

7/29/22 Friday

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

VIDEO: Pelosi Refuses to Confirm Possible Taiwan Stop, Calling Asia Tour Schedule 'a Security Issue'

US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) is preparing to leave on a trip to several Asian partners of the US, a trip that could potentially include Taiwan, with which Washington has no formal relations. Such high-profile visits are invariably used by US politicians to denounce China and call for an end to the One China Policy.

"I don't ever talk about my travel because, as some of you know, it's a security issue," [Pelosi told reporters](#) on Capitol Hill on Friday. "It's a security issue for every member of Congress traveling, especially abroad. But for the Speaker, it is an additional security issue, and for those traveling with me, not just members, but staff, et cetera."

Bloomberg [first reported the story](#) on Thursday, citing anonymous sources familiar with the plans. She will reportedly visit Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia, with [Taiwan listed as a "tentative" option](#). Which country she will visit first remains unclear. Many of the nations are key US allies in the US' push to encircle China, while others Washington hopes to woo away from Beijing by casting China as a threat to them.

Pelosi has invited several other senior US lawmakers to join her on the trip, but while some have declined, the status of others is unknown.

A day prior, Chinese President Xi Jinping told his US counterpart Joe Biden that "one who plays with fire will certainly burn himself" - undoubtedly a warning to Washington not to test China's patience by violating Chinese sovereignty over Taiwan, a territory Beijing sees as a Chinese province in rebellion. The US acceded to that position in 1979, when it switched its recognition of the legitimate Chinese government from Taipei to Beijing.

Biden has tried to dissuade Pelosi from making the trip, as have senior Pentagon leaders.

Pelosi and other lawmakers have countered, arguing it is undemocratic for anyone - Chinese or American - to ask her not to visit Taiwan. Republicans, typically her political adversaries, have rallied behind the trip.

'Strategic Ambiguity'

If the House speaker does go, she will be the highest-ranking American to make the trip in 25 years, since then-House Speaker Newt Gingrich went to Taiwan in 1997. On that trip, Gingrich [met with then-Taiwanese President](#) Lee Teng-hui and [said to China](#): "We want you to understand, we will defend Taiwan. Period."

That statement was a violation of the US' longstanding [policy of "strategic ambiguity"](#) on the question of defending Taiwan from Mainland China. The policy is calculated to maintain the status quo, which is that Taiwan neither feels confident enough to declare independence nor grows close enough to China to reunite with it. Since Biden became president in 2021, he has tripped several times over the same rule, and his leading diplomats [have had to walk back](#) his claims.

In 1997, China was focused on the imminent [reincorporation of Hong Kong](#) into the country, having been a British colony since it was seized as a war prize in 1840. It also came on the heels of the [1995-1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis](#), which began when Lee was granted a visa to visit the United States and China responded with missile and amphibious assault drills near Taiwan. In response, the US dispatched two carrier battle groups and an amphibious assault ship - another type of aircraft carrier - and numerous US warships sailed directly through the Taiwan Strait, flouting Chinese warnings against it. Beijing was forced to back down and Lee was boosted in the polls, winning a narrow majority in Taiwan's first democratic elections in 1996. The situation led to major reforms in the People's Liberation Army and the [acquisition of new weapons](#) capable of [challenging the massive US Navy](#).

The government in Taiwan is all that remains of the republican government that ruled all of China between 1912 and 1949. While the communist Red Army was victorious on the mainland and founded the People's Republic of China, it was unable to cross the Taiwan Strait, and a stalemate ensued. Since then, all but a handful of nations have switched their recognition of the legitimate Chinese government from Taipei to Beijing, [including the United States](#) in 1979.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

ExxonMobil Quadruples Profits as Americans Face Record-High Gas Prices, Inflation

US President Joe Biden's decision to release much of the country's Strategic Petroleum Reserve into the market by selling it to oil companies was blasted for being a gift to petrol giants, who then sold it in Europe for record-high prices.

US oil corporations are going gangbusters at the bank as Americans face the biggest consumer price hikes in decades. Oil giants ExxonMobil and Chevron released their Second Quarter earnings reports on Friday, revealing immense profiteering by the corporate giants.

ExxonMobil, the world's largest petroleum corporation not owned by a state entity, [said on Friday it had made](#) \$17.85 billion in Q2 of 2022 - four times last year's figure and twice what it made in Q1 of 2022. [Chevron boasted an \\$11.62 billion](#) profit in Q2, a 74% increase from Q1 and a 247% increase from Q2 of 2021.

[According to CNN](#), that amounts to ExxonMobil making \$2,245.62 every second of the 92-day-long quarter, and Chevron making \$1,462.11 per second. In other words, in the time it took to fill your car's gas tank, the two together made more than \$400,000.

That the oil giants are raking in the dough is hardly news, though: US President Joe Biden slammed them for making "[more money than God](#)" in a June speech, noting in particular that they were using profits to buy back stock instead of expanding oil production.

The news comes after months of [sky-high gas prices](#) in Europe and North America, driven up by US sanctions and other trade disruptions connected to Russia's special operation in Ukraine, which began in February. In March, Biden announced a total boycott of Russian petroleum, which accounted for [about 8% of US oil imports](#). The rising gas prices have translated into rising commodity costs across the board, as companies that ship goods via train, plane or truck have increased prices to offset their own higher costs.

However, it's not that simple for either the gas giants or for other companies.

An [April study by the Economic Policy Institute](#) found that corporate profits accounted for 54% of inflation in the United States in 2021 and 2022, meaning companies increasing their prices because consumers expect price increases has made inflation caused by other issues, such as pandemic-related expenses, to be twice as bad.

With inflation out of control, the Federal Reserve, the US central bank, [increased interest rates](#) on Wednesday for the fourth month in a row. However, without appreciably blunting inflation, the Fed's activity has had the other expected effect: forcing the US economy into recession, despite attempts by the Biden administration [to portray it otherwise](#).

Meanwhile, Biden's efforts to subdue rising gas prices have largely floundered, with oil giants who were sold petroleum from the US strategic reserve turning around and [selling much of it in Europe](#), where prices are even higher, instead of putting that into the US market to bring prices down. Diesel fuel [has also seen shortages](#) in the US as sellers did the same, leaving Biden considering an even rarer release of the US' diesel reserve, which is typically kept to ensure access to heating oil for northeastern homes in case of a disaster.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Watch US Supreme Court Justice Alito Mock Critics of Abortion Rights-Gutting Dobbs Ruling

US Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito has often been referred to as the high court's most conservative justice. The Catholic justice has ruled in favor of abortion in the past, but penned the recent opinion that eviscerated that right at a federal level.

Speaking last week at an event in Rome, Italy, Alito took on some of his international critics who got fired up in response to his majority opinion in Dobbs vs. Jackson, a decision handed down last month that [overturned the federal right](#) to an abortion in the United States.

"Over the last few weeks, since I have had the honor this term of writing, I think, the only Supreme Court decision in the history of that institution that has been lambasted by a whole string of foreign leaders, who felt perfectly fine commenting on American law," [Alito said, referring to Dobbs](#) as "the decision whose name may not be spoken," a reference to Harry Potter villain Voldemort.

"One of these was former [UK] Prime Minister [Boris Johnson](#) - but he paid the price," Alito said, to laughter and cheers from the crowd. Others he mentioned included French President [Emmanuel Macron](#), Canadian Prime Minister [Justin Trudeau](#), adding that "what really wounded me" was when [Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex](#), seemed to compare the Dobbs ruling and Russia's special operation in Ukraine during a speech at the United Nations.

