

10/4/24 Friday

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'The Myth of America is Over': US, Israel Reportedly Downplay Level of Destruction by Iran

The report added that 20 missiles struck the Nevatim Airbase, in central Israel, and that at least two missiles landed near Tel Aviv in Cinema City Gllot, Hod Hasharon, which is close to Israel's Mossad spy agency headquarters.

At least two dozen long-range Iranian ballistic missiles were able to break through both Israeli and other Western air defenses on Tuesday night, the [Washington Post](#) reported. The missiles struck or landed near at least three military and intelligence installations, a review of videos and photos of the attack and its aftermath showed.

"The findings raise questions about the full scope of the damage to Israeli military bases and suggest that Iran was more successful in evading Israel's defenses than in April," the report wrote.

The Pentagon declined to comment on the report's findings, the Post said. And the Israeli military did not respond to a request for comment, either. Phil Kelly, a political commentator and socialist activist based in Belfast joined Sputnik's [Political Misfits](#) on Friday, and suggested that Western media is "struggling" to "give credence to Israeli propaganda".

"...it's interesting when the Washington Post [...] newspaper, which is not a go-to read for me anymore, is starting to find itself struggling to give credence to Israeli propaganda and more and more things you're starting to find that where the lurid kind of propaganda of the Israeli regime is just too much. It's, the stenographers at the Washington Post and various Western media just struggle to bring themselves to go that far because of its ridiculousness," Kelly explained.

"It's clear Israel was hit hard. The Iron Dome was not so secure that Iran made a point and will probably be forced to make further points, I would imagine, because Israel is hell-bent on escalation. It wants to drag other parties into this abyss with it," he added.

Using commercial satellite imagery, researchers have identified more than 30 points where Iranian missiles may have impacted an air base in southern Israel, a report from [NHPR](#) (New Hampshire and NPR) revealed. The images showed damaged hangars, buildings, taxiways and a crater on one of the runways at Nevatim Airbase, the report writes.

However, both Israel and the US have attempted to downplay the amount of damage that Israel has suffered: "This attack appears to have been defeated and ineffective," said U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan.

Sputnik's Michelle Witte also noted that the US has a law that dates back to the 1990s which restricts the quality of commercial satellite imagery that US companies can sell if they depict Israel and Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories. An unusually specific restriction, she added, that seems to give Israel a special level of protection other countries do not receive from the US. "But, in terms of that special relationship, it shouldn't shock anyone when you look at the Israeli lobby that basically owns [the US] political system. It would seem that it would go to these lengths to stop people looking under the rock that is Israel, stop people seeing the reality of the

situation, whether it is how much damage they've sustained or the mass graves that they are filling with innocent civilians.”

“...when Israel commits its crimes, when Israel commits its invasion, when Israel keeps bombing different sovereign countries, the response of the West is to help them cover it up, help them help their propaganda dominate, make sure it's the Israeli narrative that we hear and do not allow people to see the truth of what is unfolding in this conflict. It should set alarm bells ringing,” the analyst added.

At least 215 people in the US are believed to be dead as a result of the recent storm, Hurricane Helene. In May, NOAA National Weather Service forecasters at the Climate Prediction Center predicted above-normal hurricane activity in the Atlantic basin this year. Despite their prediction, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas announced this [week](#) that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will not have enough funds to last the rest of the hurricane season.

Yet, just a week ago, [Israel](#) announced that it had secured an \$8.7 billion aid package from the US to support its military goals.

“The reality is that most US politicians, when they talk about putting country before politics, they're talking about Israel,” Kelly explained. “And that should really enrage ordinary US citizens who have struggled for a long time, seeing that their living standards drop and wondering why in hell your government is sending billions of dollars to a racist, colonial regime, a small regime in the Middle East, which is committing genocide...”

“...the myth of America, I think, is over. It was struggling long before it went all in on genocide Joe's watch to push Europe into World War III and to facilitate [Israeli Prime Minister] Benjamin Netanyahu in the ethnic cleansing of Palestine. But the rest of the world sees the US for what it is, and that is why you're seeing real concrete moves in the global side to disengage,” he added. “That the war in Ukraine was really a starting point for that, and it's gained momentum because the US cannot be trusted.”

“Europe's starting to get a bit worried. Macron made a few noises about how Europe needs to keep an eye on the US - slow learner there, Mr. Macron. As Kissinger said, the US doesn't have friends, it has interests. The world's awakening to that,” the analyst said. “But, make no mistake, this genocide is absolutely only happening because the US is allowing it to happen.”

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Bibi Bugs Boris' John - Cartoon

Johnson would resign later that year from his role as foreign secretary, but would meet the Israeli leader again in 10 Downing Street in 2019 during his time as prime minister.

Former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has suggested that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu bugged his loo during a visit to London in 2017. Johnson said his security team found the device after the Israeli prime minister used the privy, [The Jerusalem Post](#) reported citing Johnson's recently released book.

Johnson said a listening device was discovered in the private bathroom at the Foreign Office after it was used by the Israeli leader during one of their meetings. At the time, Johnson was the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

"Thither Bibi repaired for a while, and it may or may not be a coincidence but I am told that later, when they were doing a regular sweep for bugs, they found a listening device in the thunderbox [a slang term for bathroom]," Johnson wrote in his new memoir.

Around the same time as the meeting with Johnson, Israel allegedly planted listening devices in the White House, according to the Telegraph. The Middle Eastern country has also been accused of spying on the International Criminal Court (ICC), [The Guardian](#) reported.

The report claimed that Israel has been running an almost decade-long secret "war" against the court which announced arrest warrants for Netanyahu and his defense minister, Yoav Gallant, in May for alleged war crimes in Gaza. Israel had deployed its intelligence agencies to reportedly surveil, hack, pressure, "smear", and allegedly "threaten" senior ICC staff in an attempt to derail the court's inquiries, the report wrote in late May.

According to one intelligence source, the report writes, Netanyahu took on a "close interest" in the intelligence operations against the ICC and was described as being "obsessed" with information on the case.

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US continues to hand-hold Israel despite its wrongdoings Iran launched at least 180 missiles into Israel on Tuesday as the region has entered a growing escalation that is threatening to push the Middle East into a wider war. According to reports, Israelis "scrambled for bomb shelters as air raid sirens sounded and the orange glow of missiles streaked across the sky,"

following Iran's retaliatory missile launch. 🗨️ "I think that the strategy on the part of the Israelis for the past many months has been to try to draw the US more directly into the conflict on Israel's side. [President Masoud] Pezeshkian and the Iranian government have shown great restraint. Great restraint in the face of direct attacks from the Israelis," John Kiriakou, a former CIA officer and co-host of Sputnik's Political Misfits, told Sputnik's Fault Lines. The former CIA officer added that the Iranian government is under "great pressure" from its public to act in the face of Israel's violence, where one has to start thinking about whether or not it's "safe for the Iranian government" not to respond. 🗨️ "Let's be clear, [the US] speak out of both ends of their mouth. The US says it wants a ceasefire, but, on the other hand, it continues providing the assistance and backing, and with other claims made by US officials that they will back Israel should it go into Lebanon," added Michael Maloof, a former senior security policy analyst in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, who also spoke to Fault Lines. 🗨️ "The Israelis are ignoring all cautionaries from the US, and they know that the United States will do nothing," Maloof added.

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'The myth of America is over': US, Israel reportedly downplay level of destruction by Iran

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Erdogan to Attend BRICS Summit as Turkiye Continues Steady March Away From West

The Eurasian country has been recognized as a candidate for full membership in the European Union since 1999, but its efforts to join the body have stalled in the decades since. Turkiye's future lies with the group of nations seeking to create an alternative to Western hegemony via the BRICS economic bloc, and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan knows it. That's according to filmmaker and analyst Regis Tremblay, who offered insight on the matter as it was announced that [President Erdogan would attend the bloc's annual summit](#) this year in the Russian city of Kazan.

"President Erdogan has confirmed his participation in the 16th BRICS summit's outreach/BRICS+ session," announced Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov during a press conference Thursday.

"The Ukraine conflict is going to be one of the issues that will be discussed, particularly at the high level, when we welcome the Turkish leader to Kazan," Ryabkov added; Turkiye has approached the ongoing Western proxy war with more caution than other NATO members, previously playing host to peace negotiations in 2022.

"Erdogan is doing what Erdogan has always done: he's straddling both sides of the proverbial picket fence," said Tremblay on [Sputnik's The Critical Hour program Thursday](#). "Erdogan has

been trying to be a peacemaker between Russia and Ukraine... I'm not sure that it will be the top issue in Kazan this month, but the conflict in Ukraine will be on the agenda somewhere." "I think the main topic in Kazan will be a new international monetary system," the documentarian clarified. "That has been all over Russian media for the last couple of weeks while this preparation is going on for Kazan. So, I'm really glad that Erdogan is going to attend this meeting. I'm not sure that he's going to be invited to be a member right yet, but I think it'll be a feeling out session."

