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8/22/24 Thursday

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‘Act of Madness’: US Soft Launches New Nuclear Plans Refocusing on Russia and China - Report

While the documents - which are updated every presidential term or so - are highly classified, two insiders spoke to a US-based newspaper and gave partial details about the US’ revised nuclear strategy.

In March, US President Joe Biden approved a highly classified nuclear strategic plan for the US that will refocus its “deterrent strategy to focus on China”, a report from a US-based newspaper claimed. The US believes China is expanding its nuclear arsenal “rapidly”, and that their stockpiles will rival the size and diversity of the US and China over the next decade.

The White House did not announce that Biden had revised the “Nuclear Employment Guidance”, which will prepare the US for possible nuclear warfare with China, Russia and North Korea. On Wednesday, KJ Noh, a journalist, political analyst and educator, sat down with Sputnik’s The Backstory and addressed the US government’s recent signal of global provocation.

“...It's hard to know what the actual strategy is because everything is classified. And so, very, very few people know what's actually in these documents or what's really being said or prepared or being done,” Noh began to explain. “But I think part of this [news] is to prepare [...] the public for eventual nuclear war with China. I believe that this is a kind of a deliberate propaganda effect, a propaganda rollout.”

“And I think it's just to kind of normalize the idea that we are moving towards nuclear war,” he continued. “And this comes out of several different pieces. The US went from the doctrine of mad neutral assured destruction to what is called NUTS. It's nuclear utilization, target selection.”

“Essentially, the idea is that [the US] does a nuclear first strike. It's the nuclear sucker punch and the first person who launches wins. That's US doctrine at the current moment. It's also called a counter-force strike doctrine. But, because of this, we can understand this in the larger context as the US is escalating to war with China, as well as waging proxy war against Russia,” the analyst added.

Vipin Narang, an MIT nuclear strategist who served in the Pentagon reportedly said earlier this month that Biden has “recently issued updated nuclear-weapons employment guidance to account for multiple nuclear-armed adversaries.” A separate insider told the news outlet that the US is prepared to respond to nuclear crises that “break out simultaneously or sequentially” with a combination of nuclear and nonnuclear weapons.

“[This report] strikes me as an act of madness. I mean, just think about this language. Simultaneous nuclear war with North Korea, Russia and China at the same time. I mean, just to put those, to type those words into a sentence and to think that that is a rational thing to publish is mind boggling,” said Noh.

“But, of course, we can look at the Chinese response,” the analyst explained. “The Chinese say - this is from their foreign ministry - they say that the US is hyping the China threat and this is a

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pretext for the US to shirk its obligations of nuclear disarmament, and to expand its own nuclear arsenal and to seek absolute strategic dominance."

"I think that's very clear what it's doing," he added. "It's using China as the pretext, North Korea as the pretext, Russia as the pretext to seek absolute strategic dominance…"

The recent report explained that the US has changed its thoughts regarding nuclear weapons because of the partnerships made between Russia, China, North Korea and Iran.

"The US relies on China for so much trade, so much of its industrial production. The US would not be a functioning society without Chinese industry, and that includes its military and its military industrial complex," Noh explained. "It's the core contradiction."

"...Thousands and thousands of suppliers supply components for US military weapons that they …could very easily use against China. So this is the interconnected nature of the modern supply chain. And, at the same time, I think there is an ideological core," he added. "These are the neocon crazies who think that they can have their cake and eat it, too. That they can destroy China and somehow still come out the other end and have a functioning society."

Sputnik's Rachel Blevins asked the show's guest if there is a possible US presidential candidate who may be able to de-escalate tensions with China. US Republicans have criticized Minnesota Governor Tim Walz for having "connections to China" because he has "gone to China" and "taught in China".

"It's a political consensus that has been built over at least the last decade, at least since 2012. And nobody will get anywhere unless they fall in line. The official position is escalation to war with China," answered Noh. "...I don't think there's any viable political candidate who could come out in favor of China, or even in de-escalation with China."

"And they're talking about going after [US general election VP candidate] Tim Walz for not being anti-China enough, as if he didn't pass significant legislation attacking and trying to undermine China. So, I think it is a complete and total groupthink, it's a deadly groupthink."

"It's the kind of groupthink that got [the US] into the Vietnam War, the Korean War, the Iraq, the wars in the Middle East. And, it is so deadly," he added. "We see how extreme this group thinks in their groupthink around Palestine. A livestreamed genocide is nothing [to them]. They ignore it as if it were not happening because we have a woman of color who is going to represent us. Ignore the genocide."

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

Within the first four days of the blast, roughly 120,000 people died as a result of American bombing. While some were vaporized in an instant, others suffered from their wounds or radiation. Just three days later, a second atomic bomb was used to devastate the city of Nagasaki where an estimated 73,000 people were killed by an American bomb.

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'Israel's Intentions Are Not for Peace': DNC Snubs Pro-Palestinian Protesters

The Israeli-favored proposal, according to Hamas, does not include a permanent ceasefire nor the full withdrawal of Israel from Gaza. Meanwhile, Israel is demanding continued control of the Netzarim Corridor, and the Gaza-Egypt border.

Democratic National Convention (DNC) organizers have decided to shut out pro-Palestinian speakers who would talk about Israel's military operation in Gaza, a Washington, DC news outlet said.

Voters who are withholding their support from US Vice President Kamala Harris, who is running for presidency, were hoping that just one of several speakers would be allowed to make a statement regarding the Biden administration's support of Israel. Those who requested to speak were not given a reason as to why they were denied that opportunity.

Robert Fantina, an author and Palestine activist, spoke to The Critical Hour on Thursday, and accused the DNC decision as "appalling" but "not surprising".

"...the people who are relatives of hostages being held by Hamas were given airtime and such sympathy and everything. But, what about the over 40,000 Palestinians who have been slaughtered? What about the thousands of Palestinians being held as political prisoners in Israeli jails? None of this is mentioned," Fantina explained. "Zionism is a part of the US government and the injustice at the Democratic National Convention is appalling but not really surprising."

"There's such organizations as Jewish Forces for Peace that are very involved in fighting this genocide. They've been involved in Palestinian liberation activities for years. So, this is not a Jewish issue. This is not a religious issue. This is an issue of international law and human rights and Blinken, Biden, Harris, and that whole US government refuses to see that only because it's convenient for them not to," the guest said.

According to a recent report from a Turkish newspaper, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) presents itself as having the aim of strengthening goodwill between the US and Israel, but with over 3 million members it is the largest lobbying group in terms of human resources, the report explains. Security assistance for Israel and combatting "terrorism" is one of the key fields that AIPAC pursues.

Republican Representative Thomas Massie said that accepting funding from AIPAC means having to obey their orders, and if a political candidate or even an elected Senator tries to ignore AIPAC, the punishment is "immediate". Their funds are redirected to a different politician and then their reputation is smeared by gossip columns and leaked documents. AIPAC offers funding to both Democratic and Republican candidates and politicians.

"Netanyahu, for whom International Criminal Court (ICC) Chief Prosecutor Karim Khan issued an arrest warrant, was welcomed in Congress, and his arrival was applauded 72 times during his address," the report details. "Despite a massive protest outside Congress, the representatives and senators chose to turn their backs on their constituencies, aware that their political reputations could be compromised unless they demonstrated obedience to their benefactor, namely AIPAC."

"...every year at AIPAC's convention elected leaders from the highest level, including the president, go and speak to the AIPAC convention and they talk about [...] US' ironclad security

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to Israeli security. They talk about the wonders of Israel, etc, etc, etc.. These are people who are terrified of losing the support of AIPAC and losing their campaign donations," Fantina explained.
"We have to remember two pro-Palestinian representatives recently lost their primary elections because AIPAC and other pro-Israeli lobbies sunk millions and millions of dollars into their opponents campaigns," he added. "Now, US officials talk about Russian interference in elections and Iranian interference in elections, what about Israeli interference in elections, which is clear and right in front of everybody?"
"They never talk about that because those candidates, those elected officials benefit from those, from that interference. So, this is why the DNC is ignoring the pro-Palestinian delegates and not allowing them to have any voice. Because AIPAC will issue consequences if they do," the activist explained. "[The Gaza conflict] could end today if the US would stop the flow of money and weapons to Israel."
Hostage deal negotiations between Israel and Hamas have come to a standstill after the new US proposal that was submitted last week showed too much favorability towards Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's demands, a US-based, anti-war outlet reported. However US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that Netanyahu had accepted the US proposal and the ball was now in Hamas' court to agree to.
Two Arab officials from a mediating country and another official involved in the talks said that the talks have reached a standstill, and that negotiators likely won't convene in another meeting unless the US puts pressure on Israel to fall back on some of their demands. Israeli negotiators believe Netanyahu is trying to sabotage the ceasefire deal by refusing to back down from his demands, Israeli media reported.
"The US used to broker so-called negotiations between Israel and Palestine. The negotiations are ridiculous anyway between those two parties.They're not needed and the US cannot be an honest broker," Fantina explained. "They're gonna do whatever they want to accommodate Israel, which is what they're doing."
"The demands that Israel is making now are such that no country would agree to under any circumstances. It's close to total surrender. And yet, [US Secretary of State Antony Blinken], will say, well, we're waiting for Hamas to agree to this. We've got a deal in place. We just need Hamas to agree to this. Well, Hamas is never going to agree to this, as any reasonable country wouldn't agree to it," he added.
"So, this is the US, again, favoring Israel not only in the negotiations for the ceasefire, but in seizing the narrative and saying that it's Hamas who is resisting the ceasefire. And yes, Hamas is resisting the ceasefire because it gives Israel everything and Palestine nothing."
Khalil Maqdah, a senior official in the Palestinian Fatah Movement, was killed by an Israeli airstrike in the southern Lebanon city of Sidon on Wednesday in the first direct attack on a Fatah member since the Gaza conflict first broke out in October. The attack will undoubtedly worsen the tension between Hezbollah and Israel.
Israel made a claim that Maqdah had been working with the Iranian Revolutionary Guards in helping to transfer weapons and funds to militants in the West Bank. But senior Fatah member Tawfiq Tirawy criticized the attack as "further proof that Israel wants to ignite a full scale war in the region", a US-based, anti-war outlet reported.

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“They continue with everything that is going to violate a ceasefire. Hezbollah is supportive of the Palestinian people and the reason it’s acting aggressively toward Israel now is in response to the slaughter in Gaza,” Fantina explained.
“Now, it's very interesting that this article talks about how Israel targeted the car and killed this senior official of the Palestinian movement, and yet, Israel refuses to use the same targeting in Gaza. It'll blow up, as it did a couple days ago, a school and a mosque, killing over a hundred Palestinians because there were three or four suspected Hamas leaders there. Nothing about targeting, just indiscriminate killing of whoever's there.”
“But this continued killing of senior officials of other governments, along with the unprecedented slaughter of Palestinians in Gaza just shows that Israel's intentions are not for peace,” he added.
“They're not toward justice. They're not interested in international law. They're not interested in human rights. And yet, the US is complicit in all of it. How can anyone negotiate a ceasefire with such entities as the United States and Israel?”

