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Sullivan-Xi Meeting Won't Improve US-China Relations

On Wednesday, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan visited China, meeting with President Xi Jinping and other high-ranking Chinese officials. The meeting is expected to be followed up with a call between Xi and US President Joe Biden in the coming weeks.

The meeting was reported as an attempt to improve relations between the world's two largest economies and militaries, but is unlikely to move the needle in any perceptible way, scholar, journalist and geopolitical analyst specializing in the Asia-Pacific KJ Noh told Sputnik's Political Misfits.

"I don't think it's really in the cards. If you look at the Chinese readouts [of the meeting], they essentially focus on the Chinese desire to get along with the United States. Their point is [that] we can't be enemies and cooperate. [The US has] to make a decision," Noh began. "They always come back to the Bali agreements, even the 'Five Nos' - no Cold War, no hot war, no regime change, no block forming, no support of secession… They want the US to affirm that. And the Chinese explicitly mentioned that in their readout. The US [readout] does not mention that."

Despite occasional public overtures by the United States, its actions have been consistently aimed at limiting China's growth and influence. The United States saw itself fit to insert itself in territorial disputes in the South China Sea. It has also supported Chinese separatists in Taiwan, held military drills in the region, flown spy planes right on China's borders, and stationed troops just a mile off of China's coast.

Then there is the economic warfare. "If you recall, when they initially rolled out these [micro]chip sanctions, [influential think tanks] crowed that they had essentially destroyed China's economy. They said they had China in a four-point chokehold and they were strangling with intent to kill, that this was a declaration of war. They never walked back those statements," explained Koh. "Jake Sullivan emphasized in the readout that the US will continue to take necessary actions to prevent advanced US technology from being used to undermine national security, that means they're going to continue the tech war against China."

Despite the United States' hand-wringing about national security and election interference, Koh suspects the real reason for the tech war, particularly on Chinese tech giants Huawei and ByteDance, is to maintain the US "monopoly control over the backbone of the internet and social media companies for geostrategic reasons."

Huawei is the world's largest supplier of telecommunication equipment that makes up the backbone of the internet, like routers and servers. ByteDance owns TikTok, one of the most popular and fastest-growing social media platforms, boasting 170 million users in the United States and more than a billion worldwide.

The upcoming call between Xi and Biden will be to let China know that if Harris wins in November, the Harris administration is "essentially going to keep our policies as is."

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"I think they want to position themselves as a better alternative than [former US President Donald] Trump who the Chinese are weary about because he's so unpredictable despite his kind of transactional neo-mercantile approach to China," explained Koh. "But what we do have to note is anything that Trump did in terms of escalating against China, the Biden administration has maintained and then took it up several notches. All you have to do is look at the tariffs [and] you'll see that the Biden administration has been much, much, much worse."

Koh speculated that Sullivan wanted to stabilize relations between the countries before the election but afterward "the escalation against China will continue."

"Right before this meeting, there was a massive high-level delegation of DPP Taiwan separatist officials who came to the United States. Right after this meeting is over, there will be further meetings with high-level separatists. And so, there's always this doubled-edged message that the US is sending."

So from a Chinese perspective, there are no good choices in November, Noh contended. "I don't think they're making plans for either administration. The Chinese outlook is just literally the long term. They believe that if they can avoid war, and if they can avoid nuclear war, then eventually, things will stabilize and the United States will hopefully find a modus vivendi."

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To Serve Tech Bros

On Monday, Telegram CEO Pavel Durov was detained by French authorities. He was eventually officially arrested and charged with a variety of crimes for not moderating his platform enough and providing privacy tools to the French public.

In the days following his arrest, media reports surfaced that French President Emmanuel Macron had lured Durov to France by inviting him to dinner. The two had dined in the past, sharing lunch in 2018 as Macron attempted to convince Durov to move Telegram's headquarters to Paris.

Macron denied that he had lured Durov to France with the promise of dinner or that he even knew Durov was headed to France at the time. However, the rumors persist. A year before the lunch he shared with Durov, Macron's government reportedly worked with the United Arab Emirates to hack Durov's phone. US media said that France was pursuing a "long-term effort" to "compromise Telegram."

Wherever Macron was eating dinner that night, it is clear that for the French government, tech entrepreneur was on the menu. So far, there have been no reports claiming that Durov was heard screaming "It's a cookbook!" as he was arrested by authorities, but it cannot be ruled out.

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FBI Agents Feel Child Sex Crimes Are 'Beneath Them' - Fmr Special Agent

A Department of Justice inspector general report released on Thursday said that the FBI is failing to properly investigate sex offenses against children, noting that individual agents are juggling dozens of cases at one time. Additionally, of 300 child sex cases filed from 2021 to 2023, the FBI did not follow up on 42 of them.

The report by the IG also noted that 50% of all child sex cases during that time were never referred to local law enforcement and of the other 50%, only 43% were referred within 24 hours, which is required by FBI regulations.

An attorney for the victims of Larry Nassar, the former US Olympic Gymnastics doctor who was sentenced to life in prison for abusing dozens of gymnasts, said that the report showed that the "FBI is simply not doing its job when it comes to protecting our children from the monsters among us who stalk them… it is now clear that the Larry Nassar scandal could happen again today."

Former FBI special agent Jane Turner, who worked for the Bureau for 25 years and led the FBI's programs combating crimes against women and child sex victims said that the FBI doesn't focus on child sex crimes because agents feel it is beneath them and that they prefer to focus on headline-grabbing cases like terrorism or January 6.

Turner was the resident RA in a Native American reservation, which the FBI has jurisdiction over. She said even then, agents would close sex cases as car accidents or other events to avoid working on them.

"Of course, I told the bureau the agents did not want to work these cases. They felt it was beneath them. They felt it was a waste of their time. They felt it was women's work," Turner told Sputnik's Political Misfits, to the shock of co-hosts John Kiriakou and Michelle Witte.

The FBI retaliated against Turner after she blew the whistle on the agency's lack of action on those crimes. She eventually won the largest compensatory package legally possible for federal agents.

"They've (the FBI) never considered these kinds of crimes worthy of their investigative abilities. I mean, that's the bottom line," Turner added later, noting that solving sex crimes is not the type of work that nets agents awards.

"It's been a situation that has been happening over and over and over again. And if that doesn't tell you that there's something wrong with that system, nothing does," Turner continued. "Twenty-five years ago, we wrote up… this 30-page massive thing pointing out the FBI's derelictions and, of course, nothing, crickets. And then you have Larry Nassar and then you have today. I mean, it's just a continuing problem."

Kiriakou, himself a veteran of the CIA who blew the whistle on the United States' torture techniques during the so-called War on Terror noted that he recently had a conversation with an FBI agent who said they weren't interested in cases that didn't focus on a few subjects that the Bureau prefers. "Unless a walk-in, a call-in, a volunteer has information about Russia, China, terrorism, or January 6, they're just not interested. They don't have the manpower."

Responding to the IG's report, an FBI spokesperson claimed that many of the cases that were cited as not being followed up on actually were, but the agents just didn't have time to fill out the proper paperwork. Turner said that excuse is unbelievable.

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“That’s what the FBI lived and died on, their FD-302s, which are… write-ups of any evidence you have. And you have that five-day period to get it done. There are no ifs, ands, or buts. And that’s one of the things that comes up in court, ‘When did you write this report?’ So, that’s a very duplicitous to say, ‘Oh, we didn’t have time to write it down,’” Turner continued. “I’m just blown away by that. Blown away.”

While US Senator Dick Durbin (D-Il) said he is going to hold a hearing on the issue, neither Kiriakou nor Turner believes it is going to lead to any substantial changes.

“Nothing ever comes out of [these kinds of hearings]... let’s be real blunt here. As you guys know, they (lawmakers) are scared to death of the FBI,”Turner contended. “‘Don’t train your lens on me.’ That’s what their concern is. When you raise an issue, is the FBI going to be looking at them?”

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Durov Arrest First Salvo of Final Battle in the 30-Year War on Privacy

On Monday, Telegram CEO Pavel Durov was detained in France immediately upon landing in the country. He was eventually charged with a litany of crimes, including “importing a cryptology tool.” It is only the latest attack in a war against privacy that goes back more than three decades.

The 90s

In late January 1991, a then 48-year-old senator from Delaware named Joe Biden, introduced Senate Bill 266: the Comprehensive Counter-Terrorism Act of 1991. Buried in the last third of the proposed bill’s text was a section on “electronic communications” that imposed requirements for providers of electronic communication services.

“It is the sense of Congress that providers of electronic communications services and manufacturers of electronic communications service equipment shall ensure that communications systems permit the government to obtain the plain text contents of voice, data, and other communications when appropriately authorized by law,” the proposed bill read.

Essentially, SB266 would have required companies to create backdoors to enable the government to snoop on their customers, making it impossible to have truly private conversations digitally.

That may seem relatively mundane in the post-Snowden leak world we live in, but this was the birth of the digital age and the standards we enjoy online today did not yet exist.

Emails, for example, were sent through the internet unencrypted, in plain text. Any malicious actor with the right hardware and know-how, not just the government, could intercept email and even send emails appearing to come from someone else.

Developing a secure and private way to send information online wasn’t just a civil rights issue; it was a hurdle that needed to be solved before the internet could go mainstream. Had Senator Biden gotten his way, the internet would be a very different place right now.

Today, encryption is used to both hide the content of emails and verify the sender. But even in 1991, it was clear encryption would become a big part of how people communicated digitally

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and Senator Biden wanted to ensure the government had keys to a backdoor - literally and figuratively.

While the bill gathered three co-sponsors, including then Sen. Harry Reid (D-NV), it never got out of committee. Terrorism and the internet were not concerns most people, even Congress, had in 1991. But, it was enough to frighten the privacy advocates that populated the early internet, including one young computer scientist named Phil Zimmermann.

Zimmermann was already working on his encryption software when SB266 was introduced, but it sounded an alarm in his head that would push it from a hobby to an obsession. He would later say he missed five mortgage payments while working on it.

Congress might not have seen the coming fight over privacy in the digital age, but some, like the relatively young Biden, had started to wake up to it. The war might not have started, but the battle lines were being drawn.

On June 5 of that year, Zimmermann sent the first release of PGP 1.0, an acronym for "Pretty-Good-Privacy," to a few of his friends to upload to the internet. It first appeared on a newsgroup called Peacenet, a gathering place online for activists worldwide. A day later, it was on Usenet, the largest collection of newsgroups and a service that still exists today.

PGP used a technique called "public key encryption," a method invented in the 1970s by a group at Stanford MIT led by Martin Hellman. Previously, if two parties wanted to communicate using encryption, a key to decode those messages was required.

That presented a problem because, unless the two parties were physically in the same space, that key would have to be shared before encryption took place. The key would go through either an insecure channel, where it could be captured, or through a secure channel which likely meant the physical transfer of a key, which again could be intercepted.

Public key encryption works by giving each user two keys: a public key and a private key. The public key, as the name implies, is shared publicly. Anyone who wants to send the user a message uses the receiver's public key to encrypt the message, which can only be decoded with the receiver's private key.

Not even the message's author can decode it once it is encrypted. It also allowed users to "sign" messages using their private key, proving they authored the message without revealing the private key. That and a later innovation by PGP developers called Web of Trust are still part of how emails are validated today.

"Their invention essentially allows us today to perform operations on information in our desktop computers that introduces no noticeable overhead whatsoever. The additional amount of time required to encrypt a message with this technology is basically negligible," explained Dr. James Bidzos, then the president of RSA Data Security, during a discussion on internet security held by the Commonwealth Club of California in 1995. "It is essentially free and it's unbreakable and this presents a problem for the government."

PGP soon took off and by September 1992 it was ported to virtually every platform besides Mac. But that grabbed the government's attention, and they weren't happy about powerful encryption being released for free and for everyone.

Computer encryption, at that time, was almost exclusively the domain of governments. It was, after all, originally used to send - and crack - military messages during World War II. By the 1990s, there were a few commercial options, but they were expensive, licensed and crucially,

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controlled. PGP was free, it was available to everyone and it used a more secure encryption method than anything commercially available at the time.

