

9/19/24 Thursday

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Why Does the US Seem So Resistant to Finding Out How the Pagers Were Rigged?

On Tuesday, State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said at a press briefing that the United States had no foreknowledge of the Israeli pager attack against Lebanon and claimed that the United States was collecting information about the attack “in the same way journalists are across the world,” despite its close ties to Israel.

The booby-trapped pager attack on Lebanon and the subsequent attack that utilized walkie-talkies, phones and solar stations, has raised the question about the safety of supply lines across the world. While Miller’s absurd assertion that the United States has to gather information the same way journalists do is laughable on the face of it, actual journalists are running circles around the US intelligence community’s alleged fact-gathering.

Journalists have already revealed that the pagers were branded by a Taiwanese company called Apollo, which in turn blamed a Hungarian company, saying that it only licensed its logos to the company. However, it appears that the company was a shell corporation, perhaps acting as an intermediary for a Bulgarian company called Nortra Global.

It has also been revealed through statements from Hezbollah that the devices were delayed for three months in transit, during which they suspect Israel intercepted and implanted explosives in the devices. Reports have also stated that Israel set off the devices because they believed Hezbollah fighters were starting to notice something was off about them.

In contrast, on Thursday, Miller refused to provide any more details about the attacks, only denying any US involvement. On Wednesday, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin held a phone call with his Israeli counterpart where it has been reported that they “discussed the situation in Lebanon and Gaza” but apparently nothing that Miller could later share with the public.

“Why doesn’t someone from our government ask the Israelis?” Syrian-American journalist for The Gray Zone Hekmat Aboukhater posed to [Sputnik’s Political Misfits](#) on Thursday. “Do we know if any of our citizens, many of whom live in Lebanon, many of whom live in the region, if they use any pagers?”

However, US media reported, citing anonymous intelligence officials that Israel had “informed Washington of [the attack’s] specifics after the operation through intelligence channels.”

However, that information, it seems, is not for the hundreds of millions of Americans who carry devices that could be used in the same way the pagers and other devices were used in Lebanon.

Instead, as has been the case for many of Israel’s actions since October 7, the US has closed its eyes and ears to the situation, still refusing to say if they suspect Israel was behind the attacks.

When asked on Thursday if the US hoped its investigations would lead to public attribution of the attack, Miller refused to say. “We continue to gather information for a number of reasons, I’m not going to speak to them publicly.”

"Compare and contrast that to the absolute freakout in 2001 to the anthrax threats where the entire system of shipping and system of mailing within the United States had to be stopped just because of two or three mail letters that were suspected of having anthrax," argued Aboukhater.

"We have a situation here where thousands of Americans, potentially, and allies of America could be using devices that are still to this day laced with explosives."

The United States also had little hesitancy in placing blame in that situation, first pinning the attacks on Iraq, then on a scientist, and then on another scientist who, purportedly, committed suicide after being accused. However, there are significant doubts about the evidence connecting the attack on that suspect, but the US considers the matter closed.

"But, for some reason, we have [Miller] going out and saying we're going to treat this like investigative journalists," Aboukhater exclaimed. "We, the United States, the country with eyes everywhere, with the most superior intelligence operation around the globe, we're gonna treat this like journalists."

On Tuesday during his [System Update broadcast](#) on Tuesday, journalist Glenn Greenwald called Miller's journalist comment "incredibly deceitful."

"The U.S. government is the government on whom Israel depends for their funding, for the payment of their military, and for the arming of their wars. Obviously, the U.S. government has the easy, direct, immediate means of finding out 'what happened' here and who was responsible by picking up the phone and calling the Israelis and demanding that they explain to them what it is that they did," Greenwald argued.

On Thursday, Miller again insisted that the US had no foreknowledge of the first attack, but refused to say whether it had been informed about the second attack the next day.

"We were not involved in that operation in any shape or form, and I'll leave it at that," Miller said. When the reporter asked for clarification whether that answer meant the US had no awareness or if he would not say whether the US had foreknowledge of the second attack, Miller again would only say that the US was "not involved."

One reason the US may be hesitant to say what it knows about the attack is that it uses very similar methods in its so-called security operations. In 2013, Der Spiegel [revealed](#) internal NSA documents that the agency—along with the CIA and FBI—were routinely and secretly intercepting laptops and other electronic devices to plant surveillance bugs inside of them before reaching their destination.

It has been largely speculated that Israel did something similar to the pagers and other devices in Lebanon, only implanting explosives instead. The question most have is: where and when this happened.

"Because of my own understanding of how Israel works in the region and what its allies and the puppets of the United States Empire are, [I] would point my finger to the UAE, [I] would point my finger to Saudi Arabia," speculated Aboukhater. "And [I] would question these areas where it could have potentially been held up and had the explosives laced."

On Wednesday, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby was asked if Americans who have these pagers should be concerned. Kirby would only say that he has "nothing more to add" about the attacks.

On Thursday, a group of UN human rights experts called the attack a violation of humanitarian law, noting that it was an indiscriminate attack that also violated international law against explosive booby traps disguised as benign devices.

"[The Israelis] knew that these people who were carrying these pagers were going to be driving cars down the street, going to the grocery store, walking alongside children. They knew that was the case and they, despite all of that, directly attacked civilian populations," activist and podcast host Misty Winston told [Sputnik's The Critical Hour](#). "The way that they've done this is such a terrifying thing. I think that we're all kind of looking at our electronics a little differently today."

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Forgetting Jerome Powell

On Thursday, US President Joe Biden falsely claimed that he never met with Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell as President. Biden was criticizing former President Donald Trump for not respecting the Reserve's independence during his term in office.

"Unlike my predecessor, I respect the Federal Reserve's independence as they pursued a mandate to bring inflation down," Biden said during a speech to the Economic Club of Washington. "And that independence has served the country well. And by the way, I've never once spoken to the chairman of the Fed since I became president."

Biden was photographed with Powell inside the White House in May 2022, during what [US media described](#) as his "third in-person" meeting with Powell.

Biden also introduced Powell at a press conference announcing his nominations for chair and vice chair for the Federal Reserve Board of Governors.

In February, Special Counsel Robert Hur was investigating Biden's handling of classified documents but declined to press charges because he felt Biden would appear as an "elderly man with a poor memory" to a jury, making it difficult to prove intent.

Biden had difficulty remembering when he served as Vice President and which year his son Beau died, according to the transcript of his meeting with Hur. Considering that the latest Powell meeting happened over two years ago, it is doubtful that many were surprised that they slipped Biden's mind, it seems most things have.