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Railways Come to a Halt in Canada Due to Union Negotiations, Threatening N. America’s Economy

More than 30,000 commuters across Canada will also be struggling to find a way to get to work as trains won’t be able to operate over CPKC’s tracks amid the shutdown.
On Thursday, the Canadian National Railway (CN) and Canadian Pacific Kansas City (CPKC) locked out nearly 9,300 workers after failing to mint a deal with the Teamster Canada Rail Conference which represents about 10,000 engineers, conductors and dispatchers. Teamsters and CN had been negotiating for nine months while CPKC had been trying to negotiate for a year, the unions said.
Significant economic harm to North American businesses and consumers may be under way after both of Canada’s major freight railroads came to a grinding halt.
Rail traffic in Canada and all shipments moving across the US border have stopped, but CPKC and CN’s trains will reportedly continue to operate in the US and Mexico. However, according to the US Department of Transportation, billions of dollars of goods each month move between Canada and the US via railway. Canada also sends about 75% of all the goods it exports to the US and usually does so by railway, a British-based broadcaster explained.
"If rail traffic grinds to a halt, businesses and families across the country will feel the impact," said Jay Timmons, president and CEO of the National Association of Manufacturers.
"Manufacturing workers, their communities and consumers of all sorts of products will be left reeling from supply chain disruptions."
Finished products won’t be the only goods unable to cross the US-Canadian border. Manufacturing companies will not be able to get their raw materials without their regular rail deliveries, which could cause them to scale back production or even close shop altogether. A US news source also warned that ports and grain elevators may become clogged with

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shipments waiting to move. Water treatment plants across Canada may also experience difficulty in operating without new shipments of chlorine.
According to the report, the railroads said their contract offers have included raises, and that their engineers make about $150,000 a year at CN while conductors make about $120,000 with CPKC claiming its wages are similar.
Later on Thursday it was reported that Labor Minister Steve McKinnon reportedly sent both sides to final binding arbitration and said railways should resume operating within days.
"Workers, farmers, commuters and businesses rely on Canada's railways everyday, and will continue to do so," McKinnon said. "It is the government's duty and responsibility to ensure industrial peace in this critically vital sector."
Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau urged the railway and the Teamsters to reach a deal on Wednesday out of fear of an economic downturn. However, he was reportedly hesitant to call for an arbitration because he does not want to come down against a labor union. Business groups have urged the prime minister to take action.
'Act of madness': US soft launches new nuclear plans refocusing on Russia and China - report

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In March, US President Joe Biden approved a highly classified nuclear strategic plan for the US that will refocus its "deterrent strategy to focus on China", a report from a US-based newspaper claimed. The US believes China is expanding its nuclear arsenal "rapidly", and that their stockpiles will rival the size and diversity of the US and China over the next decade. "Essentially, the idea is that [the US] does a nuclear first strike. It's the nuclear sucker punch and the first person who launches wins. That's US doctrine at the current moment. It's also called a counter-force strike doctrine. But, because of this, we can understand this in the larger context as the US is escalating to war with China, as well as waging proxy war against Russia," said KJ Noh, a journalist, political analyst and educator, told Sputnik's The Backstory. Vipin Narang, an MIT nuclear strategist who served in the Pentagon reportedly said earlier this month that Biden has "recently issued updated nuclear-weapons employment guidance to account for multiple nuclear-armed adversaries." A separate insider told the news outlet that the US is prepared to respond to nuclear crises that "break out simultaneously or sequentially" with a combination of nuclear and nonnuclear weapons. "[This report] strikes me as an act of madness. I mean, just think about this language. Simultaneous nuclear war with North Korea, Russia and China at the same time. I mean, just to put those, to type those words into a sentence and to think that that is a rational thing to publish is mind boggling," said Noh.

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Nord Stream Ecocide & Fall of Germany 'Engineered by Western Powers' – Analyst

As the clock ticks down on Western hegemony, Germans will be confronted with a choice: declare their independence or go down with the sinking US ship.

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The United States must answer some day for the destruction of the Nord Stream pipeline and the resultant collapse of its German ally's economy,says analyst George Szamuely.

The senior research fellow at London's Global Policy Institute joined Sputnik's The Critical Hour program this week to discuss the controversial incident, which some experts claim represented "the largest single methane gas" release ever recorded.

"It's always remarkable that the most belligerent actors in any drama are the ones who are the furthest away from the action," said Szamuely, responding to reports that the UK has taken a leading role in providing drones and other equipment for Ukraine's proxy war against Russia. "The British have been consistently the most belligerent on Ukraine."

"If the stakes are so high, why don't you get involved directly yourself?" the analyst wondered. "Why are you allowing Ukraine to do all the heavy lifting? … They [the United States] have been consistent in thwarting any possibility of any kind of negotiated outcome, any temporary ceasefires, temporary resolutions. And without doubt they are involved, and they have been involved in this incursion into Kursk.

"There is no way in the world it can be done, an invasion, without very accurate satellite intelligence. You can't do it. You can't just simply launch an invasion without knowing the terrain, the exact disposal of Russian forces. So clearly this was engineered by the Western powers, the British obviously – the British are now boasting about it – but above all, the Americans."

German authorities claimed they had wound a new lead in the case of 2022's Nord Stream pipeline explosion last week, pinning the blame on a small group led by a Ukrainian diving instructor. The whereabouts of the new suspect are conveniently unknown, the officials claimed.

Germany's economic growth has cratered in the wake of the country's loss of cheap Russian natural gas, with the European Commission estimating the country's GDP will only expand by .1% this year. Polling has shown most Germans remain concerned over the lack of clarity over the pipeline's explosion, which has widely been alleged by journalist Seymour Hersh and others to have been engineered by the United States.

"The more serious issue is that Germany is really losing its position as an economic giant, as an economic superpower," said Szamuely. "It's now steadily going from one quarter after another into recession. But even more seriously, the German industries are being sidelined. They're moving out of Europe and they're being priced out of markets because there's just simply the energy costs. They're now really going through the roof."

"It has been cheap Russian energy that has powered this German economic miracle," he noted. "So it doesn't have it anymore. Germany is ceasing to be competitive and that's why Germany is now invariably in a recession."

Host Garland Nixon agreed that the situation is "very dangerous,"speculating that the US and its allies are likely escalating their involvement in the Ukraine proxy war to attempt to negate the threat of a newly-reelected President Donald Trump seeking to end the conflict. Szamuely suggested that Republican allies such as notorious neoconservative Lindsay Graham would likely move to impeach Trump in such an event.

Szamuely also claimed Germany's right-wing Alternative for Deutschland party could stand to gain from the declining popularity of the NATO-backed war, with the German establishment seeking to "crackdown" on the controversial party.

At some point Germans will seek to regain their sovereignty and oppose Washington's influence over the country, Szamuely speculated.

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“No one in Germany is buying it,” Szamuely said of German officials’ latest explanation for the Nord Stream pipeline explosion. “It's a violation of common sense… Even if the German government is committed to this and saying, ‘oh, well Ukraine is behind this, which of course undercuts its position as to why you are assisting Ukraine since Ukraine is destroying your own infrastructure, Ukraine is creating ecocide.”

“And this is your great client? This is the one we're supposed to create sacrifices for? For this Ukraine?” he asked. “So that argument doesn't work. And then, of course, then you have the next argument, the common sense argument: ‘well, it was the Americans who were behind this.’ And it goes, ‘well, so that's your great ally? Your great friend? Your great elder brother? And this is what they do to you?’”

“‘They humiliate you, they destroy your infrastructure, they destroy your industry. This is what we're supposed to sacrifice ourselves for?’ So it's a huge problem. And the Germans are going to try and kick the can down the road, try not to address it. But… at some point they're going to have to really seriously look at this.”

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Beyond McCarthyism: FBI Promises Continued Crackdown on US Journalists, Dissidents

Civil liberties are under assault in the United States as authorities target contributors to Russian media, suggesting Russiagate will play a prominent role during a third consecutive US presidential election cycle.

The US Federal Bureau of Investigation reportedly plans to continue its “crackdown” on journalists and other dissidents connected to foreign news organizations, with criminal charges under consideration.

The agency’s plans were revealed by anonymous officials cited Wednesday in The New York Times.

“This month, F.B.I. agents searched the homes of two prominent figures with connections to Russian state media: Scott Ritter, a former United Nations weapons inspector and critic of American foreign policy, and Dimitri K. Simes, an adviser to former President Donald J. Trump’s first presidential campaign in 2016,” the controversial newspaper reported.

“More searches are expected soon, some of the officials said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss investigations. Criminal charges are also possible, they said.”

Electronic equipment was reportedly seized from Ritter, while Simes claimed agents removed artwork from his home in Virginia and froze multiple bank accounts. Both men are American citizens.

Attorney and independent journalist John Jackman joined Sputnik’s The Final Countdown program Thursday to discuss the development.

“The reach of the deep state – the FBI, CIA – they're looking at all of us right now,” said Jackman. “They're really looking to just chill free speech. That's really what it is at the core of all of this.”

“And they're using all of these different legal justifications – FARA, the Foreign Agents Registration Act – to justify coming after a dissident,” he claimed. “That's really what it is.”

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Originally passed in 1938, the Foreign Agents Registration Act was initially conceived as a response to Nazi propaganda during the runup to World War II. The law was revised during the Cold War era to target people engaging in alleged political lobbying, but a handful of prosecutions under the act before 2015 resulted in no criminal convictions.

FARA has been enforced more frequently in recent years, however, chiefly against figures associated with Trump.

"The First Amendment should be being screamed from the rafters by the ACLU," said host Steve Gill in response to the apparent acts of political intimidation. "Why aren't they defending Scott Ritter? You know, when you've got the Democrats having their convention, why aren't they screaming, in addition to democracy, First Amendment?"

"These are politically motivated at the end of the day," agreed Jackman. "It's just really what they are. And, they can give all of these different excuses for why they're targeting certain individuals, but it's facially obvious."

"We're heading to another election cycle here in just a couple of months. And so we're going to start hearing 'Russia, Russia, Russia.' Russia is going to be in the paintings, they're in the walls. They're everywhere."

"What you're seeing is not people who are actually, in most cases, even in direct coordination with any legitimate institutions that are based in Russia," he added. "But it's people who, on their own accord, are speaking what they feel is the truth, right? … It's because they're looking at the world, they're determining that our media is lying to us at every turn. Our government, especially on issues of foreign policy, has lied to us repeatedly, the Ukraine war [and] the conflicts between Israel and Palestine being some of the latest examples."

Ritter has been paid small amounts of money for contributing articles to the website for the Russian television network RT, according to the former US Marine Corps intelligence officer, with Ritter retaining ultimate control over the content of his writing.

The former UN weapons inspector's career suffered after he prominently rejected US officials' claims of alleged Iraqi weapons of mass destruction during the runup to the United States' catastrophic war on the Middle Eastern country in the early 2000s. Ritter has offered his analysis to Russian radio and television programs along with other prominent dissidents such as John Kiriakou, a former CIA intelligence officer who was sentenced to prison after revealing the agency's secret torture program.

"There's some conflation; I think they're starting with Russia because if that works then they can move on to, you know, sort of the Martin Niemöller [dynamic]," said host Ted Rall, referring to the German pastor's famous poem. "First they came for RT, then they came for etcetera, etcetera, etcetera."

"We're in an environment, in a geopolitical environment that we haven't been in in a long time," Jackman observed. "This really does remind me quite a bit of McCarthyism, but I think that this might even be a level beyond that. Because today we're in a situation where the fundamental dynamics of the elites, the ruling class in this country, are shifting in such a way that their reality is kind of being pulled out from underneath them."

"It's ironic because they talk about media manipulation, they talk about false narratives, they talk about misinformation and so on and so forth… It's not that they are scared of misinformation, it's that they're scared of the truth."

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Iranians Who Allegedly Hacked Trump Campaign Targeted Utah Gov't Websites - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – An Iranian hacker group that allegedly targeted both the Trump and Biden presidential reelection campaigns earlier this year also went after several Utah government websites, NBC News reported on Friday, citing a state law enforcement notice.

The targets included "Utah-based assets including a county in Utah, geological archive data, oil and gas, and other geographical resources related to Utah," according to the July 30 notice from the Utah Department of Public Safety Statewide Information and Analysis Center, as quoted by NBC.

The notice said that the group had made unsuccessful series of hacking attempts from March 2023 to March 2024.

On Monday, the FBI, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency and Office of the Director of National Intelligence said Iran was behind attempts this year to hack presidential campaigns of both the Republican and Democratic parties. The Trump campaign acknowledged earlier this month that it had been hacked by Iran, and three US news outlets said they had received stolen campaign documents. The Harris campaign told NBC that it has not been hacked by Iran.

Iran has no plans to launch cyber attacks or meddle in US elections, the Iranian mission to the United Nations told Sputnik earlier this month after Microsoft alleged that Iran-linked hacker groups were attempting to interfere in the upcoming US presidential race through covert news websites.

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US Prepares Network of Bases, Airfields in Pacific For Potential War With China - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – The US Air Force is preparing a network of dispersed bases and airfields in the Pacific region for a potential conflict with China, Defense News reported, citing US officials.

The US military fears that its traditional air bases in Japan and Guam could become a target for Beijing's "barrages of missiles" in the event of a conflict, the report said.

Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David Allvin stressed the need to set up a more robust active base defense. "If we're going to need to operate from those [sites], having active defenses would certainly help against a threat of a large number of missile attacks," he told reporters, as quoted by the report.

To counter the threat, the Air Force has developed Agile Combat Employment (ACE), which would spread out air operations to a variety of smaller operating locations in the region, the report said.

Allvin said US military units worked on ways to operate in a "simulated contested battlespace" during the Bamboo Eagle exercise that took place in the Pacific and in the state of Nevada

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earlier in August.

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US National Security Advisor Will Raise Taiwan Concerns During Beijing Trip - Official

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan will raise US concerns about China's increased military, diplomatic, and economic pressures on Taiwan during his upcoming meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Beijing, a senior administration official said on Friday.