Turkiye has often maintained a fraught relationship with its Western allies, Tremblay noted. The Eurasian country has been recognized as a candidate for full membership in the European Union since 1999, but its efforts to join the body have stalled in the decades since. A majority Muslim country, Turkiye maintains a culture distinct from that of historically Christian Europe – Turkiye's influence in the Islamic world has grown in recent months as President Erdogan has become a strong proponent of the Palestinian cause.

Turkiye frequently takes advantage of its outsider status in NATO, previously holding up the ascension of Finland and Sweden to the alliance while it attempted to secure the extradition of Kurdish separatists. The United States could opt to eventually punish Turkiye's independence with sanctions, claimed host Garland Nixon, providing Ankara with even more incentive to build links beyond the US and its European allies.

"I'm sure that Turkiye has upset Washington and those people who are controlling what's happening in Washington because Erdogan really has broken from NATO," said Tremblay, pointing out the country's relatively independent position on the Ukraine proxy war. "If Erdogan is concerned that he's going to be sanctioned, it would make sense for him to cozy up to the BRICS countries and to try to get himself involved in that international monetary system that they're creating."

"He and Putin have had a very open and frequent relationship," he noted. "They have talked on the phone many times. They've met in person many times. Russia has got huge investments in Turkiye, especially helping them build nuclear power plants. And Turkiye really needs Russia as a friend. And so I think maybe Putin said, 'you maybe better climb over on this other side of the fence.'"

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Russia 'Moving Like a Steamroller' Through Ukraine-Controlled Territory as US Support Dries Up

Moscow is now advancing at its fastest rate in over two years, according to observers – the result of Russia's commitment to its war of attrition and Ukrainian losses recently suffered during its ill-fated operation in the Kursk region.

Moscow continues to steadily advance through Ukraine-controlled territory as the United States turns its attention towards the Middle East, notes independent journalist Sarah Bils.

The US Navy veteran and co-founder of DD Geopolitics joined [Sputnik's The Backstory program](#) this week as reports emerged that Russia had liberated the coal mining town of Ugledar in the

Donetsk People's Republic (DPR). Russian officials confirmed the development Thursday after the Ukrainian military [claimed](#) it was withdrawing from the city after a week of heavy fighting. Located at an elevation of 614 feet, Ugledar is a strategic link between southern and eastern fronts in the conflict and a crucial supply hub. Russia's control of the settlement marks a major step towards the complete liberation of the DPR, also allowing it to protect a nearby rail line running from Crimea to the Donbass region. Ukraine had previously launched attacks on Russian supply lines from the city, which claimed a population of about 14,000 in 2022.

"The interesting thing about Ugledar is.. that there's nothing behind Ugledar. There's no fortifications behind Ugledar," noted Bills. "So what the [Russian] troops can now do is sweep to the west and then come up from the south and hit up Kurakhovo, which is not fortified on the south side. So allegedly the Ukrainians will likely have to retreat again, and that will be from Kurakhovo."

"The situation is looking like it's kind of panning out to be a lot like at Avdeyevka where the front collapses, the city falls, and then there's no reserves behind it and people are just running," she continued. "The retreat is actually quite ugly right now."

The [liberation of Avdeyevka earlier this year](#) was seen as one of Russia's most significant gain in months of fighting. In another sign of a growing breakdown in discipline among Kiev's troops, Ukrainian soldiers spontaneously fled their positions as the Russian armed forces closed in on the city. Kiev attempted to save face by giving an order to retreat two days later, but by then the plummeting morale of its military had become apparent.

Russia is now advancing at its fastest rate in over two years, according to observers – the result of Moscow's commitment to its war of attrition and Ukrainian losses recently suffered during its ill-fated operation in the Kursk region. Ukraine's attack on Russian territory briefly made headlines in Western media but forced the Kiev regime to expend some of its best-trained troops and most advanced weaponry.

"Kursk [region] was a failed endeavor that lost almost 20,000 Ukrainian soldiers," Bills pointed out. "I'm having trouble understanding why they're not giving anything to Ukraine and it's not because we've run out of stuff to give to Ukraine – we can just create money. I think that the American public have sort of fallen out of love with this idea of taking down Russia via Ukraine when they are now faced with the opportunity to possibly take down Iran via Israel. It's an attention span thing. It's a priority thing. It's an election thing."

"Russia's moving like a steamroller through the west and those troops that went to the north [in the Kursk region] are not coming back, they're dead," the analyst added. "So it's getting worse."

"I think that people need to understand that Ukraine is now just one front of this now very large-scale war, which includes the Levant and parts of Africa," Bills warned, "I would also include Africa at this point because Ukraine is there and so is Russia... The priorities now have to be shifted because now we're looking at a much wider scale war for America."

The ongoing conflict threatens to strain the United States to the limit, observers warn, with the US now at risk of being forced to support its ally Israel on multiple fronts while it continues to ship arms to Ukraine and Taiwan.

"In Andrei Martyanov's new book he actually talks about why the ego – the inflated ego and the delusions of grandeur of the United States – will actually ultimately be its downfall," Bills claimed. "We overestimate our capabilities and who we can feasibly take on."

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Chemical Lab Fire in Georgia Demonstrates Regulatory Capture of US Agencies

Local residents are reporting symptoms such as coughing, lung tightness and shortness of breath after an explosion at a plant outside Atlanta released chlorine and other chemicals. An explosion and release of gas at a pool and spa chemical plant outside Atlanta, Georgia threatens residents with long term environmental consequences, while the response to the incident is shining a spotlight on corporations' influence over US regulatory agencies. An explosion occurred Sunday at a facility run by the company BioLab, Inc. in the city of Conyers, Georgia, about 20 miles outside Atlanta city limits. A fire on the roof of the plant was extinguished, but a massive plume of smoke shot into the air after water from a malfunctioning sprinkler came in contact with a water-reactive chemical. Thousands of people in the surrounding area were ordered to evacuate while others remain under a shelter-in-place order. Air quality data from a local meteorologist has since brought the government response into question; one reading suggested airborne chlorine was at 22 times the so-called "action level" for the US Environmental Protection Agency to investigate the matter.

Author and environmental organizer Tina Landis, who writes for the website [Liberation News](#), joined [Sputnik's Political Misfits program Friday](#) to discuss the incident.

"Chlorine gas is very dangerous, especially considering it's been lingering around for many days now in the Atlanta metro area," Landis noted. "It's a skin irritant, eye irritant, obviously it irritates your respiratory system and leaves permanent damage to your lungs after prolonged exposure...especially, if you already have respiratory conditions. It can be deadly and for youth; for pregnant people, it's all more dangerous."

"They don't actually even know how much is in the air at the moment," she added, pointing out that nearly half of air monitoring stations located near the plant are not able to measure chlorine levels. "It takes much longer to disperse than other pollutants would... They put out an [evacuation] order, but there was no assistance for people to evacuate."

Landis faulted media for downplaying the danger of the leak as well as local officials, who she claimed were more concerned with protecting local businesses than residents of the region.

"There's these shelter-in-place orders that are from 7pm to 7am," Landis explained, "because they're worried more about the economy than they are about people's health because they want people to go to work as usual, go shopping as usual during the day. And also, these are low-income areas outside of Atlanta that, if you have older housing, your windows and doors do not seal airtight. So that chlorine gas is getting into people's homes."

"There's just a lot of outrage right now in the area because of the lack of government response."

The leak is the third documented accident at the BioLab facility since 2004. One news outlet reported that the US Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has cited the plant for 18 violations over the past two decades, with most of the infractions deemed "serious." Yet the company has only been fined a total of \$67,000 over 20 years; BioLab's yearly revenue is [estimated](#) at some \$3.5 million.

Local residents are already [reporting](#) symptoms such as coughing, lung tightness and shortness of breath. An expose in the American Prospect [revealed](#) that BioLab's owner, the private equity firm Centerbridge Partners, has a history of putting safety regulations second to shareholder profits.

"The environmental regulatory system in the US was always flawed, but starting under [former US President Ronald] Reagan it's been slowly chipped away, the powers of the EPA and other organizations to actually protect people," Landis claimed. "These fines that are given to industries for polluting and literally killing people in the communities around them are so minimal. They're just seen as an operating expense and they just increase the cost of their products to compensate for it."

