

9/17/24 Tuesday

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Is the Pager Attack Only the Beginning?

At around 3:45 local time, thousands of handheld pagers exploded in Lebanon and parts of Syria, injuring thousands and killing more than a dozen people. The pagers were commonly used by Hezbollah fighters, but some civilians were killed, including an eight-year-old girl. Hezbollah and the Lebanese government blamed Israel, who has not commented.

"After examining all the facts, current data, and available information about the sinful attack that took place this afternoon, we hold the Israeli enemy fully responsible for this criminal aggression that targeted civilians too," a statement from Hezbollah reads, adding that the group will continue to support the Palestinian resistance.

CCTV footage from Lebanon showed the devices exploding in civilian areas, including a grocery store. The Lebanese Ministry of Health has urged all citizens with pagers to dispose of the devices immediately.

Former senior security policy analyst at the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Michael Maloof, [told Sputnik's The Final Countdown](#) that the attack seems to be a precursor to a larger attack by Israel on Lebanon.

"One of my sources said... this is the beginning of what they believe is going to be [an] attack from Israel. And we just heard yesterday that [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu] said that they were going to look to take on Hezbollah now," Maloof argued.

According to Maloof, the attack was designed not only to kill and injure but also to interrupt Hezbollah's communications, a common military tactic before a larger attack.

"The fact that they hit the communications first - that's what you always go after anyway," Maloof explained. "This way, it minimizes the ability [of the target] to coordinate and communicate with the elements throughout the country."

Maloof is not alone in his speculation. Mohamad Elmasry told Al Jazeera that it could [portend a large-scale](#) invasion by Israel. "It seems to me what you want to do before a large-scale invasion is to disable or disrupt the communication network of the enemy. I do think we'll have to pay close attention to what happens over the next few hours and potentially a couple of days." Elmasry also noted that Hezbollah has been increasing its use of couriers to send messages and may have to rely on that tactic more heavily in the wake of the attack.

Meanwhile, Netanyahu has convened a meeting with top defense officials including Defense Minister Yoav Gallant and IDF Chief of Staff Herzl Halevi to discuss "readiness for attack and defense in all arenas."

"I would expect if Israel is going to do anything, they would do it at this vulnerable moment," Maloof speculated, adding that he isn't sure how the attack will come. "Are they going to launch missiles? I haven't heard any assessments of indications or warnings of troops massing. I think they do have some tanks near the border and troops. Does this mean there's going to be boots on the ground? I don't know. Israel is not communicating any of that."

It is still unclear how the attack was pulled off. A Hezbollah official speaking anonymously told media outlets that the pagers were a new model that included lithium batteries and unnamed security sources told US media that the devices were recently acquired by the Lebanese group, but the reports did not specify a timeline.

Former NSA contractor turned whistleblower Edward Snowden posted on X that it is likely explosives were planted inside the devices, rather than a hack that caused the batteries to overheat.

"As information comes in about the exploding beepers in Lebanon, it seems now more likely than not to be implanted explosives, not a hack. Why? Too many consistent, very serious injuries. If it were overheated batteries exploding, you'd expect many more small fires & misfires," Snowden [said on X](#).

In a later post, Snowden condemned the attack as "reckless" and "indistinguishable from terrorism."

It could still be possible that intentionally overheated batteries were used to ignite implanted explosives. One anonymous Hezbollah official reportedly told [US media](#) that some Hezbollah members noticed that their pagers were heating up and managed to dispose of them before they exploded. Alternatively, modified devices could be used to reroute electricity to an implanted explosive after being given a signal, but that should result in an instant explosion without a heat-up period.

In Iraq, improvised explosive devices used against occupation forces utilized modified cell phones that when called, could be instructed to redirect electricity to an explosive charge. That tactic has continued to be used by the IS*. Israeli media reports stated that owners of the pagers received a message shortly before the attack.

Remnants of at least some of the exploded devices [appear to](#) have been manufactured by Gold Apollo, a Taiwan-based wireless company focusing on pagers. For explosives to be implanted into the device, they would have had to be intercepted and modified before entering the Hezbollah supply chain. Israel has a history of using explosives planted inside electronic devices. In 1996, Hamas member Yahya Ayyash was assassinated by Israeli intelligence forces who detonated implanted explosive materials while he was speaking on the phone.

According to the Lebanese Ministry of Health, at least 2,750 people were injured and nine were killed, while an additional seven people were killed in Syria, according to Iranian media.

Israel has not officially commented on the attack. According to [Israeli media](#), Topaz Luk, a former spokesman for Netanyahu, implied in a now-deleted social media post that the Israeli Prime Minister was behind the attack. "This didn't age well," Luk wrote on X in reply to a post that predicted Netanyahu would not make any moves against Lebanon before his trip to New York next week.

The office of the Prime Minister distanced itself from the comment, saying that Luk has not been the spokesman for months and "isn't in the close circle of discussion."

*also known as ISIS or the Islamic State, banned in Russia as a terrorist organization

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Trudeau to Allow Tories Move Non-Confidence Motion in Parliament Next Week - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 18 (Sputnik) – Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's ruling Liberal Party has offered the Conservative opposition the possibility of tabling a non-confidence motion at the House of Commons (HoC) next week, the Toronto Star reported on Wednesday.

Liberal House Leader Karina Gould informed the Tories they will get a day in next week's parliamentary agenda to put forward their proposal, the report said citing sources. The motion will be introduced on Tuesday and followed by a vote on Wednesday, it added.

The decision comes after the Liberals lost the Montreal's LaSalle-Emard-Verdun byelection, a riding they had held since 2015, to the Bloc Quebecois - a federal party that supports independence for the French speaking province - by a margin of 0.8%. The loss marked the Whigs' second major setback since late June.

Last Wednesday, Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre said that he would introduce at the HoC a non-confidence motion against Trudeau at the earliest possible opportunity. The pledge came in the wake of NDP leader Jagmeet Singh announcing the termination of the "confidence-and-supply agreement" with the Liberals which had ensured the survival of their minority government since March 2022.

Poilievre challenged Singh to support the Tories' motion and trigger an election or else he would be "selling out" Canadians once more. The NDP leader however said he would not listen or take advice from him and noted he would not communicate the party's decision ahead of time and would rather look at the votes on a case-by-case basis.

The next Canadian federal elections are scheduled to take place on or before October 20, 2025.

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Biden Calls on Sudanese Armed Forces, Rapid Support Forces to Re-Engage in Talks to End War

WASHINGTON, September 18 (Sputnik) - US President Jose Biden urged the parties to the conflict in Sudan to pull back forces and revive negotiations to end the war.

"I call on the belligerents responsible for Sudanese suffering - the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) - to pull back their forces, facilitate unhindered humanitarian access, and re-engage in negotiations to end this war," Biden said in a statement on Tuesday.

In 2023, clashes broke out between the Sudanese armed forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces. The parties to the conflict have since introduced a number of temporary nationwide ceasefires, but none have helped to settle the conflict.

Earlier in September, the World Health Organization said Sudan's conflict has so far killed more than 20,000 people.

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Trump Advocates Doing Business With China, Russia Under 'Fair' Trade Deals

WASHINGTON, September 18 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump at a town hall meeting in Michigan said engaging in business with China and Russia would benefit the United States if Washington is able to reach fair trade deals.

"Doing business with China is a good thing, but you have to have a fair deal. Doing business with Russia - they have so much in terms of minerals and things, the size of their landmasses, like four times bigger than the United States... we can do great business, and you keep everybody happy," Trump said at a rally in Flint, Michigan on Tuesday.

Trump, talking to an audience of Michigan workers, also said the massive debt with China is not sustainable and the US is "losing" to Mexico.