At that, however, the crowd did not laugh. Alito then changed the subject.

The rest of his speech mostly focused on religious liberty, which he characterized as under attack around the globe. However, he did not address one common criticism of the "religious liberty" justification for banning abortion: that [under Jewish halacha](#), abortion access is a necessity because of Jewish [prioritization of the mother's life](#) over all other considerations.

Supreme Court justices typically try to refrain from wading into the muddy waters of partisan politics. However, this isn't the first time Alito has jumped into the fray: last October, [he took aim at critics](#) of a series of overnight snap rulings informally referred to as "[shadow docket](#)" [decisions](#). The decisions did not feature oral arguments, with the justices rendering consequential rulings in a handful of hours on issues including the eviction moratorium, US immigration policies, and a Texas abortion restriction law that seemingly violated the 1973 Roe vs. Wade ruling.

"The catchy and sinister term 'shadow docket' has been used to portray the court as having been captured by a dangerous cabal that resorts to sneaky and improper methods to get its ways," Alito said in a speech at Notre Dame Law, the same institution that hosted him last week in Rome. "And this portrayal feeds unprecedented efforts to intimidate the court or damage it as an independent institution."

"The truth of the matter is there was nothing new or shadowy about the procedures we followed in those cases," he added.

Two of Alito's conservative colleagues, Justices [Amy Coney Barrett](#) and [Clarence Thomas](#), also spoke out last year in response to rising criticism that the court has become more political since acquiring a decisive 6-3 conservative majority.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

What's the Big Deal About Pelosi, Or Any Other US Politician, Going to Taiwan? An Explainer

The People's Republic of China (PRC) has threatened strong measures in response to a potential visit by US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) to the island of Taiwan. Pelosi, with Republican backing but opposing the White House, has insisted that being deterred from going would be undemocratic.

"One who plays with fire will certainly burn himself" - that's how Chinese President [Xi Jinping warned US President](#) Joe Biden on Thursday about the consequences of Pelosi going to Taiwan and, by extension, Washington's policy of increasing support for the Taiwanese government. Chinese Foreign Ministry [spokesperson Zhao Lijian](#) was a bit more verbose earlier this week, telling reporters that if Pelosi visits Taiwan as part of her Asia tour, "We are fully prepared. If the US goes its own way, China will certainly take firm and forceful measures to safeguard its national sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the United States should be held responsible for any serious consequences."

So why does China care so much if a US politician visits an island off its coast? The answer lay in a civil war fought nearly three-quarters of a century ago.

Republic Rump State

Taiwan was first annexed to the Qing Empire in 1683 by the Kangxi Emperor as part of an effort to crush resistance forces left over from the Ming Dynasty. However, in 1895, the Japanese Empire invaded and conquered Taiwan during the First Sino-Japanese War, forcing the Guangxu Emperor to cede control of the island. Japan turned Taiwan into a colony for producing sugar cane and brutally crushed anti-colonial revolts. At the end of World War II, the victorious

Allies returned Taiwan to Chinese control, along with other parts of the country Tokyo had seized.

On the mainland, the imperial government had since fallen, following a mass democratic movement that forced the [Xuantong Emperor, Puyi](#), to abdicate the throne in 1912. The Republic of China was declared, but the new government struggled to maintain control over the far-flung empire and was still at the mercy of imperialist powers like Japan, the US, and UK, inheriting the unequal treaties imposed on the empire. Warlordism by self-interested governors and generals gave way to a rising communist movement, which temporarily joined forces with the Republican government to resist the Japanese invasion.

After the war, the final reckoning between the two sides saw the communist Red Army conquer the entirety of mainland China and found a new People's Republic of China in Beijing [on October 1, 1949](#).

According to Chinese revolutionary leader Mao Zedong, on that day, China "stood up" and put the so-called "Century of Humiliation," when China was subservient to foreign powers, behind it. However, the Red Army lacked a navy capable of crossing the Taiwan Strait, an 80-mile-wide waterway separating Taiwan from Fujian and Guangdong provinces on the mainland. With the Cold War becoming more intense and a war between the competing socialist and capitalist governments in nearby Korea on the horizon, the United States continued to support and defend the Republic of China government in Taiwan, including sending the US Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Strait in 1950.

The RoC government has claimed ever since that it remains the sole legitimate government of all of China, and refuses to have relations with countries that recognize the PRC instead; Beijing has an identical policy, but in reverse.

After losing the mainland, the RoC government in Taipei instituted martial law, and a military dictatorship ruled the island until 1996, when the first democratic elections were held. A "white terror" saw thousands arrested, tortured, or executed for organizing against military rule or on suspicions of sympathizing with the socialist government.

Three Communiqués

After the PRC and the Soviet Union split into rival communist factions in the early 1960s, the US acquired new interest in befriending Beijing, since Washington perceived the primary threat to the capitalist world to be the Soviet Red Army and its Warsaw Pact allies in Europe. Beginning with [a secret trip into China in 1971](#) by then-US national security adviser Henry Kissinger to meet with Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, Beijing and Washington slowly grew closer. Then-US President Richard Nixon publicly visited China the following year and signed the Shanghai Communiqué.

In that highly important document, the US said it "acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China."

"The United States Government does not challenge that position. It reaffirms its interest in a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question by the Chinese themselves," the communiqué says.

The two nations notably published their statements separately instead of jointly, at Zhou's insistence.

[Two more communiqués](#) followed, in 1979 and 1982, with the US formally switching its recognition of the legitimate Chinese government from Taipei to Beijing in 1979. In the August 17, 1982, communiqué, the US stated it has "no intention of infringing on Chinese sovereignty

and territorial integrity, or interfering in China's internal affairs, or pursuing a policy of 'two Chinas' or 'one China, one Taiwan.'"

Washington also said in the 1982 communiqué that it "does not seek to carry out a long-term policy of arms sales to Taiwan, that its arms sales to Taiwan will not exceed, either in qualitative or in quantitative terms, the level of those supplied in recent years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and China, and that it intends gradually to reduce its sale of arms to Taiwan, leading, over a period of time, to a final resolution."

"In order to bring about, over a period of time, a final settlement of the question of United States arms sales to Taiwan, which is an issue rooted in history, the two Governments will make every effort to adopt measures and create conditions conducive to the thorough settlement of this issue," the document also stated.

Taiwan Relations Act, Six Assurances

Parallel to the US' agreements with the PRC, the US also passed a new [Taiwan Relations Act](#) in 1979 and issued Six Assurances in 1982. While the US had officially ended diplomatic relations with the government and abrogated the 1955 Sino-American Mutual Defense Treaty that obligated it to defend Taiwan, it created a [new, informal means of relations](#).

The act refers to "governing authorities on Taiwan," but also refers to Taiwan as a political entity that includes outlying islands under Taipei's control. It allowed the establishment of an American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) to serve as a de facto embassy and a similar office in Washington, DC, today known as the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office (TECRO).

Notably, the act does not state the US will come to Taiwan's defense, but does promise the US "will make available to Taiwan such defense articles and defense services in such quantity as may be necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain sufficient self-defense capabilities."

[The Six Assurances](#), given to Taiwan after the August 17 communiqué with the PRC, include pledges not to set a specific date for weapons sales to end and not to interfere or serve as intermediaries between Taipei and Beijing, and that the US will not pressure Taipei to open its own negotiations. The US also pledged not to revise the Taiwan Relations Act.