"So it's really not a disincentive for them to take the needed safety and maintenance actions that are needed to prevent these accidents," she explained. "This is the problem of the capitalist system that protects the rights of corporations over human health and the health of our environment, right? It's so criminal."

"The implications of what's happening right now in the Atlanta area there's no way to know, but it's potentially impacting millions of people's health long term. The soil and the water pollution and the pollution that's in the infrastructure, in the buildings, will be long lasting, similar to what happened with the train derailment in Ohio the other year. People are still living with those toxins in their environment, and no one really even knows the health implications of it. And this happens time and again in this country, because there just aren't the protections and the strong regulations that are needed."

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First Amendment Makes It 'Really Hard to Govern Today' – Ex-Secretary of State

The comment caused an uproar among conservatives, who have grown increasingly sensitive towards efforts to involve the federal government in the moderation of online content.

Former Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry said the quiet part out loud at a World Economic Forum event recently, lamenting that the United States' constitutional protection of [free speech](#) is a "major block" to stamping out online disinformation.

"The dislike of and anguish over social media is just growing and growing," said the ex-Secretary of State during a panel on green energy and sustainable development. "It is part of our problem, particularly in democracies, in terms of building consensus around any issue. It's really hard to govern today."

"You know there's a lot of discussion now about how you curb those entities in order to guarantee that you're going to have some accountability on facts," he continued. "If people only go to one source, and the source they go to is sick and has an agenda and they're putting out disinformation, our First Amendment stands as a major block to be able to just hammer it out of existence."

The comment caused an uproar among conservatives, who have grown increasingly sensitive towards efforts to further involve the federal government in the moderation of online content since [the 2016 election of Donald Trump](#). President Joe Biden was forced to [backtrack](#) from

plans to establish a “disinformation czar” two years ago when the idea drew fierce [criticism](#) from political opponents and some experts.

“Kerry is sitting there saying, precisely, [that] we need one central source of information that everybody depends on,” explained independent journalist Jim Kavanagh on [Sputnik’s The Critical Hour program Friday](#).

“He’s [saying] we should be dependent on our information and our judgment of what the facts and the truth are on the government that lied to us about WMDs, the government that lied to us for 20 years about Afghanistan... the government who’s lying to us all the time. ‘It’s a real tragedy that people are actually undermining the consensus that we want to have for believing those lies that we’ve been telling.’”

[“This is anti-democratic,”](#) Kavanagh claimed. “It’s completely contrary to everything that supposed liberals stood for for 50 years and they’re all eating it up.”

Host Garland Nixon pointed to the removal of Glenn Diesen’s channel on YouTube as an indication of the growing trend towards online censorship. The professor and public intellectual from Norway recorded a video four years ago explaining Russia’s security interests regarding Ukraine and the region, concluding that Moscow had been unfairly demonized as a security threat.

The claim was apparently enough to justify Diesen’s channel being suspended, along with accusations the political scientist was guilty of spreading “Russian propaganda.”

“When the goons meet at Davos or wherever else the West is having a little soiree or any of these other foundations – Bilderberg, Chatham House, Bloomberg, all that kind of stuff – they’re talking to each other,” said podcaster and commentator Steve Poikonen. “They’re never talking to us, only about us and all of the people in that room certainly agree with John Kerry that it would be way easier to enter into a technocratic fascist state than anything that markets itself as a democracy.”

“Let’s just move into the technocratic panopticon because all of the digital infrastructure has already been built for it.”

“Let me add because Kerry’s talking about how it’s hard to build a consensus: there is a consensus – just look at the polling data,” said host Wilmer Leon. “70 percent of Americans polled don’t want this conflict in Gaza to continue, almost 70 percent of Americans polled [don’t want their hard-earned tax dollars wasted in Ukraine](#). There is a consensus, they’re just ignoring it.”

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Israel, an outgrowth of European colonialism, now threatens West’s dominance

The emergence of the Zionist project owes much to the legacy of European imperialism, but Israel’s conduct now threatens to bring a dying Western hegemony crashing down, according to commentators Robert Fantina and Niko House on Sputnik’s The Critical Hour program.

"Remember, Israel is the monster of the US's creation and it's one that it's lost control of," claimed Fantina. "The possibility of Israel pulling the United States into a war in the Middle East grows every day, and it would be a disaster for everyone."

Theodor Herzl, the founder of Zionism, conceived of the project in explicitly racial terms, attempting to sell Europeans on the concept of an "outpost of [Western] civilization against barbarism" in the Arab world. The UK spearheaded Israel's creation in land it had colonized in the Levant but the US quickly became its most powerful backer. The defense of Israel has become a primary driver of Western policy in the Middle East even as some question the ramifications for US national security and American interests more broadly.

"I do believe, honestly, that the United States did want a ceasefire agreement because they have interests in Lebanon," said House. "[Israel] can't handle that war by themselves. So that means we're going to have to get involved and that is a very unpopular position here in the US."

House noted the US is struggling amid its proxy war in Ukraine as Prime Minister Netanyahu raises the prospect of US support for Israel's multi-front war, with Iran representing a formidable opponent.

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■ Erdogan to attend BRICS summit as Turkiye continues steady march away from West

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● "Erdogan is doing what Erdogan has always done: he's straddling both sides of the proverbial picket fence," said Tremblay on Sputnik's The Critical Hour program, responding to the announcement that Erdogan would attend the outreach/BRICS+ session during the upcoming annual BRICS summit in Russia. "Erdogan has been trying to be a peacemaker between Russia and Ukraine... I'm really glad that Erdogan is going to attend this meeting. I'm not sure that he's going to be invited to be a member right yet, but I think it'll be a feeling out session."

Turkiye has often maintained a fraught relationship with its Western allies, Tremblay noted. The United States could opt to eventually punish Turkiye's independence with sanctions, claimed host Garland Nixon, providing Ankara with even more incentive to build links beyond the US and its European allies.

● "I'm sure that Turkiye has upset Washington and those people who are controlling what's happening in Washington because Erdogan really has broken from NATO," said Tremblay, pointing out the country's independent position on the Ukraine proxy war. "If Erdogan is

concerned that he's going to be sanctioned, it would make sense for him to cozy up to the BRICS countries and to try to get himself involved in that international monetary system that they're creating.”

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Russia ‘moving like a steamroller’ through Ukraine-controlled territory as US support dries up

Moscow continues to steadily advance through Ukraine-controlled territory as the US turns its attention towards the Middle East, notes independent journalist Sarah Bils. The US Navy veteran and co-founder of DD Geopolitics joined Sputnik’s The Backstory program this week as Russia liberated the coal mining town of Ugledar in the Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR).

● “The interesting thing about Ugledar is.. that there's nothing behind Ugledar. There's no fortifications behind Ugledar,” noted Bils. “So what the [Russian] troops can now do is sweep to the west and then come up from the south and hit up Kurakhovo, which is not fortified on the south side.”

Located at an elevation of 614 feet, Ugledar is a strategic link between southern and eastern fronts in the conflict and a crucial supply hub. Russia’s control of the settlement marks a major step towards the complete liberation of the DPR. Russia is now advancing at its fastest rate in over two years, according to observers – the result of Moscow’s commitment to its war of attrition and Ukrainian losses recently suffered during its ill-fated aggression on the Kursk region.

● “Kursk [region] was a failed endeavor that lost almost 20,000 Ukrainian soldiers,” Bils pointed out. “I think that the American public have sort of fallen out of love with this idea of taking down Russia via Ukraine.”

The ongoing conflict threatens to strain the US to the limit, observers warn, with the US now at risk of being forced to support its ally Israel on multiple fronts while it continues to ship arms to Ukraine and Taiwan.

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Chemical lab fire demonstrates regulatory capture of US agencies

An explosion and release of gas at a pool and spa chemical plant outside Atlanta, Georgia threatens residents with long term environmental consequences, while the response to the incident is shining a spotlight on corporations’ influence over US regulatory agencies.

“Chlorine gas is very dangerous, especially considering it's been lingering around for many days now in the Atlanta metro area,” noted author and environmental organizer Tina Landis on Sputnik’s Political Misfits program. “It’s a skin irritant, eye irritant, obviously it irritates your respiratory system and leaves permanent damage to your lungs after prolonged exposure.”

“They don’t actually even know how much is in the air at the moment,” she added, pointing out that nearly half of air monitoring stations located near the plant are not able to measure chlorine levels. “They put out an [evacuation] order, but there was no assistance for people to evacuate.”

Air quality data from a local meteorologist has since brought the government response into question; one reading suggested airborne chlorine was at 22 times the so-called “action level” for the US Environmental Protection Agency to investigate the matter.

“These fines that are given to industries for polluting and literally killing people in the communities around them are so minimal. They’re just seen as an operating expense and they just increase the cost of their products to compensate for it,” Landis explained.