Trump called for a reciprocal trade tax, vowed to bring auto plants back to the US, and promised to close the border and increase oil drilling to address the energy crisis.

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Trump Says He Will Meet With India's Prime Minister Modi Next Week

WASHINGTON, September 18 (Sputnik) - US Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump said that he would meet with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi next week.

"He happens to be coming to meet me next week," Trump said at a town hall meeting in Flint, Michigan, on Tuesday. "And Modi he's fantastic."

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US Awards \$99Mln to Support Standoff Missile Production for 5 Allies - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 18 (Sputnik) - Lockheed Martin was awarded a \$99 million contract to support production of Joint Air to Surface Standoff Missiles for five countries including Finland

and Poland, the US Defense Department said in a press release.

"Lockheed Martin Missiles and Fire Control, Orlando, Florida, has been awarded a \$99,000,000... contract to increase the ceiling value for Joint Air to Surface Standoff Missile Foreign Military Sales production support and sustainment," the release said on Tuesday. "This contract involves unclassified Foreign Military Sales to Finland, Poland, Netherlands, Japan, and Australia."

The modification doubles the value of the original contract to \$198 million, the Defense Department added.

Work on the extended contract will be performed in Orlando, Florida over the next five years and is expected to be completed by August 13, 2029, the release said.

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JD Vance Calls for Open Debate, Reduced Censorship

WASHINGTON, September 18 (Sputnik) — US presidential candidate Donald Trump's running mate JD Vance during a rally urged leaders across the nation to not only reduce hateful rhetoric but also to ease censorship, advocating for open debate.

"I call on every leader in this country not just to tone down the rhetoric but tone down the censorship. Let's have a debate with one another," Vance said on Tuesday.

Vance's remarks came after he argued that numerous attempts had been made to censor Donald Trump, referencing Kamala Harris's past calls to remove Trump from social media and Hillary Clinton's recent suggestion that misinformation should face criminal penalties.

"My friends, if you are willing to throw a person in jail because you disagree with what they say, then you're going to be willing to put a bullet in their head too," Vance added.

The US presidential election will be held on November 5. The Democratic Party was expected to be represented by current US President Joe Biden, but after his disastrous performance in the June debate with Republican opponent Donald Trump, calls for Biden to abandon the race became increasingly loud among Democrats. On July 21, he decided to leave the race and supported the nomination of Vice President Kamala Harris.

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US House Blocks Bill to Ban Political Committee Funding From Groups Linked to Foreigners

WASHINGTON, September 18 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives blocked legislation to impose penalties on contributions to political committees from certain tax-exempt groups that receive money from foreign nationals.

House lawmakers rejected the bill, dubbed the No Foreign Election Interference Act, on Tuesday in a vote of 218 in favor, 181 opposed and one present, with two-thirds support required for passage under suspension of the rules.

The bill amends the Internal Revenue Code to prohibit tax-exempt organizations from making

contributions to political committees for eight years after receiving a contribution or gift from a foreign national.

"From paid agitators who disrupt official proceedings on Capitol Hill, to groups who have been fueling radical antisemitic protests that resemble the violent riots of 2020, to Swiss billionaires who've donated hundreds of millions to various left-wing causes, it's clear that our adversaries will find any loophole possible to wreak havoc on and influence our political system," US Congresswoman Nicole Malliotakis said in a statement on the bill.

The Federal Election Campaign Act prohibits foreign nationals from donating to US campaigns, but there are no laws or regulations preventing foreign nationals from influencing US elections by directing funds to tax-exempt organizations.

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Vance Says Trump Seemed Unfazed by Second Assassination Attempt During Phone Cal

WASHINGTON, September 18 (Sputnik) - US presidential candidate Donald Trump's running mate JD Vance said that in a phone call with Donald Trump regarding his second assassination attempt, he could tell it didn't bother Trump as much as it bothered him.

"And I could tell it didn't bother him [Trump] nearly as much as it bothered me," Vance said on Tuesday.

Vance said that while political rhetoric needs to be toned down, he emphasized that this particularly applies to Democrats, urging them to stop the "craziness" and "violent talk" and allow Donald Trump to present his case to the American people.

Earlier this week, Trump said that US President Joe Biden's and Vice President Kamala Harris' rhetoric is the main cause of the assassination attempts on him.

Fox News quoted Trump as saying in an interview that the language his Democratic political opponents use against him is what has caused him to be the victim of two assassination attempts, including the second one allegedly committed by Ryan Routh on Sunday.

Last week, a shooting occurred at a golf course in Florida, where Trump was present. The assailant fled the scene and attempted to escape in a vehicle, but was apprehended. Trump was not injured. Furthermore, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has joined the investigation. US authorities are treating the incident as an attempted assassination of Trump.

The latest attempt on Trump comes nine weeks after 20-year-old Thomas Crooks tried to assassinate the Republican presidential candidate at a campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, in July. The bullet grazed Trump's right ear. US Secret Service agents killed the gunman moments after he was able to fire several rounds toward the stage, killing one spectator and critically injuring two others.

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US House Passes \$2.88Bln Funding Bill for Department of Veterans Affairs

WASHINGTON, September 18 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives passed legislation to provide approximately \$2.88 billion in funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), in order to cover a shortfall ahead of a deadline to fund the federal government or initiate a shutdown.

House lawmakers passed the supplemental appropriations bill on Tuesday by voice vote.

The supplemental funding bill addresses a \$2.88 billion VA funding shortfall for Fiscal Year 2024. Without congressional action before September 20, the shortfall would prevent the Veterans Benefits Administration from processing benefits payments scheduled for October 1.

The bill also includes oversight measures to uncover how the shortfall occurred and to prevent it from happening in the future.

"This isn't just about a funding shortfall - it's about holding the administration accountable for its failures. We cannot simply throw more money at a broken system and enable further waste and mismanagement. My bill is focused on both ensuring our veterans receive the care they've earned and demanding accountability from those in charge," US Congressman Mike Garcia said in a statement on the bill.

The US Congress must pass appropriations bills or short-term funding legislation before the end of the month, lest the federal government shutdown.

US House Speaker Mike Johnson said that the House of Representatives will vote on a six-month funding bill on Wednesday, to which House Republicans attached an election integrity bill opposed by the White House.

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UN Deplores Deadly Pagers Attack in Lebanon - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, September 18 (Sputnik) - The United Nations Office in Lebanon condemns the latest pagers-related attack in the country that killed at least 11 people and injured thousands, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.

"Special Coordinator for Lebanon Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert deplores today's attack across Lebanon, which left thousands injured, many critically, and is confirmed to have killed at least nine, including children," Dujarric said in a statement.

Special Coordinator Hennis-Plasschaert is reminding all concerned actors that civilians cannot be the targets of attacks, the statement said.

Earlier on Tuesday, Lebanese Health Minister Firas Abyad said that eleven people died and more than 2,800 were injured as a result of the mass detonation of pagers in different parts of Lebanon.

The Lebanese Foreign Ministry said that the detonation of the pagers was caused by an Israeli cyberattack.

Media reported that the pagers were used by Hezbollah as a closed communication system least susceptible to hacking and eavesdropping.

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Musk's Neuralink Gets US Regulator Approval for 'Blindsight' Implant - Statement

WASHINGTON, September 18 (Sputnik) - Neuralink said it received an approval from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for its device aimed at restoring sight to blind people.

"We have received Breakthrough Device Designation from the FDA for Blindsight," Neuralink posted on its X profile on Tuesday.

The Neuralink team also suggested people to apply as patients and check the career openings. The company has a mission to "restore autonomy of those with unmet needs" and increase human's potential.

Back in March, Elon Musk said on his X profile that the Neuralink's device, called Blindsight, is so far working in monkeys, adding that "resolution will be low at first, like early Nintendo graphics, but ultimately may exceed normal human vision."