The US government considered encryption a weapon, and its export was prohibited by the United States. It announced a criminal investigation into Zimmermann, accusing him of violating the Arms Export Control Act - that he was an arms dealer - because his software was downloaded outside of the United States. He was eventually searched by US Customs agents while traveling multiple times.

What was soon called “The Crypto Wars” had begun. By that time, PGP was already being used by human rights organizations around the world, including Amnesty International.

The investigation was ultimately dropped in 1996, four and a half years after PGP was first posted to Usenet. The move came down as the Clinton administration changed weapon export laws, removing encryption software from its “munitions” list. Every Western democracy soon followed.

Today, PGP lives on as OpenPGP and can be downloaded for free by anyone in the world. It is still considered the gold standard for private communications.

The Clipper Chip

Zimmermann was not the only focus of the Clinton administration’s war on privacy and encryption. In 1993, it announced another front in the Crypto Wars. It claimed that it developed a chip with “key escrow” functionality that provided encryption while enabling government access; privacy and patriotic security in one neat package.

Officially named MYK-78, but colloquially known as the “Clipper Chip,” the Clinton administration’s proposal set off a firestorm of outrage not only among the internet community but the telecommunication and burgeoning data security industries as well.

The New York Times called it “the first holy war of the information superhighway.”

The Clipper Chip was created in response to AT&T announcing the launch of the TSD-3600, a device that allowed users - for the relatively low price of $1,295 - to have fully encrypted phone calls.

The Clipper Chip was designed to be inserted into devices, enabling encrypted phone calls but could be unlocked by keys that the government held. Its sister chip, Capstone, was designed to do the same thing with data, including internet and fax transmissions. AT&T announced an upcoming modified version of the TSD-3600 with the Clipper Chip, but the rest of the industry was less enthused.

The plan was vehemently opposed by the left and the right: everyone from the American Civil Liberties Union to conservative radio talk show firebrand Rush Limbaugh railed against it. More than 50,000 people responded to the government’s request for petitions on the plan, with the vast majority opposing it, according to media accounts from the time.

The Clipper Chip plan came crashing down when the government gave it to Matt Blaze, a computer scientist working for Bell Labs, in the hopes of clinching his stamp of approval. Within a day, he found flaws that made it unusable, including one that eliminated the backdoor the government wanted to use.

Had that version of the Clipper Chip been implemented, the criminals the government hoped to catch could have modified it to give them more security than they would have had without it. But the flaws weren’t the reason the chip was a bad idea, it was a bad idea because of the premise of the chip itself, as Blaze detailed in a later interview.

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“It’s good that Clipper was killed—and I’m glad that I helped kill it…but it was sorta killed for the wrong reasons,” Blaze told Gizmodo. “The bug I found wasn’t why it was a bad idea. The stuff I found could be fixed…but there were all these other problems—the fact that it involved a secret algorithm…the fact that it included the key escrow mechanism that could be compromised." "There was no version of this that you could build that wouldn’t have had those problems," he said.

The US Government was the only “customer” to buy the Clipper Chip. While exact numbers are hard to find, it was reported they ordered it in “bulk,” attempting to build demand. In 1996, the same year the Zimmermann investigation was dropped, the Clipper Chip was officially canceled. The timing of those two events was likely not a coincidence. 1996 was an election year, and the Republican nominee for president, Bob Dole, was slamming the Clinton administration on their online privacy policy.

“Bill Clinton Wants to Put ‘Big Brother’ in Your Computer,” a subheadline of Dole’s campaign website read. “Within his first 100 days as president, Bill Clinton proposed the Clipper Chip…Since then, Bill Clinton has released updated versions of encryption proposals which insist that the government hold a key to individual's private data communications.”

"Bob Dole believes Americans should have the right to guard themselves using encryption." Clinton won the election, but the pressure from the public, buoyed by his political opponent, encouraged his administration to back off. Their ideas just weren’t popular; Americans still valued privacy in 1996.

From the War on Terror to Telegram

But the desire to eliminate privacy online never went away, it just shifted. In the 1990s, the debate was if the public should have access to tools that enable privacy. The government lost that battle and so they started building systems to snoop on everyone who didn’t use those tools purposefully, slowly eroding the expectation of privacy the public had.

After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, massive spying operations were launched, both in public and in secret. Slowly, either due to fear of terrorism or apathy, the American people started to lose their appreciation for privacy, which started to be portrayed as the exclusive domain of criminals and the paranoid.

In 2014, in the wake of the Snowden leaks, former CIA Deputy Director John McLaughlin, who also served as acting director for just over two months in 2004, wrote an opinion piece in the Washington Post to assure the American public that the US National Security Agency (NSA) wasn’t really spying on Americans (they were) and even if they were, it wasn’t a big deal.

“Although our society lauds, in almost ‘Stepford Wives’-like fashion, the merits of ‘transparency,’ it lacks a collective, mature understanding of how intelligence works, how it integrates with foreign policy and how it contributes to the national welfare. Meanwhile, prurient interest in the details of leaked intelligence skyrockets, and people devour material that is not evidence of abuse but merely fascinating — and even more fascinating to US adversaries.”

According to McLaughlin's upside-down perspective, those who want to know what our government is doing are “Stepford Wives” blindly following “society” and giving aid to our enemies. Those who remain willfully ignorant, according to McLaughlin, are the realists who know the NSA is “not perfect,” but the real problem is “the broad distrust of government that has taken root in the United States in recent decades.”

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The Snowden leaks did not lead to any real reforms. The government claimed they took measures to protect the privacy of citizens, but those were internal changes around the margins and the new rules are routinely ignored anyway.

No one was fired. No one was arrested. No mass protests hit the streets. The public had been conditioned to expect the government was watching them. This year, Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act was renewed for another two years, a massive blow for privacy and civil rights advocates.

“The natural flow of technology tends to move in the direction of making surveillance easier,” Zimmermann prophetically said nearly 30 years ago.

The only vestige of privacy left online is through encryption. For years that was a fairly complicated process, public key cryptography made it far easier than it was before, but few in the mainstream were using tools like PGP.

Yes, email had become secure from spoofing, but most of the encryption was handled by email providers. Google may use encryption to keep users safe from man-in-the-middle attacks, but if they have access to your decrypted emails (and they do if you use Gmail), then there is nothing preventing them from handing that information over.

That changed with apps like Telegram and Signal, which have true end-to-end encryption that not even the owners can crack. Now, more than ever, normal people are using apps that enable their privacy by default.

It’s not perfect, devices themselves are still vulnerable to government intrusion, but it is far more difficult to gain access to than simply sending a subpoena to a service provider. The government could tolerate encryption when it was limited to a few hundred thousand geeks posting on message boards, 950 million Telegram users is a much bigger issue.

On Wednesday, Telegram CEO Pavel Durov was charged with a litany of crimes accusing him of not doing enough to prevent abuse of his platform.

The critical charge however, the one that all the others rest on because without it he couldn’t be blamed for their actions is once again – as it was with Zimmermann in the US decades ago – with providing tools that enable encryption, which is the only vestige of privacy left on the internet in a post-Snowden world.

Durov is out on €5 million bond and is barred from leaving France because, according to the indictment, he was “providing cryptology services aiming to ensure confidentiality without certified declaration," as well as “providing a cryptology tool not solely ensuring authentication or integrity monitoring without prior declaration.” And, thirdly, because he was “importing a cryptology tool ensuring authentication or integrity monitoring without prior declaration.”

The charges nearly mirror what Zimmermann was investigated for.

Instead of the crime being the export of cryptology tools, it is the import of cryptology tools. In the 1990s, the US government argued they didn’t want foreign adversaries to gain access to the privacy that cryptology enables. They may have had ulterior motives, but that was the basis of their investigation.

French authorities are arguing it is a crime to give their citizens the ability to communicate privately. They are adding charges related to what Durov’s users did to lessen public sympathy by associating him with the most horrible crimes, which would be like blaming AT&T because someone used a telephone to order a hitman. However, the cryptography charge is the heart of the case.

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“A telephone company can't be sued [for crimes facilitated on its network], it can't control what the people say on the telephone,” former university professor and journalist Jim Kavanagh told Sputnik. “And that's where it should be with these social media companies.”

One may argue that the French are not the Americans, and so these are separate fights by different governments on different populations with different expectations about their freedoms, but that would be the height of naivete.

The attacks on internet privacy and freedom of speech have spread across the West. People and journalists are being arrested in the UK and Australia for social media posts. The US government is abusing the Foreign Agents Registration Act to attack any critics of its policies and has been pressuring social media companies to ban content and users.

In Brazil, a censorship-happy judge is opening investigations on his critics, and then ruling in those same cases. That same judge just shut down X inside the country and imposed a fine worth roughly $8,900 for anyone who attempts to circumvent the ban.

Just because Durov was arrested in France does not mean it is unrelated to the rest. The prosecution of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and whistleblower Edward Snowden are a part of it as well. Their work would have been impossible without reliable encryption.

“[The French are] part of the [Five] Eyes network of NSA-type agencies. And you can bet that the French have not done this rogue, that they have been talking to their American and, I would imagine, also British and maybe Israeli and other counterparts. I'm sure that's happening," Ted Rall, a political cartoonist and host of Sputnik Radio's Final Countdown, said on fellow Sputnik program The Backstory.

The West is systematically removing free speech from the public square of the internet. When that is complete, they will come for the speech in the private corners of it and that is why they need to end truly secure encryption.

“When I look at what happened with Durov,” Critical Hour co-host and former law enforcement officer Garland Nixon said on Wednesday, “You know what term comes to mind? Extraordinary rendition. We can’t quite get away with [arresting Durov] here, so we’ll lock you up if you land in… one of our colonies.”

On October 11, 2020, the Public Affairs Office of the US Justice Department released an “international statement” on end-to-end encryption, making clear that they believe tech companies have a responsibility to install backdoors in their software.

End-to-end encryption that precludes lawful access to the content of communications in any circumstances directly impacts these responsibilities, creating severe risks to public safety in two ways:

1.

By severely undermining a company’s own ability to identify and respond to violations of their terms of service. This includes responding to the most serious illegal content and activity on its platform, including child sexual exploitation and abuse, violent crime, terrorist propaganda and attack planning

2.

By precluding the ability of law enforcement agencies to access content in limited circumstances where necessary and proportionate to investigate serious crimes and protect national security, where there is lawful authority to do so.

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As in the 1990s, the government is arguing that innocent people cannot be afforded privacy, because criminals would have it as well. But, privacy isn't just for criminals.
Everything from financial transactions to sending your address to a relative so they can ship a present for your child is something that should be encrypted before you do it. Any backdoor is susceptible to being hacked and abused. Eliminating encryption will make the world not only less private but less secure.
In the digital age, a private conversation is not as simple as going to the backyard. Never forget that privacy is supposed to be the default in free societies, government snooping is supposed to be the exception.
"So, this is the end of the celebration of democracy and free speech [and] free expression that was supposedly a foundational part of American and Western civilization," Kavanagh said.
Writing in 2021 on the 30th anniversary of PGP's release, Zimmermann warned that his old enemies were coming again and pleaded for the public to take the threat seriously.
"We see it in Australia, the UK, the US, and other liberal democracies. Twenty years after we all thought we won the Crypto Wars. Do we have to mobilize again? Veterans of the Crypto Wars may have trouble fitting into their old uniforms. Remember that scene in Pixar's The Incredibles when Mr. Incredible tries to squeeze into his old costume? We are going to need fresh troops."
It is time for a new generation of digital freedom fighters to take center stage from our dial-up and Usenet-using forefathers. Users of TikTok, Twitter, Telegram and Signal, unite! You have nothing to lose but your digital chains.