TG conversions for that post:

The Good

A few Republican senators spoke out against censorship of dissenting voices, albeit without pushing back on the idea that freedom of speech belongs exclusively to Americans.

Cmte. Vice Chair Marco Rubio (R-FL) brought up the Hunter Biden laptop story as evidence of when government and tech censorship can go wrong.

"There was a concerted effort... to silence a media outlet in the United States for something that turned out not to be Russian disinformation," the Senator lamented, also bringing up the censorship of the COVID lab leak origin theory.

Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AZ) echoed those statements and noted that it was far more influential than anything Russia, China or Iran had been accused of.

The Bad

Anti-Russian, Chinese and Iranian sentiments were high in the hearing, as was the desire to quiet speech from anyone originating from those countries.

Cmte. Chair Mark Warner (D-VA) complained that Meta* and Google have allegedly allowed their ad tools to be used by sanctioned entities (read: companies in China, Russia and Iran). He also slammed Elon Musk for not cooperating with their efforts to fight “disinformation.”

“I think it’s a real shame that in the previous investigations, Twitter was a very collaborative entity. Under X they are absent and some of the most egregious activity is taking place,” Warner said, later thanking the Meta* president of global affairs for the axing of Russian sites (see: Sputnik and RT) from the platform.

*banned in Russia as an extremist organization

The Funny

Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME) accused China of using the Sister Cities program to sow discord.

“China is attempting to build relations with state and local officials. We see the sister cities programs, we see the Confucius Institutes and educational institutions, so how are your platforms trying to help safeguard the down-ballot races?” she asked.

The Sister Cities program was created in 1956 by US President Dwight Eisenhower to foster “bonds between people from different communities around the world.” More than 140 countries and 300 communities participate in the program.

Meanwhile, after showcasing fake sites meant to mimic The Washington Post and Fox News, Warner implied Americans are too brainless to read URLs.

“I don’t know... how a normal American consumer, even a relatively sophisticated one, would have the expertise to read the URL that closely when everything else looks so closely like Fox or Washington Post,” he said.

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White House Says No Message Being Sent to Israel After Austin, Blinken Postpone Visits

WASHINGTON, September 20 (Sputnik) - The White House said on Friday that no message is being sent to Israel after media reported that US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and Secretary of State Antony Blinken postponed their planned visits to the country following a series of explosion attacks in Lebanon.

"There's no message being sent to Israel. First of all, I don't believe the Defense Department announced any kind of a trip for Secretary Austin," Kirby said during a press briefing.

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white house's kirby says no message being sent to Israel after austin, blinken postpone planned visits

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White House Says Still Believes Diplomacy 'Best' Solution for Israel, Hezbollah

WASHINGTON, September 20 (Sputnik) - The White House said on Friday that it still believes diplomacy is the best solution to resolve the escalating confrontation between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah.

"We still believe that there is time and space for a diplomatic solution. We think that that is the best way forward. War is not inevitable up there at the Blue Line and we're going to continue to do everything we can to try to prevent it," White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said during a press briefing.

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White House Says No New Travel Guidance for Lebanon

WASHINGTON, September 20 (Sputnik) - There is no new guidance for US citizens seeking to travel to Lebanon, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Friday.

"I'm not aware of any additional guidance," Kirby said during a press briefing, when asked if there has been new guidance for US citizens in Lebanon.

In July, the US State Department issued a "do not travel" warning for Lebanon, amid increasing tensions between Israel and Lebanese Shia movement Hezbollah.

Recent attacks in Lebanon provide an important reminder for US citizens not to travel to the country, Kirby said.

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us still believes there is time and space for diplomatic solution, israel-hezbollah war not inevitable - white house's kirby

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White House's Kirby Says No Advance Notification of Strikes on Beirut Building

WASHINGTON, September 20 (Sputnik) – The White House said Friday that it was not notified in advance by Israel of its strikes on residential building in Beirut earlier in the day that killed at least five children.

“I am certainly not aware of any pre-notification of those strikes,” White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said at a press briefing.

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white house's kirby says not aware of any advanced notification of israeli strike in beirut

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Gold At Record High for 3rd Time in US Rate Cut Week, Stalks Major \$3,000 Target

NEW YORK, September 20 (Sputnik) - Gold prices hit record highs Friday for a third time in a week as a hedge against a dollar battered by projected US interest rate cuts, with analysts saying the major target of \$3,000 an ounce was in view although several corrections were expected before that.

At the time of writing, US gold futures for December delivery were slightly above \$2,640 an ounce on the Comex division of the New York Mercantile Exchange, after peaking at \$2,644.80 — rewriting prior record highs from Wednesday and Monday. The daily gain for December gold was about 1.1% while its weekly rise was around 1.2%, keeping it on a hot streak after last week's 3.4% rally.

Spot gold, which tracks real-time trades in gold bullion, hovered a little above \$2,615 an ounce, after an all-time high at \$2,619.36. For the session, spot gold rose 1.1%. For the week, it was up 1.5%.

“The precious metals bulls are reveling in the aftermath of an aggressive interest rate cut from the US Federal Reserve,” analyst Jim Wyckoff wrote on the website of bullion trader Kitco.

The Fed cut 50-basis points from US rates on Wednesday for the first time in four years, bringing the peak rate paid by Americans on their borrowings to 5% per annum from a previous two-decade high of 5.5%. Money market traders are betting there would be two more cuts of 25 basis points before the year-end to bring the peak for rates down to 4.5%.

The dollar has been the biggest casualty from the action on rates, driving up gold, which typically rises as a contra trade for investors looking to hedge against the US currency's drop.

The Dollar Index, which pits the greenback against six major rival currencies, has fallen to 100.22 — a low not seen since the July 2023 bottom of 99.58. Many analysts think it's a matter of "when" rather than "if" for the Dollar Index to break below the psychological 100 reading.

Gold's run-up this week also came amid heightened tensions in the Middle East after Lebanon blamed Israel for the widespread detonation of explosives planted in communication devices held by its Hezbollah operatives.

Aside from being a hedge against the dollar, gold is also viewed as protection against political troubles that could weigh on the world economy. Lebanon has vowed retaliation as fighting in and around Gaza continued between the Palestinian Hamas operatives it supported and the Israel Defense Forces.

With gold looking to take out by next week the near-term target of \$2,700 an ounce envisaged by Wall Street bank Goldman Sachs, some analysts have set their sights on the major \$3,000 price hurdle viewed as impossible by some just a year ago.