"I expect in these conversations next week, we're going to raise concern about the PRC's increased military, diplomatic, and economic pressure on Taiwan. These activities are destabilizing and risk escalation. And we're going to continue to urge Beijing to engage in meaningful dialogue with Taipei," the official said at a press briefing.

China considers Taiwan a part of its territory and has on multiple occasions warned the US against interfering in its internal affairs.

In July, Beijing suspended consultations with Washington on arms control and non-proliferation due to the US's sale of weapons to Taiwan.

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Austin, Gallant Discuss Possible Iran Attack, Importance of Ceasefire Deal - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin and his Israeli counterpart Yoav Gallant discussed a possible retaliatory attack by Iran, the situation on the Lebanese border and the need to reach a ceasefire deal in Gaza, the Pentagon said in a readout on Friday.

"Secretary Austin informed the Minister that the United States continues to monitor attack planning from Iran and its proxies and is well postured across the region to defend Israel and protect U.S. personnel and facilities," the readout said. "The Secretary underscored the importance of finalizing a ceasefire deal and release of all hostages, including eight Americans, held captive by Hamas in Gaza."

During the phone call, which took place on Thursday, Austin and Gallant also discussed the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and the need to address the potential spread of polio.

The two leaders also discussed the situation on the Israel-Lebanon border and the Lebanese group Hezbollah.

The situation in the Middle East escalated after the assassinations of Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukr in Beirut and political leader of Hamas Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran in late July. Iran and Hezbollah have vowed to launch a powerful retaliatory strike against Israel.

Last week, Doha hosted Gaza ceasefire talks involving Qatar, Egypt, the United States and Israel. Hamas refused to attend, citing lack of specifics on the terms of the truce. After the talks, the US, Egypt and Qatar said in a joint statement that their mediators had presented to both

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parties a bridging proposal on a ceasefire and the release of hostages based on a relevant UN Security Council resolution and the principles laid out by US President Joe Biden in May.

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Sullivan Will Not Propose Prisoner Swap with China During Beijing Trip - Official

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan will not discuss a prisoner swap proposal during his upcoming meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Beijing, a senior administration official said on Friday.
"Look, we raise the Americans that are detained in China on every single senior-level engagement. But no, I have no expectation of that on this trip," the official said at a press briefing, when asked if Sullivan will discuss a prisoner swap proposal.

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US Imposes Export Restrictions on 123 Entities, Including 63 in Russia - Commerce Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – The United States imposed new export restrictions on 123 entities including 63 in Russia, 42 in China and 11 in Iran, the Commerce Department said in a notice in the Federal Register on Friday.
"The Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) amends the Export Administration Regulations (EAR) by adding 123 entities under 131 entries to the Entity List. These entries are listed on the Entity List under the destinations of Canada (1), the People's Republic of China (China) (42), the Crimea Region of Ukraine (1), Cyprus (1), Iran (11), Kazakhstan (1), Kyrgyzstan (1), Russia (63), Turkey (8), Ukraine (1), and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (1)," the notice said.
The businesses were added to the entity list for exporting US-origin electronics, sensitive technology and other items to Russia and Iran or exporting goods for the benefit of Russia's defense industry or intelligence service, the notice said.

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US Oil Services Firm Halliburton Confirms Cyber Attack on Its Systems

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - US oilfield services firm Halliburton said on Friday that an unauthorized third party had gained access to some of its systems, reviving memories of a cyber-security breach on a pipeline company three years ago that disrupted fuel supplies along the American east coast.
"On August 21, 2024, Halliburton Company ... became aware that an unauthorized third party gained access to certain of its systems," the publicly-trader said in a regulatory filing to the US Securities and Exchange Commission.

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Halliburton has been in the news over the past 24 hours about a cyber-attack that supposedly took place on its systems.

In confirming the matter, Halliburton said that upon knowledge of the incident, it "activated its cybersecurity response plan and launched an investigation internally with the support of external advisors to assess and remediate the unauthorized activity."

The company's response included "proactively taking certain systems offline to help protect them and notifying law enforcement."

Halliburton added that it was communicating with its customers and other stakeholders. The company is following its process-based safety standards for ongoing operations.

In 2021, a ransomware attack paralyzed the Colonial Pipeline, causing panic buying that wiped out supplies at gas stations along the US east coast.

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US National Security Advisor's Trip to China Not Tied to November Election - Official

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan's upcoming meeting with Chinese Foreign Affairs Minister Wang Yi in Beijing is not related to the US presidential election, a senior administration official said on Friday.

"I wouldn't tie this trip or associate it too closely with the election. That's not the point," the official said at a press briefing.

The official noted that the Sullivan and Wang aimed to meet once a quarter, and this trip would have taken place earlier, had it not been for difficulties coordinating their schedules.

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Sullivan's Visit Does Not Indicate Change in US Approach to China - Official

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan's upcoming meeting with Chinese Foreign Affairs Minister Wang Yi does not indicate a change in the US's approach to China, a senior administration official said on Friday.

Sullivan will visit China from August 27-29.

"It bears repeating that US diplomacy and channels of communication do not indicate a change in approach to the PRC," the official said at a press briefing.

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Sullivan to Visit Beijing on August 27-29 to Meet With Wang Yi - US Official

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan will visit China from August 27-29 to meet with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, a senior US

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administration official said on Friday.

"National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan will travel to Beijing for meeting with PRC Foreign Minister… Wang Yi August 27-29. This is the fifth meeting between Wang and Sullivan," the official said.

This strategic channel of communication between the two plays an important role in responsibly managing competition, the official said.

"Each time the two have met, they have typically spent about 10 to 12 hours over two days, covering bilateral issues, global, regional issues, and cross-Strait issues. We expect to follow the same format in Beijing next week," the official added.

During the meetings, Sullivan will raise US concerns about China's alleged support for Russia's defense base, the South China Sea, North Korea, Myanmar and cross-Strait issues, according to the US official.

It will be the first trip to China by a national security advisor of the Biden administration.

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US diplomacy and channels of communication do not indicate a change in approach to China - senior administration official

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Sullivan's trip to beijing not linked to US election - senior administration official

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us imposes export restrictions on 123 entities including 63 in Russia, 42 in China, 11 in Iran - Commerce Dept.

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Sullivan Will Visit China Next Week to Prepare Potential Biden-Xi Meeting - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan will visit China next week to prepare the groundwork for a potential meeting between presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping, Axios reported on Friday, citing three people familiar with the matter.

Biden and Xi are expected to attend the G-20 leaders summit in Brazil after the US presidential election in November, the report said.

During the trip, which will last from August 27-29, Sullivan will meet with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, according to the report.

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It will be Sullivan's first visit to China as national security advisor.

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Harris Says As President Will Stand Strong With Ukraine, NATO Allies

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) — US Vice President Kamala Harris said during her speech at the Democratic National Convention (DNC) that she will stay strong with Ukraine and NATO if she becomes the country's next leader.

"And as President, I will stand strong with Ukraine, and our NATO allies," Harris said.

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Посол Антонов: обмен заключенными США рассматривают как изолированный эпизод контакта с РФ

ВАШИНГТОН, 23 авг - РИА Новости. Недавний обмен заключенными между Россией и странами НАТО, в том числе США, рассматривается американцами как изолированный эпизод взаимодействия Москвы и Вашингтона, заявил посол РФ в Вашингтоне Анатолий Антонов.

"Недавно состоявшийся обмен заключенными рассматривается американцами как изолированный эпизод взаимодействия", - сказал Антонов журналистам.

Дипломат подчеркнул, что Вашингтон продолжает ультимативно требовать от нас "изменить поведение" в угоду своим эгоистическим установкам.

В ФСБ 1 августа сообщили, что в Россию возвращены восемь россиян, задержанных и находившихся в заключении в ряде стран НАТО. Речь шла, в частности, о Вадиме Соколове (Красикове), приговоренном к пожизненному заключению в Германии, а также о находившемся в заключении в США Владиславе Клюшине. В Россию также вернулись Артем и Анна Дульцевы, Павел Рубцов, Вадим Конощёнок, Михаил Микушин, Роман Селезнев. Вернувшимся на родину россиянам вменялось сотрудничество с разведывательными ведомствами РФ, но их вина не была доказана. Все россияне в ходе судебных слушаний и во время отбывания сроков вину не признали. В аэропорту их лично встретил глава РФ Владимир Путин и заявил, что те, кто имеет отношение к военной службе, будут представлены к госнаградам.

В свою очередь при обмене из России выехал ряд осужденных за шпионаж граждан и ряд россиян с двойным гражданством. Вина этих граждан была полностью доказана, они были осуждены среди прочего по статьям о госизмене и публичных призывах к осуществлению экстремистской деятельности. Иностранная сторона проявила интерес к россиянам, которых на Западе представляли как оппозицию, такое внимание к ним понятно и объяснимо, они были на связи с кураторами из западных спецслужб, работали на оппонентов.

В рамках обмена в Штаты вернулись трое граждан США Эван Гершкович, Пол Уилан и

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Алсу Курмашева, а также обладатель вида на жительство США Владимир Кара-Мурза (признан в РФ иноагентом). Президент России Владимир Путин подписал указы о помиловании обменянных из России граждан. Как сообщалось на сайте Кремля, решение о подписании указов было принято с целью возвращения граждан РФ, задержанных и находившихся в заключении на территории иностранных государств.

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Посол Антонов заявил, что проведет в пятницу встречу с представителями Госдепа

ВАШИНГТОН, 23 авг - РИА Новости. Посол России в Вашингтоне Анатолий Антонов заявил, что в пятницу проведет встречу с представителями Госдепартамента США.
"Недавно состоялась встреча с коллегами из Белого дома, а завтра состоится встреча с представителями госдепа", - сказал Антонов журналистам.
Дипломат подчеркнул, что контакты с администрацией США в целом носят эпизодический характер.
"Очные встречи с дипломатами посольства здесь бойкотируются. Если они и происходят, то в основном для того, чтобы чиновники Белого дома или госдепа смогли вручить нам очередной демарш и отчитаться об этом перед своим руководством", - сказал Антонов.

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Harris Says Will Never Hesitate to Protect US Forces Against Iran, Its Proxies

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Kamala Harris said at the Democratic National Convention (DNC) that she would take all necessary actions to protect US forces and interests against threats from Iran and "Iran-backed terrorists."
"I will never hesitate to take whatever action is necessary to defend our forces and our interests against Iran, and Iran-backed terrorists," Harris said on Thursday evening.
Harris further said that she would not align with "tyrants and dictators" like North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, who, she suggested, is supporting Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump.
"Because they know he is easy to manipulate with flattery and favors. They know Trump won't hold autocrats accountable because he wants to be an autocrat himself," Harris said.
Harris added that as president, she would remain steadfast in defending America's security and ideals, emphasizing her clear stance in the ongoing struggle between democracy and tyranny.

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Russian Ambassador Believes US Demonstrating Duplicity in Dialogue on Strategic Stability

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WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The United States, in its dialogue with the Russian Federation on strategic stability, extends its hand, but still "holds a dagger behind its back," Russian Ambassador to Washington Anatoly Antonov said on Thursday.

"The current administration behaves like a person, who on the one hand, extends his hand... and on the other hand, holds a dagger behind his back," Antonov told reporters, answering a corresponding question.

At the same time, he noted that the United States "seems to be teasing" Russia, talking about restrictions on Kiev's use of American weapons deep into Russia.

"In fact, they are essentially preparing the ground for the fact that at a certain moment, they will simply lift all the restrictions that exist," the ambassador added.

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Russian Ambassador Antonov Says Meeting Between Russia, US at UNGA Not Expected

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - Russian Ambassador to Washington Anatoly Antonov said that US representatives did not approach the Russian side with a proposal for contacts, and a meeting between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken during the high-level week of the UN General Assembly is not expected.

"Well, you tell me what to discuss with them ... We didn't interrupt them [contacts]. We're not running from the Americans. We're not running after the Americans," Antonov told Russian journalists, answering a question about a possible meeting between Blinken and Lavrov during the upcoming UN General Assembly.

"If there was some topic for discussion, of course, I am sure that the Russian side would consider this kind of proposal," the envoy added. "To date - I never say never - to date no proposals have been made, at least not to us at the embassy."

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Russian Ambassador to US Antonov Believes Kiev Will Not Create Buffer Zone in Kursk Region

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - Russian Ambassador to Washington Anatoly Antonov said that Kiev will not be able to create some kind of "buffer zone" on Russian territory, adding that "this is impossible."

Earlier, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that the purpose of the Ukrainian armed forces' attack on the Kursk Region was to create a "buffer zone" on the Russian territory.