The leak is the third accident at the plant since 2004. OSHA has reportedly cited the plant for 18 violations over 20 years, with most of the infractions deemed “serious.”

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Biden Privately Admits He is Unpopular, Ready to Disappear From Campaign Trail - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden has been largely absent from public view in the final months of his presidency, privately acknowledging he is unpopular and willing to retreat into the shadows so as not to harm Kamala Harris' campaign, Axios reported on Friday, citing people familiar with the matter.

Both the president and First Lady Jill Biden have quietly stepped aside from taking part in any campaign events while Harris’ team has not insisted on their participation in them, the report said.

The news website found that in the 75 days since Biden dropped out of the presidential race against Donald Trump on July 21, he has not participated in any public events for 43 days.

In recent months, Biden has aged much faster than before, amid the job stress and the continued legal cases of his son Hunter, the report said.

At the same time, the White House maintains Biden is involved in his administration's work around the clock.

"Being commander-in-chief is about far more than public events, which are scheduled at strategic times to reach the most Americans possible, like before 20 million Americans watch the national evening news," the report quoted White House spokesperson Andrew Bates as saying.

Biden's participation in Harris' campaign events is also expected to be limited in October due to

his trip to Angola and Germany.

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Blinken, Sybiha Discuss Ukraine's Energy Resiliency Ahead of Winter – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony and his Ukrainian counterpart Andrii Sybiha discussed Ukraine's energy sector resiliency ahead of the coming winter, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Friday.

In August, Ukrainian Economy Minister Yuliia Svyrydenko said that the Ukrainian government had given the US a list of equipment needed to restore the energy sector and was expecting to receive \$800 million in aid to restore damaged infrastructure.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha ... The two discussed the commitment of U.S. and partner assistance to strengthen the resilience of Ukraine's energy sector this winter," Miller said in a readout.

The top diplomats look forward the participation of US President Joe Biden and other heads of state at the upcoming Ukraine Defense Contact Group (UDCG) in Germany's Ramstein, it added.

Biden is set to travel to Germany later in October, where he will host a leader-level meeting of the UDCG on October 12.

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Israelis Prefer Trump Over Harris by a Huge Margin as Better for Security - Poll

WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) - Israelis favor Donald Trump (58%) over Kamala Harris (20%) as a better choice for the Jewish country's security, ABC reported on Friday, citing a Langer Research/PORI poll.

When asked who they would support if they had a vote in the US election, 54% said they would pick Trump, and 24% would back Harris.

Almost two-thirds of Jews (64%) found Trump better for Israeli security. However, Israeli Arabs are split 27%-24% between the two, with 36% seeing no difference between the candidates.

Only 14% of Israelis believe that Israel is doing "too little" for its security, while 54% said "too much." This gap becomes even greater among ethnic groups. Only 7% of Jews said the government is doing "too little," while half of Israeli Arabs share this view.

The poll was conducted from September 8-22 in Hebrew and Arabic among 1,012 respondents across Israel.

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Pentagon Plans to Spend \$1.2 Billion to Restock Weapons Used in Red Sea Battle – Reports

WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Defense plans to spend \$1.2 billion on restocking weapons to fight Yemen's Houthis in the Red Sea area, Bloomberg reported, citing budget documents.

Two documents dated September 6 and submitted to congressional defense committee indicate that funds are earmarked to restock missiles to repel Houthi attacks and to maintain warships in the Red Sea, as part of “costs incurred by the DoD within the US Central Command region in responding to the situation in Israel or to hostile actions in the region as a direct result of the situation in Israel.”

Around \$190 million is earmarked to restock the Standard Missile-3 Block 1B and about \$8.5 million for the AIM-X Sidewinder missiles, while \$300 million is allocated for unplanned depot maintenance on the USS Bataan amphibious assault ship and USS Eisenhower Carrier Strike Group ships.

There are also requests of \$276 million to buy Standard Missile SM-6 model weapons, \$57.3 million for Tomahawks cruise missiles, \$6.7 million for Enhanced Sea Sparrow self-defense missiles, \$25 million for Boeing's JDAM-GPS guidance kits, and \$7.4 million for its small diameter bombs.

There is \$25 million requested to “increase manufacturing sources” for the Standard Missile, \$26.4 million to replace RTX “Coyote Block 2” drone interceptors, and \$20 million to buy BAE Systems PLC laser-guided Advance Precision Kill Weapon System rockets.

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US Adds Forecast-Beating 254,000 Jobs In Sept, Casting Doubts On Nov Rate Cut

WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) - The United States added 254,000 jobs in September, some 100,000 more than Wall Street's forecast and the prior month's growth, the Labor Department reported Friday in a report that cast doubts on the probability of another major interest rate cut by the Federal Reserve in November.

The Labor Department revised its previously-published 142,000 non-farm payrolls growth in August to 159,000, while economists on Wall Street projected a 150,000 growth. The report for September exceeded both numbers by 60% or more.

The Fed needs to see a steady decline in employment-related inflationary pressures to follow through with September's 50-basis, or half-percentage, point rate cut, which marked the central bank's first monetary easing in four years.

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US Adds 254,000 Jobs in September, Vs Wall Street's 150,000 Forecast and August's Previously Published 142,000

Sputnik

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RPT - US Vulcan Centaur Rocket Lifts Off for Second Test Flight - ULA

(Repeats to correct time in para 5)

WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) - The Vulcan Centaur rocket lifted off early Friday morning from Cape Canaveral, Florida, for the second of two flights required for the US Space Force to certify the rocket for launching sensitive national security payloads, United Launch Alliance (ULA) said.

The liftoff happened at 7:25 a.m. ET (11:25 GMT).

Several minutes later, the company confirmed that the rocket remains on course, flying down the center of the range track to space.

The successful ignition of the Centaur V upper stage and payload fairing jettison were also confirmed.

At 7:41 a.m. ET, the company confirmed the first main engine cutoff for the Centaur V upper stage.

"The #VulcanRocket has reached a preliminary Earth orbit where it will coast above the globe for the next 15 minutes before the burn to achieve an Earth-escape injection to deep space begins," ULA wrote on X.

ULA, which is a joint venture between Boeing and Lockheed Martin, called the launch "the next step in ensuring the nation's assured access to space."

The Vulcan Centaur rocket will be the successor of the company's Atlas V and the Delta IV Heavy rockets.

The 202-foot-tall Vulcan rocket is not reusable like SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket.

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Biden Says Full-Scale War in Mideast Can Be Averted, But 'Lots to Do'

WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden told reporters that he believes a full-scale war can be averted in the Middle East as tensions heat up but much work remains to keep fighting contained.

"I don't believe there is going to be an all-out war," Biden said Thursday. "I think we can avoid it, but there is a lot to do yet, a lot to do yet."

Biden said this week that he does not support an Israeli attack on Iranian nuclear sites but left the door open for Israel to strike at Iran's oil reserves.

Earlier on Thursday, Biden and his G7 counterparts released a joint statement expressing concerns about the deteriorating situation in the Middle East.

The G7 leaders collectively said that they consulted on efforts and actions to avoid escalation in the area and are pushing for a ceasefire in Gaza and Lebanon.

"A dangerous cycle of attacks and retaliation risks fueling uncontrollable escalation in the Middle East, which is in no one's interest," the statement said. "Therefore, we call on all regional players to act responsibly and with restraint. We encourage all parties to engage constructively to de-escalate the current tensions."

The G7 leaders said they will continue to be in close contact with all parties involved in this conflict.

Tehran, after the strikes on Israeli territory, sent a message to Washington via Qatar, warning the United States that it would no longer exercise unilateral restraint, media reported.

Israel and the Lebanon-based Shia movement Hezbollah have been exchanging rocket and air strikes since last week. Israel sent troops across the border this week, and clashes on the ground started earlier on Wednesday. Numerous countries are evacuating their nationals from Lebanon due to insecurity. Iran's missile attack against Israel on Tuesday only exacerbated tensions in the region.

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Malian Officials, Rosatom Discuss Plans to Build Nuclear Power Plant - Foreign Minister

UNITED NATIONS, October 4 (Sputnik) - Representatives from Mali and Russia's State Atomic Energy Corporation Rosatom recently discussed plans to build a nuclear power plant in the country, Malian Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Abdoulaye Diop told Sputnik.

"We have a delegation in Russia who just left, which includes the Minister of Economy and Finance, but also the minister in charge of energy, participating in the Rosatom forum. Besides that, they also discussed and looked at the details of the plans between Mali and Russia for building a nuclear power plant," Diop said in an interview on the margins of the UN General Assembly.