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US Rushing Weapons to Israel Reveals Lie of Harris 'Working' Towards Ceasefire

At a campaign rally on Thursday in Georgia, Democratic nominee for President Kamala Harris said that she and current US President Joe Biden are "working around the clock" to secure a hostage deal and ceasefire in Gaza. That same day, Israeli newspaper Haaretz reported that the US was "rushing" arms shipments to Israel.
Since her ascension to the top of the Democratic presidential ticket, Kamala Harris has tried to appear sympathetic to the Palestinian cause while reaffirming her strong commitment to the state of Israel, two contradictory stances that cannot possibly exist in the same place at the same time.
Through their actions, Harris and the rest of the Democratic party have shown which of those two stances they back up with action and which is only empty rhetoric. According to the report, the US has been increasing weapon shipments to Israel since July and August was the second busiest month for US weapon shipments since October.
The report notes that the weapons are ostensibly to help Israel respond to attacks by Hezbollah in Lebanon and a potential attack by Iran, but as antiwar.com points out, they are also being used to slaughter Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.
As president, Biden has the power to unilaterally end weapon shipments to Israel under the Leahy Law, which forbids weapon transfers that may be used to violate human rights.

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“There’s been The New York Times reports of Joe Biden behind closed doors cussing Netanyahu to his staff. And that doesn’t mean anything. It’s much like the talk of ‘oh, ceasefire now’ at the convention,” explained the Left is Dead podcast host James Carey on Sputnik’s The Critical Hour.“Okay, well, what’s one thing that could facilitate that? Probably the major world power that’s sending off the arms to Israel that fuels these things. It’s our F-16s and F-15s flying over the West Bank and Lebanon. These are our planes supplied with our bombs."

“All we’re going to get is more harsh language and more empty demands for a ceasefire because, obviously, the Democratic Party is not willing to acknowledge the very clear thing to everybody who’s watching that without the US supplying Israel, a ceasefire would be much easier because [Israel would] have to do it.”

While Biden and Harris allegedly work to secure a ceasefire, the Israelis have greatly increased their operations in the occupied West Bank, tearing up streets and bulldozing monuments under the guise of counter-terror operations. At least 12 Palestinians have been killed in the Jenin refugee camp, including 83-year-old Tawfiq Ahmad Younis Qandil, who was shot by an Israeli sniper as he stepped outside of his home. His family said he was going to get groceries.

“I think we're seeing the right wing of Israel sort of look to shift their genocidal kind of war to both areas. And you're seeing now Israeli ministers talking about, ‘oh, well, we're going to have to evacuate people from the villages in the West Bank,’” Carey explained. “And you know how it works there. Do you get to come back? When do you get to come back? And chances are, to answer both those questions, is never.”

Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz said that Israel would use the same tactics it is using in Gaza in the West Bank. “We must deal with the threat just as we deal with the terrorist infrastructure in Gaza, including the temporary evacuation of Palestinian residents and whatever steps are required,” he wrote.

On Saturday, Israel cut off all water, internet and electricity to Jenin.

“It's just, much like Gaza, flatten it. Destroy whatever you can, and make sure that there's nothing to even come back to,” Carey explained, describing the Israeli plan.

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Israel accused of buying Google ads to block UNRWA donations - report

The Israeli government is buying false advertising on Google search results for the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) in an attempt to discredit the agency, Wired reported. The Israeli government draws search users to a website alleging that the agency has not declared whether or not employing Hamas members violates its neutrality and that the agency doesn't investigate its facilities for abuse by extremists, which the agency has strongly rejected.

“There is an incredibly powerful campaign to dismantle UNRWA,” Mara Kronenfeld, the executive director for UNRWA, said. “I want the public to know what’s happening and the insidious nature of it, especially at a time when civilian lives are under attack in Gaza.”

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According to that report, between May and July when users searched 300 terms related to the agency, Israel's ads would pop up 44% of the time as opposed to UNRWA USA's own advertisements which would show up just 34% of the time. UNRWA was first established in 1949, just a year after the Nakba (catastrophe) occurred in which 750,000 Palestinians were forced out of their homes which created an unresolved refugee crisis. UNRWA supporters have claimed that Israel does not want the agency preserving Palestinians' refugee status because it would give them a better chance of reclaiming occupied land someday.

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Israel Accused of Buying Google Ads to Block UNRWA Donations - Report

The organization was able to raise over $32 million for humanitarian efforts from donors last year following the war that Israel launched against Hamas, the organization's director said.
The Israeli government is buying false advertising on Google search results for the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) in an attempt to discredit the agency, Wired reported on Monday.
The report says that the Israeli government draws search users to a website alleging that the UN agency has not declared whether or not employing Hamas members violates its neutrality and that the agency doesn't investigate its facilities for abuse by extremists, which the agency has strongly rejected.
At around the same time that Mara Kronenfeld, the executive director for UNRWA, found the advertisement, Israel had accused 12 of the agency's staff of having participated in the October 7 attack by Hamas last year. UNRWA employs 30,000 people in total, making it the second-largest employer in Gaza after Hamas.
As a result, several western countries suspended financing of UNRWA after the accusations surfaced. The UN said in early August that it had fired staff members from the agency after an internal investigation found that they may have been involved in the attack. Overall, the agency fired 13 employees this year including nine whom an oversight body determined may have been involved in last year's attack. All donor countries except for the US resumed their funding for the agency.
However, the report writes that UNRWA "does require independence from military interests" and added that an outside review found "evidence of facility inspections" and added that checkups happen frequently.
"There is an incredibly powerful campaign to dismantle UNRWA," Kronenfeld said. "I want the public to know what's happening and the insidious nature of it, especially at a time when civilian lives are under attack in Gaza."
UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini said in a post on X that Israel's defamatory advertisements continue to be used as a "weapon in the war in Gaza".
According to the report, several current and former Google employees spoke to WIRED and said that this anti-UNRWA campaign is just one of several ad campaigns that Israel had crafted in recent months that has drawn criticism from both inside and outside of the company. As of

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late August, the slanderous advertisements have remained on Google, a separate report revealed.

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The agency offers healthcare, education and humanitarian aid to Palestinians in Gaza, the occupied West Bank, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. Thus far, nearly 41,000 people in the Gaza Strip have been killed while more than 94,000 have been injured as a result of Israel's war against Hamas, Al Jazeera reported.

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New Study Suggests NASA Collision Could Create First Ever Man-Made Meteor Shower

Using ground-based telescopes to monitor the impact for almost two years, astronomers discovered DART shifted the moonlet asteroid's orbital period by about 32 to 33 minutes.

A NASA test in space may result in the first man-made meteor shower that could last for 100 years, a recent report from CNN writes. In late September of 2022, NASA's Double Asteroid Redirection Test (DART) was directed to strike the small asteroid Dimorphos to test their asteroid deflection technology as a way to protect our planet.

After crashing into the asteroid at a speed of about 15,000 miles per hour(24,000 km/h), NASA's test may have resulted in the creation of what could be the first manmade meteor shower known as Dimorphids, a recent study revealed. The crash resulted in more than 2 million pounds (close to 1 million kilograms) of rocks and dust, and now scientists are trying to predict where that debris could end up.

While the meteor that NASA fired on did not pose a danger to Earth, it offered perfect target practice for the administration to see whether or not a kinetic impact could change the motion of a celestial object which poses a threat to Earth.

"This material could produce visible meteors (commonly called shooting stars) as they penetrate the Martian atmosphere," said Eloy Peña Asensio, a study author and a postdoctoral researcher for the Deep-space Astrodynamics Research and Technology group at Italy's Polytechnic University of Milan. "Once the first particles reach Mars or Earth, they could continue to arrive intermittently and periodically for at least the next 100 years, which is the duration of our calculations."

LICIACube, a small satellite which was used to capture the impact made between DART and Dimorphos, was used to capture footage of the collision and the debris that was produced afterwards. Using that data, researchers found that if debris was ejected from the asteroid at speeds of 1,118 miles per hour (500 meters per second) then some fragments could reach Mars

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while other, smaller and faster moving debris could reach Earth traveling at 3,579 miles per hour (1,600 meters per second).
The researcher's first simulation suggests that slower moving particles could reach Mars by 2035 due to the proximity of the asteroid's orbit. The simulation also found that none of the slower moving particles produced by the asteroid impact will reach Earth, Space.com reported. But a second simulation hinted that faster moving asteroid particles could reach Mars within 5 years of the DART impact, and could reach Earth in 2029. However, scientists admit the possibility of this man-made meteor shower actually reaching Earth is unlikely. And if it does happen, the shower would be small and faint.

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Highly Contagious COVID Strain Could be Responsible for Major Future Spike - Report

A health official told the outlet that XEC has spread relatively quickly and has been reported in Germany, the Netherlands and in other parts of western Europe.
Doctors and scientists are tracking yet another COVID subvariant named XEC which could surpass the latest hyper infectious subvariant, KP.3.1.1 which is believed to be the most common subvariant across the US, currently.
The subvariant XEC was first detected in Germany and is "just getting started now around the world and here" a California-based doctor told the Los Angeles Times. "And that's going to take many weeks, a couple months, before it really takes hold and starts to cause a wave."
"XEC is definitely taking charge. ...That does appear to be the next variant," the source added. "But it's months off from getting into high levels."
Currently, the XEC subvariant isn't so widespread and is not being tracked on the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) variant tracker website, the LA Times report explained.
Yet, the updated COVID vaccines that US officials approved in late August are designed against the strain KP.2 which is effective against the current circulating variants. It is not, however, effective against XEC, as the latest vaccine was designed against something substantially different from this newer strain that seems to be biding its time.
"It would be surprising if this doesn't turn out to be the next challenge," the health official added.
For the two-week period that began on August 18, the strain KP.3.1.1 was estimated to make up over 42% of coronavirus samples across the US, which is up 19.8% a month ago, the report said citing the CDC. It is still believed to be the US' most common subvariant.
But Dr. Elizabeth Hudson, the regional chief of infectious diseases for Kaiser Permanente Southern California, said she believed the new vaccines would provide generous enough protection against XEC as there is "some overlap, because these are all sub, sub, sub-grandchildren of the original Omicron. So there is still going to be some level of protection there."
"We're not like in a new Greek letter — they're not that much different; it's not like something completely new," the regional chief explained. She added that XEC is a recombination of the

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sub variants KS.1.1 and KP.3.3, but it is different in the fact that it seems to be showing a "growth advantage over JN.1 or the deFLuQE variants or the FLiRT variants.
"It's going to be a little hard to know where this is going to go, because right now, KP.3.1.1 really still is the predominant variant," the health official explained. "So we have to really monitor not only what's happening within the U.S., but also what's happening in Europe as they get more towards their colder seasons."
COVID, unlike the flu, is difficult to predict because it seems to come in two waves each year as opposed to one cold season wave.
"We'll really have to watch — because the overall info on it is not super robust now — but I would imagine over the next couple of weeks, particularly if it starts to creep up higher and higher, we will be hearing a little bit more about it," Hudson said.

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Russia, Trade Partners Build Alternative Payments Systems Circumventing US Dollar

New currencies and financial systems are being built to circumvent Western economic pressure on Moscow.
Russia and various trade partners are working to strengthen alternative currencies and payments systems, reducing global reliance on the US dollar and Western-based financial networks.
"Moscow keeps finding ways to keep the country's economy going," writes business reporter Huileng Tan, describing Russia's response to Western sanctions imposed after the launch of its special military operation against Ukraine in 2022. "Russia's trade partners, too, are looking for ways to continue doing business with the country via alternative systems to rival the Western-led, US dollar-dominated global financial order."
Moscow has been adapting to Western financial pressure since 2014 when trade restrictions were imposed after Russia's reunification with Crimea.
"There are risks in using the global financial networks," said Russian central bank governor Elvira Nabiullina in 2018. "Therefore, since back in 2014 we have been developing our own systems."
Western economic aggression intensified in 2022, causing Moscow to increasingly make use of its System for Transfer of Financial Messages (SPFS). The financial messaging system is used in place of SWIFT, the Western system that has traditionally served as the de-facto global standard. SPFS is reportedly used by 556 organizations in 20 countries, with foreign organizations' use of the system more than doubling after 2022.
Russia has also made efforts to integrate its financial system with that of Iran, with Moscow's Mir card payment platform now working with Tehran's Shetab system.
Meanwhile, banking and messaging systems developed by China and India, two major global economic powers in their own right, have seen increasing use in financial transactions involving Russian entities. China's Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS) processed more than 6.6 million transactions last year amounting to $17.3 trillion. India's Unified Payments Interface

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(UPI) has also expanded rapidly, threatening to pose a significant challenge to SWIFT's dominance.