"This is impossible... there will be no buffer zone on the territory of the Russian Federation," Antonov told reporters.

In response to a question that the United States does not unequivocally reject such statements from Kiev, Antonov said: "It is not for Americans to judge what Russia should do, and how Russia will defend its borders. We will not even talk about this with them."

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Kiev Does Nothing Without US's 'Go-Ahead' - Antonov on Ukraine's Attack on Kursk Region

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - Ukraine doesn't do anything without the green light from Washington, and Kiev would not dare to "lift a finger" without the consent of the United States, Russian Ambassador to the US Anatoly Antonov said, commenting on the US role in Ukraine's attack on Russia's Kursk Region.

"I am firmly convinced that in Kiev they do nothing without the go-ahead of their masters," Antonov told reporters. "Considering how many advisers there are around Zelenskyy, how much intelligence is provided to the Zelenskyy regime, to say that they don't know about anything here... They simply wouldn't dare to lift a finger, move, point a machine gun or a rifle in our direction without consent from Washington. Or, at least, they are confident that any of their actions will be supported by Western countries."

On August 6, Ukrainian forces crossed the border into Russia and launched an offensive in the Kursk Region. Commenting on the attack, Russian President Vladimir Putin said Ukraine had carried out another large-scale provocation, firing indiscriminately at civilian targets. The enemy will receive a proper response in the border regions of Russia, Putin added.

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Russian Ambassador Antonov Says Had No Contacts With US Over Kiev's Attack on Kursk Region

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said on Thursday that he has had no communication with the American side concerning Ukraine's attack on Russia's Kursk Region.

"No," Antonov told reporters, answering a question about whether he had any contacts with the Americans on Ukraine's attack on the Kursk Region. "I think that this just needs to stop, that's all. There's nothing to discuss here."

The Ambassador underscored that the United States can influence Ukraine's actions in the Kursk Region "with one snap of its fingers," but in Washington "they believe that it is necessary to continue."

On August 6, Ukrainian forces crossed the border into Russia and launched an offensive in the Kursk Region. Commenting on the attack, Russian President Vladimir Putin said Ukraine had carried out another large-scale provocation, firing indiscriminately at civilian targets. The enemy will receive a proper response in the border regions of Russia, Putin added.

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Harris Says As President Will Stand Strong With Ukraine, and Our NATO Allies

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) — US Vice President Kamala Harris said during her speech at the Democratic National Convention (DNC) that she will stay strong with Ukraine and NATO if she becomes the country's next leader.
"And as President, I will stand strong with Ukraine, and our NATO allies," Harris said.

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Harris Says Will Ensure If Elected President That US Always Has Strongest Fighting Force

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) — US Vice President Kamala Harris announced during her speech at the Democratic National Convention (DNC) that if elected as the country's next leader she will make sure that Washington has the most lethal fighting force in the world.
"As Commander-in-Chief, I will ensure America always has the strongest, most lethal fighting force in the world," Harris said.

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Harris Says She Accepts Nomination of Democratic Candidate for US President

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) — US Vice President Kamala Harris announced during her speech at the Democratic National Convention (DNC) that she accepts the Democratic Party's nomination for US President.
"I accept your nomination to be the president of the United States of America," Harris said on Thursday evening.

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NASA May Reach Decision on Crew Possible Return on Starliner on Saturday - Release

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - NASA officials may reach a definite decision as early as Saturday on whether they have approved Boeing's troubled Starliner can return to Earth with its flight crew Barry "Butch" Wilmore and Sunita "Suni" Williams on board, or whether the spacecraft will be brought back to Earth unmanned and by remote control, the US space agency announced in an official blog.
"NASA's decision on whether to return Starliner to Earth with astronauts aboard is expected no earlier than Saturday, August 24 at the conclusion of an agency-level review chaired by Ken Bowersox, the associate administrator of NASA's Space Operations Mission Directorate," the release said on Thursday.
The agency flight readiness review is where any formal dissents are presented and reconciled,

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NASA said.

"Other agency leaders who routinely participate in launch and return readiness reviews for crewed missions include NASA's administrator, deputy administrator, associate administrator, various agency center directors, the Flight Operations Directorate, and agency technical authorities," the blog said.

NASA officials have already said Wilmore and Williams may stay on the International Space Station for another six months, making their stay nine months in all on what was due to have only been a visit of a few days before the Starliner developed five helium leaks and failures of five of its 28 maneuvering thrusters.

NASA will host a televised news conference following the review's conclusion to discuss the agency's decision and next steps. More information on the news conference will be shared once confirmed. After the agency-level decision, program and flight control teams will continue preparing for Starliner's return, including training sessions and other actions as appropriate.

Ahead of the agency-level review, NASA and Boeing are working to finalize and present flight rationale to various teams across the community and to the program control board. Engineering teams have been working to evaluate a new model that represents the thruster mechanics and is designed to more accurately predict performance during the return phase of flight. This data could help teams better understand system redundancy from undock to service module separation. Ongoing efforts to complete the new modeling, characterize spacecraft performance data, refine integrated risk assessments, and determine community recommendations will fold into the agency-level review.

Starliner was launched with its two-astronaut crew on June 5 but five of its 28 thrusters failed at different times during its flight to the ISS and five helium leaks were also recorded. The spacecraft's return flight was originally scheduled for June 14 but has been repeatedly delayed since then while engineers back on Earth tried to solve the problems, NASA officials have acknowledged.

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Navy Dept. Paid Nearly $4Mln in Excess to Repair 211 Parts of F/A-18 Hornets - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The US Department of the Navy paid almost $4 million too much for the repair of 211 parts of F/A-18 Hornet combat aircraft, the Inspector General of the Department of Defense (IG DOD) concluded in a new report.

"The DON [Department of the Navy] did not obtain fair and reasonable pricing for repair of the AN/APG-65 and AN/APG-73 radars on the F/A-18 Hornet," the report said. "Naval Supply Systems Command Weapon Systems Support (NAVSUP WSS) paid at least $3.93 million in excess of fair and reasonable prices for repair of 211 parts."

NAVSUP WSS followed Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) price reasonableness determination requirements, but it only obtained fair and reasonable prices for repair of 100 of 211 parts (47%), totaling $12.02 million, the report noted.

But NAVSUP WSS "did not obtain fair and reasonable prices for repair of 111 of the 211 parts (53 percent), totaling $32.92 million, on five definitized delivery orders," the Inspector General

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said.
The failure occurred because NAVSUP WSS did not identify fluctuations in definitized touch costs compared to actual touch costs on a Contract Line Item Number (CLIN) level, and allowed inconsistent allocation of the support costs across the delivery orders by Vertex M&S, the report explained.

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Muslim Women For Harris Group Disbands Over Democrats' Silence on Gaza - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The Muslim Women for Harris-Walz organization is disbanding in protest over the Democratic National Committee (DNC) 's refusal to allow any Palestinian-American onstage during the party's convention in Chicago this week, the group announced in an official statement.
"The family of the Israeli Hostage that was on the stage [on Wednesday night] has shown more empathy towards Palestinian Americans and Palestinians than our candidate," the statement said on Thursday. "This is a terrible message to send to Democrats. Palestinian Americans have the right to speak about Palestine."
The organization had received information that Harris's officials had explicitly turned down a request to let any Palestinian-American speak on stage at the convention, the statement explained.
"We cannot in good conscience continue Muslim Women for Harris-Walz in light of this new information from the uncommitted movement that VP [Vice President Kamala] Harris' team declined their request to have a Palestinian-American speaker take the stage at the DNC," it said.
The Uncommitted National Movement (UNM) is a group that won 30 delegates to the convention and is seeking to pressure the Democratic Party to do more to achieve a ceasefire in Gaza, Al-Jazeera reported. UNM delegates staged a sit-in outside the DNC on Wednesday after the movement was told its Palestinian-American speaker had been denied permission to speak on the convention's main stage.

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UPDATE- US Supreme Court Rules For Arizona Voting Law, Handing Republicans A Win

(Adds additional info in paras 3-4)
WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court on Thursday ruled that an unenforced Arizona law that requires proof-of-citizenship for voters be enacted at least in part, siding with a request by the Republican Party against the Democratic Party's argument that the move will impede November's presidential election.
The law in question mandates that officials in Arizona reject the voter registration forms of those who do not provide US proof of birth. The Republican National Congress (RNC) had demanded

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enactment of the hitherto unenforced law, even when federal-level forms do not require proof of citizenship. The Democratic National Committee (DNC) had opposed the enactment.

The Supreme Court is split unevenly with six conservative-leaning justices supporting most Republican requests and three liberal-minded judges who typically back Democrats. Thursday's decision was 5-4 in favor of the RNC, with one conservative judge, Justice Amy Coney Barrett, dissenting along with her liberal-leaning colleagues in support of the DNC.

Since former Republican president Donald Trump lost his re-election bid in 2020, Trump claimed that massive cheating had occurred in that election and filed multiple lawsuits to prove electoral fraud in 2020 but lost in every case.

DNC officials in Arizona had argued prior to Thursday's ruling that the Supreme Court's intervention in the state's balloting process "would be destabilizing" given the short timeframe before November's election.

Media reports cited Arizona's secretary of state as estimating that enactment of the proof-of-citizenship law for voting could impact roughly 42,000 people already registered to vote in November using just federal forms.

"A seismic win in the fight to stop non-citizens from voting — more to come!" RNC Chairman Michael Whatley wrote on social platform X after the ruling.

Trump faces Democrat Kamala Harris, incumbent President Joe Biden's vice president, in the November 5 election.

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US Supreme Court Rules For Arizona Voting Law, Handing Republicans A Win

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court on Thursday ruled that an unenforced Arizona law that requires proof-of-citizenship for voters be enacted at least in part, siding with a request by the Republican Party against the Democratic Party's argument that the move will impede November's presidential election.

The law in question mandates that officials in Arizona reject the voter registration forms of those who do not provide US proof of birth. The Republican National Congress (RNC) had demanded enactment of the hitherto unenforced law, even when federal-level forms do not require proof of citizenship. The Democratic National Committee (DNC) had opposed the enactment.

Thursday's decision was 5-4 in favor of the RNC, with one conservative judge, Justice Amy Coney Barrett, dissenting along with her liberal-leaning colleagues in support of the DNC.

DNC officials in Arizona had argued prior to Thursday's ruling that the Supreme Court's intervention in the state's balloting process "would be destabilizing" given the short timeframe before November's election.

Media reports cited Arizona's secretary of state as estimating that enactment of the proof-of-citizenship law for voting could impact roughly 42,000 people already registered to vote in November using just federal forms.

"A seismic win in the fight to stop non-citizens from voting — more to come!" RNC Chairman Michael Whatley wrote on social platform X after the ruling.

Trump faces Democrat Kamala Harris, incumbent President Joe Biden's vice president, in the

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November 5 election.

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UPDATE- Arizona Police Locate Man Tied to Threats to Kill US Presidential Candidate - Sheriff

(Update: adds information in paragraphs 5-6; updates headline; edits throughout)
WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The Cochise County Sheriff's Office in Arizona said that it found a man who was wanted on outstanding warrants and in connection with threats to kill a US presidential candidate, amid a trip by Republican nominee Donald Trump to the state.
The man, 66-year-old Ronald Lee Syvrud, was wanted for outstanding warrants from Wisconsin for driving under the influence and failure to appear, as well as warrants in Arizona for hit and run and failure to register as a sex offender, the sheriff's office said in a statement.
"Public Safety consideration: Syvrud is being sought as an investigative lead for threats to kill a presidential candidate," the statement said on Thursday.
Trump was in Cochise County on Thursday to deliver remarks at the US southern border.
The sheriff's office said in an update that they took Syvrud into custody without incident.
The office expressed appreciation for information received and the collaboration of other public safety partners.

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Canada Losing Potassium Market Share to Russia 'Every Day' of Railroad Shutdown - Minister

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - Canada is losing market share in the potassium sector to Russia every day that a railroad shutdown impacts the country, Canadian Labour Minister Steven MacKinnon said during a press conference.
"The potassium sector – every day, they're losing market share to Russia," MacKinnon said on Thursday.
Considering the situation in Ukraine, the matter is "extremely concerning" to Canada, MacKinnon said.
MacKinnon announced that the Canadian government is forcing two of Canada's major railroad companies to enter contract arbitration with the industry union after the railroads locked out their employees amid a labor dispute.
Canada is the world's leading exporter of potash, exporting over 21.3 million tones of potash in 2022 and representing 46% of the world's potash exports.