Strategic Ambiguity

While the mutual defense treaty is gone, Washington has been deliberately vague about whether or not it would actually defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese attack. The policy is two-pronged: it has kept Taiwan from feeling it has the blank check of US military backing to safely declare independence from China, and it has kept the PRC from feeling it has the blank check of US acquiescence to reuniting Taiwan with the mainland via force, as has happened to other outlier parts of the RoC that survived past 1949, such as Tibet and Hainan.

However, there have been several disruptions to this balance, owing to [the popular belief](#) in the United States that Taiwan is an independent country, a US ally, and worth fighting China over. While several recent trips to Taiwan by former US politicians [have led to statements](#) that the "One China" policy is dead or should be allowed to die, it's likely that when it comes to Pelosi's rumored forthcoming trip, Beijing has a far more serious infraction in mind.

The last time someone of such high rank in the US government traveled to Taiwan was 25 years ago, when then-House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-GA) flew there in 1997. On that trip, Gingrich [met with then-Taiwanese President](#) Lee Teng-hui and [said to China](#): "We want you to understand, we will defend Taiwan. Period."

In 1997, China was preparing for a major political triumph: the [reincorporation of Hong Kong](#) into the country, which had been a British colony since it was seized as a war prize in 1840. It also came on the heels of the [1995-1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis](#), which began when Lee was granted a visa to visit the United States and China responded with missile and amphibious assault drills near Taiwan.

In response, the US dispatched two carrier battle groups and an amphibious assault ship - another type of aircraft carrier - and numerous US warships that sailed through the Taiwan Strait, flouting Chinese warnings against it.

The situation was embarrassing for Beijing, since it was forced to back down, and the crisis gave Lee a boost in the polls and a political victory by winning a narrow majority in Taiwan's first democratic elections in 1996. However, it also led the Chinese People's Liberation Army to [acquire and design a host](#) of new weapons and warships that would be capable of taking on the advanced US fleet, including [long-range anti-ship missiles](#) designed to keep US aircraft carriers far from Chinese shores.

Beijing has warned the US in recent years that the dramatic [increase in weapons sales](#) to Taiwan, combined with renewed efforts to give it political cover on the international stage, are [empowering pro-independence forces](#) on the island, including President Tsai Ing-wen's Democratic Progressive Party.

If Taiwan does declare independence, it will certainly mean war.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Will He or Won't He? Manchin Refuses to Say Whether He'll Back Biden for 2024 Election

With two years before the 2024 presidential cycle, US President Joe Biden has indicated he fully intends to run once again for the White House bid. However, not many Americans are in favor of the move, with 65% of those surveyed in a recent poll opposing the move. Another 68% said they also didn't want former US President Donald Trump.

US Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV) refused to comment Sunday on whether or not he would be throwing his support behind US President Joe Biden during the 2024 presidential election. Speaking to ABC correspondent George Stephanopoulos, the West Virginia senator simply remarked that he would back "whoever" manages to win the presidential post in two years' time. "I'm not getting into 2022 or 2024. I'm not speculating on it," Manchin said, also referring to the looming midterm elections. "Whoever is my president, that's my president. And Joe Biden is my president right now."

"I think the Democrats have great candidates that are running. They're good people I've worked with, and I have a tremendous amount of respect and friendship with my Republican colleagues," he added.

Manchin further noted that he "can work on either side very easily." The official also sidestepped questions on whether he hoped Democrats would maintain their slim control of the US House of Representatives or Senate following midterms.

The centrist senator has spent the last several days avoiding giving a firm response to the big 2024 question after he managed to broker a deal Wednesday with Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer on the Inflation Reduction Act.

Although Manchin has previously referred to Biden as a "good person," he has also taken the opportunity to criticize the commander-in-chief over his energy policies.

The latest comes as a recent Gallup poll found that just 38% of voters approved Biden's work as president, effectively marking a new low. A June survey had Biden at a 41% approval.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

UPDATE - US Ready to Negotiate New Treaty to Replace New START in 2026 - Biden
(Adds details in paras 5-6)

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Monday that his administration is ready to promptly negotiate a new arms control framework to replace the New START treaty with Russia when it expires in 2026.

"Today, my Administration is ready to expeditiously negotiate a new arms control framework to replace New START when it expires in 2026. But negotiation requires a willing partner operating in good faith," Biden said in a statement ahead of the Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

Russia should demonstrate it is ready to resume work on nuclear arms control with the United States, he continued. So should China, the US president said.

"China also has a responsibility as an NPT nuclear weapons state and a member of the P5 to engage in talks that will reduce the risk of miscalculation and address destabilizing military dynamics. There is no benefit to any of our nations, or for the world, to resist substantive engagement on arms control and nuclear non-proliferation," he said.

The US, for its part, reaffirms its commitment to the NPT treaty, Biden said.

"In this moment of uncertainty and upheaval on the global stage, reaffirming our shared commitment to the grounding principles of the global nonproliferation regime has never been more crucial. The world can be confident that my Administration will continue to support the NPT and seek to strengthen the nonproliferation architecture that protects people everywhere," he added.

A global conference that reviews the NPT every five years will convene in New York from August 1-26.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Ready to Negotiate New Treaty to Replace New START in 2026 - Biden
(Updates headline, adds background in para 5)

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Monday that his administration is ready to promptly negotiate a new arms control framework to replace the New START treaty with Russia when it expires in 2026.

"Today, my Administration is ready to expeditiously negotiate a new arms control framework to replace New START when it expires in 2026. But negotiation requires a willing partner operating in good faith," Biden said in a statement ahead of the Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

Russia should demonstrate it is ready to resume work on nuclear arms control with the United States, he added. So should China, the US president said.

"China also has a responsibility as an NPT nuclear weapons state and a member of the P5 to engage in talks that will reduce the risk of miscalculation and address destabilizing military dynamics. There is no benefit to any of our nations, or for the world, to resist substantive engagement on arms control and nuclear non-proliferation," he said.

A global conference that reviews the NPT every five years will convene in New York from August 1-26.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Ready to Negotiate New Treaty to Replace New START When Expired - Biden

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Monday that his administration is ready to promptly negotiate a new arms control framework to replace the New START treaty with Russia when it expires in 2026.

"Today, my Administration is ready to expeditiously negotiate a new arms control framework to replace New START when it expires in 2026. But negotiation requires a willing partner operating in good faith," Biden said in a statement ahead of the Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

Russia should demonstrate it is ready to resume work on nuclear arms control with the United States, he added. So should China, the US president said.

"China also has a responsibility as an NPT nuclear weapons state and a member of the P5 to engage in talks that will reduce the risk of miscalculation and address destabilizing military dynamics. There is no benefit to any of our nations, or for the world, to resist substantive engagement on arms control and nuclear non-proliferation," he said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

ANALYSIS - US Recession Debate Irrelevant Amid Threat of Long-Term Stagflation

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The debate over the definition of a recession sparked by the White House this week is of secondary importance because the US economy, beset by

stagnation and soaring prices, may be on the verge of something much worse, analysts told Sputnik.

Commerce Department data released on Thursday confirmed that the US economy shrank for two consecutive quarters, the popular definition of a recession. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) fell by 0.9% in the second quarter after falling 1.6 percent in the first, according to the US Bureau of Economic Analysis.

However, President Joe Biden later denied that the country was facing such an economic downturn, despite the GDP data, only to be contradicted by New York City Mayor Eric Adams, a fellow Democrat, who said the country was not only in a recession, but Wall Street was on the brink of collapse.

The GDP data came a day after the Federal Reserve raised interest rates for the fourth time this year in a bid to rein in inflation that is running at a 41-year high of 9.1 percent.

Fed Chairman Jerome Powell downplayed talk of recession, pointing to the strong labor market, while the White House disputed the notion that the textbook definition of a recession is two consecutive quarters of negative growth.