"It is significant that UPI can also be used to bypass the SWIFT banking system, enabling payments with sanctioned countries such as Russia, thereby weakening US financial hegemony," wrote international relations analyst Evan Freidin earlier this year.

Central bank currencies and cryptocurrencies round out the selection of financial innovations utilized by Russia to maintain its robust and growing economy, with both technologies threatening to further undermine the US dollar's global reserve currency status.

One last strategy can be revived from the Soviet era as Russia looks into economic barter with China and other countries. The direct exchange of quantities of one commodity for another cuts out the need for a currency entirely, harkening back to the days of the socialist-aligned Comecon economic organization. The tactic has been employed by various countries subjected to Western sanctions such as Cuba and Venezuela, which engage in barter with several Latin American neighbors via the ALBA–TCP bloc.

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'Crucible of Terrorism': NATO Trained Ex-General Laments US Failure in Afghanistan

American military involvement has served to strengthen global terrorism rather than combat it, with the resurgence of Al Qaeda* and the Taliban** in Afghanistan serving as the latest example.

Domestic political turmoil rather than smart strategy directed the United States' military intervention in Afghanistan, causing the Taliban and al-Qaeda to become empowered after the disastrous US pullout according to a former top army chief.

Ex-Deputy Chief of General Staff of the Afghan National Army Sami Sadat made the claim during an interview with Fox News Digital published Sunday.

"There is 50,000 al-Qaeda members and al-Qaeda associates in Afghanistan – most of them have trained for overseas operations in the last three years," said Sadat who, like many former Afghan security personnel, trained at a NATO military academy.

"Allowing [al-Qaeda] to retake Afghanistan with the Taliban in 2021 gave them a new rallying call. This is now their most important hub," Sadat wrote in a book released last month.

"Al-Qaeda not only survived but adapted to the changing policies of American administrations, waiting the West out of Iraq and Afghanistan and watching the U.S. attack their Islamic State rivals in the Middle East."

Fox News was unable to verify the figures cited by the ex-military chief but other observers have claimed the notorious terrorist organization is "expanding" and "thriving" in the Central Asian country, funding itself via proceeds from smuggling, mining and drug trafficking. Al-Qaeda is best known for planning and executing the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States.

US President Joe Biden claimed in 2021 that the group was no longer present in Afghanistan, only to be corrected shortly after by his own Defense Department which noted that al-Qaeda and ISIS*** fighters remain in the country. The United States spent over $2.3 trillion over the

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course of some 20 years in Afghanistan, with Biden calling the ill-fated intervention "the longest war in American history."

The US military has undergone a restructuring in recent years amid plummeting recruitment as the Pentagon shifts its focus away from counterterrorism operations in the Middle East and towards a predicted war in the Pacific with Russia or China.

"The war [in Afghanistan] was lost not because the Taliban were strong but because for twenty years it was not treated as a war but as a short-term intervention," wrote Sadat, who currently resides in London. "Afghanistan has once again become a crucible of international terrorism, under Taliban protection."

The Taliban was legitimized in the eyes of many Afghan people by its role in resisting the two decade-long US occupation. The Taliban originally came to power with the help of the United States, which funded Taliban fighters throughout the 1980s to resist the Soviet-backed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan.

The group is reviled by many for its social conservatism and religious fundamentalism. Taliban officials have recently indicated that girls' schools in Afghanistan will remain closed; US officials often justified American intervention in the country under the pretext of protecting women's rights.

The United States reportedly invested millions of dollars to modernize Afghanistan's mining industry during its occupation, with limited results. Analysis by the investigative outlet ProPublica revealed at least $17 billion in "questionable spending" during the war and reconstruction effort. A recent audit of the Pentagon found that the US Department of Defense cannot account for 63% of its nearly $4 trillion in assets.

Former US President George W. Bush presided over a US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 even as the then-ruling Taliban offered to help locate and turn over suspected 9/11 mastermind Osama bin Laden. A study by Brown University found that at least 4.5 million people have been killed directly or indirectly by the US-led "War on Terror," which led to a collapse in infrastructure in various "post-9/11 war zones."

Meanwhile US armed forces have experienced an epidemic of suicides with the study finding at "at least four times as many active duty personnel and war veterans of post-9/11 conflicts have died of suicide than in combat."

The United States' failure to successfully combat terrorism has led many countries to instead turn towards Moscow for assistance, with governments across Africa's Sahel region becoming the latest to employ the help of the Russian Wagner Group private military company.

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Russia, Trade Partners Build Alternative Payments Systems Circumventing US Dollar

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“Moscow keeps finding ways to keep the country's economy going,” writes business reporter Huileng Tan, describing Russia’s response to Western sanctions imposed after the launch of its special military operation against Ukraine in 2022. “Russia's trade partners, too, are looking for ways to continue doing business with the country via alternative systems to rival the Western-led, US dollar-dominated global financial order.”

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‘Crucible of terrorism’: NATO trained ex-general laments US failure in Afghanistan (Part 1 / Part 2)

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The Taliban was legitimized in the eyes of many Afghans by its role in resisting the two decade-long US occupation of the country. The Taliban originally came to power with the help of the US, which funded Taliban fighters during the 1980s to resist the Soviet-backed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan.

The group is reviled by many for its religious fundamentalism. Taliban officials have recently indicated that girls’ schools in Afghanistan will remain closed; US officials often justified American intervention in the country under the pretext of protecting women’s rights.

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Russia and various trade partners are working to strengthen alternative currencies and payments systems, reducing global reliance on the US dollar and Western-based financial networks.

“Moscow keeps finding ways to keep the country's economy going,” writes business reporter Huileng Tan, describing Russia’s response to Western sanctions imposed after the launch of its special military operation against Ukraine in 2022. “Russia's trade partners, too, are looking for ways to continue doing business with the country via alternative systems to rival the Western-led, US dollar-dominated global financial order.”

Russia has been adapting to Western financial pressure since 2014 when trade restrictions were imposed after Russia's reunification with Crimea.

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Moscow has increasingly made use of its System for Transfer of Financial Messages (SPFS). The financial messaging system is used in place of SWIFT, the Western system that has served as the de-facto global standard. SPFS is reportedly used by 556 organizations in 20 countries, with foreign organizations’ use of the system more than doubling after 2022.

Alternative payment and messaging systems developed by China, India, and Iran have also seen increasing use. Central bank currencies and cryptocurrencies round out the selection of financial innovations utilized by Russia to maintain its robust and growing economy, with both technologies threatening to further undermine US economic hegemony and the dollar’s global reserve currency status. One last strategy could be revived from the Soviet era as Russia looks into economic barter with China and other countries.

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Following breach of international humanitarian law, UK to halt some arms exports to Israel - report

The UK will suspend 30 of its 350 arms exports licenses to Israel due to a “clear risk” that they could be used in breaches of international humanitarian law, Foreign Secretary David Lammy told parliament. Lammy added that the partial ban will include items “which could be used in the current conflict in Gaza” against Hamas but did not include parts for F-35 fighter jets, Al Jazeera reported. However, Samel Perlo-Freeman of the Campaign Against Arms Trade told Al Jazeera that while the UK has “acknowledged for the first time that Israel is not complying with international law”, there is “one huge, huge loophole” regarding components for the F-35 fighter jets still being supplied to Israel.

“We had confirmation just today from a Danish NGO Danwatch which got confirmation from the Israeli military that an F-35 was used to drop 3,000-pound bombs on al-Mawasi, a so-called safe zone, on July 19,” he said. “So saying that you’re going to stop arms that might be used in Gaza except for the F-35 is a bit like saying you’re going vegetarian except for bacon.”

UK officials argued that suspending critical components within a global pool of "spare parts" could harm the maintenance of F-35s in other countries, the Financial Times reported.

Landslide in pricey Los Angeles neighborhood prompt power cuts, property damage
Multimillion-dollar homes in the Southern California city of Rancho Palos Verdes are now under threat as a worsening landslide has prompted an evacuation warning for more than 100 homes in the oceanside community which is located just 30 miles south of Los Angeles. Residents were advised to leave on Sunday after the Southern California Edison (SCE) utility company shut off power to 140 homes and warned that another 105 residents will lose electricity by Monday night, ABC News reported.

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Following Breach of International Humanitarian Law, UK to Halt Some Arms Exports to Israel - Report

Following the Labour Party’s landslide victory in July’s general election, Lammy announced his decision to update a review on arms sales to Israel to ensure they complied with international law.
The UK will suspend 30 of its 350 arms exports licenses to Israel due to a “clear risk” that they could be used in breaches of international humanitarian law. Foreign Secretary David Lammy

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told parliament on Monday that the UK government had concluded there to be a “clear risk” that weapons exported to Israel could be used to “commit or facilitate a serious violation of international humanitarian law.”

Lammy added that the partial ban will include items “which could be used in the current conflict in Gaza” against Hamas but did not include parts for F-35 fighter jets, Al Jazeera reported on Monday. However, he said that the decision to suspend the licenses is not the same as a blanket ban or an arms embargo and said the UK will continue to support Israel’s right to self-defense in accordance with international law.

“It is with regret that I inform the House [of Commons] today the assessment I have received leaves me unable to conclude anything other than that for certain UK arms exports to Israel, there does exist a clear risk that they might be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of international humanitarian law,” the foreign secretary said.

The decision comes after the Palestinian human rights organization Al-Haq and the UK-based Global Legal Action Network filed a legal challenge regarding the UK’s arms sales to Israel in December. In April, a High Court judge granted a judicial review hearing for October. Dearbhla Minogue, a senior lawyer for the Global Legal Action Network, said the UK’s decision “vindicates everything Palestinians have been saying for months.”

However, Samel Perlo-Freeman of the Campaign Against Arms Trade told Al Jazeera that while the UK has “acknowledged for the first time that Israel is not complying with international law”, there is “one huge, huge loophole” regarding components for the F-35 fighter jets still being supplied to Israel.

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UK officials argued that suspending critical components within a global pool of "spare parts" could harm the maintenance of F-35s in other countries, the Financial Times reported.

In response, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallanr said on X that he was “deeply disheartened to learn of the sanctions placed by the UK Government on export licenses to Israel’s defense establishment.”

Thus far, nearly 41,000 people in the Gaza Strip have been killed while more than 94,000 have been injured as a result of Israel’s war against Hamas. Yet, Western nations including the US and the UK have exercised their allyship by exporting weapons and other funding to Israel despite the nearly 1-year-old conflict’s staggering death toll. Roughly 100 hostages are reportedly still being held captive in Gaza, but a third of are presumed to be dead.

The UK sells a smaller amount of weapons and other supplies to Israel when compared to Germany and the US, but because the UK is one of Israel’s closest allies news of the decision could carry with it some symbolic significance.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s government has faced pressure from its own members and lawmakers to address the violence in the Gaza Strip.

Unlike their Conservative predecessor, the Labour government said in July that the UK will not intervene in the International Criminal Court’s (ICC) request for an arrest warrant against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Starmer also restored funding for the humanitarian organization UNRWA which had been suspended by the previous government in January.

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Landslide in Pricey Los Angeles Neighborhood Prompt Power Cuts, Property Damage

At least two homes were deemed uninhabitable due to damage from the landslide, and earlier this month the landslide also caused a 10,000-gallon sewer spill onto private property, officials said.

Multimillion-dollar homes in the Southern California city of Rancho Palos Verdes are now under threat as a worsening landslide has prompted an evacuation warning for more than 100 homes in the oceanside community which is located just 30 miles south of Los Angeles.

Residents were advised to leave on Sunday after the Southern California Edison (SCE) utility company shut off power to 140 homes and warned that another 105 residents will lose electricity by Monday night, ABC News reported.