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US Stocks Dip Ahead Of Powell Speech Despite Growing Rate Cut Bets

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NEW YORK, August 23 (Sputnik) - US stocks fell Thursday on the eve of a speech by Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell on caution that he will play down the odds of a September rate cut despite Wall Street's bets that the central bank can no longer delay an easing in its monetary policy.

The three main US stock indexes on Wall Street — the S&P 500, the Nasdaq Composite, and the Dow Jones Industrial Average — closed the day down between 0.4% and 1.6%.

The S&P, an index which tracks the stocks of 500 high-performing US companies, slid 0.4%.

The technology-heavy Nasdaq, which comprises pricey stocks such as Amazon, Apple, Netflix, and Google, lost almost 1%.

The Dow, the broadest indicator for US equity markets and one that often reflects value, tumbled 1.6%.

Powell will take to the podium on Friday at the Fed's annual banking symposium in Jackson Hole, Wyoming to address bankers, academics, economists, and financial media specialists from around the world. Analysts say listeners expecting any clear guidance on the Fed's September 18 decision on rates may be disappointed.

Thursday's losses on Wall Street were driven by rising Treasury yields as some investors expected Powell to steer clear of explicitly telegraphing a September rate cut.

Reinforcing that notion were remarks on Thursday by Kansas City Fed President Jeffrey Schmid that he preferred to see more economic data before supporting any decision to reduce rates. This is despite FOMC minutes from the committee's meeting in July, published on Wednesday, showing an overwhelming desire for a September rate cut.

The odds for a US rate cut have grown this week amid deteriorating jobs data in the world's largest economy.

The number of Americans filing for unemployment insurance rose by 4,000 to reach 232,000 in the latest week to August 17, versus the 228,000 filings witnessed during the prior week to August 10, the Labor Department said in a report Thursday.

The jobless claims data came a day after the department revised down by 818,000 the growth in payrolls originally reported for the 12 months to March, citing a "statistical error". The highest markdown in job estimates since the post-financial crisis era of 2009 highlights the vulnerability of the labor market following the post-COVID jobs boom, analysts say.

Wall Street's bet is that the Fed will institute a cut as large as a half percentage point at its September 18 rate decision. The central bank's last rate reduction was in March 2020, after the COVID outbreak. The Fed tightened policy 11 times after that, adding 5.25 percentage points to rates, as inflation hit four-decade highs in the aftermath of the pandemic.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) -

MIDDLE EAST TENSIONS

* Israel had refused to allow Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to visit the Gaza Strip,

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Riyad al-Maliki, special envoy of Palestinian president, told Sputnik on Thursday.
* Palestine will initiate action next month at the United Nations General Assembly to end Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories in accordance with the top UN court's historic advisory opinion on the matter, Palestinian Ambassador to the UN Riyad Mansour said.
* The office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denied media reports that the presence of international forces to control the Philadelphi corridor on the border of Gaza and Egypt was allegedly considered.
* The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) demands an immediate investigation in connection with the statement by Israeli security forces about the discovery of explosives near one of the organization's schools in the Gaza Strip, UNRWA Middle East media adviser Adnan Abu Hasna told Sputnik.

SITUATION IN RUSSIA'S BORDER REGIONS
* US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin is planning to engage Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov in the coming days on Kiev's plans to create a "buffer zone" in Russia's Kursk region following a military incursion there, Pentagon deputy spokesperson Sabrina Singh said on Thursday.
* International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Grossi will personally assess the situation at the Kursk NPP site during his visit next week, the agency said.
* The IAEA was informed about attempted attacks on the Kursk NPP and promised to send specialists, Russian President Vladimir Putin said.
* Marines from the 810th brigade of the Russian Black Sea Fleet destroyed a Ukrainian reconnaissance group of 12 fighters traveling on a Kozak armored car near Melovoe in the Kursk Region, a representative of a Russian law enforcement agency told Sputnik.

ARMS CONTROL
* US Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Ben Cardin said on Thursday that he is hopeful the United States can continue arms control dialogue with all nuclear powers after the end of the conflict in Ukraine.
* Cardin said that it is absolutely important for Russia and the United States to preserve the arms control treaties.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE
* Russia's army group South has eliminated up to 765 Ukrainian soldiers over the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Thursday.
* The United Nations hopes that all visits to Ukraine, including the upcoming one by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi after his trip to Russia, would help in resolving the ongoing conflict there, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.
* Moscow strongly condemns Kiev's law against the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), Russian Permanent Representative to the OSCE Alexander Lukashevich told Sputnik.

US MILITARY SALES
* The US State Department has approved a $405 million sale of advanced medium-range air-to-air missiles-extended range (AMRAAM-ER) to Norway, the Defense Security Cooperation

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Agency (DSCA) said on Thursday.
* The US State Department has approved a potential $592 million sale of 186 AIM-120 advanced medium-range air-to-air missiles and related equipment to the government of Romania, the DSCA said.

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Canada Labor Minister Says Ordered Final Binding Arbitration to End Rail Labor Dispute

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - Canadian Labor Minister Steven MacKinnon said on Thursday that he has ordered the final binding arbitration that ends the rail labor dispute after the largest union in the country began a strike earlier in the day.
"As Minister of Labor … I have directed the Canada Industrial Relations Board to assist the parties in settling the outstanding terms of their collective agreements by imposing final binding arbitration," MacKinnon said during a press briefing.
MacKinnon added that he has also directed the board to extend the term of the current collective agreements until new agreements have been signed.
Earlier on Thursday, Teamsters Canada, the country's largest transportation and supply chain union, announced that it had begun a strike after failing to reach an agreement with the Canadian National Railway Company (CN) and the Canadian Pacific Kansas City (CPKC). Both companies move around C$1 billion ($736 million) worth of goods on a daily basis, according to the Railway Association of Canada.

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Trump Says Hearing Rumors RFK Jr. Will Endorse Him, Thinks Would Be Great Honor

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump told reporters on Thursday that he is unable to confirm reports that independent presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. will endorse him, calling them rumors, but said he would consider it a great honor.
"There are rumors that he's going to make an endorsement. That would be a great honor for me," Trump said during a press conference while visiting the Arizona-Mexico border.
Trump added that at present he has no plans to meet with Kennedy on Friday, even though both will be in the Phoenix area.

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Gold Price Dips But Not Far From Record High Amid US Interest Rate Cut Bet

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NEW YORK, August 22 (Sputnik) - Gold prices dipped a second day in a row on Thursday but the retreat was not far from the record highs of above $2,500 an ounce as Wall Street intensified its bets for a US interest rate cut in September.

US gold futures for delivery in December last traded at $2,517.80 an ounce - down $29.70, or 1.1%, from the previous day's session. In Wednesday's trade, the most-active gold futures contract slid 0.1%.

But even at Thursday's low of $2,506.45, December gold was less than 3% off Tuesday's record high of $2,570.40.

"Technically, December gold bulls have the strong overall near-term technical advantage," Jim Wyckoff, analyst for gold bullion dealer Kitco, said. "Bulls' next upside price objective is to produce a close above solid resistance at $2,600. Bears' next near-term downside price objective is pushing futures prices below solid technical support at $2,450."

Viewed as a safe haven in times of both political and economic troubles, gold has rallied with few stops since the end of February as the war in Gaza worsened and cracks began to appear in the US economic boom narrative.

Year-to-date, gold is up more than 20%, making it the year's best-performing commodity after fellow precious metal silver, which is up 22%. Other major outperformers in the natural resources space for 2024 are cocoa, which is up 85%, orange juice (54%) and coffee (50%).

The dollar and the yield on 10-year US bonds - both of which often trade opposite to gold - are flat on the year.

The odds for a US interest rate cut - which, logically, would push the dollar and yields lower and gold higher - have increased this week amid deteriorating jobs data in the US economy.

The number of Americans filing for unemployment insurance rose by 4,000 to reach 232,000 in the latest week to August 17 versus the 228,000 filings witnessed during the prior week to August 10, the US Labor Department said in a report on Thursday.

The jobless claims data came a day after the Labor Department revised down by 818,000 the growth in payrolls originally reported for the 12 months to March, citing a "statistical error." The highest markdown in job estimates since the post-financial crisis era of 2009 highlights the vulnerability of the labor market following the post-COVID-19 jobs boom, analysts say.

Wall Street's bet is that the Federal Reserve will institute an interest rate cut as large as a half percentage point at its September 18 meeting. The US central bank's last rate reduction was in March 2020, after the COVID-19 outbreak. The Fed tightened policy 11 times after that, adding 5.25 percentage points to rates, as inflation hit four-decade highs in the aftermath of the pandemic.

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US, Argentina Sign MOU to Boost Critical Minerals Cooperation - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - The United States and Argentina signed a Memorandum of Understanding to enhance collaboration on critical minerals, the US State Department said in a statement on Thursday.

"Today, as part of the US-Argentina Energy Security Dialogue, US Under Secretary of State for

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Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment Jose W. Fernandez and Argentine Foreign Minister Diana Mondino signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to strengthen cooperation between the United States and Argentina on critical minerals," the statement said.

According to the statement, the MOU indicates that the countries' governments aim to enhance cooperation in critical mineral supply chains, including trade, investment, exploration, extraction, processing, refining, recycling and recovery, the statement said.

The move is aimed at setting a framework for collaboration in sector governance, investment and global supply chain security, the statement said..

"By signing this Memorandum, the United States and Argentina advance our common interest in supporting the energy transition and deploying clean energy technologies," the statement added.

The signing ceremony was in Buenos Aires during a bilateral meeting between Fernandez and Mondino, according to the statement.

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Palestinians Dont Believe US Promises About Imminent Ceasefire in Gaza Strip - Activist

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - The Palestinian people don’t believe Washington’s current promises about an imminent ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, Hatem Abudayyeh, chair of the US Palestinian Community Network told Sputnik on Thursday.

"We don't trust the assurances of the US government any more than we trust the statements coming from Israel," Abudayyeh said.

Abudayyeh went on to say that he believes that Russia could make a positive contribution to a Middle Eastern resolution if it chose to intervene.

"Russia's relationship with Palestine dates back to the Soviet era," he noted. "Russia’s approaches are fundamentally different from the American ones."

Last week, Qatar hosted Gaza ceasefire talks, which involved Egypt, Israel, and the United States. However, the Palestinian movement Hamas refused to participate, citing the lack of specifics on the terms of the truce.

After the talks, the United States, Egypt, and Qatar issued a joint statement saying their mediators had presented both parties a so-called bridging proposal on a ceasefire and on the release of the remaining 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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Ukraine's Kursk Operation Has Not Violated US Policies on Use of Its Weapons – Pentagon

Washington, August 22 (Sputnik) – The Ukrainian military incursion into Russia’s region of Kursk has not violated US policies on the use of its weapons on the battlefield as it is taking place within Kiev’s defensive counterfire against Russian attacks from beyond the border, Pentagon

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Deputy Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said on Thursday.

"Our policy does allow for Ukraine to conduct counter fires to defend itself from Russian attacks coming over that border region, and that border region does include Kursk, it does include Sumy, and so they are defending themselves from Russian attacks within that region," Singh told a press briefing.

The official's remarks came in reply to a question on whether the United States assessed that the policy on the use of US-supplied weapons to Ukraine had been violated amid the ongoing operation in Kursk.

On August 6, Ukrainian forces crossed the border into Russia and launched an offensive in the Kursk Region. Commenting on the attack, Russian President Vladimir Putin said Ukraine had carried out another large-scale provocation, firing indiscriminately at civilian targets. The enemy will receive a proper response in the border regions of Russia, Putin added.

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Law Enforcement Responding to Second Wave of Bomb Threats Across Canada - RCMP

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) is responding to a second wave of bomb threats against institutions nationwide, the RCMP said on Thursday.

"The RCMP is responding to additional bomb threats being made to institutions across Canada today, including synagogues, museums, malls, ports, art galleries and more. All Threats are being rapidly addressed in coordination with police of jurisdiction," the agency said in a statement via the social media platform X.

Law enforcement continues to investigate the matter. It is suspected that the individuals responsible for Wednesday threats are responsible for those of today, the statement said.

Police is working in close partnership with domestic and international agencies to identify the suspected individuals and put an end to their activities, the statement added.

On Wednesday, B'nai Brit Canada reported that more than a hundred Jewish institutions had received identical emails at 5:00 a.m. ET containing bomb threats, including to their Toronto and Montreal offices. The incidents prompted local police services and the RCMP to launch operations at several locations nationwide.

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Arizona Police Looking for Man Tied to Threats to Kill US Presidential Candidate - Sheriff

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - The Cochise County Sheriff's Office in Arizona said on Thursday that it is seeking a man who is wanted on outstanding warrants and in connection with threats to kill a US presidential candidate, amid a trip by Republican nominee Donald Trump to the state.