Mali wants to see Russia as its partner in solving a range of problems, including those related to critical power outages, Diop added.

Rosatom said in July that it had signed a memorandum on the development of peaceful nuclear infrastructure in Mali.

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Congress Not Expected to Approve More Disaster Relief Until After Election - House Speaker

WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) - The US Congress is not expected to approve emergency funding for Hurricane Helene recovery efforts until after the US election, House Speaker Mike Johnson told reporters.

Hurricane Helene caused widespread destruction in several US states, including Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, North Carolina and South Carolina. The death toll from the storm has risen to more than 200, according to reports.

"A lot of that work is being done immediately, and I think the timing of that will probably correspond when Congress is expected to return to session right after the election," Johnson said on Thursday after viewing some of the damage caused by the storm in Florida.

On Wednesday, US Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said that the Federal Emergency Management Agency lacks the funds to continue aid efforts through hurricane season.

Johnson said it will take some time to tabulate the cost in damages caused by the storm, but he expects Congress will make a strong bipartisan effort to provide relief when lawmakers reconvene on November 12.

President Joe Biden said in earlier remarks that the US Congress cannot delay the passage of a supplemental package to aid in recovery efforts.

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Biden Says Full-Scale War in Mideast Can Be Averted, But 'Lots to Do'

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Biden on Prospects of Meeting With Putin at G20, APEC Summits: 'Doubt He Will Show Up'

WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden commenting on the prospects of potentially meeting Russian President Vladimir Putin on the margins of the G20 or APEC summits next month said he doubts the Russian leader will show up.

"I doubt whether Putin will show up," Biden said on Thursday.

The Kremlin has said it is still working on whether Putin will attend the summits. Last month, Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump criticized Biden for not making an effort to talk to Putin in more than two years to try to resolve the Ukraine conflict. Trump claims that he will be able to broker a peace plan immediately if he wins the presidential election in November. The former US president said this week that his first two calls as president-elect would be to Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Putin.

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Mali Appreciates Swift Supply of Arms From Russia – Foreign Minister

UNITED NATIONS, October 4 (Sputnik) – Mali appreciates the prompt deliveries of military equipment purchased from Russia as they help to protect the country, Malian Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Abdoulaye Diop told Sputnik.

"We do appreciate the swiftness of the provision of all the military equipment that Mali is purchasing and all the support that we are receiving from Russia to be able to capacitate [our armed forces] because our main objective is to make sure that the Malians have the capacity to protect and defend their country," Diop said in an interview on the margins of the UN General Assembly.

Mali is "very much interested" in defense industry cooperation with Russia, the minister said. The Malian government also appreciates the importance the Russian government is attaching to Bamako's requests for prompt arms deliveries to enable its ongoing fight against terrorist groups, Diop added.

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ULA Set For Second Test Launch of Vulcan Rocket Early Friday - Statement

WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) - United Launch Alliance, a joint venture between Boeing and Lockheed Martin, is set to carry out its second test flight of the Vulcan Centaur rocket early Friday morning from Cape Canaveral, Florida, the company said in a statement.

"United Launch Alliance has initiated the launch countdown at Cape Canaveral for the second flight of the #VulcanRocket," the company said in a statement via X on Thursday. "Liftoff is planned for Friday at 6 a.m. EDT (1000 UTC). This important #Cert2 mission will fulfill flight test obligations and complete its certification process with the U.S. Space Force to carry national security payloads starting later this year."

If Friday's test launch is successful, the rocket will be cleared to conduct missions for NASA, US Space Force, among others, according to media reports.

The Vulcan Centaur rocket will be the successor of the company's Atlas V and the Delta IV Heavy rockets.

The 202-foot-tall Vulcan rocket is not reusable like SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket.

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US Dockworkers Suspend Strike Until January 15, Will Resume Negotiations - Union

WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) - US dockworkers will suspend their strike at ports across the United States until January 15 after a tentative agreement was reached for higher wages, but negotiations will resume on other issues, the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) said in a press release.

On Tuesday, some 45,000 US dockworkers went on strike at ports in Baltimore and Brunswick, Georgia, the busiest for auto imports; Philadelphia, which mainly receives fruits and vegetables; and New Orleans, which handles coffee.

"The International Longshoremen's Association and the United States Maritime Alliance, Ltd. have reached a tentative agreement on wages and have agreed to extend the Master Contract until January 15, 2025 to return to the bargaining table to negotiate all other outstanding issues," the ILA said on Thursday. "Effective immediately, all current job actions will cease and all work covered by the Master Contract will resume."

The dockworkers union demanded significantly higher wages and a total ban on the automation of cranes, gates and container-moving trucks that are used in the loading or unloading of freight at 36 US ports. These ports handle roughly half of the nations' cargo from ships.

Earlier on Thursday, President Joe Biden told reporters that he thought progress was being made in ending the strike.

The White House said this week that it expected a limited impact on the US supply of fuel, food, and medicine at this time. However, JPMorgan previously noted that the strike could cost the US economy up to \$5 billion per day.

Biden in a separate statement said the tentative agreement includes a record wage, and the extension of the collective bargaining process represents critical progress towards a strong contract.

The US president further said the union workers, the carriers, and the port operators acted "patriotically" by reopening US ports and ensuring the availability of critical supplies for Hurricane Helene recovery and rebuilding.

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US Dockworkers Suspend Strike Until January 15, Will Resume Negotiations - Union

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Americans Hoard Toilet Paper in Fear of Ports Strike, Rekindling Pandemic Memories

NEW YORK, October 4 (Sputnik) - Americans have taken to hoarding toilet paper, rekindling memories from the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, amid fear that a ports strike will squeeze supply

of such basic essentials despite assurances that most goods will remain available in the country. Some 45,000 US dockworkers went on strike this week for the first time in 47 years, impacting, among others, ports in Baltimore and Brunswick, Georgia, the busiest for auto imports; Philadelphia, which mainly receives fruits and vegetables; and New Orleans, which handles coffee.

But toilet paper was definitely not on the list anywhere, with the sanitary item produced almost entirely in the United States.

"Just because the ports are closed, there is no need to buy and hoard all of the toilet paper. It's made in the USA," commented a user on the X platform.

Toilet paper hoarding was common in the early days of the supply chain breakdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. For weeks then, social media was inundated with pictures of empty supermarket aisles where toilet paper and other sanitation and cleaning items are stored.

The port strike comes as the dockworkers' union demands significantly higher wages and a total ban on the automation of cranes, gates and container-moving trucks that are used in the loading or unloading of freight at 36 US ports. Those ports handle roughly half of the nations' cargo from ships.

President Joe Biden told reporters Thursday that he thought progress was being made in ending the strike, saying "we'll find out soon."

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Vance Says Could Tell Walz Was Nervous in US Vice Presidential Debate After First Question

WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) - US Senator and 2024 Republican vice presidential nominee JD Vance said that he could tell Democratic vice presidential nominee Tim Walz was nervous after the very first question of their debate.

Vance and Walz participated in the only vice presidential debate of the 2024 election cycle on Tuesday evening.

"The first answer, it was about the attacks on Israel and how Israel should respond, and I definitely realized that [Walz] was extremely nervous... I could tell he was nervous," Vance said on Thursday in an interview with the Ruthless Podcast.

Vance said that he was also nervous going into the debate, but could tell he did well after seeing his wife's reaction after the event.

Vance also said that a viral picture of him glancing at the camera was not intentional, but rather, due to the timer for the debate being placed next to the camera.

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Biden to End Temporary Legal Status for Venezuelan Migrants in US - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration will not renew the legal status for Venezuelan migrants living in the United States under humanitarian parole, CBS News

reported on Thursday, citing US officials and records.

The report said that about 117,000 Venezuelans have come to the United States under this policy, and the first group of these migrants is set to lose their legal status later this month.

The Venezuelan migrants affected by this decision will be given notices instructing them to apply for another immigration benefit, like Temporary Protective Status, or leave the United States, the report added.

The program, which launched in October 2022, has allowed a total of 530,000 eligible migrants from Venezuela, Cuba, Haiti, and Nicaragua to be flown into the United States and given permission to work legally for two years, the report said.

The report said it's unclear if migrants from Cuba, Haiti, and Nicaragua who are in the United States under this policy will eventually face a similar fate.

The program was designed to curb the record level of migrants making the trek to the US-Mexico over throughout the Biden presidency.

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Trump's Attorneys Submit Motion to Dismiss Superseding Indictment in January 6 Case

WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) - Attorneys for former US President Donald Trump have filed a motion to dismiss a superseding indictment in the ongoing federal January 6 case, court documents showed.