The landslide has been shifting for decades - by just an inch a year - however it recently began accelerating following heavy rains in spring of 2023, quickening to a movement of four feet a month. Over the past year, the landslide zone has grown by approximately 680 acres. The rain has saturated a deep layer of clay below the ground, and that clay - known as bentonite - has become slippery enough to accelerate the movement of the landslide.

"SCE has determined there is a public safety threat," SCE stated. "Electricity service will be discontinued in these zones effective Sunday, September 1 at 12 p.m. PST. DO NOT USE WATER OR PLUMBING AFTER THE POWER IS SHUT OFF -- THIS COULD RESULT IN A SEWER SPILL."

According to a separate report, gas had already been shut off more than a month ago to various residents who were have since been forced to shelter in their homes with electric hot plates and propane.

Los Angeles County Supervisor Janice Hahn said at a news conference on Sunday that the land movement is “so gigantic and so damaging” that “one city should not have to bear the burden alone”. The county has dedicated $5 million to respond to the disaster. Hahn also called on California Governor Gavin Newsom and hopes he will declare a state of emergency.

“There’s no playbook for an emergency like this one,” said Hahn.

City administrators have reached out to hotels for possible housing help, while the utility company has said it was working to figure out engineering solutions that could potentially allow for power to be restored. The California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services said it is continuing to coordinate with emergency response officials in the county.

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Teenagers Who Vape Are More Likely to Suffer From Poor Mental Health - Study

Teenagers' brains are wired to seek risk-taking behavior, one health official noted, which makes vaping addictive nicotine with friends the "perfect storm".

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A new study has found that Australian high school students with symptoms of severe depression or poor wellbeing are twice as likely to have tried vaping. The study also found that one-fifth of students in junior high school had moderate to severe symptoms of depression and demonstrated the need for early intervention for their mental health and vaping, The Guardian reported citing the study's experts.

The study, which was published in the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, was part of the OurFutures vaping prevention program led by the University of Sydney's Matilda Centre. More than 5,000 students aged 12 to 14 were surveyed in 2023 for the study, with teens from 40 schools across Australia answering questions on various topics.

Those topics included drug use, vaping, possible future drug use, and mental health subjects including; depression, anxiety, stress and low wellbeing.

According to the study, 22% of teens surveyed had moderate to severe depression, 20% had moderate to severe anxiety, and one-third experienced low well-being.

Chief Investigator associate professor Emily Stockings said that while the survey found just 8% of students had used a vape, those with symptoms of severe depression were twice as likely to use e-cigarettes. And those who reported moderate stress levels were 74% more likely to have tried vaping, while those with high stress levels were 64% more likely to have tried vaping.

"For those who had low well-being, they were 100% more likely to vape and those with high stress were 74% more likely to vape," she said. "So, this is a mentally not very well population."

The study shows a clear correlation between mental health and vaping, but does not say if vaping causes poor mental health, or vice versa. Stockings says it is likely "bi-directional" based on evidence from previous studies.

And it's obvious why teenagers would be susceptible to vaping, she added, considering the product's bright colors, flavors and clever marketing. However, adding nicotine to the product has made it an undeniably addictive drug.

"Nicotine is an incredibly effective drug on the brain [...] once it's in the bloodstream it hits your brain within seconds," she said.

Three aspects that make vaping the "perfect storm" are the social aspect of doing it with friends, the addictive nicotine, and the risk-taking behavior involved, explained Dan Hermens, a professor of youth mental health and neurobiology at the University of Sunshine Coast.

He explains that teenage brains have an "exaggerated response to rewarding behaviors" or "risk-taking things". The brain can respond to risk-taking events by releasing dopamine - the feel-good hormone - and research suggests this response can be two to seven times higher in adolescents.

The average age of those who participated in the study was 13. The study did not survey public schools either, which Stockings admits did not allow for them to hear from kids who are "the most vulnerable, the most disadvantaged, or the schools that have the most problems."

"If we want to try to improve mental health and we want to try to prevent vaping, clearly we've got to do these two things together," she added. "It's a critical period for development [when] they have just started high school. We need to be doing a better job of [...] supporting them so that they don't turn to vapes to help with their anxiety or stress or depression."

Scholz's pro-war policy faces setback in Eastern Germany elections

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Parties critical of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's support for the Western-backed Ukraine proxy war against Russia fared well in elections in eastern German states.

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"The election results of Sunday are bitter," said Scholz. "Our country cannot and must not become accustomed to this."

The AfD and BSW were united in their expression of opposition to Scholz's support for US proxy war against Russia. Both parties called for an end to arms shipments to the Kiev regime and immediate negotiations to bring about a peaceful end to the conflict. The BSW has also demanded a popular referendum on plans to station US missiles in Germany as a condition for any coalition.

Die Linke has been more internally divided on the issue, but influential figures within the party have also criticized Scholz's pro-war stance.

The Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party has strongly criticized German chancellor Olaf Scholz for his response to the apparent sabotage of the Russo-German Nord Stream gas pipeline in 2022, which is widely perceived to have been carried out by or on behalf of the United States.

"There is no reason to assume that the German government is seriously interested in unearthing the truth about who is behind the Nord Stream attacks," said AfD politician Dr. Gunnar Beck recently. "The German government regularly yields to international pressure from both the EU and the US. It will not be able and not be willing, more importantly, to assert the national interests."

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Scholz's Pro-War Policy Faces Setback in Eastern Germany Elections

Anti-establishment politicians in the eastern half of the country performed strongly in state-level elections as members of the German chancellor's so-called "traffic light coalition" came up short. Parties critical of Olaf Scholz's support for the Western-backed Ukraine proxy war against Russia fared well in elections in eastern German states Sunday, causing the German chancellor to lament the "bitter" results.
"The election results of Sunday are bitter – also for us," saidScholz. "All democratic parties are now called upon to form stable governments without right-wing extremists… Our country cannot and must not become accustomed to this."
The strong performance of the right-wing Alternative für Deutschland party made headlines this weekend. The party received an unprecedented share of the vote thanks in part to substantial

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support from 18 to 29 year olds, surging to a close second place to the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party in Saxony with 30.6% of the vote.

The AfD won its first German regional election in the state of Thuringia by almost 10 points, finishing with 32.8% of the vote.

Other opposition parties also performed well. The upstart left-wing Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW) received 11.8% of the vote in Saxony and 15.8% in Thuringia. The democratic socialist Die Linke, which traces its lineage to the former East German Socialist Unity Party (SED), received 13.1% in Thuringia.

The AfD, BSW, and Die Linke were relatively united in their expression of opposition to Scholz's support for Ukraine's war against Russia. Alternative für Deutschland and the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance both called for an end to arms shipments to the Kiev regime and immediate negotiations to bring about a peaceful end to the conflict. The BSW has also demanded a popular referendum on plans to station US missiles in Germany as a condition for any coalition government.

Die Linke has been more internally divided on the issue, but influential politicians within the party have also strongly criticized Scholz's pro-war stance.

"Russia will not be forced to its knees by weapon supplies," said Die Linke co-chair Dietmar Bartsch in 2023. "Who says that the people of Ukraine want more weapons? Most Ukrainians want only for the war to end so that they could live in peace."

AfD has also strongly criticized the German chancellor for his response to the apparent sabotage of the Russo-German Nord Stream gas pipeline in 2022, which is widely perceived to have been carried out by or on behalf of the United States.

"Critical infrastructure on which the competitiveness of German industry depends was blown away before our eyes," said AfD Minister of European Parliament Maximilian Krah on the issue. "I still have enough contacts in the US that my American friends can tell me: 'Of course it was the United States [who destroyed the pipeline], who else?" he continued.

"There is no reason to assume that the German government is seriously interested in unearthing the truth about who is behind the Nord Stream attacks," said AfD politician Dr. Gunnar Beck recently. "The German government regularly yields to international pressure from both the EU and the US. It will not be able and not be willing, more importantly, to assert the national interests."

Alternative für Deutschland has drawn significant scrutiny in Europe for its alleged sympathies towards the former German Nazi party. Krah was heavily criticized in May for comments that appeared to defend some members of the Nazi Schutzstaffel (SS) paramilitary organization. Earlier this year, the co-leader of the AfD in Thuringia Bjorn Hocke was fined for using a banned Nazi slogan during a speech at a campaign rally.

AfD has nonetheless enjoyed increasing support for its criticism of the German political establishment, particularly regarding the Ukraine proxy war and immigration policy.

The AfD is particularly strong in eastern German states, which maintain a political character distinct from that of the western half of the country. Many East Germans remain unsatisfied with many of the changes that have taken place since the former socialist German Democratic Republic (GDR) was annexed by the NATO-aligned West German state in 1990.

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Polling has revealed that a majority of eastern Germans feel life was better under the former Soviet-aligned GDR. Many people living in the eastern half of the country also maintain a positive perception of Russia and oppose Germany's backing of the Kiev regime.

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US Close to Sending Kiev Long-Range Cruise Missiles, Decision Expected in Fall - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 3 (Sputnik) - The United States is close to approving a shipment of long-range cruise missiles that would enable Ukraine to strike deep inside Russia, with the decision expected this fall, Reuters reported on Tuesday, citing US officials.

Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missiles (JASSM) are expected to be part of a new weapons package to be announced this fall, the report said, citing three sources.

A final decision reportedly has not been made.

The JASSM has so far only been integrated into US-designed aircraft, but efforts are ongoing to make it operable with non-Western fighter jets in Ukraine's possession, a US official said.

Older-model JASSMs have a range of about 230 miles, while a longer-range version can fly more than 500 miles, the report noted.

It is unclear which of the two types the US is considering, according to the report.

The White House National Security Council told Sputnik in August that they had no comment on media reports alleging that US President Joe Biden was considering providing long-range cruise missiles to Ukraine.

Russia views the supply of weapons to Ukraine as an impediment to conflict resolution, saying that it directly involves NATO countries in the conflict.

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US, European and Ukrainian Partners to Strengthen Ukraine on Battlefield - White House

WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) - US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan held a high-level meeting with partners from Ukraine, the United Kingdom, Germany, and France to discuss steps to strengthen Ukraine's armed forces, including through critical capabilities, the White House said in a press release.

Earlier this week, US media reported that Ukrainian officials would be in Washington this week to ask the Biden administration to lift restrictions on hitting certain military targets deeper in Russian territory using US-supplied weapons.

"National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan convened a meeting at the White House today with French Diplomatic Counselor to the President Emmanuel Bonne, German Chancellery Foreign and Security Policy Advisor Jens Ploetner, British National Security Advisor Tim Barrow and Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine Andriy Yermak to discuss our strong and steadfast support for Ukraine in its defense against Russian aggression," the release said on Friday.

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In the meeting, Sullivan and his counterparts discussed steps they will take to strengthen Ukrainian forces on the battlefield, including through the supply of artillery, air defense, and other critical capabilities, the release added.

The group also discussed efforts to generate support for a peace plan established at the latest Ukraine Peace Summit in Switzerland, according to the release.

Other topics of discussion during the meeting included strengthening Ukraine's air defenses, hardening Ukraine's energy grid, and investments Ukraine's allies are making in Ukraine's defense industrial base.

The release also mentioned that Sullivan held a separate bilateral meeting with Yermak on Friday to discuss the security cooperation between the two countries.

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Musk Says Brazil 'Shutting Down No. 1 Source of Truth' With Ban On X

WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) - Brazil is clamping down on the main source of truth in the country by banning social media platform X, CEO of X Elon Musk said.

“They’re shutting down the #1 source of truth in Brazil,” Musk wrote on X on Friday after a Brazilian judge ruled that the platform be blocked when the billionaire refused to comply with orders to suspend certain accounts.

Judge Alexandre de Moraes of Brazil’s Supreme Court told internet providers in the nation of 200 million to block access to X, saying the platform lacked a “necessary legal representative” in Brazil — a key requirement tied to the suspension of accounts which X had refused to comply with.

In response, X’s Global Government Affairs team said it would not comply with what it called "illegal orders".

Justice Moraes also froze the finances of a second Musk business in Brazil, the Starlink satellite-internet service linked to his SpaceX company. That order was to compel X to pay $3 million in fines he had levied against the social media platform. Starlink reportedly has more than 250,000 customers in Brazil.