Andrew Addison, a technical analyst for gold, wrote in the Barrons financial publication this week that gold had broken through various resistance to begin what he called "escape velocity" in the ramp toward \$3,000.

The technical analyst noted that from 2020 to 2023, the precious metal had formed a series of high-level consolidations, with each consolidation ending higher and shorter from the previous one — indicating less selling pressure at every major rally.

Addison did caution of price corrections ahead in gold, but still asked investors to "consider all pullbacks as opportunities to buy or add to positions".

Gold's run-up this year has made it one of the best-performing commodities of 2024, with both US futures and spot prices up more than 26%. In comparison, oil, represented by benchmark Brent crude, is down more than 3% on the year.

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Constellation Signs 20-Year Nuclear Energy Agreement with Microsoft – Company

WASHINGTON, September 20 (Sputnik) – Constellation announced on Friday the signing of a 20-year power purchase agreement with Microsoft that will enable it to relaunch its shuttered nuclear station, according to a release.

"Constellation announced today the signing of a 20-year power purchase agreement with Microsoft that will pave the way for the launch of the Crane Clean Energy Center (CCEC) and restart of Three Mile Island Unit 1, which operated at industry-leading levels of safety and reliability for decades before being shut down for economic reasons exactly five years ago today," the release stated.

It added that Microsoft will purchase energy from Three Mile Island Unit 1 in order to use carbon-free energy in its data centers in the Pennsylvania-New Jersey-Maryland Interconnection.

Constellation estimated that the agreement will add around 835 megawatts of carbon-free energy to the grid, create 3,400 direct and indirect jobs, and generate more than \$3 billion in state and federal taxes.

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US Faces \$17Bln Shortfall in Funding for Virginia Class Submarines - Lawmaker

WASHINGTON, September 20 (Sputnik) - A shortfall in funding for the US Navy's nuclear-powered Virginia-class attack submarines is projected to grow to \$17 billion over the next six years, House Defense Subcommittee Chairman Ken Calvert said in a released statement.

"We have also learned that there is a projected \$17 billion shortfall in the Virginia-class program alone over the next six years," Calvert said in the statement on Thursday.

Calvert also said the US Navy suffered from persistent delays and cost overruns in the service's shipbuilding program.

The US Navy system of keeping metrics and reporting facts was flawed at best and misleading at worst, Calvert said.

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Vinnik's Defense Expects to Get Sentencing in January Without Serious Delays - Lawyer

WASHINGTON, September 20 (Sputnik) - Russian national Alexander Vinnik's legal defense team expects to secure sentencing for him in January 2025 to avoid significant delays, lawyer Arkady Bukh told Sputnik.

"At this stage, we are cohering to the sentencing, which is scheduled to be in January 2025. But I still cannot guarantee the specific date, which was ordered, because adjournments are very common," Bukh said on Thursday.

The US government has accused Vinnik of enabling criminal activity through the cryptocurrency exchange BTC-e by obscuring and anonymizing transactions and sources of funds. A US court issued a filing setting up January 17, 2025 as the sentencing date.

Bukh expressed hope that an adjournment - if it happens at all - will not last very long.

The defense and the government are arguing about different factors that could affect the sentencing, such as the number of victims, potential losses and the use of foreign jurisdictions.

"Hopefully, all those issues will be mutually resolved so that we do not get a contested sentencing," Bukh said.

With respect to consular access to Vinnik, Bukh highlighted that Russian diplomats meet with his client "frequently enough."

"Their visits are a great psychological and moral support for Vinnik," Bukh added.

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US Awards \$1.2Bln for Poseidon Aircraft Engine Support - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 20 (Sputnik) - Two US defense contractors were awarded a combined \$1.2 billion to provide depot-level engine maintenance for P-8A Poseidon maritime security patrol aircraft for the Navy, the Australian Air Force and other foreign military sales customers, the Pentagon said in a press release.

"These contracts provide depot-level engine maintenance, repair, overhaul, and field assessment and repair in support of the P-8A Poseidon aircraft for the Navy, the Royal Australian Air Force, and Foreign Military Sales customers," the release said on Thursday.

AAR Government Services and Standard Aero were awarded the contracts that have an estimated aggregate ceiling of \$1,210,116,191, according to the release.

Work on the contract is scheduled to take a decade and is expected to be completed in September 2029, the release said.

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US Court Detains Russia's Denis Postovoy, Transfers Him to Washington - Lawyer

WASHINGTON, September 20 (Sputnik) - A US court in Florida decided to detain Russian national Denis Postovoy, who was arrested on charges of conspiring to violate the Export Control Reform Act, smuggling, money laundering and defrauding the United States, and to transfer him to Washington, his lawyer Todd Foster told Sputnik.

"The judge ordered him [Postovoy] to be detained and transported to Washington," Foster said on Thursday.

Magistrate Judge Natalie Adams held earlier a detention hearing at the US District Court for the Middle District of Florida in Tampa.

"Postovoy may appeal the judge's decision," Foster said.

Foster also said that he did not know when Postovoy is expected to arrive in Washington, where he will be detained or when the next hearing will be.

Postovoy's family still has to decide who will represent his interests in court.

The US Justice Department said on Wednesday that Postovoy, who lives in Sarasota, Florida, procured and illegally exported microelectronic components with military applications from the United States to Russia through companies he owns or operates in Russia, Hong Kong and elsewhere, without obtaining required licenses.

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US Army Extends Raytheon Contract by \$48.8Mln for Stinger Support Services - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 20 (Sputnik) - The US Army has given Raytheon Missiles Defense an almost \$50 million contract extension to continue providing engineering and technical support services for the Stinger Weapon System, the Defense Department announced.

"Raytheon Missiles Defense [of] Tucson, Arizona was awarded a \$46,843,858 modification ...contract for engineering and technical services to support the Stinger Weapon System," the Defense Department said in a press release on Thursday.

Work on the extended contract is now scheduled to take two and a quarter years with an estimated completion date of December 30, 2027, the release said.

The Army Contracting Command based in Redstone Arsenal in the US state of Alabama will oversee work on the project as its contracting activity, the release added.

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Kentucky Governor Says District Judge Shot, Killed in Chambers

WASHINGTON, September 20 (Sputnik) - A district judge was shot and killed in the US state of Kentucky, Governor Andy Beshear said in a statement via social media platform X.

"Sadly, I have been informed that a district judge in Letcher County was shot and killed in his chambers this afternoon," Beshear said on Thursday.