BEYOND RECESSION

The US National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) actually defines a recession as more than a few months of significant economic decline. The Biden administration has argued that in determining a recession economists look at variables such as labor market conditions, consumer and business spending, industrial production, and incomes - in addition to GDP.

"The question of whether a recession is coming this year or next is much less important than the likelihood that the US economy has entered a long period of stagflation - which would be a big step backward from even the historically slow recovery that followed the global financial crisis and Great Recession," International trade analyst Alan Tonelson told Sputnik.

During the 2008 recession, Tonelson recalled, prices were tame and stable but growth was slow. Living standards, he added, bounced back only weakly largely because productivity growth - the best way to achieve robust and sustainable prosperity - was so meager.

"Now productivity improvement remains feeble, both the Fed and the Congressional Budget Office peg the economy's medium term growth rate at under 2% and inflation will surely stay elevated well into 2023, and would subside meaningfully only if demand levels remain subdued and therefore overall growth remained subpar," he said.

Several years ago, former Secretary of the Treasury Larry Summers revived the term "secular stagnation" to describe a US economy that he believed could only foster acceptable growth by inflating asset bubbles that were bound to burst disastrously, Tonelson noted.

"Today, we may be in for prolonged secular stagflation," Tonelson concluded.

Even if the textbook definition goes beyond GDP growth, other indicators are not looking good either. Levy Economics Institute of Bard College Research Associate Marshall Auerback said the latest economic data confirmed the reality of recession.

"Since June 15, we have had an across-the-board deterioration in almost all economic indicators," Auerback said. "We now have a 3-month average household survey job change that is significantly negative. Whenever that has happened in the past we were already in recession."

Other indicators have plunged as well, he added, including home sales, construction spending, and industrial production.

Moreover, US investors were moving away from stocks into bonds, always a sure sign that an economic downturn was expected and imminent, Auerback pointed out.

Political analyst and former hedge fund manager Charles Ortel cautioned that a stagflation cycle would be long, deep-rooted and particularly difficult to break.

"Is it inflation or recession? It is both. Costs are relentlessly increasing now that inflation has become an accepted reality. So most individuals and families are struggling to survive.

Meanwhile, those lucky enough to have money to invest are concerned that interest rates will continue to rise and thereby depress values of many asset classes," Ortel warned.

Ortel predicted that the recession would accelerate and reach serious dimensions in the fall.

"With the cost of human labor rising and the ease of replacing humans with technological substitutes increasing, expect the real pain to come with layoffs accelerating come September and afterwards," he said.

MITIGATION NEEDED

Brown University retired Assistant Professor of Economics Barry Friedman agreed that the US economy faced a stagflationary future but he advised that determined federal policy could still mitigate its effects and get the inflation aspect under control.

"In a market you can put downward pressure on prices either by policies to restrict demand or increase supply. The part of inflation due to excess demand can be brought down with restrictive budget and monetary policies," he pointed out.

However, it will take time for producers and consumers to make the decisions on cutting costs and cutting outlays that together will restrain the increase of prices, Friedman acknowledged.

"The Fed says it is willing to tolerate a slowdown in growth in order to bring inflation down to a target rate. I think they are quite determined. Pain means ultimately incomes, liquid assets, and employment opportunities for the bulk of the population are reduced, so price pressures are reduced. And there will always be some pain," he said.

There was a consensus of American economists that inflation will not be cooled until consumer demand and employment come under pressure and drawdowns of their liquid assets, Friedman commented.

"It will be some pain. But with resolve, the period of 'stagflation' can be shorter than in some earlier cycles with vacillating resolve such as in the late 1960s, [with] President [Lyndon] Johnson's unwillingness to raise taxes to offset heavy spending for the 'wars on poverty' and Vietnam," he said.

Ortel, however, is not confident the Biden administration will create any conditions conducive to reviving long-term capital investments in the domestic economy and feared the continual wasting of money on nonproductive initiatives.

"This is a time to cut personal spending, reduce debt and save," Ortel said. "Not to borrow money that we do not have to spend epic sums on social justice fantasy programs."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden Urges Senate to Back House-Passed Assault Weapons Ban - Statement

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden in a statement urged the Senate to quickly pass the House-passed bill to ban assault weapons.

Earlier on Friday, the House passed a bill by a slim 217-213 margin that would prohibit the sale of assault rifles to the general public in the United States.

"The majority of the American people agree with this common sense action," Biden said on Friday. "The Senate should move quickly to get this bill to my desk, and I will not stop fighting until it does."

The legislation, first introduced in March 2021, was moved forward following a series of recent high-profile mass shootings in the United States, including one at an elementary school in Texas that left 19 children dead and another at a supermarket in New York that resulted in ten people being killed. AR-15-style automatic rifles were used by gunmen in both mass shootings.

The bill would allow Americans keep semiautomatic assault weapons that they already legally own.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

ROCOR to Enthroned New First Hierarch on September 21 - Archbishop

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) set up September 18 as a date of enthronement of the new First Hierarch, Archbishop of Montreal and Canada Gabriel (Chemodakov) told Sputnik after the Synod meeting.

"We made a slight change with regard to the schedule of the upcoming Bishops Council, and now we have decided for practical reasons to have the enthronement of the new First Hierarch on September 18," Gabriel, who chairs the pre-Council Commission, said on Friday.

The election will take on September 13, on the first day of the Council, he added.

Initially, the enthronement was scheduled on September 21 in New York.

The Synod will convene before the Council once again on August 30 in order to see if there are questions to decide, Archbishop said.

The seat of the ROCOR First Hierarch became vacant after the six church Primate Metropolitan Hilarion (Kapral) passed away on May 16.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Looking Into Designating Russia as State Sponsor of Terrorism - White House

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The US government is looking into the possibility of designating Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism (SST) and also undertaking other measures to impose additional costs on that country, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said.

"We're looking into it along with a range of other proposals to impose further costs on Russia," Jean-Pierre said during a briefing on Friday.

Jean-Pierre noted that the US government has already imposed measures against Russia whose consequences equal those the SST designation would exact on the country.

"The cost that we have imposed are in line with some of the consequences of an SST designation," she said.

Western comprehensive sanctions have greatly affected Russia's economy, exacting high inflation, stock market falling by a third and a 40% decrease of imports.

"Russia defaulted for the first time in more than a century," Jean-Pierre said.

The comments come amid heightened tensions between Moscow and Washington after US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi reportedly urged Secretary of State Anthony Blinken to designate Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism.

On Thursday, the US Senate unanimously approved a non-binding resolution asking the State Department to apply the SST designation on Russia.

The United States has so far designated Cuba, North Korea, Iran and Syria as states sponsoring terrorism.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US House Narrowly Passes Assault Weapons Ban, Sending Bill to Senate

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives by a slim 217 - 213 margin passed a bill to prohibit American citizens from acquiring or possessing certain assault weapons.

The bill, which the House passed on Friday, faces a high hurdle to pass the Senate, however, which would require at least ten Republicans to cross party lines to support it.

The legislation, first introduced in March 2021, was moved forward following a series of recent high-profile mass shootings in the United States, including one at an elementary school in Texas that left 19 children dead and another at a supermarket in New York that resulted in ten people being killed. AR-15-style automatic rifles were used by gunmen in both mass shootings.

The legislation if passed will make it unlawful for a person to "import, sell, manufacture, transfer, or possess.... a semiautomatic assault weapon," according to the text of the bill.

However, the legislation grandfathered in protections for semiautomatic assault weapons already legally owned, so long as they are securely stored.