Musk said Starlink would continue to support the Brazilian armed forces despite the Brazilian court's decision to freeze its accounts. Many remote schools and hospitals rely on Starlink, he added.

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Trump Faces Lawsuits From Artists Over Unauthorized Music Use - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump's campaign is facing legal challenges from artists who demand that their music not be used at campaign rallies and on social media platforms, Axios reported.

Jack White, the lead singer of The White Stripes, threatened the Trump campaign with legal

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action for using the song "Seven Nation Army" in a video depicting Trump boarding an airplane.
Trump campaign spokesperson Steven Cheung said the current focus among many artists is on money rather than on freedom and expressed confidence that Trump will reclaim the White House in the November election.
On Thursday, Universal Music Group and members of the group ABBA demanded that Trump stop using ABBA's music in the election campaign.
ABBA has joined artists such as Celine Dion, Rihanna, Bruce Springsteen and Neil Young in demanding that Trump stop using their music in public.
The family of US musician Isaac Hayes announced that they were filing a lawsuit against Trump and his campaign because they used one of the artist's songs at campaign rallies without permission.

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Pentagon Awards Lockheed Martin $3.4Bln Contract for GMLRS Development

WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) - The Pentagon has awarded defense contractor Lockheed Martin a contract worth more than $3.4 billion for the Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System (GMLRS), the Pentagon said in a statement.
"Lockheed Martin Corp., Grand Prairie, Texas, was awarded a $3,430,119,287 modification (PZ0007) to contract W31P4Q-23-D-0003 for the Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System. Work locations and funding will be determined with each order, with an estimated completion date of Oct. 20, 2027. U.S. Army Contracting Command, Redstone Arsenal, Alabama, is the contracting activity," said the statement on Friday.
In May, the WSJ reported, citing US officials, that Washington will allow Kiev to use GMLRS, HIMARS rockets, and artillery for strikes on Russian territory and the Kharkov (also known as Kharkiv) region.

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Wall Street Up 4th Month in Row Banking on September US Interest Rate Cut

NEW YORK, August 31 (Sputnik) - US stocks rose for a fourth month in a row as Wall Street bet on the first Federal Reserve interest rate cut in four years happening by September.
The three main US stock indexes on Wall Street - the S&P 500, the Nasdaq Composite and the Dow Jones Industrial Average - finished the last trading session of August up between 0.5% and 1%. For the full month, they rose between 0.6% and 2%.
"Weakening inflation gives the Fed plenty of room to begin cutting rates, while still resilient household spending is the recipe for a soft [economic] landing," David Alcaly, lead macroeconomic strategist at Lazard Asset Management, said.
The S&P, an index which tracks the stocks of 500 high-performing US companies, closed up

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1% on Friday. It increased 0.2% on the week and 2.3% on the month.

The technology-heavy Nasdaq, which comprises pricey stocks such as Amazon, Apple, Netflix, and Google, finished the day up 1.1%. While the Nasdaq fell 0.9% for the week, it still ended August up 0.6%.

The Dow, the broadest indicator for US equity markets, rose 0.6% for the session and 0.9% for the week. For August, it rose 1.8%.

The Fed is widely expected to agree to the first US interest rate cut in four years at the conclusion of its September 18 policy meeting. What is uncertain is how much of an easing it will move toward, with interest rates currently at two-decade highs.

The last time the Fed cut rates was in March 2020, right after the COVID-19 outbreak. It slashed 100 basis points, or a full percentage point, to bring borrowing costs to an all-time low of between zero and 0.25%.

Following that, the central bank added 525 basis points to rates between March 2022 and June 2023 to bring them to a two-decade high of between 5.25 and 5.5% amid inflation triggered by government pandemic relief spending and breakdown in supply chains.

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Pentagon awards $3.4 billion contract to Lockheed Martin for the Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System

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Trump After Viewing Harris Interview Says Doubts She Can Handle China, Russia And N. Korea

WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) - Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump said during a rally in Pennsylvania that he doubts his Democratic rival Kamala Harris will be able to deal with China, Russia, and North Korea after viewing her first media interview as a presidential nominee this week.

"Did you see her last night? Think she's going to be able to handle President Xi [Jinping], China, North Korea, Russia? I don't know," Trump said on Friday.

Harris' interview with CNN aired Thursday night and featured only one foreign policy question about her stance on the Gaza conflict.

CNN did not ask Harris about matters related to Russia or China.

The US presidential election is set for November 5, with Vice President Kamala Harris representing the Democratic Party and Donald Trump representing the Republican Party.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, August 31 (Sputnik) -

MIDDLE EAST TENSIONS

* Israel said on Friday that its fighter jets struck rocket launcher barrels belonging to the Lebanese movement Hezbollah.
* No information is available at present on the progress in negotiations on a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, a source in the Palestinian movement Hamas told Sputnik.

WESTERN MILITARY AID TO UKRAINE

* The EU member states' defense ministers agreed to open a liaison office in Kiev for purposes of military assistance to Ukraine, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said on Friday.
* EU member states provide military assistance to Ukraine worth 43.5 billion euros ($48.1 billion), Borrell said.
* Fighting in Ukraine would have ceased long ago had the countries of the collective West stopped sending weapons to the Kiev regime, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* Russia's army group South repelled five counterattacks by Ukrainian assault groups over the past week, with Kiev losing more than 4,840 soldiers, US-made Abrams tanks and German-made Leopard tanks, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Friday.
* The transfer of arms and ammunition into any conflict such as the one in Ukraine creates a risk of diversion and raises concerns about escalation, Director and Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Adedeji Ebo said on Friday on behalf of High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu.
* The reported use of cluster munitions in the Ukraine conflict is deeply concerning, Ebo said.
* The EU defense ministers made the decision to leave the decision on restrictions on Ukrainian strikes on Russia up to the countries of the union, so there will be no joint solution, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said.

SITUATION IN RUSSIA'S BORDER REGIONS

* The Russian armed forces have eliminated more than 7,800 Ukrainian soldiers and 75 tanks during military operations in the border areas of the Kursk Region, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Friday.
* The death toll from Ukraine's shelling of Russia's Belgorod region increases to five, with another 37 civilians being injured, including six children, Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said.
* The United Nations is concerned by the increasing negative impact on the civilian population in the Ukraine conflict, including in Russia's Kursk and Belgorod regions, UN Disarmament Affairs Office Director and Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Adedeji Ebo said on behalf of High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu.

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Gold Not Far From Record High Despite End of 4-Week Rally

NEW YORK, August 30 (Sputnik) - Gold prices fell for the week after a four-week rally but the precious metal was not far from its latest record high, with analysts saying a new peak was likely if US interest rates dipped as forecast by next month.

September "will solidify whether or not we have a 50- or 25-basis-point interest rate cut", Phillip Streible, an analyst for gold at Chicago's Blue Line Futures, said, referring to the interest rate decision involving the US Federal Reserve.

Gold is an alternative play to the dollar, which typically falls when US interest rates are lower. While the currency rose in the latest week, it slid 3.6% over five prior weeks on rate cut expectations.

The Fed is widely expected to agree to the first interest rate cut in four years at the conclusion of its September 18 meeting. What is uncertain is how much of an easing the US central bank will accept, with interest rates currently standing at two-decade highs.

In Friday's trade, US gold futures for delivery in December settled down 1.3% at $2,527.60 an ounce. For the week, December gold slid 0.7%, after rallying a cumulative 5.8% over four weeks. Even so, Friday's peak of $2,559.85 was not far from the August 20 record high of $2,570.40.

Gold is also one of this year's best performing commodities, rising more than 20% for 2024 after fellow precious metal silver, which is up 21%. Other major outperformers in the natural resources space are cocoa, which is up 83% on the year, robusta coffee (61%) and orange juice (44%).

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Oil Prices Tumble 2nd Month In Row In August As Demand Worries Usurp Middle East Risk

NEW YORK, August 30 (Sputnik) - Crude prices tumbled a second month in a row as August trading concluded on Friday amid worries about Chinese demand that offset fears about the war in the Middle East disrupting oil shipments.

US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude settled the final session of August down $2.36, or 3.11%, at $73.55 per barrel. That brought WTI's losses for the week to 1.7%. For the month, the US crude benchmark fell 5.6%, adding to July's deficit of 4.5%.

UK-origin Brent crude finished the New York trading session down $1.14, or 1.4%, at $78.80 per barrel. For the week, Brent slid just 0.3%. For the month, the global crude benchmark slumped 2.5%, adding to July's plunge of 6.5%.

Despite crude prices continuing their downtrend for the second month in a row, August proved to be a volatile month for the trade.

This week, particularly, was proof of that. WTI and Brent rallied for two days on concerns about output disruptions in Libya and the potential for a major Iranian strike on Israel that could

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reignite geopolitical risk in the Middle East. Offsetting those gains were three days of losses on data pointing to weaker growth in China.

Some were surprised by the tumble in WTI, given the potential for road-trips among Americans celebrating the long Labor Day weekend that includes a holiday on Monday.

Even so, GasBuddy, a website that tracks US fuel prices and road travel trends, said this year's Labor Day might be "the least popular summer holiday to hit the road." It said just over a third of respondents to its survey had travel plans for the occasion.

WTI has also been negatively impacted by less-than-flattering consumption numbers for oil reported by the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) for the just-ended week.

US crude inventories fell by just 846,000 barrels during the week ended August 23, the EIA said, versus expectations for a 2.8-million barrel drop and the prior week's consumption of 4.7 million.

Distillate stockpiles did worse, sliding by only 275,000 barrels against an expected draw of 815,000 barrels and the prior week's tumble of 3.3 million. Distillates are primarily processed into the diesel required by trucks, buses, and ships, and also goes into making airplane fuel.

Only gasoline stockpiles came in as forecast, drawing 2.2 million barrels versus expectations for 2.15 million and the prior week's usage of 1.6 million. Gasoline is the primary motor fuel in the United States and makes up the largest component of the country's energy mix.

US crude prices aren't the only one in bearish territory. Goldman Sachs, Wall Street's leading forecaster of oil prices, has slashed its outlook on Brent by $5 to a wide range of between $70 and $85 for the remainder of the year. For 2025, it expected a barrel to average $77, versus $82 before.

Daan Struyven, head of oil research at Goldman Sachs, attributed the dour outlook on Brent to weaker oil demand in China as the world's second-largest economy turns from gasoline-powered cars to electric vehicles.

China's economy is also stuttering. Prices of newly constructed homes fell 4.9% in July from a year earlier, the fastest drop in nine years, according to calculations by Reuters. Unemployment ticked up last month by 0.2% to 5.2%, with the 16-24 age group, particularly, hit by a 17% jobless rate — the highest since such data became available in December.

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Pentagon, USAID Officials Visit Tunisia to Enhance Cooperation - AFRICOM

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - US Agency for International Development (USAID) and Defense Department officials visited Tunisia to enhance cooperation between the two countries, the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) said in a statement on Friday.

"US Marine Corps Gen. Michael Langley, commander, US Africa Command, USAID Senior Development Advisor (SDA) Ms. Maura Barry Boyle and US Marine Corps Sergeant Major Michael Woods, Command Senior Enlisted Leader traveled to Tunisia, to further cooperation between the United States and Tunisia, August 28, 2024," the statement said.

The US delegation led by Langley met with Tunisian National Defense Minister Khaled Shili, the statement said.

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In addition, the delegation visited several military bases across the country and observed live fire exercises, paratrooper demonstrations, training facilities and other Tunisian military activities supported by the US government, the statement said.

"We share a common commitment to promoting peace, stability and prosperity in the region, and we look forward to continuing to work together to achieve these goals," Langley said in the statement.

Langley also participated in a groundbreaking ceremony at a Tunisian Naval base that will increase Tunisia's maritime and naval capabilities, the statement said.

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Ukraine Fighting Would Have Stopped Long Ago if West Ceased to Send Weapons - Polyanskiy

UNITED NATIONS, August 30 (Sputnik) - Fighting in Ukraine would have ceased long ago had the countries of the collective West stopped sending weapons to the Kiev regime, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Friday.