Judge Kevin Mullins was allegedly shot by Letcher County Sheriff Mickey Stines, local news outlet The Mountain Eagle reported.

Stine was arrested after turning himself over to police, the report said.

Kentucky Attorney General Russell Coleman said via X that his office will work with Commonwealth's Attorney for the 27th Judicial Circuit Jackie Steele as special prosecutors in the case.

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US Congress Funding Delays Impact Nuclear Submarine Programs - Navy Chief

WASHINGTON, September 20 (Sputnik) - US government reliance on budgetary stopgap measures has impacted the navy's navigation plan including the acquisition and development of nuclear submarines, Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Lisa Franchetti told an audience at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

US Congress has failed to approve a regular budget and has relied on temporary stopgap measures called continuing resolutions (CRs) to fund government operations.

"Everything is made more difficult by a CR," Franchetti said on Thursday. "Continuing resolutions really stop any momentum in the things that I'm trying to achieve in this NAVPLAN."

Franchetti warned that the funding issues will impact procurement of Columbia and Virginia class submarines and overhaul of the Truman aircraft carrier.

In September, Franchetti sent a letter to Congress opposing stopgap spending measures, saying it would undermine readiness and hinder strategic priorities.

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US Navy Studying Ukraine's Use of UAS in Black Sea to Block Russia's Fleet - Top Admiral

WASHINGTON, September 20 (Sputnik) - The US Navy has been closely studying the operations of the Ukrainian armed forces in using unmanned aerial systems (UAS) and related unmanned weapons to deny Russia operational advantages in the Black Sea, Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Lisa Franchetti told an audience at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

"We added to [the US Navy 2022 priorities program] based on what we're seeing in Ukraine ... is the importance of having sea denial capability," Franchetti said in her CSIS appearance on Thursday. "The thing that we've really learned from Ukraine is the value of sea denial."

The US Navy has learned a lot from Ukraine, especially about the use of autonomous systems, Franchetti continued.

"There are many examples from Ukraine including innovation on the battlefield," she said.

The integration of autonomous platforms and entirely unmanned platforms showed great promise for the Navy. Therefore, the Navy was exploring the integration of autonomous and entirely unmanned platforms in the Navy fleet, Franchetti said.

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Oil Markets Up 4th Time in 5 Days After US Rate Cut, Middle East Tensions

NEW YORK, September 20 (Sputnik) - Oil markets rallied for the fourth time in five days, with key crude benchmarks settling above the key \$70 per barrel mark, as energy traders and investors reacted belatedly to the first Federal Reserve cut of US interest rates in four years.

A fresh escalation in Middle East tensions as Lebanon blamed Israel for the widespread detonation of explosives planted in communication devices held by its Hezbollah operatives also kept crude prices on a boil, analysts said.

The US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) and UK North Sea Brent crude benchmarks were up 5% week-to-date after three days of positive closes out of four.

WTI finished Thursday's session at \$71.95 a barrel, up \$1.04, or 1.5%, in the latest session.

Brent settled at \$74.88 per barrel, up \$1.23, or 1.7%.

Oil markets seem to be in a state of "risk-on with the Fed announcement," Scott Shelton, an energy futures broker at ICAP in North Carolina said. The Fed dropped 50-basis points from US interest rates on Wednesday in its first monetary easing since 2020, saying more cuts could follow.

Energy traders and investors were also "keeping an eye on events in the Middle East after walkie-talkies used by Lebanese armed group Hezbollah exploded" on Wednesday after explosions the previous day of pagers held by the operatives. Lebanese authorities blamed Israel for the attacks, with security sources saying the Mossad, the Israeli intelligence service, was possibly the mastermind. West Jerusalem declined comment.

Adding to this week's bullish fervor was Citigroup's forecast for a counter-seasonal oil market deficit of around 0.4 million barrels per day that could take Brent as high as \$75 per barrel range during the fourth quarter. But the Wall Street bank also noted that the upswing might be temporary.

"As 2025 global oil balances deteriorate in most scenarios, we still anticipate renewed price weakness in 2025 with Brent on a path to \$60/barrel," analysts at Citigroup said.

Oil markets started the year strongly, with WTI and Brent rallying more than 20% on the year by April, before a selloff sparked by demand worries in the United States and China.

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US Getting Closer to Discuss Stricter Regime for Russia's Oil Exports - White House

WASHINGTON, September 20 (Sputnik) - The United States is getting closer to starting discussions about a much stricter regime concerning Russia's oil fleet and exports, US Deputy National Security Advisor Daleep Singh said during a Carnegie Endowment for International Peace event.

"I think we're getting closer to the point at which we can talk about a much more strict regime, both in terms of the shadow fleet, but also the amount of oil that Russia is allowed to supply to the market," Singh said on Thursday.

Western countries and their allies rolled out a comprehensive sanctions campaign against Russia after it launched its military operation in Ukraine in February 2022, including the imposition of an oil price cap on Russian crude oil exports and the blocking of Russia's sovereign assets and banks. Moscow says that Western sanctions against Russia have failed.

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Delta Air Lines Extends Pause on Flights to Israel Through Dec. 31

WASHINGTON, September 20 (Sputnik) – Delta Air Lines said in a press release that it is extending its pause on flights between New York and Tel Aviv due to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and heightened tensions on the Israeli-Lebanese border.

"Delta flights between New York-JFK and Tel Aviv will be paused through Dec. 31, due to ongoing conflict in the region," the release said on Thursday.

The airline added that it has already issued travel waivers to all customers who booked travel to/from Tel Aviv before December 31.

Earlier on Thursday, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah said that Israel had crossed all red lines, endangering the lives of multiple Lebanese civilians and that the communication device blasts were a terrorist attack potentially triggering a declaration of war.

On Tuesday, pager detonations took place across Lebanon, killing 12 people and injuring over 2,800 others, the Lebanese Health Ministry said. A second wave of mass explosions of communication devices belonging to Hezbollah members on Wednesday killed at least 25

people and wounded more than 600, according to the ministry. Lebanon believes that Israeli intelligence services are behind the detonations.

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Immigrant Detainees at Guantanamo Bay Face Inhumane Conditions, Ill-Treatment – Reports

WASHINGTON, September 20 (Sputnik) - Migrants detained at Guantanamo Bay facility are forced to live in inhumane conditions, are subjected to ill-treatment, and unlike other migrants, are often denied the opportunity to defend their rights, The New York Times reported, citing internal government accounts on the situation.