The bill also stipulates background checks by a licensed gun dealer prior to the sale or transfer of grandfathered firearms.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

UN Chief Condemns Terror Attack at Kabul Cricket Stadium - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, July 30 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemns the attack at a cricket stadium in Kabul that killed 19 people, United Nations spokesperson Farhan Haq said.

"The Secretary-General strongly condemns the attack today at the Kabul International Cricket Stadium in Afghanistan, which claimed the lives of at least 19 civilians and caused additional casualties," Haq said in a statement on Friday.

Guterres reiterated that attacks against civilians and civilian objects are strictly prohibited under international humanitarian law, Haq said.

Earlier on Friday, Afghan media reported that an explosion occurred at the Kabul International Cricket Stadium.

The blast went off at around 4:10 p.m. (11:40 GMT) during a game of the domestic T20 League between Band-e-Amir Dragons and Pamir Zalmi.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Prominent Islamic State Media Figure Sentenced to Life in Prison - US Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - A Saudi-born Canadian citizen has been sentenced to life in prison for providing material support to the Islamic State terror group (banned in Russia) and for executing two Syrian soldiers, the US Justice Department said in a press release.

"Mohammed Khalifa, aka Abu Ridwan Al-Kanadi and Abu Muthanna Al-Muhajir, 39, served in prominent roles within ISIS [Islamic State] starting in 2013 and continuing until his capture by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in January 2019," the release said on Friday.

In addition to serving as a fighter and personally executing two Syrian soldiers on behalf of the Islamic State, Khalifa served as a lead translator in the terror group's propaganda production and the English-speaking narrator on multiple violent videos, the release said.

Khalifa worked in Islamic State media until late 2018, producing content that glamorized portrayals of the terror group and its fighters as well as scenes of violence, including depictions of unarmed prisoners being executed, footage of attacks and fighting and depictions of attacks in the United States, the release also said.

Khalifa surrendered to the SDF on or about January 13, 2019, and was transferred to FBI custody in 2021 and transported to the Eastern District of Virginia where he had his initial court appearance on October 4, 2021, the release added.

Khalifa pled guilty to conspiring to provide material support or resources to a foreign terrorist organization, resulting in death, on December 10, 2021, according to the release.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Northrop Grumman Wins \$3.2Bln Deal to build Next-Gen Missile Interceptors - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - Northrop Grumman has won a more than \$3.2 billion contract to design, manufacture and deliver the next-generation Ground-Based Midcourse Interceptor for the US Missile Defense Agency, the Defense Department announced. "Northrop Grumman Systems Corporation [of] Huntsville, Alabama is being awarded a ... contract with a maximum amount of \$3,286,745,005," the Defense Department said in a press release on Friday.

The Defense Department said in the release that Northrop Grumman will design, develop, test and field the next Ground-Based Midcourse Defense Weapon System (GWS) program. "The GWS contract covers the systems engineering, design, development, integration, testing, and fielding of GWS software and hardware meeting warfighter needs, new requirements and evolving threats with greater reliability, availability, maintainability and testability than the current system," the release said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Elon Musk Files Response With Counterclaims to Twitter Lawsuit Over \$44Bln Deal - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - Elon Musk formally responded to Twitter's lawsuit that is seeking to force him to complete the \$44 billion acquisition of the social media company, The Wall Street Journal reported.

The report said on Friday that Musk filed counterclaims against Twitter's lawsuit, but the details are not viewable to the public since it was made confidentially.

The trial for Twitter's lawsuit against Musk is set to start on October 17.

Musk has argued that the volume of fake accounts on Twitter is higher than the 5% the company had reported as a basis for the deal that he had agreed to in April.

The takeover was approved by Twitter's Board of Directors in June, but Musk attempted to terminate the deal in early July, prompting Twitter to file a lawsuit to compel him to follow through on his purchase.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Massachusetts Man Charged With Bomb Threat to Arizona State Official - US Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - Police have arrested a resident of the US state of Massachusetts and charged him with sending a bomb threat to an election official in the state of Arizona, the US Justice Department said.

"A Massachusetts man was arrested today in Falmouth, Massachusetts, for allegedly sending a communication containing a bomb threat to an election official in the Arizona Secretary of State's Office," the Justice Department said in a press release on Friday.

James Clark, 38, was charged with one count of making a bomb threat, one count of perpetrating a bomb hoax and one count of communicating an interstate threat, and if he is convicted, he faces up to 15 years in jail on the combined charges, the release said. "Illegal threats of violence put election officials and workers at risk and undermine the bedrock of our democracy: free and fair elections," the release added.

According to the indictment, around February 14, 2021, Clark allegedly sent a message to the website of the Elections Division in the Arizona Secretary of State's Office threatening to blow up the state Attorney General within two days if she did not resign, according to the release.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Trump Says 'Crazy Nancy' Involvement With China, Taiwan Will Make Things Worse

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi should not get involved in the situation around China and Taiwan because she will only make it worse, former President Donald Trump said in a statement.

"Why is Nancy Pelosi getting involved with China and Taiwan other than to make trouble and more money," Trump said via his Truth Social platform on Friday. "The China mess is the last thing she should be involved in - she will only make it worse. Crazy Nancy just inserts herself and causes great friction and hatred."

Amidst reports that Pelosi will be traveling to Taiwan in August, tensions have risen between China and the US.

Beijing promised to take decisive measures, including military actions, to protect its territorial sovereignty, adding they will hold Washington responsible for any further degradation of the situation and bilateral relations.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Bulls Toast on Wall Street as Big Tech Posts Best Month in 2 Years Despite US Recession

NEW YORK, July 30 (Sputnik) - Bulls on Wall Street shrugged off worries about a US recession, giving Big Tech stocks their biggest monthly gain in over two years on Friday as trading for July concluded on bets that the Federal Reserve will have to curtail its aggressive interest rate hikes to stop an economic implosion.

"The Fed has a clear path to continue with aggressive hikes, but many are still thinking they'll be inclined to go at only a half point in September," Ed Moya, analyst at online trading platform OANDA, said after back-to-back three-quarter point hikes in June and July. "A couple more inflation and employment reports will dictate how the data-dependent Fed will behave after the summer."

The S&P 500 index, representing the top 500 US stocks, closed Friday's session up almost 1.5%. For the week it was up 4.3%, adding to the prior week's gain of 2.6%.

For July, the S&P rose 9%, for its biggest monthly gain since November 2020, when it rose almost 11%.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average, comprising stocks of 30 large US corporations, finished Friday up almost 1%. It rose 3% on the week, after a 2% rise in the week prior.

For July, the Dow rose 6.7%, practically overwriting June's decline of the same.

The outlier for Wall Street was still the Nasdaq Composite Index, which comprises marquee technology names such as Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google. The so-called Big Tech index rose almost 2% on the day. For the week, Nasdaq was up 4.7%, after a 3.3% rally the week prior.

For July, Nasdaq rose 12.4%, putting on its best showing since a 15% spike in April 2020.

Wall Street's behavior this week has been akin to an athlete on steroids, trying to make up for months of anemic performance due to spotty US macroeconomic data and fears of a recession. Those worries have, however, dissipated since the Commerce Department officially confirmed on Thursday that the United States was in recession - at least technically - as it reported a negative gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 0.9% for the second quarter, following a negative 1.6% in the first quarter. Under conventional economics theory, two straight quarters of negative GDP amount to a recession.

The weak GDP data came a day after the Fed raised rates for a fourth time this year, while playing down talk of a recession on the argument that the job market was outperforming.