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Russia, Iran Target 2024 Election, Shift Toward Harris-Walz Campaign - Microsoft

WASHINGTON, September 18 (Sputnik) — Russia and Iran are engaged in cyber influence operations ahead of the 2024 presidential election, with Russia recently shifting its focus to the Harris-Walz campaign, the Microsoft Threat Analysis Center said in a statement.

"Russia and Iran have both undertaken cyber influence operations headed into the 2024 presidential election...In the past two months, Microsoft has observed a notable shift in Russian influence operations tactics reflecting the changing US political environment," the statement said on Tuesday.

According to the statement, Russia has shifted its focus toward the Harris-Walz campaign by spreading disinformation and fabricated videos aimed at creating discord surrounding Democratic nominee Vice President Harris.

The statement went on to say that the shift in focus toward the Harris-Walz campaign highlights a strategic move by Russian actors, including "Kremlin-aligned groups" Storm-1516 and Storm-1679, who produced misleading videos aimed at discrediting Vice President Harris, gaining significant traction across various platforms.

"As we inch closer to the election, we should expect Russian actors to continue to use cyber proxies and hacktivist groups to amplify their messages through media websites and social channels geared to spread divisive political content, staged videos, and AI-enhanced propaganda," the statement added.

On September 4, the US Treasury Department announced sanctions against Simonyan, two of her deputies and several other RT employees. The US State Department, in a parallel move, tightened the operating conditions for Rossiya Segodnya and its subsidiaries, designating them as "foreign missions."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Tuesday that the blocking of the Russian media

accounts was unacceptable and Meta(banned in Russia) was discrediting itself with such actions. Previously, Peskov called the US measures "nonsense" as Washington tries to suppress the work of journalists in order to hide unpleasant truths.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said earlier that the US measures were undertaken by the country's security services to "sterilize" the national and global information space from any form of dissent and added that Russia will respond.

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PREVIEW - Big Cut or Small, Fed Dealt 'Tough Hand' on Wednesday's Rate Decision

WASHINGTON, September 18 (Sputnik) - The wait for a US interest rate cut might finally be ending, with the Federal Reserve expected to approve on Wednesday the first easing of rates since it stopped in mid-2023 a hiking spree that began the inflation ramp-up from the coronavirus pandemic.

But the drama over how much the Fed will cut hereon is far from over, analysts said, citing market expectations against what the central bank might do.

Take, for instance, the upcoming rate decision: A plunge in consumer price inflation over the past two years and a slowing jobs market despite positive economic growth suggests the central bank could do an aggressive cut at the close of its September 18 policy meeting.

Investing.com's Fed Rate Monitor Tool shows the odds for a 50-basis, or half-point cut, at 62% versus the 38% for a 25-basis, or quarter-point cut.

Yet, still-elevated costs for things such as shelter, airfares, auto insurance, education and apparel could convince some decision-makers at the Fed to begin its easing cycle with a smaller snip.

"In a world where the Fed is a punching bag and perception is reality, that's a tough hand to be dealt," economist Adam Button said on the ForexLive forum, referring to the central bank's dilemma.

For context, Button pointed at US stocks, which up to Tuesday had rallied seven days in a row in anticipation of a 50-basis point rate cut.

It's not just the past week; Wall Street has had a dizzying run since the year began, mostly fueled by rate cut bets. The S&P 500 index for the top 500 US stocks is up 18%. The broad-based Dow Industrial Average index has gained 10%. The tech-heavy Nasdaq Composite index has added 17%.

Button noted that the stock indexes were running into major resistance and the central bank is likely to "disappoint, no matter what they do."

The pressure will then be on Fed Chair Jerome Powell to communicate at his best and guide markets to what's likely to come next, he said.

"If they cut 25 bps and stocks fall, it will be seen as a sign they didn't do enough and fell behind the curve," Button said. "If they cut 50 bps and stocks fall, it will be seen as a move that spreads panic."

The last time the Fed cut rates was in March 2020 when it dropped 100-basis points right after the outbreak of the pandemic. It added 525 basis points over the next three years, leaving the

door open for a long and extended easing when conditions warrant.

When those conditions would be ripe for a change had always been a matter of debate.

A labor market that exploded even before the ravages of COVID-19 were over took Fed policy-makers by surprise, delaying a rate cut that otherwise might have happened by mid-2023 when the central bank paused on its hiking spree, analysts said.

Adding to the conundrum was inflation, which remained stubborn longer than thought. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) hit a four-decade high of 9.1% per annum in June 2022 and remained well above the Fed's 2% target until June this year.

But data over the past months had consistently indicated a turn in the inflationary tide.

The United States added 142,000 non-farm payrolls in August, the Labor Department said Friday, some 23,000 jobs below Wall Street estimates. That compared with the 315,000 positions created in April.

The CPI slowed to a growth of 2.5% per annum in August, finally coming within sight of the Fed's 2% target.

Then on Tuesday, retail sales for August showed a 0.1% annual growth versus the forecast of minus 0.2%. That suggested to some that the economy was still alive and kicking — making the case for the Fed to go with both a 25 basis-point or 50-basis point cut.

"The stronger than expected retail sales data for August suggest that, boosted by rapid wealth gains and falling energy prices, consumers continue to spend freely despite the labor market slowdown," Capital Economics North America economist Olivia Cross said in a note to the advisory's clients on Tuesday. With consumption still very healthy, for now, "recession fears appear overblown," allowing the Fed to draw cuts out over a longer term, she added.

Money market traders are betting the Fed could cumulatively reduce anywhere between 75 basis points and 100 basis points at the three rate decisions left before the end of this year.

The central bank has made one thing clear: Whatever it does will be guided by data. And data as of now has been mixed, suggesting inflation was easing but could pick up if economic growth surprises to the upside.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, September 18 (Sputnik) -

US-RUSSIA RELATIONS

* The United States and Russia will maintain bilateral relations despite existing tensions on several issues, Antonov told Sputnik on Tuesday.

* An arms control dialogue between Russia and the United States is impossible against the backdrop of the conflict in Ukraine, Russian Ambassador in Washington Anatoly Antonov said.

* Washington does not want to consider the fundamental interests of Moscow in US-Russia arms control dialogue, Antonov said.

* The US authorities did not contact the Russian Embassy to organize bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York, Antonov said.

PAGERS DETONATION IN LEBANON

- * At least eight people died and more than 2,800 people were injured as a result of a mass detonation of pagers in different parts of Lebanon, the country's Health Minister Firas Abyad said on Tuesday.
- * The mass detonation of the pagers was caused by an Israeli cyberattack, the Lebanese Foreign Ministry said.
- * The Lebanese Shiite movement Hezbollah said that Israel is fully responsible for the mass detonations of pagers in Lebanon and it would retaliate.

MIDDLE EAST TENSIONS

- * The US Defense Department confirmed on Tuesday that an MQ-9 Reaper drone crashed near Yemen and the US military is investigating the incident.
- * The US administration offered Yemen's Ansar Allah movement to recognize the legitimacy of their authority over the entire territory of Yemen in return for stopping attacks but the movement refused, a member of the movement, Khuzam al Assad, told Sputnik.
- * The Palestinian movement Hamas believes it can retain its leading role in determining the future of the Gaza Strip after the conflict with Israel ends, senior Hamas official Khaled Meshal said.
- * Indiscriminate killings of Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip are a continuation of the massacre that occurred in the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila in Beirut in 1982, a senior official of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), Ali Faisal, told Sputnik.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

- * Russian forces have taken control of Ukrainsk in the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), law enforcement agencies told Sputnik on Tuesday.
- * A mercenary from Algeria who fought on the side of Ukraine has been sentenced in absentia to 14 years in prison and has been placed on the international wanted list, the Russian Investigative Committee told Sputnik.
- * Russia's army group South has repelled five counterattacks and eliminated up to 685 Ukrainian soldiers over the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

RUSSIA-NORTH KOREA TALKS

- * Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and North Korean Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui discussed the development of relations between Moscow and Pyongyang, the Russian Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday.
- * Russian President Vladimir Putin has no scheduled contacts with Choe Son Hui this week, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

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US Concerned Over Russia's Increased Domain Awareness in Arctic - General

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) - The United States is concerned that Russia is increasing its domain awareness in the Arctic region by adding more radars and getting more information through them as a result, US Air Forces in Africa and Europe Commander Gen. James Hecker said on Tuesday.