"So let's come to the main conclusion here, without Western supplies of arms to Ukraine, they would have stopped fighting a long time ago," Polyanskiy said during a UN Security Council meeting.

The Russian diplomat also said that this conclusion is something that Western politicians, including European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, have acknowledged.

On Thursday, Borrell said the European Union had already directed 1.4 billion euros ($1.55 billion) from frozen Russian assets for military supplies to Ukraine. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov described the transfer as theft, adding that it would have legal consequences.

The countries of the collective West and their allies froze approximately 300 billion euros ($333 billion) worth of foreign exchange reserves belonging to Russia after it launched its special military operation in Ukraine in February 2022.

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US Approves Potential $390Mln Sale of HIMARS Systems to Croatia - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - The US State Department has approved a potential $390 million sale of eight High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) and other equipment to the government of Croatia, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Friday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the government of Croatia of M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems and related equipment and services for an estimated cost of $390 million," the DSCA said in a press release.

The Croatian government has also requested to purchase 24 M30A2 guided multiple launch rocket system (GMLRS); alternative warhead pods with insensitive munitions propulsion system;

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24 M31A2 GMLRS-unitary high explosive pods; and two M1152 high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles, among other items, the release said.

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White House Declines to Comment on US Mercenaries Participating in Kursk Offensive

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - The White House National Security Council declined to comment to Sputnik on Friday about reports that American mercenaries participated in Ukraine's offensive in the Kursk region.

"I don't think we'll have any comment," a National Security Council spokesperson said when asked about US mercenaries fighting in the Kursk region.

Earlier this week, a former US soldier turned mercenary claimed in an interview with ABC News that he was a part of a group of US combat veterans who were deployed to assist with a sniper operation in Russia's Kursk region.

The mercenary also said he is "genuinely worried" that Ukraine may have overextended its military by attacking the Kursk region.

The mercenary introduced himself as a "volunteer" who decided to help Ukraine and get rid of the alleged authoritarianism in Russia.

The participation of US mercenaries in the conflict in Ukraine is well known. The opaque US private military group Forward Observations Group has been regularly posting footage of its activities in Ukraine and Russia. Yet, the company claims its "volunteers" are participating in the conflict allegedly on a volunteer basis.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said that all foreign combatants involved in terrorist activities in Russia would be considered legitimate targets for the country's armed forces.

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US Confirms Crew 9 Changes for ISS Mission to Use Stranded Astronauts - NASA

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - NASA has confirmed that it has stripped the Crew 9 replacement mission team to the International Space station (ISS) to include only a single American astronaut and one Russian cosmonaut so that the stranded Boeing Starliner personnel Barry Wilmore and Sunita Willaims can fill out the remaining places on the ISS rotation for the next six months, the US space agency announced in a press release on Friday.

"NASA astronaut Nick Hague and Roscosmos cosmonaut Aleksandr Gorbunov will launch no earlier than Tuesday, September 24, on the agency's SpaceX Crew-9 mission to the ISS," the release said. "NASA astronauts Zena Cardman and Stephanie Wilson, previously announced as crewmates, are eligible for reassignment on a future mission."

The announcement accompanies NASA's decision to fly the troubled Boeing Starliner that Wilmore and Williams flew to the ISS in June back to Earth unmanned and by remote control

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rather than risk the lives of the astronauts on it.
Five of the Starliner's 28 maneuvering thrusters failed and five separate helium leaks were recorded on the flight - the spacecraft's first with a human crew.
Hague and Gorbunov will fly to the space station as commander and mission specialist on a previously used SpaceX Dragon spacecraft, NASA said.

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CORRECTION - Austin Reassures Ukraine Counterpart of US Steadfast Military Support for Kiev - Pentagon

(Corrects background in para 4 to say that presidential office chief Andriy Yermak is on a visit to Washington, not Zelenskyy himself)
WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin met with his Ukrainian counterpart Rustem Umerov and reassured him that the United States will continue to support the country in its conflict with Russia, the US Defense Department said in a press release on Friday.
"Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III underscored the United States' enduring commitment to supporting Ukraine as he met with Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov at the Pentagon today," the release said.
Austin and Umerov met ahead of the 24th gathering of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, which is scheduled to take place next week at the Ramstein Air Base in Germany.
CNN reported on Thursday that Ukrainian officials, including Volodymyr Zelenskyy's office chief Andriy Yermak and Umerov, will arrive in the United States this week in another attempt to persuade their American allies to lift restrictions on long-range strikes into Russian territory.
According to the report, the Ukrainian officials will provide Washington with a list of priority targets to strike in order to change the course of the war in Ukraine's favor.
On Tuesday, Defense Department spokesperson Pat Ryder said that the United States has no immediate plans to lift restrictions on strikes inside Russia with US-provided weapons.

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US Requests USMCA Dispute Consultations Over Canada's Digital Service Tax - USTR

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - The United States has requested dispute settlement consultations with Canada over its digital service tax (DST), the Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR) said on Friday.
On Thursday, Global Affairs Canada said that US Trade Representative Katherine Tai raised concerns about the DST during a meeting with her Canadian counterpart Mary Ng. Ng defended the tax as fair, non-discriminatory and in alignment with Ottawa's international trade obligations, the ministry said.
"United States Trade Representative Katherine Tai today announced that the United States has

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requested dispute settlement consultations with Canada under the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) regarding Canada's recently enacted digital service tax (DST)," the Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR) said in a statement.

The US is opposed to any unilateral digital service taxes that "discriminate" against US companies, Tai said in the statement. The office will continue to support the Treasury Department in the global tax negotiations to bring a solution to the challenges posed by the DST, she added.

USTR finds Canada's service taxes to be discriminatory and inconsistent with its commitments under the Cross-Border Trade in Services and Investment chapters of USMCA, which stipulates that it must refrain from treating US business less favorably than its own.

Canada's 2023 Fall Economic Statement included a section on the implementation of a DST, which entered into force on June 28. The Digital Services Tax Act imposes a 3% tariff on revenues of companies or groups with profits surpassing $829 million and Canadian digital services making more than $15 million. It applies to online marketplaces and targeted advertising, social media platforms as well as user data.

Companies will begin paying the tax on June 30, 2025. The Canadian government seeks to collect nearly $875 million per year from the DST.

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Austin Reassures Ukraine Counterpart of US Steadfast Military Support for Kiev - Pentagon

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CIA Veteran Agent Reveals Agency Uses Fake Friendships to Recruit Traitors - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - CIA recruiters deliberately lie to Russian and other nationalities as part of their routine seven-step recruitment process to persuade them to betray their country, a former senior US espionage official told CNBC in a new series, according to reports on Friday.

The CIA recruiters work to create what they describe as "false friendships" with targeted potential traitors and informants and seek to discover their needs, desires, and aspirations in order to tempt them into regularly transmitting sensitive information on them, former CIA Counterintelligence Chief James Olson told CNBC in an interview for the network's new seven-part series on espionage operations.

The process of recruiting and suborning sources from other countries is taught systematically at a secret CIA training facility near Williamsburg, Virginia that has been known for generations as "The Farm," the program said.

Olson served in the CIA for 31 years including a tour of service in Moscow during the Cold War, the program said.

The recruitment process was often developed through meetings over restaurant meals, in bars, and even in gymnasiums, Olson explained.

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US State Dept. Says RTX Agreed to Pay $200Mln as Part of Settlement for Export Violations

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) – The US State Department announced on Friday that one of the largest US military contractors, RTX Corporation, formerly known as Raytheon Technologies, agreed to pay a $200 million fine for hundreds of identified export violations.

"The U.S. Department of State has concluded an administrative settlement with RTX Corporation (RTX) to resolve 750 violations," the department said in a press release. "Under the terms of the 36-month Consent Agreement, RTX will pay a civil penalty of $200 million."

The State Department has agreed to reduce this amount by $100 million on the condition that the money would be spent by the company on developing and implementing compliance measures that would prevent a repeat of export violations, according to the release.

RTX voluntarily disclosed details of the violations and cooperated with the State Department in its review of the errors, the release added.

On an earnings call for investors on July 25, RTX acknowledged that it was in talks with the Justice Department, the US Securities and Exchange Commission, and the State Departments to settle the violations, and also said that it expects the total amount of fines to not exceed $1 billion.

During the call, the corporation clarified that the US government had identified export violations during the integration of Rockwell Collins and Raytheon Co. into RTX.

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US Boosts Artillery Shell Production to 36,000 155mm Shells Per Month - Defense Official

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - The United States has increased its production of 155mm artillery shells to 36,000 each month and expects to continue boosting its capacity through next year, a US defense official told Sputnik on Friday.

"Since the start of the conflict in Ukraine, DOD [Defense Department] has enabled a rapid and significant increase in 155mm ammo production ... Overall, the US is now producing over 36,000 155 rounds per month," the official said.

The United States is on a path to produce more than 70,000-80,000 155mm artillery shells by the end of 2024 and aims to produce up to 100,000 a month during 2025, the official added.

According to the official, the increased US production of artillery shells is critical to Ukraine's needs on the battlefield. The United States has provided Ukraine with more than 3 million 155mm artillery shells since the start of Russia's special military operation, data from the Pentagon shows.

Moreover, the Defense Department is also investing heavily to increase production of other key munitions like the Javelin and the Stinger weapon systems, the official added.

On Thursday, the US Army announced it awarded a $1.3 billion contract to a joint venture between US defense firms Raytheon and Lockheed Martin for the production of Javelin anti-tank weapon systems. The goal is to increase Javelin production to 3,960 per year by late 2026.

This contract also includes more than 4,000 Javelins to replenish rounds sent to Ukraine.

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

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China Calls on US to Work With Other States to End Ukraine Conflict - Deputy Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, August 30 (Sputnik) - The United States should work with other countries, including with China, to bring an end to the Ukraine conflict, Chinese Deputy Ambassador to the UN Geng Shuang said on Friday,

"We wish to advise the United States, if it truly wants to put an end to the war, it should make efforts together with countries concerned, including China, instead of shirking its responsibilities," Geng said during a meeting of the UN Security Council.

Earlier on Friday, by US Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Robert Wood said China's support for Russia and the two countries' strategic partnership contribute to Moscow's ability to

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continue the conflict with Ukraine.

Geng said the United States has not only turned "a blind eye and deaf ear" to China's efforts to promote peace, but "repeatedly spread lies in the Security Council" and smeared China on the issue of Ukraine.

China firmly opposes and absolutely will not accept such behavior, Geng added.

China has repeatedly called for a peaceful resolution to the Ukraine crisis, asserting its readiness to play a constructive role and collaborate with other nations to bring about peace.

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Mali Alarmed That Weapons Supplied to Ukraine Fuel Terrorism in Sahel Region - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, August 30 (Sputnik) - Mali is alarmed that the weapons supplied to Ukraine by the collective West are ultimately fueling terrorism in the Sahel region, Malian Ambassador to the United Nations Oumar Daou said in Friday.

"The government of Mali would like to express its alarm with regard to the supply of weapons to Ukraine, because it's been clearly established that a good part of the weapons … end up fueling terrorism and crime in the Sahel," Daou said during a meeting of the UN Security Council.

The Malian ambassador also said that the weapons deliveries carry the risk of further destabilizing countries in Africa and exacerbate the suffering of the Malian people, who have already been "sorely tested by several years of conflict with dramatic consequences."

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mali alarmed that weapons supplied to ukraine are ultimately fueling terrorism in sahel - mission to un

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Teamsters Canada File Appeals to Challenge Government Back-to-Work Order - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - The Teamsters Canada Rail Conference on Friday filed four court appeals to challenge a decision by the Canada Industrial Relations Board (CIRB) that obliged railway workers to return to work.

"The Teamsters Canada Rail Conference (Teamsters) filed appeals challenging the decisions that led to binding arbitration being imposed on workers at CN [Canadian National Railway] and CPKC [Canadian Pacific Kansas City], effectively stripping them of their right to collectively bargain," the union said in a statement.