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The man, 66-year-old Ronald Lee Syvrud, is wanted for outstanding warrants from Wisconsin for driving under the influence and failure to appear, as well as warrants in Arizona for hit-and-run and failure to register as a sex offender, the Cochise Sheriff's Office said in a statement.

"Public Safety consideration: Syvrud is being sought as an investigative lead for threats to kill a presidential candidate," the statement said.

Trump is in Cochise County on Thursday to deliver remarks at the US southern border regarding the record influx of illegal immigrants to the United States during the Biden presidency.

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Yemen's Houthis Still Maintain Robust Arsenal Despite US Degrading Capabilities - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - Yemen's Houthis continue to possess a robust military arsenal even though the United States has been successful in degrading their military capabilities in a series of strikes, Defense Department deputy spokesperson Sabrina Singh said on Thursday.

"We have been successful in degrading their capabilities. They still maintain a robust arsenal, but we have been able to degrade their capabilities over time, and we have been able to protect ships that transit the Red Sea," Singh said during a press briefing.

Singh also acknowledged that the Houthis have been able to attack several commercial vessels transiting in the Red Sea.

Earlier on Thursday, the movement's leader, Abdul Malik al-Houthi, said the Houthis have attacked 182 maritime vessels linked to Israel since the beginning of the Gaza conflict.

The Houthis' movement, whose official name is Ansar Allah, have declared their support for a free Palestine and their intention to target any ships connected to Israel.

They have emphasized they are not interfering with the freedom of navigation in the region and are not targeting vessels from other countries.

Following the attacks, some cargo companies have decided to suspend shipments through the Red Sea. The United States and its allies are working to pressure the Houthis to stop attacking maritime vessels off the coast of Yemen.

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US Approves $405Mln Sale of Advanced Military Equipment to Norway - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - The US State Department has approved a $405 million sale of advanced medium range air-to-air missiles-extended range (AMRAAM-ER) to Norway, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Thursday.

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

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the government of Norway of advanced medium range air-to-air missiles - extended range and related equipment for an estimated cost of $405 million," the DSCA said in a statement.
The DSCA delivered the required certification notifying Congress of this possible sale, the statement said.
Norway has requested to buy 100 such missiles and four AMRAAM AIM-120C-8 guidance sections, along with other military equipment, the statement said.
"This proposed sale will support the foreign policy goals and national security objectives of the United States by improving the security of a NATO Ally that is a force for political stability and economic progress in Europe," the statement added.

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US State Dept. Approves $592Mln Sale of AIM-120 Missiles to Romania - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - The US State Department has approved a potential $592 million sale of 186 AIM-120 advanced medium range air-to-air missiles and related equipment to the government of Romania, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Thursday.
"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the government of Romania of AIM-120 advanced medium range air-to-air missiles and related equipment for an estimated cost of $592 million," the DSCA said in a press release.
The Romanian government also requested to purchase AIM-120 captive air training missiles (CATMs), missile containers, propulsion sections, control sections, telemetry kits and warhead spares, the release said.
In addition, the Romanian government requested KGV-135A cryptographic devices; common munitions built-in-test/reprogramming equipment; and ADU-891 computer test set adapter groups, the release added.

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US Working to Understand How Ukraine's Kursk Attack Fits Into Strategic Objectives - DOD

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - The United States is still trying to understand how Ukraine's attack on Russia's Kursk region fits into Kiev's broader strategic goals on the battlefield, Pentagon Deputy Press Secretary Sabrina Singh told reporters on Thursday.
“We are still working with Ukraine on how that fits into their strategic objectives on the battlefield itself,” Singh said during a press briefing, while admitting that "we do have some questions on that."
The spokesperson indicated that the US could gain a better understanding of Ukraine's strategic goals when Defense Secretary Austin speaks with Ukraine's Defense Minister Rustem Umerov.
On August 6, Ukrainian forces crossed the border into Russia and launched an offensive in the

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

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy would not have attacked the Kursk Region if the United States had not instructed him to do so, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Monday.

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US Senator Says Introduced Bill to Establish Support for 'Democratic Order' in Venezuela

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - US Senator Rick Scott said on Thursday that he introduced legislation to establish US policy in support of a transition to a "democratic order" in Venezuela, following Nicolas Maduro's reelection to the presidency.

The legislation, dubbed the Venezuela Advancing Liberty, Opportunity, and Rights (VALOR) Act, is also being introduced in the US House of Representatives, Scott said in a statement.

"The time is now for Maduro to leave office and allow the Venezuelan people to be free from his dictatorship. The United States must be a leader in bringing freedom and democracy to Venezuela and the VALOR Act is a step in the right direction," the statement said.

The legislation establishes democratic benchmarks guiding the removal of sanctions on the Maduro regime and any "non-democratic" successor, the statement said.

The bill also codifies financial sanctions on the Venezuelan Central Bank, Petroleos de Venezuela, SA and Venezuelan cryptocurrency, the statement said.

Moreover, the legislation requires the US to block participation of any non-democratic government of Venezuela at the Organization of American States, Inter-American Development Bank and International Monetary Fund, the statement said.

Additionally, the bill blocks US foreign aid to any country providing assistance, except humanitarian aid, to the Maduro regime or any non-democratic successor, the statement said.

The Supreme Court of Venezuela confirmed the results of the country's election commission and recognized Maduro as the elected president for 2025-2031, despite the US and other countries disputing the election results.

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UPDATE - Crude Prices End Up After 4-Day Tumble as US Oil Draws Offset Gaza Watch

(Updates with more details in paras 2, 3; modifies headline and lede)

NEW YORK, August 22 (Sputnik) - Crude prices ended up on Thursday after a four-day slump as large US inventory draws garnered attention, even as the prospect of Middle East calm eroded the geopolitical risk that had been highly supportive to this year's oil rally.

West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude settled up $1.08, or 1.5%, at $73.01 per barrel after a 7% tumble between Friday and Wednesday. Thursday's high for WTI was $73.33, after its 2024 low

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of $71.47 in the prior session. Year-to-date, the US benchmark shows a 1.5% gain, after rallying 22% earlier.

UK-origin Brent settled its latest New York trading session up $1.17, or 1.5%, at $77.22 per barrel. Brent lost more than 6% in four prior days of trading, hitting a November low of $74.79 on Wednesday. The global crude benchmark is near flat on the year, after running up some 20% earlier.

Thursday's rebound in crude prices came amid a belated reaction to positive data on US oil inventories released a day earlier by the Energy Information Administration.

Crude inventories fell by 4.649 million barrels during the week ended August 16, reversing the prior week's build of 1.357 million, which came after a decline of some 30 million barrels over six straight weeks.

Gasoline stockpiles fell 1.606 million barrels for the week to August 16, adding to the prior week's draw of 2.894 million. Distillate stockpiles tumbled by 3.312 million, after the previous week's deficit of 1.673 million.

Gasoline is the primary motor fuel in the United States and makes up the largest component of the country's energy mix. Distillates are primarily processed into the diesel required by trucks, buses and ships, and also goes into making airplane fuel.

Some analysts said it was far from certain that the bullish trajectory in oil would be maintained, citing continued pressure on the Israeli government and the Palestinian movement Hamas to end the Gaza war.

The Gaza war was initially a boon to the oil market. Crude prices rallied with little stop between January and March from Israel's bombardment of Gaza and the retaliation by Hamas and its allies, including Lebanon's Hezbollah and Iran, that sometimes disrupted oil shipments.

From the end of June, however, the oil rally began to unravel as the United States and its peace-keeping allies pushed for a ceasefire in Gaza.

Since July, crude prices have fallen about 8%, with analysts saying they expect the rut to resume if fighting stops altogether in Gaza.

US President Joe Biden, in a call with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday, emphasized the urgency of reaching a ceasefire, the White House said.

Downward pressure on crude prices could also build if the draws in US oil inventories softened, analysts said. "If [oil] products made new lows, WTI would follow," Scott Shelton, a trader in crude oil and other energy products for Durham, North Carolina-based commodities broker ICAP, said.

Some analysts argue that oil may be supported after this by talk of an impending US interest rate cut as the Federal Reserve looks poised to loosen its monetary policy for the first time since the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak as jobs and other economic data weaken.

An interest rate cut would lower the cost of doing business in the United States - a boon to the economy and the consumption of energy that is dependent on growth.

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Austin to Engage Umerov on Ukraine's 'Buffer Zone' in Kursk Region – Pentagon

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WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin is planning to engage Ukrainian Minister of Defense Rustem Umerov in the coming days on Kiev's plans to create a "buffer zone" in Russia's Kursk region following a military incursion there, Pentagon deputy spokesperson Sabrina Singh said on Thursday.

"Is there an intention to continue to hold when they [Ukrainians] say they're creating a buffer zone? How large are they going to expand? These are some of the questions that we're asking, because if they are going to create a buffer zone [in Kursk region] that does entail creating multiple defensive lines. I don't have all those answers right now, but that's something that the secretary [Austin] is going to engage Minister Umerov again in the coming days," Singh said during a press briefing.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy would not have attacked the Kursk region if the United States had not instructed him to do so, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Monday.

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Harris Campaign Honeymoon Phase Should End 'This Weekend' at Latest - Ramaswamy

UNITED NATIONS, August 22 (Sputnik) - Businessman and former US presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy said on Thursday that he would like to see Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris's so-called "honeymoon phase" with the media and the public end by Labor Day at the latest so that the country can engage in a "real election."

"When should the honeymoon phase end? I propose this weekend," Ramaswamy said when asked by Sputnik to comment on the Harris campaign. "Maybe even after Labor Day. But after Labor Day let's turn the page and have a real election."

Ramaswamy had predicted earlier that Harris would replace cognitively challenged President Joe Biden in the 2024 presidential election and then benefit from a honeymoon phase given that US voters are not as familiar with her policies, with the corporate media effectively shielding her.

Ramaswamy made the comments on the sidelines of the Democratic National Convention (DNC) in Chicago, taking place August 19-22.

Some Republicans are attending the DNC and holding press conferences to refute many of the claims made by Democrats about Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump.

Democrats are gathering in Chicago to rally support behind Harris and her running mate 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 United States. Biden endorsed Harris as the Democratic nominee, which she accepted.

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Air Canada Pilots Overwhelmingly Vote at 98% in Favor of Strike Mandate - Union

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WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - Pilots at Canadian flag carrier Air Canada have voted overwhelmingly to authorize union leaders to launch a strike as soon as mid-September, the Air Line Pilots Association said in a statement on Thursday.

"Air Canada pilots, represented by the Air Line Pilots Association, Int'l (ALPA), voted overwhelmingly in favor to authorize union leaders to call a strike. With 98% of members participating, 98% of Air Canada pilots voted in favor of job action, if necessary, to achieve a new contractual agreement with Air Canada," the statement said.

Air Canada pilots will be in a legal position to commence a strike action as soon as mid-September unless an agreement is reached by the end of the so-called "cool-off period," the statement said.

Pilots have been working under the pay-rates and quality of life provisions negotiated in 2014, the statement said.

Negotiations for a new agreement began in 2023 but entered mediation between January and June of this year and subsequently, ALPA filed a notice of dispute over the inability to reach a new collective agreement with the air carrier, the statement said.

Some 5 400 pilots voiced their readiness to go to great lengths to secure a new collective agreement that reflects their contribution to Air Canada, the statement said.

ALPA remains committed to avert a strike action, but the company refuses to listen to the crews' needs regarding fair compensation, retirement benefits and quality of life improvements, the statement said.

"After more than a year of negotiations, management must now to come to the realization that if they fail to reach an agreement, they will be responsible for us withdrawing our services," the statement added.

Created in 1931, ALPA is the largest airline pilot union in the world, representing more than 78,000 pilots at 41 US and Canadian airlines.

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Economy Should Decide Voter Choice Between Trump, Harris - Ramaswamy

CHICAGO, August 22 (Sputnik) - American voters should consider the economy to be the main factor when choosing between former President Donald Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris in the November election, former US presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy said on Thursday.

"Trump has given you a clear vision: drill, frack, extract … Kamala Harris did not offer on economic policy until earlier this week when she came out with her 'Nobel Prize winning' suggestion of regulating prices," Ramaswamy said at a press conference at Trump Tower in Chicago. "So those are the two issues that will and should decide this election."

Trump has proposed clear policies and now it is up to Harris to propose her own ideas "if she actually has an alternative vision," Ramaswamy stated.

The Trump campaign is hosting a press conference at Trump Tower in Chicago, the city where the Democrats are holding their convention to rally support behind their 2024 ticket of Harris and

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Minnesota Governor Tim Walz.