"They [Russia] are also increasing their domain awareness by adding radars, by adding satellites that they haven't had before. So, they're getting a lot more information in that domain, way up north than they've had before. That concerns us," Hecker said during a discussion hosted by the Air, Space & Cyber Conference.

The United States is also concerned about Russia's naval presence in the Arctic which includes 55 ice breakers, 37 surface vessels, and eight nuclear submarines, Hecker added.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said earlier in September that the United States is seeking to maintain its global military and political dominance, and, along with its satellites, is increasing its military presence near Russian western borders, including in the Arctic.

In May, Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping signed a joint statement stipulating that Moscow and Beijing would support the preservation of the Arctic as a region of low military and political tensions.

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US Did Not Contact Russian Embassy on Bilateral Meetings on Sidelines of UNGA - Antonov

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) – The US authorities did not contact the Russian Embassy to organize bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York, the Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"As for bilateral [meetings], the Americans did not request through the embassy," Antonov said.

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McConnell Says 'Politically Beyond Stupid' to Allow Government Shutdown Before Elections

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) - Allowing the federal government to shut down due to a lapse of funding before elections in November would be a poor political move by Republicans, US Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said on Tuesday.

"The one thing that you cannot have is a government shutdown. It would be politically beyond stupid for us to do that right before the election because certainly, we'd get the blame," McConnell said during a press conference.

The US Congress must pass appropriations bills or temporary government funding legislation before the end of the month to avert a government shutdown.

Some Republican members in the US House of Representatives, including Speaker Mike Johnson, have pushed a six-month continuing resolution to fund the government. House

lawmakers are set to vote on the legislation on Wednesday.

The legislation also includes the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility (SAVE) Act, which requires people to present proof of US citizenship to register to vote in federal elections.

Former US President Donald Trump said that Republican lawmakers should oppose a temporary government funding bill if Democrats block the inclusion of election integrity legislation.

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US, Russia to Maintain Bilateral Relations - Ambassador Antonov to Sputnik

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) - The United States and Russia will maintain bilateral relations despite existing tensions on several issues, Russian Ambassador in Washington Anatoly Antonov told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"Yes, I am firmly convinced of this," Antonov said.

The Russian ambassador also said that the US government is interested in the continued work of its diplomatic mission in Russia.

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Schumer Says Open to Giving US Secret Service More Funding

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) - US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said on Tuesday that he is open to the idea of giving the US Secret Service more funding, following a second apparent assassination attempt against former president Donald Trump.

"If the Secret Service believes they need more money, I would be very open to giving them more money in this bill or the next bill, however quickly we can work it out and get bipartisan agreement," Schumer said during a press conference.

US Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell likewise said that he was open to getting more funding for the Secret Service.

On Sunday, the US Secret Service opened fire after spotting what appeared to be a gunman's nest near where Trump was playing golf at the time. Police arrested Ryan Routh in connection with the incident and have so far charged him with two felony firearm-related offenses.

Trump was also the victim of an assassination attempt in July at a campaign rally in Pennsylvania, which resulted in the director of the Secret Service resigning.

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us authorities did not contact russian embassy to organize bilateral meetings on sidelines of un general assembly in new york - antonov to sputnik

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us and russia will maintain bilateral relations, Washington is interested in the work of its diplomatic mission - antonov to sputnik

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US Does Not Want to Consider Interests of Russia in Arms Control Dialogue - Antonov

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) - Washington does not want to consider the fundamental interests of Moscow in US-Russia arms control dialogue, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said on Tuesday.

"There is no light at the end of the tunnel and none is in sight due to the administration's stubborn unwillingness to talk on equal terms, to take into account the interests of another nuclear power not in words but deeds," Antonov said.

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US-Russia Arms Control Dialogue 'Impossible' Against Backdrop of Ukraine Crisis - Antonov

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) - An arms control dialogue between Russia and the United States is impossible against the backdrop of the conflict in Ukraine, Russian Ambassador in Washington Anatoly Antonov said on Tuesday.

"As for our country, we strongly reject the possibility of removing strategic issues from the general context of the deteriorating security situation in general, and Russian-American relations in particular," Antonov said in a statement. "Even a warm-up dialogue against the backdrop of what is happening around the Ukrainian crisis, including the Kursk region and potential decisions about the use of long-range systems deep into Russian territory, is impossible."

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Pentagon Confirms MQ-9 Reaper Drone Crashed Near Yemen, Says Incident Being Investigated

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department on Tuesday confirmed that an MQ-9 Reaper drone crashed near Yemen and the US military is investigating the

incident.

"We can confirm that yesterday, MQ-9 did crash in the vicinity of Yemen. That is being investigated," Defense Department spokesperson Pat Ryder said.

Yemen's Ansar Allah movement, whose members are also known as Houthis, has claimed that it had shot down a third US reconnaissance MQ-9 drone in central Yemen within a week, spokesperson Yahya Saree said.

Ryder pointed out that the number provided by the Houthis is not accurate but did not provide details.

"That number is not accurate, it is too high," Ryder said.

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Blinken tells Venezuela's Gonzalez US to Ensure Will of Voters Respected - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told Venezuela's former presidential candidate Edmundo Gonzales Urrutia and opposition leader Maria Corina Machado that Washington remains committed to ensure the "will of voters" is respected, the State Department said on Tuesday.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke with Venezuelan democratic opposition leaders Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia and Maria Corina Machado today... The Secretary assured them the United States would continue to champion a return to democratic freedoms in Venezuela, strive to ensure the will of Venezuelan voters is respected, and hold Nicolas Maduro and his representatives accountable for their actions," the department said in a statement.

In early September, Venezuela's Attorney General's Office announced that the Venezuelan Court of First Instance had issued a warrant for the arrest of Gonzalez, candidate for the United Right opposition, who had failed to appear three times to testify when subpoenaed.

The office is notably investigating the publication of opposition polling station data on an online site in parallel with the official presidential election results by the electoral commission, as well as incitement to street violence.

Days after the warrant for his arrest was issued, Spain confirmed granting asylum to Gonzalez, flying him out of Venezuela on a military aircraft with a safe exit permit from Caracas. The politician arrived at a military base in Madrid accompanied by his wife and Spain's foreign secretary, Diego Martinez Belio.

Venezuelans voted in a presidential election on July 28, in which Nicolas Maduro was declared the winner with over 51% of the vote. The opposition claimed a landslide victory, citing tally sheets they obtained from polling centers nationwide. This led to mass opposition protests. Several thousand people were detained on accusations of causing damage to state infrastructure, incitement to hatred, and terrorism.

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in us-russia arms control dialogue, us does not want to consider fundamental interests of another nuclear power - antonov

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russia-us arms control dialogue impossible against backdrop of ukrainian crisis, potential of allowing kiev to strike deep into russia - antonov

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Pentagon's F-35 Cost Increases 10% to \$485Bln - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) - The total cost to develop and produce the Lockheed Martin F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, already the most expensive aircraft and military program in history, rose almost 10% to \$485 billion, US media reported on Tuesday.