The Fed has had a difficult task in fighting inflation over the past year as prices of goods and services, as measured by the Consumer Price Index, grew by 9.1% in the 12 months to June - their most in four decades - despite aggressive rate hikes by the central bank.

The Fed has brought rates to a range of between 2.25% and 2.5% from nearly zero in February.

The central bank has three more rate revisions before the year is out, with economists betting on hikes of a half point in each round after the weak GDP data for the first two quarters.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Blinken Has No Plans to Meet with North Korean Counterparts at ASEAN Forum - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has no plans to meet with his North Korean counterparts during the upcoming forum of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs Daniel Kritenbrink said during a press briefing.

"There are no plans to meet with North Korean counterparts," Kritenbrink said on Friday.

Kritenbrink said that he does not know who is going to represent North Korea at the forum and pointed out that Blinken will speak "directly" to the situation in that country.

Blinken will visit Cambodia on August 3-5 to attend ASEAN and East Asia Summit meetings, as part of his bigger tour to Asia and Africa.

On Thursday, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said that his country is absolutely ready to mobilize its nuclear war deterrence forces at any moment and added that any possible attempt by South Korea to make a preventive strike would be futile.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Wants to Consult on Decision to Open Congolese Rainforest for Exploration - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The United States wants to have discussions on the decision to open up the Congolese rainforest to oil and gas exploration during the trip of US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to the country, US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Molly Phee told reporters.

"We will want to consult on the decision to open up the Congolese rainforest to oil and gas exploration," Phee said on Friday. "The consequence for the DRC, for Africa and for the world are immense."

Blinken will be in the Democratic Republic of the Congo on August 9-10 as part of his trip to Asia and Africa next week.

On Thursday, the Congolese government is auctioning off licensing rights for 30 oil and gas blocks in the country's peatlands and rainforests.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

White House Communications Director Bedingfield Reverses Decision to Step Down - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - White House Communications Director Kate Bedingfield reversed her decision from earlier this month to step down from her post, the Wall Street Journal reported.

After much thought, discussion and reflection, Bedingfield has decided to stay, the report said on Friday.

Beddington pointed out she is not done and there is much more good work to do, the report also said.

The White House Communications Director noted she had planned to step down from her post this summer, the report added.

Bedingfield was a deputy campaign manager for Joe Biden's 2020 presidential campaign and used to serve as his communications director when he was Vice President in the administration of former President Barack Obama.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Has No Plans for Blinken to Meet With Lavrov in Cambodia - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The United States has no plans for a meeting between US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov during their visit to Cambodia for meetings with ASEAN, State Department spokesperson Ned Price told reporters.

"We have no plans to meet with Foreign Minister Lavrov when they are in Cambodia," Price said during a press briefing on Friday.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US to Consider 'Any, All' Means to Increase Pressure on Myanmar Regime - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The United States will consider "any and all" means to increase pressure on Myanmar military regime to cut it off from funding streams that fuel repressions in the country, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs Daniel Kritenbrink said.

"We'll consider any and all means necessary to increase pressure on the regime in Burma [Myanmar] and to cut off their funding streams that continue to fuel their repression," Kritenbrink said during a press briefing on Friday.

Kritenbrink underscored that "all options are on the table" when it comes to dealing with the military regime in Myanmar.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) -

US-RUSSIA PRISONER EXCHANGE

* Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, in a phone conversation with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, called for return to "silent diplomacy" on the issue of prisoner exchange, without speculation and stuffing, the Russian Foreign Ministry said after the conversation.

* Blinken said he had a "frank conversation" with Lavrov about the US proposal on the return of detained Americans Paul Whelan and Brittney Griner to US soil.

* Russian officials requested the United States provide a second prisoner in response to the possible prisoner exchange offer Washington made to Moscow for Whelan and Griner, CNN reported.

* The United States is pleased that Lavrov is willing to hear its proposal for a prisoner exchange, White House National Security Council Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said.

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENT

* The United States is already in the process of procuring NASAMS air defense systems for Ukraine, a senior US Defense Department official said on Friday.

* White House National Security Council Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said it would be safe to suggest that Washington will soon unveil another drawdown to allocate military assistance to Ukraine.

LAVROV-BLINKEN CALL

* Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov discussed the situation in Ukraine with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

* Lavrov, in a conversation with Blinken, outlined the details of the Istanbul agreements on lifting restrictions on the supply of Russian products for export and on Russia's assistance in the export of Ukrainian grain, stressed the role of US sanctions in the food situation, and also said that it was unacceptable to use the topic food for political purposes, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

* Lavrov and Blinken discussed by phone bilateral relations, which are in dire need of normalization, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

GLOBAL ENERGY

* Tehran and Moscow are cooperating productively within the framework of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) and should work together to regulate energy prices, Iranian Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali said.

* Sending a Siemens turbine for the Nord Stream gas pipeline from Canada to Germany instead of Russia does not meet the terms of the contract, Gazprom Deputy Chairman Vitaly Markelov said.

* Russia and Saudi Arabia are committed to the OPEC+ agreement to maintain market stability and restore balance on the oil market, Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said after his meeting with Saudi Energy Minister Abdulaziz bin Salman in Riyadh.

WESTERN SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

* A Swiss bank froze a personal account of Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva Gennady Gatilov, the Russian permanent mission to the UN office told Sputnik on Friday.

* The United States has imposed a new round of Russia-related sanctions on two individuals and four entities, the US Treasury Department Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) said.

PUTIN-BIDEN TALKS

* There are no plans to arrange a phone conversation between the Russian and US leaders, Vladimir Putin and Joe Biden, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Friday.

* White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters that there are no plans at present for a phone call between Biden and Putin after the US Secretary of State Secretary Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov spoke earlier.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Official Says if Ukraine Shelled Prison Housing POWs 'They Did Not Mean to Do That'

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) - Even if the Ukrainian forces were behind the strike on the Olenivka detention facility housing Ukrainian prisoners of war in the Donbas, "they did not mean to do that," a senior US Defense Department official said on Friday.

"If it happened to be a Ukrainian strike, I promise you, number one - they didn't mean to do that. They certainly care about their own people, and they care about the civilians and military, of their own army," the official said during a press briefing.

The official said even though the Russian military presented some pieces of munition for the US-supplied High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), which, according to Moscow were used to shell the detention facility, it does not necessarily mean that Ukraine is the one to blame since the Russians forces have some of them.

Earlier on Friday, a Sputnik correspondent reported that the Olenivka detention center hosting Ukrainian prisoners of war was shelled by Ukrainian troops with HIMARS. Medical personnel and troops of the Emergencies Ministry are currently working at the site.

The correspondent reported that some of the wreckage contained serial numbers of HIMARS missiles.

The building of the detention center had been almost destroyed by a scorching fire, the correspondent reported, adding that Ukrainian militants detained there were almost burned to the ground with their bodies still lying at the site.

The territorial defense staff of the Donetsk People's Republic said on Friday that the death toll from the strike on the detention center in Olenivka reached 53 people, and the number of wounded detainees surpassed 130.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

UPDATE 2 - US Imposes Russia-Related Sanctions on 2 Persons, 4 Entities - Treasury
(Updates with additional details in paras 12-16)

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed a new round of Russia-related sanctions on two individuals and four entities for their alleged malign influence in the United States, the US Department of the Treasury said in a press release on Friday. "Today, the Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), as part of a joint action with the Department of Justice, sanctioned two individuals and four entities that support the Kremlin's global malign influence operations and election interference activities," the

release said. "The individuals and entities designated today played various roles in Russia's attempts to manipulate and destabilize the United States and its allies and partners, including Ukraine."