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Ramaswamy Says His Message to Harris Would Be 'Shame on You' for Catastrophe on US Border

UNITED NATIONS, August 22 (Sputnik) - Businessman and former US presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy said on Thursday that his main message to Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris would be to say "shame on you" for the disastrous consequences of illegal immigration into the United States under her watch.

"Shame on you. Shame on you as somebody who should know better, as a kid of legal immigrants who came the right way," Ramaswamy said when asked by Sputnik to provide his thoughts on the Harris campaign.

If Harris were a true leader, she would take responsibility for the catastrophe at the US southern border under her watch, Ramaswamy said.

Ramaswamy made the comments on the sidelines of the Democratic National Convention held in Chicago August 19-22.

Several Republicans are present at the gathering to hold press conferences and refute claims by Democrats during the convention about Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump.

The Democrats are gathering in Chicago to rally support behind Harris and her running mate Minnesota Governor Tim Walz for the November 2024 presidential election.

In July, President Joe Biden said he was withdrawing from the election in the best interest of the Democratic Party and the United States. Biden endorsed Harris as the Democratic nominee, which she accepted.

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FDA Says Approved New COVID-19 Vaccines to Target Current Virus Variants

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) said on Thursday that it approved and granted emergency use authorization for updated COVID-19 vaccines that target currently circulating variants of the virus.

"The mRNA COVID-19 vaccines have been updated with this formula to more closely target currently circulating variants and provide better protection against serious consequences of COVID-19, including hospitalization and death. Today's actions relate to updated mRNA COVID-19 vaccines manufactured by ModernaTX Inc. and Pfizer Inc," the FDA said in a statement.

In June, the FDA advised manufacturers that vaccine formulas for the 2024-2025 season should be monovalent JN.1 vaccines. The agency later determined and advised manufacturers that the preferred JN.1-lineage for the vaccines is the KP.2 strain.

The updated vaccines meet the FDA's standard for safety, effectiveness and manufacturing

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quality, the statement said.

However, people who receive the updated vaccines may experience similar side effects as those reported by those who previously received mRNA COVID-19 vaccines, the statement added.

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Democrats Used Debate to Test Biden, Swapped Him After Debacle - Ramaswamy

UNITED NATIONS, August 22 (Sputnik) - Democrats used the June 27 debate, scheduled very early into the US presidential election campaign, to test President Joe Biden and swapped him after his poor performance, former US presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy said on Thursday.

According to Ramaswamy, the Democratic Party acted according to its incentives by scheduling "the earliest ever presidential debate in recorded televised history of presidential general election debates in the United States."

"They wanted to float a trial bullet, test Biden and see how he did [during first Biden-Trump debate in July]. He performed poorly," Ramaswamy said at a press conference at Trump Tower in Chicago, when asked by Sputnik about his evaluation of the Democratic campaign. "They swapped him out."

This was called a "conspiracy theory" by the media about a year ago but played out in reality, Ramaswamy said.

"I have no doubt there will be ["shenanigans" from the Democratic side] and I have my own opinion on what those could be … But it doesn't matter because the way we are going to win this election isn't by worrying about the other side. It is going to be by offering our own vision," Ramaswamy stated.

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

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

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UN Hopes Modi's Visit to Ukraine Will Aid in Resolving Ongoing Conflict - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, August 22 (Sputnik) - The United Nations hopes that all visits to Ukraine, including the upcoming one by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi after his trip to Russia, would help in resolving the ongoing conflict there, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Thursday.

"We've seen a lot of heads of states and governments travel to the region. We hope that all of

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these visits will bring us closer to an end of the conflict in line with General Assembly resolutions, international law and the territorial integrity of Ukraine," Dujarric said during a press briefing.

Dujarric made the remark in response to a reporter's question whether he had any comments on Modi's upcoming visit to Ukraine following his recent trip to Russia.

Modi will arrive in Ukraine on Friday and is scheduled to meet with Volodymyr Zelenskyy to discuss bilateral ties. Modi will also meet with members of the Indian community in Ukraine, including with students.

This visit is the first by an Indian prime minister since the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Ukraine in 1992.

In July, Modi visited Russia for the first time in five years and met with Russian President Vladimir Putin. The two leaders discussed their countries' strategic partnership in various areas.

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US Election Expected to Be Decided in Six to Nine States - Senior Trump Campaign Advisor

CHICAGO, August 22 (Sputnik) - Trump Campaign Senior Advisor Bryan Hughes said on Thursday that the polls regarding the 2024 US presidential election are changing and their belief is that the race will be decided in six to nine US states.

"Polling always ebbs and flows. ... We believe it will be a tight election, decided in somewhere from six to nine states," Hughes said when asked by Sputnik to evaluate the campaign of Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris.

Hughes pointed out that the Trump campaign is seeing that the so-called honeymoon phase for Harris is "plateauing."

"We believe we are poised for what we need to do," Hughes added.

The Republican party has been doing press conferences on the sidelines of the Democratic National Convention (DNC) in Chicago in an attempt to refute some of the claims made by Democrats during speeches at the gathering.

The Democrats gathered in Chicago to rally support behind their 2024 ticket of Harris and her running mate Minnesota Governor Tim Walz.

In July, President Joe Biden said he was withdrawing from the 2024 election in the best interest of the Democratic Party and the United States. Biden endorsed Harris as the Democratic nominee, which she accepted.

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Ex-Pentagon Official Says Surgeon Removed Technical Device From Soldier With UAP Encounter

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WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - Former Pentagon official Lue Elizondo said that he saw a device removed from a US military servicemember who claimed to have had an encounter with an unidentified anomalous phenomenon (UAP).

"I saw a technical device that had been removed, excised, by the Department of Veterans Affairs, by a surgeon, a trained physician, from a US military servicemember who claimed to have a UAP encounter," Elizondo said in an interview with NewsNation.

The physician claimed that the device tried to "evade" removal, Elizondo said.

The object was embedded in a "biological capsule" that could be used to fool the body, he said.

Elizondo previously worked for the US Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and has been vocal about alleged UAP investigation programs.

The full interview with Elizondo is set to be released on Friday.

In 2022, the Pentagon established the All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO) to investigate UAP.

AARO has not found verifiable evidence for claims that the US government and private companies have access to or have been reverse-engineering extraterrestrial technology, nor that any US government investigation has confirmed that a UAP sighting represented extraterrestrial technology, according to the Pentagon.

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Israel Envoy to UN Insults Palestine Representative, Calling Him ‘Terrorist in a Suit’

UNITED NATIONS, August 22 (Sputnik) - Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations Danny Danon on Thursday insulted Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations envoy Riyad Mansour, calling him "a terrorist in a suit."

"I want to clarify an important point and demand an answer with Mansour: 'Who do you represent here today?,' Danon said during a meeting of the UN Security Council. "Mr. Mansour, if you cannot condemn them [the Palestinian movement Hamas], you are one of them. You do not represent the Palestinian people. Mr. Mansour, you are a terrorist in a suit."

Danon also said that he demands that Mansour condemn Hamas.

On October 7, 2023, Hamas attacked Israel fro the Gaza Strip, killing more than 1,100 Israeli military and civilians. Israel IDF launched Operation Iron Swords in Gaza and announced a complete blockade of the Palestinian enclave. The enclave's health ministry says that the Palestinian death toll from Israel's military operations since October 7 has exceeded 40,000.

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Palestine to Initiate Action at UNGA Next Month to End Israeli Occupation – Envoy to UN

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UNITED NATIONS, August 22 (Sputnik) – Palestine will initiate action next month at the United Nations General Assembly to end Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories in accordance with the top UN court's historic advisory opinion on the matter, Palestinian Ambassador to the UN Riyad Mansour said on Thursday.

"We are going to initiate another action to put an end to this illegal occupation as soon as possible by legislating next month in the General Assembly the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice," Mansour said during a meeting of the Security Council.

The ICJ's opinion will be turned into an actionable UNGA resolution demanding that Israel end its illegal occupation within a certain timeframe and resolve all other issues as recommended by the court, Mansour added.

The ICJ said in July that Israeli settlement activity violates international law and constitutes annexation. The court called on Israel to cease its new settlement activities and its illegal presence in the Palestinian territories and to pay reparations for the damage caused by the occupation.

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Harris to Pursue Gaza Ceasefire Addressing Israel's Security, Palestinian Needs - Campaign

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - Vice President and Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris intends to seek a complete ceasefire in the Gaza Strip which takes into account both the security of Israel and the needs of the Palestinians, Harris-Walz Campaign Communications Director Michael Tyler told RIA Novosti on Thursday.

"And I think what folks who continue to demonstrate will see for the rest of this campaign, is a vice president who's committed to ending the violence, ending the conflict, making sure that we resolve this conflict with a permanent ceasefire that allows Israel to fully secure itself, and make sure that we have a full humanitarian aid, so that Gazans are able to peacefully live and prosper," Tyler said.

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

The IDF 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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Senator Cardin Says Hopeful US Can Continue Arms Control Dialogue With All Nuclear Powers

CHICAGO, August 22 (Sputnik) - US Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Ben Cardin said on Thursday that he is hopeful the United States can continue arms control dialogue

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with all nuclear powers after the end of the conflict in Ukraine.

"Yes, I do hope that the relationship post whatever happens we can resolve Ukraine, that we would work with all the nuclear powers, particularly for arms control," Cardin told RIA Novosti.

The senator noted that while he believes Moscow and Washington could agree on a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), such a development will not happen soon.

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Crude Prices Up After 4-Day Tumble as US Oil Draws Offset Gaza Watch

NEW YORK, August 22 (Sputnik) - Crude prices increased on Thursday after a four-day slump as large US inventory draws garnered attention, even as the prospect of Middle East calm removed the geopolitical risk that had been highly supportive to this year's oil rally.

With two-and-a-half hours to the day's settlement, West Texas Intermediate (WTI) was up $1.30, or 1.8%, after a 7% tumble between Friday and Wednesday. Thursday's high for WTI was $73.33, after its 2024 low of $71.47 in the prior session. Year-to-date, the US benchmark shows a 2% gain, after rallying 22% earlier.

UK-origin Brent was up $1.37, or 1.8%, in the latest New York trading session. Brent lost more than 6% in four prior days of trading, hitting a November low of $74.79 on Wednesday. For 2024 thus far, the global crude benchmark shows a 0.5% gain, after running up some 20% earlier.

Thursday's rebound in crude prices came amid a belated reaction to positive data on US oil inventories released a day earlier by the Energy Information Administration.

Crude inventories fell by 4.649 million barrels during the week ended August 16, reversing the prior week's build of 1.357 million, which came after a decline of some 30 million barrels over six straight weeks.

Gasoline stockpiles fell 1.606 million barrels for the week to August 16, adding to the prior week's draw of 2.894 million. Distillate stockpiles tumbled by 3.312 million, after the previous week's deficit of 1.673 million.

Gasoline is the primary motor fuel in the United States and makes up the largest component of the country's energy mix. Distillates are primarily processed into the diesel required by trucks, buses and ships, and also goes into making airplane fuel.

Some analysts said it was far from certain that the bullish trajectory would be maintained, citing continued pressure on the Israeli government and the Palestinian movement Hamas to end the Gaza war as one reason.

US President Joe Biden has emphasized the urgency of reaching a Gaza ceasefire to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a call between them on Wednesday, the White House said.

The Gaza war was initially a boon to the oil market. Crude prices rallied with little stop between January and March from Israel's bombardment of Gaza and the retaliation by Hamas and its allies, including Lebanon's Hezbollah and Iran, that sometimes disrupted oil shipments.

From the end of June, however, the oil rally began to unravel as the United States and other peacekeepers pushed for a ceasefire in Gaza.

Since July, crude prices have fallen about 8%, with analysts saying they expect the rut to

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resume if fighting stops altogether in Gaza.

"If [oil] products made new lows, WTI would follow," Scott Shelton, a trader in crude oil and other energy products for Durham, North Carolina-based commodities broker ICAP, said.

Some analysts argue that oil may be supported after this by talk of an impending US interest rate cut as the Federal Reserve looks poised to loosen its monetary policy for the first time since the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak as jobs and other economic data weaken.

An interest rate cut would lower the cost of doing business in the United States - a boom to the economy and the consumption of energy that is dependent on growth.

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US Arrests Guatemalan National for Alleged Role in Human Smuggling - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - The US authorities have apprehended Guatemalan national Rigoberto Miranda Orozco for his alleged involvement in a human smuggling operation linked to the deaths of 53 people in Texas in June 2022, Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Nicole Argentieri said on Thursday.