The majority of the additional \$43 billion was spent on upgrading the F135 engine core and improving its thermal management systems, Bloomberg reported citing the Pentagon's F-35 program office.

The US armed forces and allies, the report added, now operate more than 1,000 F-35s and eventually 3,000 are planned to be in service.

The GAO in a May report said the Pentagon estimates that development efforts and costs to maintain and operate the planned aircraft through 2088 will exceed \$2 trillion.

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No Change to US Force Posture in Middle East in Wake of Lebanon Pager Blasts - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) - There has been no change to the US force posture as a result of the pager blasts in Lebanon, US Defense Department spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.

"There's been no change to US force posture," Ryder said during a press briefing.

Earlier on Tuesday, mass detonations of pagers in different parts of Lebanon resulted in the death of eight people, with more than 2,800 others wounded, the country's Health Minister Firass Abiad said.

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US Sets October 10 Launch For Europa Clipper to Seek Life Signs on Jupiter Moon - NASA

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) - NASA's Europa Clipper mission to search for conditions capable of supporting organic life on Jupiter's icy moon with a huge subsurface liquid water ocean is on schedule to take off in a launch window starting on October 10, US space agency officials said on Tuesday.

"We are on track for a launch window that opens on October 10," NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory Europa Clipper Project Manager Jordan Evans said.

The spacecraft will not land on Europa but will eventually fly to within 215 miles, or 25 kilometers of its surface and seek to measure the depth of the ocean, which is believed to be between 60 and 80 miles, the officials said.

"Clipper is a large strategic mission. It's a flagship mission [and] a high priority to a new place we've never explored before - an ocean world. We think ocean worlds may be common" in the Solar System and beyond, NASA Planetary Science Division Acting Director Gina Di Braccio said.

The Europa Clipper will also seek to measure the salinity, or salt content of the subsurface ocean, which was discovered by the NASA-JPL Galileo probe in 1997-98. Europa is slightly smaller than Earth's moon and is the sixth largest moon in the Solar System.

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no change to us force posture in middle East after lebanon pager explosions - pentagon

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Blinken Holds Call With Venezuelan Opposition Leaders - State Dept.

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US August Retail Sales Beat Forecast, Bolster Odds for Larger Interest Rate Cut

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) - US retail sales outperformed expectations in the month of August, expanding 0.1% on the year versus a forecast negative growth, as Wall Street rallied on bets for a generous Federal Reserve interest rate cut.

Economists had forecast a 0.2% decline in last month's retail sales. The positive number announced Tuesday by the Commerce Department added to the euphoria in financial markets since last week's data showing consumer price inflation at 2.5% per year in August, versus the four-decade high of 9.1% in June 2022 - another factor favoring a larger Fed cut.

The Fed is to issue on Wednesday an update to its monetary policy, with Investing.com's Fed Rate Monitor Tool showing the odds for a 50-basis, or half-percentage, point interest rate cut at 62% versus the 38% for a 25-basis, or quarter-point, reduction.

The last time the Fed cut interest rates was in March 2020 when it dropped 100-basis points

right after the coronavirus outbreak. The US central bank added 525 basis points after that, leaving the door open for a long and extended easing when conditions warrant.

"With inflation still high and interest rates impacting household budgets, the outlook for retail spending remains uncertain," financial markets commentator Ibafin said. "However, the resilience ... offers some hope that the economy will continue to grow, albeit at a more moderate pace."

Stocks on Wall Street have had a dizzying run since the beginning of the year, mostly fueled by interest rate cut bets. The S&P 500 index for the top 500 US stocks is up 18%. The broad-based Dow Industrial Average index has gained 10% while the tech-heavy Nasdaq Composite index has added 17%.

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UN Has No Particular Comment on US Alleging Russian Media Meddles in Elections - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, September 17 (Sputnik) - The United Nations has no "particular comment" on the United States' decision to sanction Russian media outlets for allegedly meddling in the US elections, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric told reporters on Tuesday.

"We don't have a particular comment on that," Dujarric said when asked to comment on the recent allegations by Washington that Russian media are meddling in the US elections.

Earlier in the day, Meta (outlawed in Russia for extremism) banned the Russian media outlets Rossiya Segodnya and RT from its apps for their alleged foreign interference.

On September 4, the US Treasury Department announced sanctions against Simonyan, two of her deputies and several other RT employees. The US State Department, in a parallel move, tightened the operating conditions for Rossiya Segodnya and its subsidiaries, designating them as "foreign missions."

Under the US Foreign Missions Act, the outlets will be required to notify the State Department of all personnel working in the United States and disclose all real estate they own.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Tuesday that the blocking of the Russian media accounts was unacceptable and Meta was discrediting itself with such actions. Previously, Peskov called the US measures "nonsense" as Washington tries to suppress the work of journalists in order to hide unpleasant truths.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said earlier that the US measures were undertaken by the country's security services to "sterilize" the national and global information space from any form of dissent and added that Russia will respond.

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US Gathering Information on Lebanon Pager Incident, Not Involved - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) - The US is gathering information on the mass detonation of pagers in Lebanon but neither did it have prior knowledge of the incident nor is it involved in it, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.

"So, we are gathering information on this incident. I can tell you that the US was not involved in it. The US was not aware of this incident in advance, and at this point, we're gathering information," Miller said during a press briefing.

More than 2,800 people were injured and eight people including a child died on Tuesday as a result of the mass detonation of pagers in different parts of Lebanon, according to the country's health minister, Firass Abiad.

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US Approves \$228M In Military Sale to Taiwan for Equipment Repairs - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) - The US State Department has approved a potential Foreign Military Sale to the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office (TECRO) valued at \$228 million, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said in a statement on Tuesday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States of Return, Repair, and Reshipment of Spare Parts and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$228 million," the DSCA said in a statement.

TECRO has requested to purchase return, repair and reshipment services for classified and unclassified aircraft spare parts, along with engineering, technical, logistics and program support services, the statement said.

The proposed sale serves US national, economic and security interests by supporting the recipient's continuing efforts to modernize its armed forces and to maintain a credible defensive capability, the statement said.

It will help improve the security of the recipient and assist in maintaining political stability, military balance and economic progress in the region, the statement added.

The return, repair and reshipment of spare parts will come from US government stock, with no offset agreements or need for additional US personnel, according to the statement.

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US Stocks Hit Record High on Eve of Fed Rate Decision, Rallying 7th Straight Day

NEW YORK, September 17 (Sputnik) - US stocks hit record highs on the eve of a widely-anticipated interest rate reduction by the Federal Reserve, rallying a seventh straight day as Wall Street bet on the higher chance of the central bank agreeing to a half-point cut versus a quarter-point trim.

Two of the three main US stock indexes on Wall Street - the blue-chip laden S&P 500 and the

broad-based Dow Jones Industrial Average - hit all-time highs. The tech-heavy Nasdaq Composite rallied short of a record.

The S&P, an index which tracks the stocks of 500 high-performing US companies, was up 0.1% at the time of writing, at 5,639, after peaking at 5,671.

The Dow, the broadest indicator for US equity markets and one that often reflects value, rose 0.04% to 41,640 after a record high at 41,835.

The Nasdaq, which comprises pricey stocks such as Amazon, Apple, Netflix, and Google, climbed 0.3% to 17,639 after surging to a session high of 17,781. Nasdaq's all-time high of 18,671 was notched in July.

Tuesday's run-up in stocks came as Fed policy-makers huddled for a decision on rates to be announced by the Federal Open Market Committee on Wednesday. Investing.com's Fed Rate Monitor Tool showed the odds for a 50-basis, or half-point cut, at 62% versus the 38% for a 25-basis, or quarter-point, cut.

