,142 likely US voters on August 15, 18-19. The poll has a margin of error of plus-or-minus three percentage points with a 95% confidence level.

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US Sanctions Former Haitian President Martelly for Drug Trafficking - Treasury

WASHINGTON, August 20 (Sputnik) - The United States is sanctioning former Haitian President Michel Joseph Martelly for facilitating the trafficking of drugs, the US Treasury Department said on Tuesday.

"Martelly abused his influence to facilitate the trafficking of dangerous drugs, including cocaine, destined for the United States. Additionally, Martelly engaged in the laundering of illicit drug proceeds, worked with Haitian drug traffickers, and sponsored multiple Haiti-based gangs," the Treasury Department said in a statement.

The sanctions emphasize the significant and destabilizing role that Martelly and other corrupt political elites have played in perpetuating the ongoing crisis in Haiti, the statement said.

The United States and its international partners are committed to disrupting people who facilitate drug trafficking, corruption and other illicit activities fueling the gang violence and political instability in Haiti, the statement added.

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US Concerns of Foreign Terrorism 'Heightened' Since Gaza War - Homeland Security Dept.

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WASHINGTON, August 20 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said on Tuesday that its concerns about foreign terrorism have heightened following the US-backed Israeli war on Gaza.

"We also have serious concerns about foreign terrorist organizations and those have been only heightened in the aftermath of what happened in Gaza and the ongoing conflict over there," Under Secretary for Intelligence and Analysis Kenneth Wainstein said at an Intelligence and National Security Alliance event on Tuesday.

However, Wainstein pointed out that the most deadly persistent threat of terrorism the United States faced was domestic extremism.

The Department of Homeland Security is supporting state and local partners to ensure the integrity of the US election system, whether against cyber threats, disinformation, or violence toward election workers, Wainstein said.

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Google Sues RT in US Court to Seek Relief From Executing Russian Court Orders - Filing

WASHINGTON, August 20 (Sputnik) – Google has filed a legal complaint in a US court in the state of California against the owner of Russia Today, TV-Novosti, demanding to be relieved of obligations to pay fines imposed and unblock the YouTube channels of Russian media as ordered by Russian courts.

"Google seeks injunctive relief enjoining TV-Novosti from enforcing the Russian Judgment and all related appellate decisions, as well as declaratory relief that the Russian Judgment and all related appellate decisions are unenforceable against Google," the complaint said on Monday.

More specifically, Google seeks to make the orders of Russian courts demanding that Google and its affiliates unblock TV-Novosti's YouTube channels and associated financial penalties unenforceable, including outside Russia, according to the document.

In addition to TV-Novosti, the lawsuit is directed against two other Russian broadcasters, Tsargrad-Media and the Orthodox Spas TV channel.

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Google files lawsuit against Russian TV channels in California court demanding relief from executing decisions of Russian courts - document

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