Although the infamous Guantanamo Bay prison is more designed to hold suspected terrorists, it also houses people, including children, who flee their countries in search of a better life in the United States.

Those unfortunate enough to be caught and transferred to the prison are forced to wear blackout goggles and live in infested and otherwise unsuitable for habitation areas of the military base, the report said on Thursday.

“Interviewees described signs of deterioration and dilapidation: toilets spewing sewage when someone in another room flushed their toilet, a plumbing problem known in notorious prisons as ‘Ping-Pong toilets’; showers overflowing; fungi growing on ceilings; and rats running around in the room,” the report quoted the International Refugee Assistance Project as saying in a report.

Between 2020 and 2023, some 37 migrants were held in the facility, with only four migrants remaining in the facility as of February of this year, according to the report.

On average, migrants stay at the facility for more than six months before either being resettled to a third country, deported to their home country, or allowed to obtain legal immigration status in the United States, the report said.

Moreover, the rules for migrants crossing over the US southern border do not apply to those who are held at the Guantanamo facility.

“The provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act and immigration regulations governing asylum, protection from removal, and removal proceedings do not apply to migrants interdicted at sea,” the report quoted the State Department as saying in this regard.

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Documents Confirm US Air Force Policy to Reduce White Males in Key Program - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 20 (Sputnik) - The US Air Force has released documents confirming that it has deliberately tried to reduce the number of white male applicants to a popular training program fast tracking the career advancement of its officers in the interests of racial and gender diversity, the Daily Caller reported.

The Air Force after repeated requests finally released a large number of documents confirming its goal of reducing the number of white male applicants in the popular officer program after

months of trying to avoid doing so, the report said on Thursday.

Current Chiefs of Staff Chairman CQ Brown, who was Air Force Chief of Staff at the time, issued a memorandum in 2022 stating that the service was seeking to promote more minority and female officers in its efforts to advance diversity and inclusion, the report said.

The documents now obtained by the Daily Caller News Foundation include a 2022 slideshow in which the Air Force outlined racial and gender quotas and explained how it hoped to cut down on the number of white males in its Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) officer's applicant program, the report added.

The Biden administration and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin have repeatedly stated they give priority to boosting diversity, equity and inclusion in the US armed forces, according to the report

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white house says getting closer to the point of stricter sanctions regime on russia's oil, including amount Russia allowed to supply to market

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, September 20 (Sputnik) -

MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

* Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said on Thursday that Israel has entered a new phase of the war and will continue to act against Lebanese movement Hezbollah.

* Israel said it struck about 30 ready-to-use rocket launchers and infrastructure sites in southern Lebanon belonging to Hezbollah.

* The Israeli air force carried out a series of simultaneous strikes on several settlements in southern Lebanon, Lebanese field sources told Sputnik.

* The United States will support defensive but not offensive operations by Israel, Pentagon deputy spokesperson Sabrina Singh said.

ELECTRONIC DEVICE EXPLOSIONS IN LEBANON

* Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah said on Thursday that Israel has crossed all red lines, endangering the lives of a large number of Lebanese civilians, characterizing the detonation of electronic devices as a terrorist attack and genocide leading to a declaration of war.

* The death toll from the explosions throughout Lebanon has increased to 25 and another 608 people have been wounded, Lebanese Health Minister Firass Abiad said.

* The United States continues to gather facts about a series of explosions in Lebanon and believes that a broader conflict is not in any party's interest, US Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Robert Wood said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

- * Russia should be part of future peace talks, but NATO should back Ukraine with strong security guarantees, Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said on Thursday.
- * A draft on providing an additional military assistance to Ukraine worth 397 million euros (\$443 million) has been submitted to the German parliament for approval, the German Cabinet of Ministers confirmed to RIA Novosti.
- * Germany has supplied 22 more Leopard 1A5 tanks and three Gepard anti-aircraft self-propelled guns to Ukraine, an updated list of the military equipment sent to Kiev from Berlin showed.
- * Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said that the country is ready to cooperate with Ukraine.

BRICS

- * The use of national currencies in transactions between BRICS member states has already overtaken the dollar, Sameep Shastri, the vice chairman of the BRICS Chamber of Commerce and Industry, told Sputnik.
- * The BRICS Chamber of Commerce and Industry is expecting the leaders of the BRICS nations to address the issue of transferring funds among the group members during the bloc's summit in the Russian city of Kazan, Shastri told Sputnik.

HUNTER BIDEN'S COURT CASE

- * Hunter Biden will face sentencing on December 4 for firearms charges, according to an order filed in the US District Court for the District of Delaware on Thursday.

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US Coast Guard May Need to Wait 15 Years For Long-Delayed Modern Cutter Ship - Report

WASHINGTON, September 19 (Sputnik) - The US Coast Guard's program to build a single modern cutter to operate in coastal inshore waters as a patrol security interceptor vessel is such a mess that the entire service will continue to lack the resources it needs until 2039, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) said in a report on Thursday.

"GAO found challenges with Coast Guard's acquisition of the Offshore Patrol Cutter that is intended to replace the Medium Endurance Cutter," the report acknowledged. "This new cutter is essential for the service's drug interdiction mission, but acquisition delays are expected to create operational capability gaps through at least 2039."

The massive delays with the cutter, now delayed for possibly 15 years, are widespread and affect the entire Coast Guard maritime force, the GAO pointed out.

"Coast Guard aircraft and vessels have not met availability targets. In 2023, GAO reported that Medium Endurance Cutters - a key asset for interdicting drugs - were not consistently meeting operational availability targets," the report said.

The Coast Guard noted that the declining condition of the cutters risked decreased capability

for meeting mission requirements, the GAO added.

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Canada's Bloc Quebecois Rejects Quebec Premier's Request to Back No-Confidence Motion

WASHINGTON, September 19 (Sputnik) – Quebec Prime Minister Francois Legault on Thursday asked the separatist Bloc Quebecois (BQ) to vote in favor of the Tory non-confidence motion against Prime Minister Justin Trudeau but was met with rejection by party leader Yves-François Blanchet.

“I ask the leader of the Parti Quebecois to have the courage to demand that his Bloc Quebecois counterpart step back, to not support the Trudeau Government next week and defend the interests of the Quebec Nation,” Legault told reporters.

Blanchet however spurned Legault’s request to vote in favor of a non-confidence motion against the Trudeau government.

“It remains ‘no.’ I am neither Conservative, nor Liberal ... nor a Caquiste. I am the leader of the Bloc Quebecois,” Blanchet said via X.