The last time the Fed cut rates was in March 2020 when it dropped a 100-basis, or full-percentage, point right after the coronavirus outbreak. The central bank added 525 basis points after that, leaving the door open for a long and extended easing when conditions warrant.

Analysts say the Fed's hand is forced now by easing inflation, which has seen the growth in US consumer prices falling to 2.5% per annum in August from a four-decade high of 9.1% in June 2022. But some point to still-elevated costs for things such as shelter, airfares, auto insurance, education and apparel.

Some analysts said the rally on Wall Street wasn't entirely surprising, though the intensity of the run was baffling, given the circumstances.

"It's a seven-day winning streak and running into major resistance," observed Adam Button on the Forex Live forum "That's a recipe for the Federal Reserve to disappoint no matter what they do tomorrow."

In a world where the central bank was "a punching bag" and perception the "reality", the central bank was being dealt "a tough hand", Button said.

He said the pressure will be on Fed Chair Jerome Powell to communicate at his best and guide markets to what's likely to come next. "If they cut 25 bps and stocks fall, it will be seen as a sign they didn't do enough and fell behind the curve," Button said. "If they cut 50 bps and stocks fall, it will be seen as a move that spreads panic."

Wall Street has had a dizzying run year-to-date, mostly fueled by rate cut bets. The S&P is up 18%, the Dow has gained 10% while the Nasdaq has added 17%.

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Developments in Lebanon 'Extremely Concerning' Given Volatile Context - UN Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, September 17 (Sputnik) - The United Nations finds the latest developments in Lebanon extremely concerning given the already tense atmosphere and is carefully watching the situation, UN Spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday.

More than 2,800 people were injured and eight people including a child died on Tuesday as a result of the mass detonation of pagers in different parts of Lebanon, according to the country's

health minister, Firass Abiad.

"These developments are extremely concerning, especially given that this is taking place within a context that is extremely volatile," Dujarric told a briefing when asked to comment on the situation in Lebanon. "We of course, deplore the civilian casualties that we've seen, but we're watching the situation."

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US to Engage With Countries During UNGA on Zelenskyy's Peace Plan - Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, September 17 (Sputnik) - The US Delegation to the upcoming UN General Assembly plans to engage with countries during the session regarding Zelenskyy's new peace plan, the US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield said on Wednesday.

"So hopefully we can make some progress on that [Zelenskyy's peace plan]. And I can't give you any details of the President's schedule or who he will be meeting with, but we'll look forward to engaging with a large number of countries here in New York next week," Thomas-Greenfield told the journalists in the briefing room.

The Ambassador also confirmed that Washington has already seen Zelenskyy's new peace plan and she said the US has yet to see how to best engage with it.

Zelenskyy will pitch his so-called victory plan to US President Joe Biden later this month on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. Zelenskyy also seeks to share the proposal with Vice President Kamala Harris and former President Donald Trump.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said in June that Russia would cease fire and start talks with Ukraine as soon as Kiev withdrew troops from the territory of Russia's new regions and abandoned plans to join NATO. On August 12, Putin stated that Russia cannot negotiate with those who indiscriminately target civilians and civilian infrastructure amid the Ukrainian attack on Russia's Kursk Region. Moreover, Russia has repeatedly said that arms supplies to Ukraine hinder the settlement and directly involve NATO countries in the conflict.

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Johnson Leading 'Fake Fight' on Republican Government Funding Plan - US Congresswoman

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Mike Johnson is leading a fake fight on legislation to temporarily fund the federal government and bolster election security, Republican US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene said on Tuesday.

Earlier on Tuesday, Johnson said that the US House of Representatives will hold a vote on a six-month continuing resolution (CR) to fund the government ahead of a shutdown deadline at the end of the month. The legislation will also include the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility (SAVE) Act, Johnson said.

The SAVE Act would require people to present proof of US citizenship to register to vote in federal elections.

"The only way to make the SAVE Act a law would be to refuse to pass a CR until the Senate agrees to pass the SAVE Act and [US President Joe Biden] agrees to sign it into law," Greene said via the social media platform X. "Johnson is leading a fake fight that he has no intention of actually fighting."

Even if there were to be a government shutdown and full fight into October, it would be too late for the SAVE Act to make a difference in the 2024 elections, because absentee ballots would already be sent out, Greene said.

US Congressman Thomas Massie likewise criticized Johnson's government funding plan. Johnson is attaching a "bright shiny object" to the CR that he will later abandon, Massie said via X.

The legislation continues spending levels that are ruining the United States, Massie said.

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Justice Dept. to Seek Pre-Trial Detention for Sean 'Diddy' Combs - US Attorney

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) - The US Justice Department will be seeking pre-trial detention for rapper Sean Combs, also known as Diddy, as part of a new criminal case against him, US Attorney for the Southern District of New York Damian Williams said on Tuesday.

"We will be seeking detention. We have filed a letter, laying out our reasoning for seeking pretrial detention. [The letter] contains all of the reasoning and contains the law as well, there is a presumption of detention in a case like this and we think that's warranted," Williams told reporters.

The FBI arrested Combs on Monday by storming the hotel in New York where he was staying and took him to the local FBI office in Manhattan, according to media reports.

The rapper has been charged with three counts of forceful sex trafficking, fraud or coercion, and transportation to engage in prostitution, according to the indictment unsealed on Tuesday.

Combs was previously ordered to pay \$100 million to a man who claimed he sexually assaulted him, but was himself an abuser and was serving a prison term.

Combs topped Forbes' list of the highest-paid musicians in 2017. In 2022, the magazine estimated his fortune at \$1 billion, making him the second-richest hip-hop artist after Jay-Z.

The rapper has been repeatedly sued for sexual assault. In February, it became known that American singer Cassandra Ventura had filed a sexual assault lawsuit against Sean Combs. Later, the rapper's son, 26-year-old Christian Combs, also found himself at the center of harassment allegations.

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US Restoring Military Infrastructure on Pacific Island to Project Power in Region -Reports

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) - The United States is refurbishing military infrastructure on the Pacific island of Tinian as part of efforts to bolster power projection in the Indo-Pacific region, Newsweek reported on Tuesday.

The US cleared overgrowth on taxiways and runways previously built on the island during the Second World War, the report said, citing recent satellite imagery and Pacific Air Forces spokesperson Capt. Keith Peden.

The US Defense Department established three projects to develop airfield operations on Tinian as part of its Pacific Deterrence Initiative, which focuses on defense planning for a potential conflict with China.

The Pentagon seeks to add refueling, takeoff, landing and parking operations on Tinian, the report said.

The projects will support a variety of aircraft and enable the US Air Force to "rapidly deploy and sustain forces" in diverse environments for both routine and contingency operations, Peden said.

However, China strongly opposes US efforts to bolster forward deployments in the Indo-Pacific region, Chinese Embassy in the US spokesperson Liu Pengyu reportedly said.

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ROCOR Expects Influx of Believers Among Ukrainian Refugees in Canada - Archbishop

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) - The Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) in Canada expects an increase in the number of believers due in part to refugees coming from Ukraine, Archbishop Gabriel (Chemodakov) of Montreal and Canada told Sputnik.

"Of course, we have a number of Ukrainian refugees that come to our church for services. I expect, maybe, even more people to come in the near future," Gabriel said.

The archbishop expressed regret that some Ukrainian parishioners had left the Russian Orthodox church since the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine.

"But we gained more people through the refugees that have come from Ukraine," Gabriel said. The archbishop explained that these believers are loyal to Metropolitan Onufrii, the head of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

Gabriel emphasized that the diocese tries to help refugees when possible, but the Canadian government is generally providing aid through social programs.

However, he also said that the clergy and the flock of the major cathedral of the diocese in Montreal and some other churches across the diocese have received threats because they commemorate the Moscow Patriarch during the services.