The union's President Paul Boucher said in the statement that they are confident the law is on their side and the railway workers' voices will be heard.

"These decisions, if left unchallenged, set a dangerous precedent where a single politician can

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bust a union at will. The right to collectively bargain is a constitutional guarantee. Without it, unions lose leverage to negotiate better wages and safer working conditions for all Canadians," Boucher said.

The union filled four different appeals challenging Canadian Labor Minister Steven MacKinnon's referrals and the CIRB's decisions as violating workers' rights, the statement said.

Teamsters Canada is the country's largest transportation and supply chain union. It is involved in a longstanding dispute with the CN and CPKC over a new collective agreement. Both companies move around C$1 billion ($736 million) worth of goods on a daily basis, according to the Railway Association of Canada.

The union has said the main obstacle to a negotiated agreement remains the companies' demands as they continue to seek a weakening of protections around rest periods and scheduling, thereby increasing the risk of fatigue-related safety issues.

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Trump Says in New Book He Got Along Well With Putin

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - Former US President and Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump in his new book of photographs said that he "got along well" with Russian President Vladimir Putin and called him a "strong man," according to excerpts obtained by NBC News.

The book features photographs of key moments in his political career with captions written by Trump himself.

"Vladimir is a strong man, but we had an understanding, and got along well," Trump said in the caption under a photo of a meeting with Putin.

Trump also reiterated that the Russia-Ukraine conflict would have never happened if he were in office.

The "Save America" book is expected to be released on Tuesday and includes Trump's recollections of meetings with other foreign leaders.

"Chairman Kim Jong Un has an opportunity like no other - To be remembered as the Leader who ushered in a Glorious New Era of Security and Prosperity for his people," Trump said in a caption under their joint photo. "Our unprecedented meeting, the first between an American President and Leader of North Korea, proves that real change is indeed possible. My meeting with Chairman Kim was honest, direct, and productive. We got to know each other well in a very confined period of time."

The caption on a shot of a meeting with Mark Zuckerberg at the Oval Office said that the internet entrepreneur used to bring his "very nice" spouse to dinners, and be very nice, but "always plotting to install shameful Lock Boxes in a true PLOT AGAINST THE PRESIDENT."

"He told me that there was nobody like Trump on Facebook [owned by Meta, banned in Russia for extremism]. But at the same time, and for whatever reason, steered it against me," Trump said in a caption. "We are watching him closely, and if he does anything illegal this time he will spend the rest of his life in prison - as will others who cheat in the 2024 Presidential Election."

The book also contains several photographs from the July assassination attempt in

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Pennsylvania,

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UN Says Concerned by Increasing Impact of Ukraine Conflict on Civilians Including in Kursk

UNITED NATIONS, August 30 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is concerned by increasing negative impact on the civilian population in the Ukraine conflict, including in Russia's Kursk and Belgorod regions, UN Disarmament Affairs Office Director and Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Adedeji Ebo said on Friday on behalf of High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu.

"The escalating attacks on Ukrainian regions have led to more civilian deaths and injuries as well as to massive destruction of civilian infrastructure, including energy, health and education facilities," Ebo said. "The UN Secretary-General [Antonio Guterres] remains greatly concerned by the worsening impacts on civilians from the increased fighting in eastern Ukraine, as well as along the Ukrainian Russian border, including in the Kursk and Belgorod regions of the Russian Federation."

The secretary-general urges all parties to act responsibly and ensure the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure, Ebo added.

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Transfer of Arms to Ukraine Conflict Risks Diversion, Escalation - UN Official

UNITED NATIONS, August 30 (Sputnik) - The transfer of arms and ammunition into any conflict such as the one in Ukraine creates a risk of diversion and raises concerns about escalation, Director and Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Adedeji Ebo said on Friday on behalf of High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu.

"The transfer of weapons and ammunition into any armed conflict carries the risk of diversion, and, by extension, raises serious escalation concerns," Ebo said during a Security Council meeting on Ukraine.

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

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UN Official Says Reports of Cluster Munitions Use in Ukraine Conflict 'Deeply Concerning'

UNITED NATIONS, August 30 (Sputnik) - The reported use of cluster munitions in the Ukraine conflict is "deeply concerning," United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) Director Adedeji Ebo said on Friday.

"Reports related to the use of cluster munitions and widespread contamination with mines and explosive remnants of war in Ukraine are deeply concerning," Ebo said.

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Transfer of weapons and ammunition into any conflict including ukraine carries the risk of diversion, raises serious escalation concerns - un official

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

un official says reports of use of cluster weapons in ukraine conflict highly concerning, security council concerned by worsening impact on civilians

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Musk Must Abide by Brazil Supreme Court Ruling, 'Who Does He Think He Is?' – Lula

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) – Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said on Friday that US tech billionaire Elon Musk must abide by the country's rules amid a recent decision by the Supreme Court involving the magnate and his companies.

On Thursday, the accounts of Musk's Starlink Holding in Brazil were frozen on grounds that the company lacked a legal representative in the country. The same day, media reported that Brazilian Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes had ordered Musk to notify the court within 24 hours who would be X's new legal representative in Brazil, or its work in the country would be suspended.

"He [Musk] is a US citizen. He's not a citizen of the world. He can't keep on offending presidents, lawmakers … or the Supreme Court. Who does he think he is?" Lula said during a radio interview. "He has to respect the decision by the Supreme Court."

Lula further said that every foreign citizen who possesses investments in Brazil must abide by the Brazilian Constitutions and adhere to its legislation.

"Just because he has money it doesn't mean he can do whatever he wants. He must accept the country's rules and respect the decision by the Supreme Court," Lula added in a statement via X.

In mid-August, X published a letter from Moraes with demands for censorship and user account information that it said could affect users not only in Brazil, but also in the United States and Argentina. Shortly before that, X posted a letter from the judge requesting the censorship of

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several accounts held in Brazil.

In early April, Musk suggested that Moraes resign, accusing him of consistently violating the Brazilian constitution and promising to publish his requests to remove material from the social network. In response, a Brazilian court ordered an investigation into Musk following the allegations against the judge.

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JD Vance Says Harris Should Tackle Middle East Crisis Now, Not After Election

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - Donald Trump's running mate, Sen. JD Vance, said on Friday that US Vice President Kamala Harris should tackle the Middle East and other crises now, but not after the election.

"I think it takes a lot of shame, shamelessness, I should say, to be able to stare at the American people's eyes and say: 'I am going to fix your problems now when I have been in power for 3.5 years.' And this Israel issue is a great example of it," Vance told CNN when asked to comment on Harris' remarks about supporting Israel's right to defend itself and achieving a two-state solution.

On Thursday, Harris said in her first major interview as the Democratic presidential nominee that her commitment to Israel's defense and its right to self-defense remains steadfast and unchanged. In the interview with CNN, she also highlighted her commitment to advancing efforts toward achieving a two-state solution.

Vance pointed out that Harris was speaking about things that she should do but not about what she did.

"She is the sitting Vice President of the United States. If she wants to tackle the affordability crisis or close down the Southern border, she should be doing it now," he said.

Vance stated that the Biden-Harris administration has limited the supply of precision weapons to Israel that would have allowed them to cut down civilian casualties and end this war as rapidly as possible.

"Donald Trump's view is very simple: we want peace in the world. We want Israel to destroy Hamas, and we want this war to be over as soon as possible because that is how you rebuild the Middle East. You do not do it by making it easier for Israelis to kill civilians and harder to minimize civilian casualties, which is what Kamala Harris has been doing," Vance said.

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

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US Student Charged With Making Bombs to Support Armenian Militants - Justice Dept

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - The United States has unveiled charges against a former US university student accused of making bombs in his dormitory that he intended to use against

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Azerbaijanis in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Justice Department said in a press release.

"A Newton, Mass. man has been charged with allegedly engaging in a scheme to conceal his efforts to develop bomb making skills after he triggered an explosion in his dormitory room at the University of Chicago," the release said.

Aram Brunson, a 21-year-old who is believed to now be residing in Yerevan, Armenia, is also charged with making false statements to federal officials at Logan International Airport when his bags set off alarms for explosives, the release said.

"According to the charging documents Brunson's bomb-making activities were linked to his desire to take militant action against Azerbaijanis and others who pose a threat to ethnic Armenians living in the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh," the release said.

The Justice Department said Brunson first came to the attention of the law enforcement in January 2023, when he triggered an explosion and burnt his dormitory room at the University of Chicago. He allegedly told law enforcement that he was copying a prank he had seen on the internet.

"A subsequent investigation allegedly revealed that Brunson sought to engage in what he described as revolutionary direct action and terrorism in support of Armenian causes," the release said. "It is further alleged that Brunson made videos of himself teaching others how to make explosive devices and rig doors and desks with grenades."

Moreover, Brunson's internet searches allegedly suggested that he intended to take action against foreign diplomatic facilities in the United States.

The Justice Department also said that when Brunson was at the Boston airport to leave for Armenia in August of last year his bags set off explosive alarms, but he allegedly told Customs and Border Protection officials that he was unaware of how or why traces of explosive material appeared to be in his bags.

"It is alleged that, during a subsequent search of his Newton home, a detailed recipe for making that explosive was found and a bomb dog detected three locations in the bedroom," the release added.

The Justice Department said that each of the two charges carries a sentence of up to five years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of up to $250,000.

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Trump Says Would Reinstate Death Penalty for Certain Crimes on Day One in Office

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) – Former US President and Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump said in an interview to the Daily Mail he would lift the ban on executions for certain federal crimes on his first day in office.

"Of course I would. I would have executions on major drug dealers," Trump said when asked if he would reinstate the death penalty on day one in office.

Trump added that he plans to resume executions of child rapists, police killers, and other violent killers if elected.

The presidential candidate specifically noted that the greatest danger to the United States is posed by drug dealers, who can kill hundreds of people with drugs and they deserve to be

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executed.
In July 2021, Attorney General Merrick Garland banned capital punishment for federal crimes after Donald Trump resumed scheduling federal executions during his administration in 2019.
In the last year of Trump's presidency, the US government carried out 13 executions.

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One Dallas Police Officer Killed, Two Others Injured in Shoot-Out – Police

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) – A shoot-out in Oak Cliff left one Dallas police officer dead and two injured, Dallas police said on Friday.
An officer-in-distress call late Thursday led police to the scene, where they found one officer shot inside a patrol vehicle. Two police officers were shot during an exchange of gunfire between the responding officers and a suspect.
The suspect fled the scene and was eventually shot dead by police in Lewisville.
Of the three officers shot, one was killed, one is in critical condition, and one is in stable condition.

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US Imposes Visa Restrictions on People 'Undermining Peace' in South Sudan - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) – The United States has imposed visa restrictions on individuals allegedly linked to thwarting peace efforts in South Sudan, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Friday.
"The Department of State is taking steps today to impose visa restrictions on individuals responsible for, or complicit in, undermining and impeding a sustainable peace in South Sudan," Miller said in a statement.
The list of designated persons includes South Sudanese government officials who allegedly participated in obstructing life-saving humanitarian aid through the taxation of aid shipments, according to the statement.
"These persons may be found ineligible for entry into the United States," Miller said.
The State Department said that despite assurances, the South Sudanese government has not taken steps to effectively reduce the unacceptably high costs, bureaucratic obstacles to, and risks of providing humanitarian assistance to South Sudanese people in need.
"This raises questions about its willingness and capacity to abide by its 2018 peace agreement commitment to create an enabling environment for the delivery of humanitarian assistance and protection," Miller said.
The World Health Organization warned in July that South Sudan is facing a growing humanitarian risk due to multiple issues, including the ongoing conflict in neighboring Sudan.

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US Imposes Visa Restrictions on 14 Syrian Government Officials - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) – The US State Department announced on Friday that it was imposing visa restrictions on 14 Syrian government officials for allegedly repressing citizens' rights and purported involvement in enforced disappearances, according to a release.
"Today, the Department of State is taking steps to impose visa restrictions on 14 Syrian regime officials for their involvement in repressing rights in Syria, including involvement in or association with enforced disappearances," the release stated.

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