Following in Blanchet’s footsteps, NDP leader Jagmeet Singh also said his party would not be supporting the motion, stressing that that Neo-Democrats would not play by “Poilievre’s games.”

On Wednesday, Liberal House Leader Karina Gould informed the Conservatives they will get a day in next week’s parliamentary agenda to put forward a non-confidence motion by Tory leader Pierre Poilievre. The proposal came after Singh announced the termination of the "confidence-and-supply agreement" with the Liberals which had ensured the survival of their minority government since March 2022.

The same day, Blanchet said the Bloc Quebecois would not be supporting the motion, arguing that it only suggests replacing Trudeau with Poilievre. The politician further noted that if necessary and if the Liberals do not deliver on their demands, they’ll have “plenty of time” to make them fall.

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

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US Coast Guard Lacks Enough Aircraft, Ships to Intercept Cocaine Flow - Report

WASHINGTON, September 19 (Sputnik) - The US Coast Guard is failing in its mission to intercept and prevent cocaine and other dangerous drugs entering the United States because of a lack of resources, investment and aging vessels and aircraft, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) said in a report on Thursday.

"GAO has previously identified several challenges the Coast Guard faces that hinder its drug interdiction mission efforts," the report said. "These include asset readiness and availability,

acquisition challenges and workforce shortages."

The GAO pointed out in the report that the Coast Guard aircraft and vessels have not met availability targets.

"In 2023, GAO reported that Medium Endurance Cutters - a key asset for interdicting drugs - were not consistently meeting operational availability targets," the report said.

The declining condition of the cutters risked decreased capability for meeting mission requirements, the report added.

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Press Freedom Group Calls on US to Declassify Records Regarding Alleged RT Activities

WASHINGTON, September 19 (Sputnik) - The US government should declassify records related to Russian media outlet RT's alleged influence activities in the United States, Freedom of the Press Foundation Daniel Ellsberg Chair on Government Secrecy Lauren Harper said on Thursday.

The Biden administration has accused RT of engaging in covert information and influence operations on behalf of the Russian government.

"Press freedom advocates have often been worried about these types of cases because it puts state-funded journalists in countries like Russia at risk of serious retaliation. Vetting the evidence is important for this reason, as is remembering that the documents in and of themselves should not be taken as the unbiased truth. They are pieces of evidence recording oftentimes subjective interpretations of events," Harper said.

Declassifying records related to the accusations could empower press advocates and skeptics to mount an informed opposition to the Biden administration's crackdown on Russian media, Harper said.

All state media outlets, including ones linked to the US government, seek to advance the interests of their country in some way, Harper said. US citizens are constitutionally entitled to consume "foreign propaganda" if they so choose, Harper added.

If RT's alleged activities are not substantially different from those of other state media outlets, then the investigation opens up outlets worldwide to retaliation, Harper said.

"The solution is straightforward. Declassify the documents themselves. This would rebuff arguments that the intelligence being presented is cherry picked or weak," Harper said.

The Biden administration's practice of declassifying intelligence is a good initiative, but its effort would be strengthened by declassifying records related to the intelligence, Harper said.

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US Arrests Alaska Man for Threatening to Kill Supreme Court Justices – Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 19 (Sputnik) – US authorities have arrested an Alaskan man who allegedly threatened to kill US Supreme Court Justices and their families, the Justice

Department said on Thursday.

"An Alaska man was arrested yesterday in Anchorage for allegedly threatening to injure and kill six US Supreme Court Justices and some of their family members," the statement said.

Court documents revealed that between March 10, 2023, and July 16, Panos Anastasiou, 76, sent over 465 messages to the Supreme Court through its public website.

"Beginning on Jan. 4, Anastasiou's messages allegedly escalated to messages intending to threaten harm toward the victims. The messages contained violent, racist, and homophobic rhetoric coupled with threats of assassination by torture, hanging, and firearms," the statement said.

Anastasiou is charged with nine counts of making threats against a federal judge and 13 counts of making threats in interstate commerce, according to the statement. The US District Court for the District of Alaska held an initial hearing on the case on Wednesday.

If convicted, Anastasiou may face up to 10 years in prison for each count of making threats against a federal judge and a maximum penalty of five years in prison for each count of making threats in interstate commerce.

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Atlantic Council Staff Upset With Plan to Let Elon Musk Introduce Italy's Meloni - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 19 (Sputnik) - Some members of the Atlantic Council (designated an undesirable foreign organization in Russia) are upset about the think tank's decision to allow billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk to introduce Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni at an upcoming event, Politico reported on Thursday.

Meloni will receive the Atlantic Council's Global Citizen Award at a gala on September 22. The think tank granted Meloni's request to have Musk introduce her at the event.

However, some Atlantic Council members are angry with the think tank's approval of Meloni's request due to Musk's statements regarding the Ukraine conflict, the report said, citing former and current Atlantic Council staffers.

Some staffers conveyed their displeasure during a call with Atlantic Council CEO Frederick Kempe on September 3, the report said.

Kempe contended that the think tank is nonpartisan and cannot deny Meloni's request based on Musk's opinions, the report said.

"Our staff includes individuals with a range of viewpoints," Kempe said in a statement to Politico. "This diversity of thought strengthens our work."

Regardless of Musk's inclusion in the event, some staffers were upset by the initial decision to grant Meloni an award due to her political party's stances on immigration and social issues, the report said.

The gala at which Meloni will receive the award will occur on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, the report added.

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US Not Worried About Jill Biden Encountering Putin at Sheinbaum Inauguration - White House

WASHINGTON, September 19 (Sputnik) - The United States is not worried about First Lady Jill Biden crossing paths with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the inauguration of Mexican President-elect Claudia Sheinbaum, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said on Thursday.

The White House announced a day earlier that the first lady would lead the US presidential delegation at Sheinbaum's inauguration on October 1.

"No," Jean-Pierre said when asked whether the prospects of Putin encountering Biden at the inauguration raised any concerns in Washington.

On August 8, the Mexican Secretariat of Foreign Affairs confirmed that Putin had been invited to Sheinbaum's inauguration. President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said that Mexico will not comply with the International Criminal Court's arrest warrant for Putin.

Lopez Obrador made the remarks in response to a communique by the Ukrainian Embassy in Mexico protesting the invitation of Putin and expressing hope the Mexican authorities would enforce the arrest warrant.