"In 2022, just before Pascha, the threat was so serious that the police responded by sending around 30 policemen for the Pasch service, and there were three or four special forces that were even inside the church," Gabriel said.

The archbishop added that several more threats had been received by telephone and email since then, but thankfully nothing had happened.

Gabriel highlighted that despite the threats, more Canadians are becoming Orthodox Christians.

ROCOR recently established several English-speaking missions in Canada and the diocese plans to continue its spiritual mission, Gabriel added.

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Trump's Palm Beach Security Costs Surge to \$93,000 Daily, Officials Seek Aid - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump's security costs in Palm Beach have surged to \$93,000 a day following two assassination attempts, prompting local officials to seek government assistance, Bloomberg reported on Tuesday.

According to the report, Palm Beach County, with a budget nearing \$8 billion, has requested federal assistance to cover costs associated with protecting Trump, including \$2.8 million in overtime for officers during a 30-day period and additional expenses for the Fire Rescue department and local services.

Last week, a shooting occurred at a golf course in Florida, where Trump was present. The assailant fled the scene and attempted to escape in a vehicle, but was apprehended. Trump was not injured. An AK-47 with a telescopic sight, two backpacks and a GoPro camera were found near where the shooter was spotted.

The FBI has joined the investigation. US authorities are treating the incident as an attempted assassination of Trump. US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene identified the alleged assassin as Ryan Wesley Routh, who was allegedly "obsessed" with the conflict in Ukraine. The suspect's identity has not been officially confirmed.

The newest attempt on Trump comes nine weeks after 20-year-old Thomas Crooks tried to assassinate the Republican presidential candidate at a campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, in July. The bullet grazed Trump's right ear. US Secret Service agents killed the gunman moments after he was able to fire several rounds toward the stage, killing one spectator and critically injuring two others.

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US Stocks Hit Record High on Eve of Fed Rate Decision, Rallying 7th Straight Day

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Trump Jr. Says US Should Find Diplomatic Outcome to Ukraine Conflict, Not Provoke Russia

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) - The United States should be exploring ways to end the Ukraine conflict instead of strengthening Kiev's strikes against Russia, Donald Trump Jr. said in an opinion piece jointly authored with former independent candidate for president, Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

"At a time when American leaders should be focused on finding a diplomatic off-ramp to a war

that should never have been allowed to take place, the Biden-Harris administration is instead pursuing a policy that Russia says it will interpret as an act of war," the authors said in the opinion published by The Hill on Tuesday.

The Biden administration was reported last week to be considering allowing Ukraine to use NATO-provided long-range precision weapons against targets deep inside Russia.

Trump Jr., the oldest son of Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump, and Kennedy Jr, who endorsed Trump last month after suspending his own campaign, warned that provoking Russia could be gravely dangerous.

"Such a decision would put the world at greater risk of nuclear conflagration than at any time since the Cuban missile crisis," the authors said. "The hawks in the Biden administration seem to have forgotten that Russia is a nuclear power."

For context, the authors cited the wisdom of former US President John F. Kennedy, who said in 1963, "Nuclear powers must avert those confrontations which bring an adversary to a choice of either a humiliating retreat or a nuclear war."

The authors said some believed Russian President Vladimir Putin was bluffing when he said Moscow will respond accordingly if Kiev is allowed to use Western weapons to strike deeper into Russia.

"These analysts are mistaking restraint for weakness," the authors said. "In essence, they are advocating a strategy of brinkmanship."

The authors cautioned that with each escalation against Russia - from equipping Ukraine with HIMARS rocket launchers to cluster munitions, Abrams tanks, F-16 fighter jets and ATACMS advanced military rocket technology - the warring forces were bringing the world "closer to the brink of an Armageddon."

"Their logic seems to be that if you goad a bear five times and it doesn't respond, it is safe to goad him even harder a sixth time," they said. "Such a strategy might be reasonable if the bear had no teeth."

The authors reminded readers that Putin had signaled numerous times that Russia would use nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances.

They warned that there would be no remaining step between firing US missiles deep into Russian territory and a nuclear exchange.

"It is past time to de-escalate this conflict," the authors said. "This is more important than any of the political issues our nation argues about. This game of nuclear 'chicken' has gone far enough. We cannot get any closer to the brink than this."

While Trump has vowed to end the Ukraine conflict if reelected in November, it might be too late by the time he takes office, the authors said.

"We need to demand, right now, that [Vice President Kamala] Harris and President Biden reverse their insane war agenda and open direct negotiations with Moscow," the authors added.

Outgoing NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said on Monday that NATO had the right to support Kiev without becoming a party to the Ukraine conflict - just as Iran and North Korea did not become parties by supplying weapons to Russia.

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Canada to Provide Moldova \$88.3Mln Sovereign Loan Over Ten Years - Foreign Ministry

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) – The Canadian and Moldovan Governments have reached an agreement for the provision of a C\$120 million (US\$88.3 million) ten-year sovereign loan to Chisinau, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) said on Tuesday.

"Today, the Honourable Ahmed Hussen, Minister of International Development, and the Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Foreign Affairs, announced that Canada will provide the Republic of Moldova with a sovereign loan of \$120 million over 10 years," GAC said in a statement.

The latest financial assistance is aimed at offsetting the "financial strain" caused by a major influx of Ukrainian refugees amid Russia's ongoing special military operation in Ukraine, the statement said.

Canada will help co-finance a loan by the World Bank Development Policy Operation that seeks to support the resilience of families and Ukrainian refugees and foster sustainable economic growth as well as climate resilience in Moldova, the statement added.

Ottawa and Chisinau agreed on the loan as the Moldova Partnership Platform meets in the Moldovan capital, the statement said. The assistance will be provided under Canada's Sovereign Loans Program announced in Budget 2018.

The Moldova Partnership Platform was created in 2022 by France, Germany, and Romania in a bid to coordinate international efforts to address internal and external challenges facing Chisinau since the onset of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine.

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ROCORA to Celebrate 120 Years of Canada Diocese by Holding Services, Events Across Country

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) - The Canadian diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCORA) will celebrate next year the 120th anniversary of its presence in Canada by holding services and other events in parishes throughout the country, Archbishop Gabriel (Chemodakov) of Montreal and Canada told Sputnik.

"We will have a service in our largest church in Toronto. Of course, we will mark it through services that will be served throughout the diocese. We will think about how to mark this occasion at every parish," Gabriel said.

The archbishop expressed hope that ROCORA's First Hierarch Metropolitan Nicholas (Olhovsky) will attend the services if his schedule allows it.

Gabriel explained that autumn would be the best time to organize the celebrations for a variety of reasons.

"I think it is the best time when everybody has come back from their summer vacations, children are returning back to school and churches are usually more full then," Gabriel said.

The ROCORA Diocese of Montreal and Canada traces its history back to 1905 when St. Patriarch Tikhon (Bellavin) established the Canadian mission of the Russian Orthodox Church. At present, the diocese has about 30 parishes in six provinces and about 300-400 believers

attend Sunday services at its largest cathedral in Toronto.

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Liberal Cabinet Ministers Voice Disappointment in Montreal Byelection Setback

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) - A number of Liberal ministers on Tuesday voiced disappointment in the loss of Montreal's LaSalle-Emard-Verdun byelection, acknowledging that Quebecers have spoken and the government must listen.

Early on Tuesday, Elections Canada said the Liberals lost the Montreal riding they had held since 2015 to the Bloc Quebecois - a federal party that supports independence for the French speaking province - by a margin of 0.8%. This is the Liberals' second major setback since late June.

Bloc Quebecois candidate Louis-Philippe Sauve was elected with 28% of the vote, whereas his Liberal opponent Laura Palestini was defeated with 27.2%. The New Democratic Party (NDP) won slightly more than 26% of the vote and the Conservatives 11.6%.