The two designated individuals are Natalya Burlinova and Aleksandr Ionov, the release said. Three of the four sanctioned companies are linked to Ionov, including the Stop-Imperialism Global Information Agency, Ionov Transcontinental and Anti-Globalization Movement of Russia, the release said.

The Treasury Department alleges that since at least mid-2018, Ionov's actions were aimed at finding possible points of instability in the United States to create socio-political disturbance by providing financial support to various organizations, the release said.

Moreover, the Treasury Department claims that the Anti-Globalization Movement of Russia, with Ionov as its founder and president, maintained connections with separatists in the United States and abroad, holding conferences and protests in the United States in opposition to US policy.

The Justice Department said in a separate press release that Ionov recruited three political groups in the US states of Florida, Georgia and California, and directed them to further Russian interests as well as coordinated coverage of this activity in Russian media outlets.

However, the Treasury Department has not provided any explanation as to why it imposed sanctions on Ionov Transcontinental and only said the company had a footprint in Iran, Venezuela and Lebanon, the release said.

The Treasury Department also did not explain why the Center for Support and Development of Public Initiative Creative Diplomacy and Burlinova, who is the founder and president of this company, were placed on the sanctions list except for being allegedly funded by the Russian government, the release said.

The entities and individuals have been designated or having acted or purported to act for or on behalf of, directly or indirectly, the Russian government, the release added.

Ionov faces a maximum penalty of five years in prison if found guilty for conspiring to have US citizens act as illegal agents of the Russian government, according to the release.

Later in the day, US Attorney Roger Handberg said prosecutors had executed three search warrants in St. Petersburg, Florida, in connection to the ongoing probe into Ionov's activities in the United States.

Tampa Bay Times reported that one of the addresses searched was a house of the Uhuru Movement in St. Petersburg, an African socialist and internationalist group based in the United States. However, the indictment does not list the Uhuru by name and instead says "US Political Group 1."

The indictment alleges that Ionov was in a relationship with US Political Group 1, or the Uhuru Movement, until March.

Handberg listed a number of cases when Ionov allegedly financed travel and covered the costs of the Uhuru members, including two trips to Russia, and supported candidates in the political campaigns in St. Petersburg.

Handberg underscored that the investigation is not over and the FBI will continue to meticulously review the evidence in the case.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US, Japan to Ensure World Abides by Established Rules, Standards - Minister

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) - The US and Japanese governments will jointly work to ensure that all countries comply with the international "rules and standards," Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi said on Friday.

Hayashi spoke at a joint press conference with US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo and Japanese Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Haguida Koichi at the State Department.

"Regarding the unfair and opaque development, finance, I hope that Japan and the United States can work together to ensure all countries comply to the international rules and standards," Yoshimasa said.

Japan also wants to ensure that US-Japan competition is guided by cooperation and partnership given that Tokyo and Washington are working to establish more resilient supply chains with the help of other countries.

Yoshimasa reiterated that Japan is not looking to apply protectionist measures, but instead is looking forward toward more transparent policies for fair trade between countries.

"I hope that we can continue to deepen our discussions in various related areas with like minded countries," Yoshimasa added.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

West Trying to Maintain Leverage Over Africa Through UNSC Sanctions - Russian Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, July 29 (Sputnik) - Western countries are exploiting development cooperation and UN Security Council sanctions mechanisms to maintain leverage over Africa, Russian deputy envoy the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Friday, after the UNSC extended an arms embargo on the Central African Republic.

"We see that mainly Western states are trying their best to maintain political leverage using the important tool of international cooperation and sanctions mechanisms at the Security Council for their opportunistic purposes," Polyanskiy told a UNSC meeting.

Russia is concerned that the views of African countries on lifting sanctions are being ignored, the envoy added.

On Friday, the UNSC voted on a draft resolution extending sanctions measures against CAR until July 31, 2023. The resolution was passed in a 10-0 vote, with five members abstaining, including Russia and China.

France circulated a first draft of the resolution on July 15. Russia later proposed its own draft resolution, but finally a compromise French text was put to the vote.

Russia, together with China and A3 (Gabon, Ghana, and Kenya), supports lifting the arms embargo on CAR, as they believe the arms embargo puts CAR at a disadvantage in fighting armed groups.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Military Official Calls Russia's Capture of Ugegorsk Thermal Power Plant 'Big Deal'

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) - The capture of the Ugegorsk thermal power plant in the Donbas by the Russian forces is a "big deal" because now they are able to control the flow of power in the region amid Russia's ongoing special military operation in Ukraine, a senior US Defense Department official said on Friday.

"That's a big deal, right? I mean, it gives them [Russians] the opportunity to use power or not use power, literally, in this case," the official said during a press briefing.

On Wednesday, the Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) militia took control of the Ugegorsk thermal power plant in the city of Svitlodarsk.

LPR militia spokesman Ivan Filiponenko said the authorities are now clearing the plant and adjusted territory of mines, and clearing all other explosive devices, including un-exploded shells, will be the next stage of operations.

The LPR authorities also said that the plant's major equipment was not damaged and preliminary inspections have shown it is possible to start up the facility.

On February 24, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine after the breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk requested help to defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Ministry of Defense said the operation is solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and the civilian population is not in danger.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Russian Officials Requested Second Prisoner in Response to Swap Offer - Reports

(Adds details in paras 3-6)

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) - Russian officials requested the United States provide a second prisoner in response to the possible prisoner exchange offer Washington made to Moscow for Americans Paul Whelan and Brittney Griner, CNN reported on Friday citing multiple sources familiar with the matter.

The report said Russia requested earlier this month that the United States provide Russian citizen Vadim Krasikov along with Viktor Bout. In December, a German court convicted Krasikov of murdering former Chechen fighter Zelimkhan Khangoshvili and sentenced him to life in prison in Germany.

The report said, according to a senior German government source, that the United States did ask Germany about whether it would be willing to include Krasikov in the potential prisoner exchange.

However, the United States' inquiry into whether Krasikov could be part of the United States' swap offer did not reach the top levels of the German government and it has not been seriously considered, the report said.

The United States is reportedly offering to release Bout to Russia in exchange for Whelan and Griner. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov discussed the matter earlier in the day.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said earlier that negotiations on the exchange of prisoners between Russia and the United States are being conducted, but there is no concrete result yet.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

White House Denies Finishing Trump's Border Wall Despite Plans to Close Gaps in Arizona

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) - White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre denied on Friday that the Biden administration is finishing a section of Donald Trump's wall on the border with Mexico, describing the process as a cleanup of the "mess" left behind by the previous administration.

"We are not finishing the wall, we are cleaning up the mess that the prior administration made," Jean-Pierre told a briefing. "A border wall is ineffective use of taxpayer dollars."

On Thursday, the Department of Homeland Security announced that Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas authorized the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to execute the Yuma Morelos Dam Project to close four gaps in the border wall in Arizona near the Morelos Dam.

One of Biden's first actions when he took office was to halt the border wall construction.

However, the move left several portions of the border wall open, which are often exploited by migrants crossing illegally into the United States.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Russian Officials Requested Second Prisoner in Response to Swap Offer - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) - Russian officials requested the United States provide a second prisoner in response to the possible prisoner exchange offer Washington made to Moscow for Americans Paul Whelan and Brittney Griner, CNN reported on Friday citing multiple sources familiar with the matter.

The report said Russia requested earlier this month that the United States provide Russian citizen Vadim Krasikov along with Viktor Bout. In December, a German court convicted Krasikov of murdering former Chechen fighter Zelimkhan Khangoshvili and sentenced him to life in prison.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US in Process of Procuring NASAMS Systems for Ukraine - Senior Official

(Adds background in paras 3-5)

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) - The United States is already in the process of procuring National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS) for Ukraine, a senior US defense official said on Friday.