Lopez Obrador said the warrant does not apply to Mexico as it favors peace and stands against war, and has also proposed agreements for mediation for the parties in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

The Hague-based International Criminal Court in March 2023 issued an arrest warrant for Putin and Russia's Children's Rights Commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova over the alleged unlawful deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov has characterized the arrest warrants as outrageous and unacceptable, noting that Russia is not party to the Rome Statute that created ICC and does not recognize its jurisdiction.

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US Expects Quad Leaders to Discuss 'Threat' Posed by Russia-North Korea Cooperation - NSC

WASHINGTON, September 19 (Sputnik) - Leaders at the Quad Summit are expected to discuss the threat posed by the growing cooperation between Russia and North Korea, White House National Security Council Senior Director for East Asia and Oceania Mira Rapp-Hooper said on Thursday.

"I would... expect them to be changing views and talking about what they can do to counter growing DPRK and Russia cooperation, which of course poses a real threat not only to Europe but to the Indo-Pacific," Rapp-Hooper said during a press briefing.

US President Joe Biden will host the fourth in-person Quad Leaders Summit in Wilmington, Delaware on September 21, where he will welcome the leaders of Australia, India, and Japan.

The Quad is an intergovernmental security forum for strategic dialogue between Australia,

India, Japan, and the United States, founded in 2007 and reestablished in 2017 after a nine-year pause.

In June, Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un signed a strategic partnership treaty in Pyongyang. Kim said the pact provided for the development of economic, political and military cooperation, while Putin did not rule out closer military cooperation with Pyongyang.

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US Expects India to Increase Regional Leadership, Partnership With Washington - NSC

WASHINGTON, September 19 (Sputnik) - The United States seeks an India that is increasingly a leader in the Indo-Pacific region as it becomes more aligned with the United States, White House National Security Council Senior Director for East Asia and Oceania Mira Rapp-Hooper said on Thursday.

"When it comes to the role that we expect India to play... The way we think about India's role, it's captured in our Indo-Pacific strategy, where we say that the United States seeks an India that is increasingly a leader in the region and increasingly partnered with the United States," Rapp-Hooper said during a press briefing.

Later this week, US President Joe Biden will host the fourth in-person Quad Leaders Summit in Wilmington, Delaware, on September 21, where he will welcome the leaders of Australia, India, and Japan.

The Quad is an intergovernmental security forum for strategic dialogue between Australia, India, Japan, and the United States, founded in 2007 and reestablished in 2017 after a nine-year pause.

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Trudeau to Host Macron September 25-26 to Advance 'Shared Priorities' - Statement

WASHINGTON, September 19 (Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau will host his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron on September 25-26 to further advance shared priorities in the areas of peace and security, the Office of the Prime Minister said in a statement on Thursday.

"The Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, today announced that the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, will visit Canada from September 25 to 26, 2024, to continue the close collaboration between our two countries on shared priorities, including peace, security, and collective defense," the statement said.

Trudeau will host Macron in Ottawa where the officials are set to discuss cooperation on geopolitical issues of "shared interest" such as Canada and France's support for Ukraine's defense, the statement said.

Discussions will also seek to find ways in which both countries can respond to emerging threats such as disinformation, the statement also said.

Macron's visit will include a stop in Montreal, where Trudeau will showcase Canada's innovation and skilled workforce in science, research and technology, especially in artificial intelligence, the statement added.

Trudeau will reaffirm Ottawa's commitment to the responsible adoption of AI, including within the framework of Canada's and Frances's Group of Seven chairmanships in 2025 and 2026.

Next week's visit will mark Macron's second to Canada after he and Trudeau participate at the UN General Assembly high-level week taking place from September 24-30.

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Blinken, UN Chief Discuss Transition of Haiti MSS to Peacekeeping Operation - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 19 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres about potentially shifting the Multinational Security Support mission (MSS) in Haiti to a UN peacekeeping operation to provide long-term security, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said after the call on Thursday.

"Secretary Blinken and Secretary-General Guterres discussed the possibility of transforming the MSS mission into a UN peacekeeping mission to ensure the Haitian people receive sustainable security support," Miller said.

In June, Haitian Prime Minister Garry Conille welcomed a 400-strong contingent of Kenyan law enforcement officers that landed at the Port-au-Prince airport, marking the beginning of the MSS mission to the country.

Earlier in September, US Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Brian Nichols said Washington hopes to see the deployment of additional MSS force members to Haiti from several other countries besides Kenya in the very near future. Nichols also said the US expects the international community to make additional financial resources available to the United Nations Trust Fund for the MSS mission in Haiti.

On February 29, gang violence erupted in Haiti's capital Port-au-Prince. The gangs said their goal was to prevent the country's prime minister from returning to Haiti and took control over parts of the city. The gangs also stormed Haiti's largest prison and freed an unspecified number of inmates. Following the events, the Haitian government declared a state of emergency in the capital region.

Haiti has long been mired in a socio-economic and political crisis that escalated after the assassination of President Jovenel Moise in 2021. The country has faced an unprecedented increase in the activities of criminal groups that engage in extortion, kidnapping for ransom, and control entire areas of the country, as well as foreign interference.

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Trump Appearance Alongside Duda Canceled - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 19 (Sputnik) - A joint appearance of former US President Donald Trump and Polish President Andrzej Duda was canceled, Reuters reported on Thursday.

Trump and Duda were set to appear at a Polish-American Catholic shrine near Philadelphia on Sunday, the report said, citing a source familiar with the Trump campaign's plans.

However, the event was canceled for unclear reasons, the report said.

Multiple foreign leaders will visit the United States in the coming days to attend the UN General Assembly.

Trump said that he will meet with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and potentially Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

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US Will Not Support Offensive Israeli Ground Operations - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 19 (Sputnik) - The United States will support defensive but not offensive operations by Israel, Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said on Thursday.

"We are there in the defense of Israel, should we need to come to their defense. We're not going in and supporting offensive ground operations in what they do, whether it be in the north or in Gaza," Singh said during a press briefing, when asked if the US would support an Israeli offensive into Lebanese territory.

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us will support Israeli defense but not offensive operations - pentagon

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Excluding Russia From UN Security Council Would Be Very Difficult to Achieve - Miller

WASHINGTON, September 19 (Sputnik) - The US State Department said on Thursday that excluding Russia from the UN Security Council would be an incredibly difficult outcome to achieve.

"It is something that would be incredibly difficult to achieve," State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said during a press briefing.

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US State Dept. Says No Engagement Expected Between Blinken, Lavrov at UN General Assembly

WASHINGTON, September 19 (Sputnik) - The US State Department said on Thursday that it does not expect any engagement between Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly.