"Obviously, it's not what we expected as the outcome. We need to be humble," Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry Francois-Philippe Champagne said. "I would say we need to redouble efforts as well to show that the Liberal team is the best team to deliver for Quebecers and making sure that their interests are well represented in Ottawa."

Champagne said Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has been clear that he was going to lead the Liberals to the next federal elections and emphasized that the party would be working with him in putting up a team.

Minister of International Trade Mary Ng echoed the sentiment, saying Canadians have made their voices heard in Verdun and the government remains committed to working for them.

Similarly, Foreign Minister Melanie Joly in response to a question on what the election results mean for Trudeau's leadership said that the residents effectively told the government they expect it should deliver on their priorities.

"People think that things are too expensive. That it's difficult to make ends meet. And we hear them. I hear them. And we need to do more to address the question of affordability. Groceries are too expensive ... rent is too expensive, and so we'll have tough conversations," Joly added.

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US Lawmakers Urge Biden Admin. to Crack Upon Russian Helium Imports – Reports

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) – A bipartisan group of US senators and congressmen sent letters to the Biden administration demanding sanctions on Russian helium imports to prevent the country from becoming a global leading supplier, according to a report by Politico.

Democratic senators Bob Casey and John Fetterman sent a letter to US President Joe Biden, saying that "Russia hopes to gain a foothold in a growing global helium market and will likely be

able to do so unless the United States” and its allies impose sanctions, the report quoted the letter as saying on Monday.

“Preventing [Russia’s] access to the most developed helium market will serve as an early indication that the global market does not welcome Russia’s war financing efforts or its other destabilizing activities around the globe,” the senators’ letter read.

At the same time, more than a dozen House members sent a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, and Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo asking for a similar action, the report said.

In June, the European Union imposed trade restrictions against the import of helium from Russia and the export of manganese ore, plastics, and electronics as part of the 14th package of sanctions.

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Diplomacy With China More Important Now Than Ever Before - US State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) - Maintaining diplomacy with China is more important for the United States now than ever before despite the profound differences between the two countries, US Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Kritenbrink said on Tuesday.

"Even despite all of the challenges, diplomacy with China is more important than ever before," Kritenbrink said a discussion at the Stimson Center in Washington.

The United States and China have to talk to one another if they are going to responsibly manage the competition to prevent the risk of miscalculation, Kritenbrink said.

The two countries experienced the most difficult moment in their bilateral relations in 2023, when the United States accused China of launching a surveillance balloon over its territory, he said.

"We have deep and fundamental concerns with a range of Chinese actions. But following the Woodside summit in San Francisco last year [between US and Chinese Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping], our channels are open," Kritenbrink said.

Since then, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan held meetings with their counterparts and the United States expects additional engagements in the future, Kritenbrink added.

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US House to Hold Wednesday Vote on Temporary Government Funding Bill - Speaker

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives will hold a vote on Wednesday on a continuing resolution (CR) to temporarily fund the federal government ahead of a shutdown deadline, US House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Tuesday.

"Congress has an immediate obligation to do two things: responsibly fund the federal government, and ensure the security of our elections. Because we owe this to our constituents,

we will move forward on Wednesday with a vote on the 6-month CR with the SAVE Act attached,” Johnson said in a statement via social media platform X.

The US Congress must pass appropriations bills or short-term funding legislation by the end of the month to avoid a government shutdown.

House Republicans have pushed for the inclusion of the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility (SAVE) Act in temporary government funding legislation ahead of Election Day. However, the White House has expressed opposition to the House Republican proposal.

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Some Ukraine Allies Beginning Talks on Potential Ceasefire With Russia - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) - Some of the countries backing Ukraine are beginning to hold discussions on how to end Kiev’s conflict with Moscow, Bloomberg reported on Tuesday.

The countries are seriously considering how to conclude the conflict as part of strategy talks for the coming year, the report said, citing people familiar with the matter.

However, the discussions are raising concerns in other countries aligned with Ukraine, the report said.

The possibility of negotiations between Ukraine and Russia is still distant and no country is pressuring Ukraine into peace talks.

Nevertheless, some of Ukraine’s partners are considering diplomatic solutions to the conflict amid little indication that Ukraine will achieve a battlefield breakthrough.

Ukraine’s Volodymyr Zelenskyy is expected to request membership in NATO and the European Union, more weapons and economic and security agreements in his peace proposal, two of the sources reportedly said.

Zelenskyy will pitch his so-called victory plan to US President Joe Biden later this month on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. Zelenskyy also seeks to share the proposal with Vice President Kamala Harris and former President Donald Trump.

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Trudeau Says ‘Would Have Been Nicer’ to Hold Verdun but More Works Needs to Be Done

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) – Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Tuesday in the wake of a political setback in the byelections of Montreal’s

LaSalle-Emard-Verdun that it “would have been nicer” to win and hold the riding but more work needs to be done ahead of the next federal elections.

“We need people to understand what’s at stake in this upcoming election. Obviously, it would have been nicer to be able to win and hold Verdun, but there’s more work to do and we’re going to stay focused on doing it,” Trudeau told reporters.

The Prime Minister added that there were “all sorts of reflections” to take out of the political setback but argued that it is even more important to ensure that Canadians understand that the

choice they'll get to make in the next elections will be on the kind of country Canada is.

Early Tuesday, Elections Canada said the Liberals lost the Montreal riding to the Bloc Quebecois – a federal party that supports independence for the French speaking province - by a slim 0.8% margin.

Bloc Quebecois candidate Louis-Philippe Sauve got elected with 28% of the vote, whereas his Liberal opponent Laura Palestini was defeated at 27.2%, the electoral body said. Close behind followed the New Democratic Party (NDP) with just over 26% of the votes and in fourth place, the Conservatives achieved a meager 11.6%.

In late June, the Liberal Party faced the unexpected loss to their Conservative counterparts of the Toronto-St. Paul federal by-election. The seat had been held by the Liberals for more than 30 years and was considered to be one of the politically "safest."

The latest electoral upset also happens nearly two weeks after NDP leader Jagmeet Singh announced the termination of the "confidence-and-supply agreement" where the Neo-Democrats pledged to support Trudeau's Liberals in exchange for commitments on legislation put forward by their party. The deal, which had ensured the survival of a Liberal minority government, was in place since March 2022.

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Dwindling Pentagon Stockpiles Force US to Send Fewer Weapons to Ukraine – Reports

WASHINGTON, September 17 (Sputnik) - Dwindling US weapons depots have been the main reason for sending modest aid packages to Ukraine in recent months, CNN reported on Monday, citing several US officials.

The paradox is that even though the Biden administration still has almost \$6 billion left to help Ukraine in the Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA), it cannot send more weapons, since they are not available in warehouses, the report said.

At the same time, the PDA is set to expire on September 30 unless Congress agrees to grant more time to spend the remaining funds.

One of the reasons for the insufficient aid sent to Ukraine is the US reluctance to do so at the expense of its readiness, as well as a policy of not sending Kiev too many weapons at one time due to the country's inability to absorb the equipment and distribute it effectively and quickly, the report said.

Russia has repeatedly stated that it views the supply of weapons to Ukraine as an impediment to the peace process, arguing this makes NATO countries a party to the conflict. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has stated that any shipments containing weapons for Ukraine will be considered legitimate targets for Russia.

Reuters reported earlier in September that the US State Department hopes to tie an extension for the PDA funding into a stopgap funding bill, which lawmakers could pass before the end of the month to prevent a government shutdown.

The Biden administration is also developing an alternative plan to spend the remaining PDA funds in a substantial package before the end of the month. Under the backup plan, the delivery timeline for the aid would be pushed back, according to the report.