"The Superseding Indictment stretches generally applicable statutes beyond their breaking point based on false claims that President Trump is somehow responsible for events at the Capitol on January 6, 2021," the motion, which was filed in a US District Court in Washington on Thursday, said.

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Biden Says Supplemental Funding From US Congress for Hurricane Relief 'Can't Wait'

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - The US Congress cannot delay the passage of supplemental funding to aid in recovery efforts from Hurricane Helene, US President Joe Biden said on Thursday.

"It can't wait. People need help now," Biden said during remarks in Georgia, when asked about a timeline for supplemental funding.

Hurricane Helene caused widespread destruction in several US states, including Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, North Carolina and South Carolina. The death toll from the storm has risen to 191, according to reports.

On Wednesday, US Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said that the Federal Emergency Management Agency lacks the funds to continue aid efforts through hurricane

season.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) -

MIDDLE EAST CRISIS

- * Israel said on Thursday that it eliminated Mahmoud Yusef Anisi, one of the leaders of Hezbollah's precision missile manufacturing project.
- * Israel caught the United States off guard by killing Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah in a strike on Beirut, Pentagon deputy spokesperson Sabrina Singh said.
- * The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) intends to completely destroy Lebanese Shia militant Hezbollah's infrastructure in southern Lebanon and eliminate the movement's presence in those areas, IDF Chief of the General Staff Herzi Halevi said.
- * Any country that gives assistance to Israel in its military operations against Iran will be viewed as an aggressor in the current Middle East conflict, the Iranian Mission to the UN said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

- * The United States and other Western nations are not purposely delaying the supply of long-range missiles to Ukraine but rather have limited stocks to share, US Defense Department deputy spokesperson Sabrina Singh said on Thursday.
- * Russia's army group East have taken control of the city of Ugledar in the Donetsk People's Republic, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
- * Russia's army group South has eliminated up to 720 Ukrainian soldiers over the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

IMF ENGAGEMENTS WITH RUSSIA

- * The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has no updates on the timing of Article IV consultations with the Russian authorities or a visit to Russia, the Fund continues to collect data, IMF spokesperson Julie Kozack said on Thursday.
- * The process of the appointment of former Russian central bank executive Ksenia Yudaeva as the IMF's new executive director for the country is still underway, the IMF said.

GLOBAL ENERGY MARKETS

- * The European Commission is exerting pressure to stop the transit of oil and gas from East to West, Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico said on Thursday.
- * Global gas demand will grow by 39% by 2050 compared to 2023 to 5.7 trillion cubic meters, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said.
- * US Defense Department deputy spokesperson Sabrina Singh declined to comment on whether Iranian oil facilities would be potential targets in an expected Israeli strike on Iran.

DEVELOPMENTS IN RUSSIA'S KURSK REGION

* The Kursk nuclear power plant is operating normally, the radiation background is normal, the station's press service said on Thursday after reports emerged that Ukraine attacked the plant by firing missiles.

* The Russian military has eliminated more than 19,850 Ukrainian soldiers during military operations in the border areas of the Kursk region, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

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Satellite Images Show Several Buildings Hit at Israel's Nevatim Base by Iran – Reports

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) – At least three buildings at Israel's Nevatim Air Base were struck during Iran's missile attack earlier this week, according to Planet Labs satellite images published by CNN on Thursday.

Among the buildings hit are two hangars used to store larger planes with two large holes in their roofs and debris scattered around, the report said.

The images also revealed that Iranian missiles left about twelve craters in the territory of the base located in the Negev desert in Israel, according to the report.

According to the images, the airfield taxiway was also damaged and is currently being actively repaired.

Iran fired a massive barrage of missiles at Israel on Tuesday in response to the killings of Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah, Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh, and senior IRGC commander Abbas Nilfroushan. The Israeli military said about 180 ballistic missiles were fired, most of which were intercepted.

Iran's military said it also targeted the Mossad headquarters in Tel Aviv, but Israel denied it was damaged in the attack.

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Trump Says He Will Block State Gas-Powered Vehicle Bans if Elected

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) — Former President Donald Trump said on Thursday that, if re-elected, he would ensure no state in the US could ban gas-powered cars or trucks.

"When I'm president, no state in America will be permitted to ban gas powered cars or trucks, and I guarantee it," Trump said during a rally in Michigan.

Trump added that he would end Vice President Kamala Harris's electric vehicle mandate and put a stop to what he called the "Green New Scam," emphasizing that while he's not opposed to electric cars, gas-powered cars would remain available as well.

Green New Deal proposals advocate for public policies to tackle climate change while also promoting job creation, economic growth, and reducing economic inequality. Democratic lawmakers have spearheaded resolutions that would transition 100% of energy demand in the United States to zero-emission sources.

The US presidential election will be held on November 5. The incumbent vice president, Kamala Harris, a Democrat, and Trump, a Republican, are running for the country's top job.

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trump's attorneys submit motion to dismiss superseding indictment in federal January 6 case - court document

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Texas Attorney General Sues TikTok For Alleged Exploitation Of Children

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton is suing TikTok for allegedly exploiting the privacy of children, accusing the popular video sharing site of using the data of minors without parental permission.

"I will continue to hold TikTok and other Big Tech companies accountable for exploiting Texas children and failing to prioritize minors' online safety and privacy," Paxton said in a statement. "Texas law requires social media companies to take steps to protect kids online and requires them to provide parents with tools to do the same. TikTok and other social media companies cannot ignore their duties under Texas law."

Minors are protected from the harms associated with social media under Texas' SCOPE — or Securing Children Online through Parental Empowerment — Act. This law states that digital service providers, such as TikTok, are prohibited from sharing, disclosing, or selling a minor's personal identifying information without permission from the child's parent or legal guardian.

The SCOPE Act also requires companies to provide parents with tools to manage and control the privacy and account settings on their child's account.

"TikTok has failed to comply with these requirements," said the attorney general, who is seeking civil penalties of up to \$10,000 per violation and injunctive relief as well to prevent future violations of the law by TikTok.

TikTok did not immediately respond to Paxton's lawsuit or remarks.

The Texas suit is the latest action against TikTok by US authorities after a surfeit of legal moves against the Chinese-owned social media that began during the Trump administration and continued under President Joe Biden.

Biden has signed a bill to ban TikTok if ByteDance, its Chinese owner, doesn't divest within a year. Under that bill, ByteDance has nine months to sell, with a potential three-month extension if it can demonstrate progress. The Chinese company is challenging that order with a lawsuit of its own.

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US Not Delaying Supply of Long-Range Missiles to Ukraine, Stocks Limited – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) – The United States and other western nations are not purposely delaying the supply of long-range missiles to Ukraine but rather have limited stocks to share with Kiev, Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said on Thursday.

“No, what I would say is we have a limited supply of long-range missiles,” Singh said during a press briefing when asked about Zelensky saying that western states are dragging out the supply of long-range weapons to Kiev.

Only a few nations can supply ATACMS, Storm Shadows, Scalp and other similar missiles to Kiev, and the deliveries are not being dragged out, Singh said.

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Gulf Arab States Assure Iran of Neutrality Amid Conflict With Israel - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - The Gulf Arab countries told Iran that they intend to remain neutral amid the conflict between Iran and Israel, Reuters reported on Thursday.

Officials from the Gulf Arab states discussed de-escalation with Iran during meetings in Qatar, the report said, citing two sources.

On Tuesday, Iran launched nearly 200 missiles at Israel, amid escalating hostilities between Israel and the Lebanese movement Hezbollah.

Israel and the United States have promised consequences against Iran for the missile attack, while Iran has vowed to target the interests of Israel-supporting countries in the region if they intervene.

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Austin, Umerov Discuss in Thursday Call Ukraine's Security Aid Priorities - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and his Ukrainian counterpart Rustem Umerov discussed via telephone Ukraine's security assistance priorities, Defense Department deputy spokesperson Sabrina Singh said on Thursday.

"Secretary Austin spoke by phone to his Ukrainian counterpart, Defense Minister Umerov," Singh said during a press briefing. "The two leaders discussed current battlefield dynamics and security assistance priorities."

Umerov also provided Austin with an update on the situation on the battlefield and Ukraine's capability needs, Singh said.

Last week, the United States announced an additional \$8 billion in military assistance for Ukraine, including long-range weapons and a Patriot air defense battery.

The assistance includes \$2.4 billion for the purchase of new arms for Ukraine as well as \$5.55 billion worth of weapons to be drawn from Defense Department stockpiles under the so-called presidential drawdown authority.

Western countries have provided hundreds of billions of dollars in aid to Ukraine since the start of Russia's special military operation in February 2022. Aid shipments began in 2022 with artillery munitions and training and have escalated to include tanks and other armored vehicles, air-defense systems, various types of missiles as well as cluster and other munitions.