"Today, the department announces the arrest of Rigoberto Miranda Orozco, a Guatemalan national, for his alleged role in a human smuggling operation that resulted in the tragic deaths of 53 victims, including children in a tractor-trailer in San Antonio, Texas in June 2022," Argentieri said during a press briefing.

According to Attorney for the Western District of Texas Jaime Esparza, the indictment alleges that defendant Orozco is responsible for at least three of the deaths.

"Our indictment charges Orozco with six counts, all related to migrants smuggling resulting in death or serious bodily injury, he now faces up to life in prison," Esparza said during the press briefing.

The US authorities would pursue Orozco's prosecution as aggressively as possible in their pursuit of justice for the victims who perished and those who were injured. Esparza added.

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UNSC Has Been Passive Observer of Deadly Gaza Conflict For Over 10 Months -Russian Mission

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - The United Nations Security Council has remained a passive observer of the ongoing deadly conflict in the Gaza Strip, failing to demand an unequivocal cessation of hostilities from all parties, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Thursday.

"It is painful but we have to acknowledge that the Security Council as the main UN body tasked with maintaining international peace and security for more than 10 months now has basically remained a passive observer of the continued bloodbath in Gaza," Polyanskiy said during the

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Security Council.

Polyanskiy stressed that Russia is disappointed that the UNSC has not been able to demand an unequivocal ceasefire and ensure that there is compliance with this demand by all sides to the conflict.

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

The IDF 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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UPDATE - Ottawa Taking Rail Strike 'Seriously', Ensuring Right Solution Found Quickly – Trudeau

(Adds background in paras 4-5)

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government is taking the railway strike action by Teamsters Canada seriously and is ensuring that the right solution is found quickly to benefit the economy, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Thursday.

Earlier in the day, Teamsters Canada, the country's largest transportation and supply chain union, announced that it had begun a strike after failing to reach an agreement with the Canadian National Railway Company (CN) and the Canadian Pacific Kansas City (CPKC). Both companies move around C$1 billion ($736 million) worth of goods on a daily basis, according to the Railway Association of Canada.

"We're taking it so seriously … We are not taking this lightly, obviously, because Canadians across the country are worried about it, and we will have more to say, shortly on what we're doing to make sure that the right solution is found quickly for the economy," Trudeau told reporters.

Teamsters Canada has previously warned that strike action could paralyze railroad transport if the CN and the CPKC did not reach an agreement with them by August 22. The union says the main obstacle to a negotiated agreement remains the companies' demands rather than union proposals. The companies continue to seek a weakening of protections around rest periods and scheduling, increasing the risk of fatigue-related safety issues, it said.

Teamsters Canada is the country's largest federally regulated private sector as well as transportation and supply chain union, with more than 130,000 members. The union represents some 10,000 workers at the CN and CPKC and more than 1.2 million individuals across North America.

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US Senator Cardin Says Arms Control Treaties With Russia Should Be Preserved

CHICAGO, August 22 (Sputnik) - US Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Ben Cardin said on Thursday that it is absolutely important for Russia and the United States to preserve the arms control treaties.
"Absolutely, yeah, our objective is to reduce the amount of arms around the world, particularly nuclear weapons," Cardin told RIA Novosti when asked if Moscow and Washington should preserve their bilateral treaties on arms control.

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Democrats Ready for RFK Jr. Voters to Go to Trump - Harris Campaign to RIA Novosti

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - Democrats are prepared for the eventuality that voters supporting independent US presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. will go to Republican candidate Donald Trump given that many of them share his views, Harris-Walz Campaign Communications Director Michael Tyler told RIA Novosti on Thursday.
"This [scenario] will not come as a surprise for us, since many of them share [Trump's] views and policies," Tyler said.

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Ottawa Taking Rail Strike 'Seriously,' Ensuring Right Solution Found Quickly - Trudeau

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Tucker Carlson, Trump Jr. Pushed Kennedy to Endorse Donald Trump - Reports

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WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - Independent US presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. was pushed to support Republican nominee Donald Trump by people including journalist Tucker Carlson and the former president's son Donald Trump Jr., NBC News reported, citing two sources familiar with the matter.

Kennedy has not yet endorsed Trump, although he is scheduled to address the nation about his "path forward" on Friday, after running mate Nicole Shanahan said the campaign is considering dropping out and supporting Trump.

Carlson, Trump Jr., and business executive Omeed Malik have been privately working to persuade Kennedy to end his campaign and endorse Trump instead, the report said on Wednesday.

Kennedy is set to announce the suspension of his campaign on Friday and back Trump, the report said. However, talks are still ongoing, the report added.

Kennedy endorsing Trump would not come as a surprise to Democrats, Harris campaign communications chief Michael Tyler told Sputnik on Thursday.

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Taiwan Foreign Minister, Security Advisor Made Secret Trip to US for Talks - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - Taiwanese Foreign Affairs Minister Lin Chia-lung and National Security Advisor Joseph Wu made a secret trip to the United States earlier this week for talks with US officials, the Financial Times reported on Thursday, citing sources familiar with the matter.

The report said this is the first such visit since Taiwan's newly-elected President Lai Ching-te took office in May.

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Democrats Ready for RFK Jr. Voters to Go to Trump - Harris Campaign to RIA Novosti

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"This [scenario] will not come as a surprise for us, since many of them share [Trump's] views and policies," Tyler said.

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Democrats ready for RFK Jr. voters to go to trump, many of them share his views - harris campaign spokesperson to ria novosti

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US Weekly Jobless Claims Inch Up, Bolstering Odds for Rate Cut

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - The number of Americans filing for unemployment insurance rose in the latest week to August 17, the Labor Department said in a report Thursday, bolstering chances for a Federal Reserve rate cut as US economic data increasingly show signs of slowing growth.

New jobless claims rose by 4,000 to reach 232,000, from the 228,000 filings witnessed during the prior week to August 10, the report said.

It was another crucial data point that harnessed the argument that the US labor — once the juggernaut of economic recovery from the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic — was no longer as resilient.

It comes a day after the Labor Department revised down by 818,000 the growth in payrolls originally reported for the 12 months to March, citing a "statistical error." The highest markdown in job estimates since the post-financial crisis era of 2009 highlights the vulnerability of the labor market following the post-COVID jobs boom, analysts say.

"The weakening labor market, along with slowing inflation, has positioned the Federal Reserve to cut interest rates at its next meeting in mid-September," MarketWatch said in a commentary. "Some on Wall Street wonder if the Fed will cut interest rates more aggressively than the expected 25-basis-point rate cut."

Wall Street's bet is that the Fed will institute a cut as large as a half percentage point at its September 18 rate decision. The central bank's last rate reduction was in March 2020, after the COVID outbreak. It tightened policy 11 times after that, adding 5.25 percentage points to rates, as inflation hit four-decade highs in the aftermath of the pandemic.

The Fed's target for inflation is a mere 2% per annum. Throughout the past two years, the central bank had steadfastly pointed to that and the runaway US labor market as reasons for holding rates high.

Inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index, hit a 40-year high of 9.1% per annum in June 2022. But over the past year, the CPI had steadily crumbled, growing by only 2.9% per annum in June 2024.

Some 20 million jobs were initially lost to the pandemic but were quickly replaced in the months after. The labor market then saw its best run since the 1960s. But Wednesday's downward revision of 818,000 payrolls for the year to March has now raised worries there too.

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Pentagon Identifies 400 Veterans Exposed to Chemical Weapons During Iraq War - Reports

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WASHINGTON, August 21 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department believes that some 400 veterans were possibly exposed to chemical weapons during the war in Iraq and are still struggling to get health and disability benefits from the government, Stars and Stripes reported, citing Veterans Affairs Department officials.

The Veteran Affairs Department came under criticism for delays in granting Iraq war veterans the status of being exposed to chemical warfare agents. At the same time, the Defense Department continues to conceal the locations where the 400 veterans had to deal with chemical weapons, the report said.

US veterans can only receive disability compensation if their military record shows confirmed contact with chemical weapons. In contrast, health conditions related to sarin, mustard gas and a range of other chemical agents remain outside the scope of the PACT Act of 2022 providing for such benefits.

As in the case of the Army's 41st Transportation Company, dozens of Iraq War veterans face hurdles in obtaining evaluations of their medical conditions caused by contacting chemical weapons.

Some veterans say they believe their health conditions have been passed on to their children. Sergeant Istvan Gabor, who was exposed to chemical agents in Iraq, believes his son Kevin inherited his medical conditions even though he was conceived after the end of his military service. Kevin was diagnosed with brittle bone disease at birth as a result.

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Russia Has Remarkable Architecture Reflecting Its History, Culture - Historian

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - Russia has a remarkable architecture that reflects its history and culture, renowned US photographer and historian of Russian architecture William Brumfield told Sputnik.

"Americans know almost nothing about Russian architecture and American art historians are not interested in it, with the exception of avant-garde constructivism," Brumfield said.

Constructivism was an avant-garde art movement whose works were based on the idea of functionalism, symbiosis of technology and art and the use of modern industrial materials.

Brumfield, 80, who has made Russia the focus of his work for more than 50 years and taken thousands of photographs of different buildings, emphasized that his work provides a new picture of Russia because he places all photographs of Russia's architectural objects in their historical context.

"These buildings are remarkable not only as architecture but also as reflections of Russian history," he said. "Therefore, through my photographs, I present not only architecture but also history and the American public can learn from my books something about both Russian architecture and history. Put another way, Russian architecture is important because it is Russian in the context of Russian history."

Brumfield explained that Russia represents a large part of the world and has a rich culture, but also noted that traditional Russian architecture, including St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow, the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, and the wooden architecture at city of Kizhi, is the most

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attractive to the American public.

However, Brumfield acknowledged that Americans' interest in Russian architecture depends on each specific person, and that their interests and background vary.

"It depends on the person, it depends on their background, it depends on their education. Every individual is different," he said.

Brumfield pointed out that US architecture had exerted an influence on Russia, particularly in the period between the 1920s and 1930s.

"American architecture was very advanced in the 20th century, and Soviet-Russian architects had noticed this, and they were informed about it. So, I would say it is a two-way process," he said.

Brumfield began working in the then-Soviet Union in the early 1970s and continued in Russia after the dissolution of the country. He did postgraduate research at Moscow State University and Saint Petersburg State University and traveled throughout the country photographing its architecture. In 2019, Brumfield was awarded the Russian Order of Friendship.

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Trump Claims Harris Met With Putin 3 Days Before Military Operation in Ukraine Began

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump claimed on Thursday that Vice President Kamala Harris met with President Vladimir Putin three days before Russia began its special military operation in Ukraine, but there is no record of any meeting between the two leaders.

"Let me tell you a little known fact that the press has not talked about. Biden sent … Kamala to see Putin in Russia three days before the attack. She went, she said, she gave her case. He attacked 3 days later, he laughed at her, he thought she was a joke," Trump told Fox News.

Trump made the same claim on Wednesday during a rally in North Carolina.

Harris traveled to Germany to attend the Munich Security Conference from February 18-20, 2022. On February 19, she delivered a speech at the gathering. On the same day, she held a bilateral meeting with Volodymyr Zelenskyy. President Putin did not attend the Munich Security Conference that year.

Russia launched its special military operation in Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

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Biden's New Nuclear Strategy Not Response to Any Single Country, Threat - White House

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - A White House National Security Council spokesperson confirmed to Sputnik that President Joe Biden approved a new nuclear strategy earlier this year and said it is not directed at any single country or threat.

On Tuesday, The New York Times reported that Biden approved the new nuclear strategy in March, which refocuses on China's growing nuclear arsenal but also addresses concerns of

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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. The revised nuclear strategic plan is called Nuclear Weapons Employment Planning Guidance.

"While the specific text of the Guidance is classified, its existence is in no way secret," the spokesperson said on Thursday. "The Guidance issued earlier this year is not a response to any single entity, country, nor threat."

The official added that the United States will continue to focus its efforts on reducing nuclear risk by enhancing deterrence and aim to resolve differences through arms control diplomacy.

In June, White House National Security Council Senior Director for Arms Control and Nonproliferation Pranay Vaddi said during a panel discussion that the United States is now taking a more competitive approach to nuclear arms control and non-proliferation in the face of the developing arsenals by Russia, China and North Korea.

Vaddi later told Sputnik on the sidelines of the event that the United States takes seriously Russian President Vladimir Putin's remarks on how nuclear weapons should never be used and hopes he is true to his word. He added that Russia is welcome to make any proposals on possible leader-to-leader discussions with the United States on arms control issues.

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