"I do not," Miller said during a press briefing when asked if he expects there to be any engagement between Lavrov and Blinken.

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Biden Falsely Says Never Met With Federal Reserve Chair Powell as US President

WASHINGTON, September 19 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden falsely said on Thursday that he has never met with Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell since becoming president.

"I've never once spoken to the chairman of the Fed, since I became president," Biden said during remarks at the Economic Club of Washington, DC.

However, Biden has met with Powell since becoming president, including on May 31, 2022.

In July, Powell said that he has not had any private meetings or phone calls with Biden since that time.

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US State Dept. Calls Iran Sending Hacked Trump Docs to Biden Campaign 'Troubling'

WASHINGTON, September 19 (Sputnik) - The US State Department finds Iran attempts to interfere in the US election by hacking Trump campaign materials troubling, spokesperson Matthew Miller told reporters on Thursday.

On Wednesday, the FBI said Iranian cyber actors sent hacked Trump campaign materials to the Biden campaign during the summer, which former President Donald Trump called "real" foreign election interference.

"I think these latest attempts are nothing new by the Iranian regime. It sought to undermine democracies around the globe for years. But of course, they're absolutely troubling. Iran should not interfere in our elections," Miller said.

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US Finds No Record of Embassy Communication in Ukraine on Trump Assassination Plot -Miller

WASHINGTON, September 19 (Sputnik) — The US has found no record of communication to its embassy in Ukraine regarding a threat posed by the alleged assassin Ryan Wesley Routh in a

plot to assassinate Donald Trump, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Thursday.

"We to date have found no record of such a communication, I can't rule out completely that there wasn't any such communication," Miller said during a press briefing.

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Biden to Meet Zelenskyy at White House on September 26 - Press Secretary

WASHINGTON, September 19 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden is set to host Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on September 26, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Thursday.

"On Thursday, September 26, President Biden will meet with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine at the White House," Jean-Pierre said in a statement.

The two leaders will discuss the Ukraine conflict and Kiev's strategic planning, the release added.

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.

Sentencing in Hunter Biden Firearm Case Set for December 4 - Filing

WASHINGTON, September 19 (Sputnik) - Hunter Biden will face sentencing on December 4 for firearms charges, according to an order filed in the US District Court for the District of Delaware on Thursday.

"The new sentencing date is set for 12/4/2024 at 2:00 p.m. in Courtroom 4A," Judge Maryellen Noreika said in the order.

In June, a jury found Biden guilty of making a false statement to acquire a firearm, making a false statement with respect to information required to be kept in records and possessing a firearm as an unlawful user of a controlled substance.

Biden faces a maximum penalty of 25 years in prison, although sentences for federal crimes are typically less than the maximum penalties, according to the US Justice Department.

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Israel's Actions Continue to Erode Foundation of 2-State Solution - Chinese Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, September 19 (Sputnik) - Israel continues to take actions that erode the basis of a two-state solution in the conflict with the Palestinians, Chinese Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Geng Shuang said on Thursday.

"Israel's actions continue to erode the foundation of the two-state solution and increasingly reveal its rejection of and resistance to the two-state solution," Geng said during a UN Security

Council meeting on the situation in the Middle East.

Israel has intensified over the past three months its military operations and has escalated provocations despite the United States' assurances that Israel had accepted the proposed ceasefire deal in the Gaza Strip, Geng said.

Moreover, Israel continues to have an exclusive veto over Palestinian statehood, preventing the Palestinians from realizing their self-determination, Geng added.

On Wednesday, the UN General Assembly passed a non-binding resolution urging Israel to pull out of the occupied Palestinian territories within a year.

The resolution was passed 124-14, with 43 abstentions. The United States was one of the countries that voted against it.

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hunter Biden to be sentenced December 4 over gun charges - court filing

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US Coast Guard Says Repatriated 124 People to Haiti After Illegal Migration Interdictions

WASHINGTON, September 19 (Sputnik) - The US Coast Guard said on Thursday that it repatriated 124 people to Haiti after they were caught trying to illegally migrate via sea.

"Coast Guard Cutter Bear's crew repatriated 124 people to Haiti, Wednesday, following two separate interdictions of irregular, unlawful migration voyages off the coast of Haiti," the Coast Guard said in a statement.

Anyone attempting unlawful maritime migration will be rescued and repatriated to their country of origin or departure, the statement said.

The US Coast Guard has repatriated a total of 631 migrants to Haiti since October 1, 2023, according to the statement.

The repatriations to Haiti come amid contested reports about the impact of Haitian migration to the United States, particularly in Springfield, Ohio.

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US Continues to Gather Facts About Series of Explosions in Lebanon – Deputy UN Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, September 19 (Sputnik) – The United States continues to gather facts about a series of explosions in Lebanon and believes that a broader conflict is not in any party's interest, US Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Robert Wood said on Thursday.

"The United States continues to gather facts [about explosions in Lebanon], and we reiterate that it is not in any party's interests for there to be a broader regional conflict," Wood said during

a UN Security Council meeting on the situation in the Middle East.

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US Imposes New Russia-Related Sanctions - Treasury Department

WASHINGTON, September 19 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed new sanctions on five entities and one person over an alleged scheme involving payment mechanisms between Russia and North Korea, the Treasury Department said in a press release on Thursday.

"Today, the Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated a network of five entities and one individual — based in Russia and in the Russia-occupied Georgian region of South Ossetia — that have enabled and supported ongoing efforts to establish illicit payment mechanisms between Russia and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)," the release said.

The targets include MRB Bank in South Ossetia and Stroytrejd LLC in Moscow, as well as TSMRBank and its vice president Dmitry Yuryevich Nikulin, the Treasury said.

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Schumer Says Filing Vehicle for Legislation to Prevent US Government Shutdown

WASHINGTON, September 19 (Sputnik) - US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said on Thursday that he will soon file cloture on a legislative vehicle to fund the federal government and prevent a shutdown before the end of the month.

"Later today, I'll file cloture on a legislative vehicle that will enable us to prevent a Trump shutdown, in the event that Speaker [Mike] Johnson does not work with us in a bipartisan, bicameral manner," Schumer said during remarks on the Senate floor.

On Wednesday, the US House of Representatives blocked a six-month continuing resolution to fund the government, to which an election integrity bill was attached.

Former US President Donald Trump urged Republicans to oppose a continuing resolution if Democrats do not provide assurances on election integrity.

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US Senate Majority Leader Schumer Says Will File Cloture on Legislative Vehicle to Prevent Government Shutdown