Russia has consistently warned against the West's continued arms deliveries to Ukraine, saying that they only prolong the conflict.

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About 250 Americans Departed Lebanon on US-Organized Flights in 2 Days – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) – Over the past two days, about 250 American citizens and their family members have been able to leave Lebanon on flights organized and partially paid for by the US government amid Israel's military operation in southern Lebanon, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Thursday.

"A second flight departed Beirut this morning with 134 passengers on it, bringing the total number of American citizens and their immediate family members who have departed on these flights to 250," Miller said during a press briefing.

Miller added that the United States continues to work with airlines to block seats for American citizens willing to leave Lebanon and made more than 1,400 seats available on flights out of the country last week.

According to Miller, tickets for such flights are not free and cost \$283, as the US government does not have the right by law to cover such costs.

Israel and the Lebanon-based Shia movement Hezbollah have been exchanging rocket and air strikes since last week. Israel sent troops across the border this week, and clashes on the ground started earlier on Wednesday. Numerous countries are evacuating their nationals from Lebanon due to insecurity. Iran's missile attack against Israel on Tuesday only exacerbated the tensions in the region.

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Pentagon Says Confident US Can Resupply Long-Term Conflict in Mideast

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - The United States is confident that its supply chains can support a long-term conflict in the Middle East, especially to replenish air defense interceptors, Pentagon Deputy Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said on Thursday.

"We're still confident in our abilities, we're still confident that we're able to resupply," Singh said during a press briefing.

However, Singh pointed out that delays in funding from Congress have impacted the Defense Department's ability to backfill its own stockpiles.

This delay in replenishment trickles down and impacts US military operations around the world, Singh added.

The Pentagon will continue to push Congress to pass a full defense spending budget in a timely manner, according to Singh.

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pentagon on zelenskyy saying west dragging out long-range weapons supplies: we have a limited supply of long range missiles

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Pentagon Declines to Comment on Whether Iranian Oil Facilities Are Potential Targets

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - Pentagon Deputy Press Secretary Sabrina Singh on Thursday declined to comment on whether Iranian oil facilities would be potential targets in an expected Israeli strike on Iran.

"Detailing out from here what potential targets might look like, I just don't think that serves a purpose or is really that helpful," Singh said during a press briefing.

US President Joe Biden said he does not support an Israeli attack on Iranian nuclear sites but left the door open when asked whether he'd support an Israeli strike on Iran's oil facilities.

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Pentagon Says US Will Be Part of Discussions on Any Israeli Response to Iran Strikes

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - The United States would participate in any discussions regarding Israel's potential response to missile strikes from Iran, US Defense Department deputy spokesperson Sabrina Singh said on Thursday.

"I certainly think that any response from Israel to Iran, we will be part of those discussions," Singh said during a press briefing.

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Pentagon Says Was 'Caught Off Guard' by Israel's Strike on Nasrallah

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - Israel caught the United States off guard by killing Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah in a strike on Beirut, Pentagon deputy spokesperson Sabrina Singh said on Thursday.

"We were caught off guard by the strike on Nasrallah," Singh said during a press briefing.

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UN's Peacekeeping Mission in Lebanon Has Contingency Plan, Ready to Adapt - Official

UNITED NATIONS, October 3 (Sputnik) – The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has a contingency plan in place amid the ongoing escalation between Israel and Hezbollah, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix said on Thursday.

"We are obviously constantly reviewing the situation, the contingency plan is ready and constantly updated, so that if needed, we can adapt UNIFIL posture," Lacroix told reporters.

He declined to go into the details of the plan, but pointed out that his team maintains contacts with all interested parties.

"We have been working very hard on several scenarios," Lacroix said, adding that the worst scenario could lead the mission to stop its operation in the region.

Israel and Lebanese movement Hezbollah have been trading fire across the border since the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack. Tensions exacerbated in September when Lebanon was hit by a deadly wave of exploding communications devices. Israel also intensified its airstrikes on Lebanon, causing heavy civilian casualties and killing Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah.

On Monday, Israel announced the start of a limited military ground operation in southern Lebanon. On Wednesday, Hezbollah said that its forces had engaged in clashes with Israeli infantry for the first time since Israel launched the ground operation.

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State Dept. Says Nasrallah's Reported Acceptance of Ceasefire Was Never Communicated to US

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) – The United States did not receive any communication indicating that Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah had agreed to a ceasefire before he died in an Israeli strike, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Thursday.

"So, I can't speak to whether he [Nasrallah] ever agreed to it and told somebody inside Lebanon. Obviously, that could be something that happened that we wouldn't be aware of. I can tell you that if that's true, it was never communicated to us in any way, shape or form," Miller said during a press briefing.

Lebanon's Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib told CNN in an interview that Nasrallah had agreed to a ceasefire with Israel shortly before being assassinated. The minister said mediators had moreover informed Lebanon that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had also agreed to a ceasefire just before the assassination.

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us state department on reports that nasrallah had accepted ceasefire before Israel killed him: If That's true, it was never communicated to us

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Melania Trump Book Publisher Mistakenly Requests \$250,000 for Interview - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - The publishing company in charge of former US First Lady Melania Trump's upcoming book mistakenly requested \$250,000 for an interview with Trump, CNN reported on Thursday.

Skyhorse Publishing asked CNN to pay \$250,000 as a licensing fee after the news network requested an interview with Melania Trump, the report said.

The request was included in a confidentiality and nondisclosure agreement document.

However, the publisher later said that it sent the payment request by mistake.

Melania Trump's book is set for publication on October 8.

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Microsoft Says Seized Over 100 Domains Allegedly Linked to Russian Intelligence

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - Microsoft announced on Thursday that it had worked with the US Justice Department and the non-governmental organization (NGO) Information Sharing and Analysis Center to take down more than 100 web domains linked to the Star Blizzard cyber group, which is allegedly working for Russian intelligence.

"Today, the United States District Court for the District of Columbia unsealed a civil action brought by Microsoft's DCU, including its order authorizing Microsoft to seize 66 unique domains used by Star Blizzard in cyberattacks targeting Microsoft customers globally," Microsoft said in a press release. "We are filing this lawsuit with the NGO Information Sharing and Analysis Center and have coordinated with the Department of Justice, which simultaneously seized 41 additional domains attributed to the same actor."

Microsoft claims that between January 2023 and August 2024, Star Blizzard targeted more than 30 civil society organizations promoting democratic institutions and values by using cyber tools to interfere in their activities.

Star Blizzard, also known as COLDRIVER and Callisto Group, is allegedly linked to the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) and has allegedly been engaged in cyberattacks since at least 2017, including various attempted interference campaigns in the United Kingdom and the United States, the software company said.

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Oil Markets Up 4% Again In Intraday Trade As Israel Hits Beirut, Vows "Pain" For Iran

NEW YORK, October 3 (Sputnik) - Crude prices were up around 4% in intraday trading for a third running day Thursday as Israel pounded Beirut with airstrikes and vowed "pain" for Iran, which attacked it earlier in the week, plunging the oil-rich Middle East into deeper wars.

UK North Sea Brent crude hit a five-week high of \$77.58 per barrel before consolidating to \$76.75 by 11:30 AM in New York (4:30 PM in London) — up \$2.85, or 3.9%.

West Texas Intermediate (WTI) hit a four-week peak at \$73.89 a barrel before retreating to \$72.81 -- for a gain of \$2.71, or 3.9%, on the day.

Israel killed at least nine people Thursday with airstrikes in southern Beirut that targeted Hezbollah's intelligence headquarters. The raid followed through with an earlier hit in the center of the Lebanese capital — an area Israel struck this week for the first time since 2006.

Israel also issued evacuation orders for additional villages in southern Lebanon, signaling a broadening of its ground incursion in the country. More than 1,000 people in Lebanon have been killed and about 1 million residents displaced since Israel escalated its war with Hezbollah.

Separately, Israel's war cabinet is mulling a retaliation to Tuesday's attack by Iran, which fired almost 200 ballistic rockets in its direction. Israel's UN ambassador Danny Danon said the Israeli response "will be soon" and "painful."

US President Joe Biden said he does not support an Israeli attack on Iranian nuclear sites but left the door open for Israel to strike at Iran's oil reserves — an eventuality that could send crude prices higher.

Even worse for oil markets would be disruptions to crude shipments in the Strait of Hormuz straddling Iran, said Bjarne Schieldrop, chief commodities analyst at the Swedish bank SEB. "That would add a significant risk premium to oil," Schieldrop said in remarks carried by CNBC.

Notwithstanding Thursday's rally, WTI remains down 1% on the year, while Brent is off by 3%.

Crude prices have been volatile, plunging in three previous months on economic woes in top importer China, before turning around this month on supply risks in the Middle East, where much of the world's oil is produced.

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IMF Says Too Early To Assess Impact Of Strike In US Ports, Fund Monitors Situation

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) – The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on Thursday that it is too early to assess the potential impact of the ongoing dock workers' strike at US ports.

Dock workers on the East and Gulf Coasts went on strike early Tuesday, an action that could cost the economy billions of dollars each day and cause widespread shortages and price increases.

"It is too early to have an assessment of the impact. Obviously, we are very carefully monitoring these developments," IMF spokesperson Julie Kozack told reporters.

The IMF hopes that the parties can come to an agreement as soon as possible to minimize the spillover to other regions of the world, she added.

Kozack underscored that the fund will have more information before the IMF and the World

Bank annual meetings later in October.

The White House said on Tuesday that this is expected to have a limited impact on the supply of fuel, food, and medicine at this time.

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Short Port Strike Should Have 'Minimal' Impact on Food Prices - US Agriculture Secretary

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - A short-term strike by dock workers at East and Gulf Coast ports should have a minimal impact on food prices in the United States, US Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said on Thursday.

"At this point, a short labor stoppage at the ports should have minimal impact and effect on prices," Vilsack said during a White House press briefing, when asked about the potential impact of the strike on food prices.

The strike will not cause significant disruptions if it lasts a couple of weeks, Vilsack said. However, a longer-term strike that lasts months could have an impact, Vilsack added.

On Tuesday, dock workers at East and Gulf Coast ports went on strike, prompting concerns about potential consequences for the US economy.

JPMorgan said that the strike could cost the economy up to \$5 billion per day, or approximately 6% of gross domestic product.

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IMF Closely Monitors Escalation in Middle East With Great Concern - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) – The International Monetary Fund said on Thursday that it is closely monitoring escalation in the Middle East with great concern and warned that the conflict could have an impact on the economic situation.

"We are closely monitoring the recent intensification of the conflict in the region with great concern. The potential for the further escalation of the conflict heightened risk and uncertainty and could have significant economic ramifications for the region and beyond," IMF spokesperson Julie Kozack told reporters.

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IMF Says Appointment of New Russia Executive Director Underway

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) – The process of the appointment of former Russian central bank executive Ksenia Yudaeva as the IMF's new executive director for the country is still underway, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on Thursday.

"Executive Directors are nominated by their countries and elected onto the IMF Executive

Board by the member country or by a group of countries that they would represent. This process is currently underway, so it would be premature for me to comment further at this time," IMF spokesperson Julie Kozack told reporters.

IMF Executive Director for Russia Aleksei Mozhin told Sputnik in September that Yudaeva will replace him starting November 1.

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IMF Says Has No Updates on Article IV Consultations with Russia, Continues Collecting Data

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) – The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has no updates on the timing of Article IV consultations with the Russian authorities or a visit to Russia, the Fund continues to collect data, IMF spokesperson Julie Kozack said on Thursday.

"The Article IV consultations with Russia have been postponed, and while we are gathering all of the necessary data and analysis to ensure that rigorous consultations and analysis can take place, I do not have any further updates at this time," Kozack told reporters.

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IMF Board to Decide on \$1.1Bln Disbursement for Ukraine by Oct. 21 - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) – The International Monetary Fund (IMF) will decide on the disbursement of a \$1.1 billion tranche of aid for Ukraine before the fund's annual meetings, which start on October 21, IMF spokesperson Julie Kozack said on Thursday.

"Board consideration of the Fifth Review is expected before the annual meetings," Kozack told reporters.

The IMF announced in a statement on September 11 that it has approved a staff-level agreement on the Fifth Review of the four-year Extended Fund Facility (EFF) Arrangement with Ukraine. Approval by the board would allow Kiev access to about \$1.1 billion in funding.

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IMF has no updates on timing of Article IV consultations with Russian authorities or visit to Russia, Fund continues to collect data - spokesperson

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imf board to decide on disbursement of \$1.1 billion tranche of aid for ukraine by October 21 - spokesperson

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Nearly Half of Canadians Live Paycheck to Paycheck – Poll

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) – Close to half of Canadians (47%) have reported currently living paycheck to paycheck, according to a Leger Poll published on Thursday.

The proportion is even higher among individuals aged 18-34 (54%) and 35-54 (57%), the pollster said.

The poll also found that 57% believe Canada is currently in a period of economic recession. Another 43% expressed fear of losing their jobs within the next 12 months, marking a four-point increase from September.

Nonetheless, 61% of Canadians consider their current household finances to be in good shape, the poll showed. Another 9% of those surveyed believe they are "very good" and 51% "good."

The proportion is higher among Quebecers (71%) and Canadians aged 55 and older (72%). Individuals aged 35-54 are more likely to rate their finances as poor (47%).

The survey was conducted from September 27-29 on a sample of 1,626 individuals and 1,010 US residents, 18 years of age or older, and randomly recruited.

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Melania Trump Says 'No Room for Compromise' on Women's Individual Freedom

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - Former US First Lady Melania Trump said on Thursday that there is no room to compromise on the individual freedom of women, ahead of the publication of her new book and the 2024 US presidential election.

"Individual freedom is a fundamental principle that I safeguard. Without a doubt, there is no room for compromise when it comes to this essential right that all women possess from birth," Trump said in a video posted to social media platform X. "What does 'my body, my choice' really mean?"

Trump is set to release a new book next Tuesday, in which she reportedly advocates for women's legal ability to get an abortion.

Women's right to individual liberty grants them the authority to terminate a pregnancy if so desired, Trump said in the book, according to a copy obtained by The Guardian in advance of its publication.

"Restricting a woman's right to choose whether to terminate an unwanted pregnancy is the same as denying her control over her own body," Trump said.

Melania Trump's stance on abortion diverges from some members of the Republican Party. However, former US President Donald Trump has opposed a federal ban on abortion and advocated for the issue to be determined at the state level.

On Tuesday, Donald Trump reiterated that he would not support a federal abortion ban "under any circumstances" and would veto such legislation if he were president. Trump said that he believes in exceptions on abortion restrictions for cases involving rape, incest and threats to the

life of the mother, but does not believe in late-term abortions.

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UN After Guterres Nomination Suggests Waiting for Announcement of Nobel Peace Prize

UNITED NATIONS, October 3 (Sputnik) - The United Nations suggests waiting for the announcement of the 2024 Nobel Peace Prize winner, spokesman Farhan Haq told Sputnik, when asked to comment on reports that UN chief Guterres is among the favorites for the award. "I think we'll wait for the award to be announced before we comment on that part," Haq said. Earlier today, media reported that Guterres, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and International Court of Justice have been shortlisted for this year's Nobel Peace Prize.

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Any Country Assisting Israel in Conflict Will be Legitimate Target for Iran - UN Mission

UNITED NATIONS, October 3 (Sputnik) - Any country that gives assistance to Israel in its military operations against Iran will be viewed as an aggressor in the current Middle East conflict, the Iranian Mission to the UN said in a statement on Thursday. "Our response will be solely directed at the aggressor. Should any country render assistance to the aggressor, it shall likewise be deemed an accomplice and a legitimate target. We advise countries to refrain from entangling themselves in the conflict between the Israeli regime and Iran and to distance themselves from the fray," the statement said.

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Shortlisting UNRWA for Nobel Prize 'Testament' to Its Vital Services in Gaza - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, October 3 (Sputnik) – The shortlisting the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) on the list of potential recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize is proof of the organization's bravery and dedication to provide vital services to the Gaza Strip, UN spokesperson Farhan Haq told Sputnik. "Regarding UNRWA, I think the work they have done over the past year, when more than 220 UNRWA colleagues have been killed and yet they have continued to provide vital services in Gaza, is testament to my UNRWA colleagues' dedication and bravery," Haq said. Earlier on Thursday, media reported that UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and UNRWA have been shortlisted among the potential recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize.

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Biden Says Discussing Israel Striking Iran's Oil Facilities

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) – The United States is discussing with Israel whether to strike Iranian oil facilities in response to its retaliatory missile strike earlier this week, US President Joe Biden said on Thursday.

"We're discussing that, I think that would be a little ... anyway," Biden told reporters when asked if he would support Israel striking Iran's oil facilities.

Biden added though that nothing would happen today with regard to Israel striking back against Iran.

On Wednesday, Biden said he did not support Israel attacking Iran's nuclear facilities after Iran fired a massive barrage of missiles at Israel on Tuesday in response to the killings of Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah, Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh, and senior IRGC commander Abbas Nilforoushan.

The Israeli military said about 180 ballistic missiles were fired, most of which were intercepted.