"I do not have the deep information on the specifics of the contracting process, but we are already in the process of procuring the system because in the moment when we announced the Ukraine security assistance initiative we move forward with that," the official said during a conference call.

On July 1, the Biden administration announced a new \$820 million military aid package for Kiev, which includes two Norwegian NASAMS.

A senior US defense official said earlier this month that the United States is expected to deliver the NASAMS to Ukraine within several months.

The NASAMS are a short-to-medium-range ground-based air defense system that can defend against drones, helicopters, cruise missiles, and aircraft.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US 'Confident' It Can Continue to Meet Ukraine's Military Needs – Official

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) – The United States is "confident" it can continue sending military aid to Ukraine in line with the needs of the Ukrainian military, including additional ammunition for the High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), a senior US defense official said on Friday.

"We are constantly checking in with the Ukrainians on where they are with their consumption rates, because we want to make sure that they have what they need on the battlefield. So, we feel really confident in our security assistance processes to be able to continue to support them with their needs," the official said during a press briefing when asked whether there is any concern in the US on HIMARS munitions running out in Ukraine.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US in Process of Procuring NASAMS Systems for Ukraine - Senior Official

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) - The United States is already in the process of procuring NASAMS air defense systems for Ukraine, a senior US defense official said on Friday.

"I do not have the deep information on the specifics of the contracting process, but we are already in the process of procuring the system because in the moment when we announced the Ukraine security assistance initiative we move forward with that," the official said during a conference call.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden to Run for Reelection in 2024 - White House

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden will run in the 2024 election, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Friday.

"The President intends to run in 2024. We are a long way away from that. I cannot get into specifics of any political election polling, because I am behind this podium," Jean-Pierre told a briefing, when asked about polls showing Biden's low popularity among Democrats themselves.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

White House Says No Plans for Biden-Putin Telephone Call

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) - White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters on Friday that there are no plans at present for a phone call between US President Joe Biden and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin after the US Secretary of State Secretary Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov spoke earlier.

"As far as a call or plans for a call, we don't have a plan for the President to call President Putin," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing. "We do not have a plan for that at this time."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

UPDATE - US Imposes Russia-Related Sanctions on 2 Persons, 4 Entities - Treasury
(Updates with more details throughout; modifies lede; adds quote in para 2)

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed a new round of Russia-related sanctions on two individuals and four entities for their alleged malign influence in the United States, the US Department of the Treasury said in a press release on Friday.

"Today, the Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), as part of a joint action with the Department of Justice, sanctioned two individuals and four entities that support the Kremlin's global malign influence operations and election interference activities," the release said. "The individuals and entities designated today played various roles in Russia's attempts to manipulate and destabilize the United States and its allies and partners, including Ukraine."

The two designated individuals are Natalya Burlinova and Aleksandr Ionov, the release said. Three of the four sanctioned companies are linked to Ionov, including the Stop-Imperialism Global Information Agency, Ionov Transcontinental and Anti-Globalization Movement of Russia, the release said.

The Treasury Department alleges that since at least mid-2018, Ionov's actions were aimed at finding possible points of instability in the United States to create socio-political disturbance by providing financial support to various organizations, the release said.

Moreover, the Treasury Department claims that the Anti-Globalization Movement of Russia, with Ionov as its founder and president, maintained connections with separatists in the United States and abroad, holding conferences and protests in the United States in opposition to US policy.

The Justice Department said in a separate press release that Ionov recruited three political groups in the US states of Florida, Georgia and California, and directed them to further Russian interests as well as coordinated coverage of this activity in Russian media outlets.

However, the Treasury Department has not provided any explanation as to why it imposed sanctions on Ionov Transcontinental and only said the company had a footprint in Iran, Venezuela and Lebanon, the release said.

The Treasury Department also did not explain why the Center for Support and Development of Public Initiative Creative Diplomacy and Burlinova, who is the founder and president of this company, were placed on the sanctions list except for being allegedly funded by the Russian government, the release said.

The entities and individuals have been designated or having acted or purported to act for or on behalf of, directly or indirectly, the Russian government, the release added.

Ionov faces a maximum penalty of five years in prison if found guilty for conspiring to have US citizens act as illegal agents of the Russian government, according to the release.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Ships Exporting Grain Ready to Leave Ukraine Once Procedures Worked Out - UN Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, July 29 (Sputnik) - The United Nations believes that merchant ships are ready to start exporting Ukraine grain via the Black Sea and hopes the process will begin soon, UN spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Friday.

"There are ships that are basically ready to go once the procedure is in place. It can happen fairly quickly after that ... I'm hoping it can be soon, but I don't want to be held to a day," Haq said during a press briefing.

The recently established Joint Coordination Center (JCC) is working to lay down operating procedures, including monitoring, inspection and emergency procedures, including the routes and corridors of the inbound and outbound vessels, Haq added.

Earlier on Friday, the UN Security Council held its first official meeting on Ukraine since the so-called Black Sea Initiative on grain and fertilizer exports was signed on July 22.

Last week, Russia and Ukraine signed separate agreements with the United Nations and Turkey to ensure the safe export of grain and fertilizer via the Black Sea. Russia has said it established corridors despite the Black Sea being heavily mined by Ukraine. Russia has also said it would have signed the agreement in April but the Western countries sabotaged the effort then.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Blinken Says Had 'Frank' Talk With Lavrov on Prisoner Exchange

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) - Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Friday he has had a "frank conversation" with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov about the US proposal on the return of Americans Paul Whelan and Brittney Griner to US soil.

"On a separate note, earlier today, I spoke with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov. We had a frank and direct conversation. I pressed the Kremlin to accept the substantial proposal that we put forth on the release of Paul Whelan and Brittney Griner," Blinken told a briefing.

Reports said earlier this week that after months of internal debate, the Biden administration has offered to exchange Viktor Bout, who is serving a 25-year US prison sentence, as part of a potential deal to secure the release of Whelan and Griner.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

New York Mayor Adams Says Biden Wrong, US Already in Recession - Reports

NEW YORK, July 29 (Sputnik) - New York City Mayor Eric Adams has said President Joe Biden is wrong in denying that the United States is in a recession and warned the financial sector that has powered the US economy for more than 200 years is now on the brink of collapse, the New York Post reported on Friday.

Wall Street is already collapsing and the United States has fallen into a state of recession, Adams said in remarks at Sanzer Yeshiva, a Jewish religious institution on Staten Island, the report said.

Biden has refused to acknowledge that the US economy is in a state of recession despite two quarterly periods in a row where official government data confirmed that the gross domestic product had continued to shrink. However, Adams said the US president was denying the self-evident facts.

The US Commerce Department released on Thursday confirmed that GDP had fallen by 0.9% in the second quarter of this year after the first quarter recorded a drop of 1.6%.

Adams went further and claimed the financial crisis centered on Wall Street was already worse than the public could imagine, the report said.

Adams also said he still trusted Biden and would follow his lead, but he reiterated the warning that the United States was dealing with tough economic times, the report added.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

China Urges Against Politicizing Black Sea Grain Deal - Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, July 29 (Sputnik) - The global community should dismiss any attempts to politicize the UN-brokered grain deal, Chinese Ambassador to the United Nations Zhang Jun said on Friday.

"The international community should see the signing and implementation of the two agreements from the humanitarian perspective, reject politicization, create a favorable environment for the follow up implementation of the agreements and provide solid guarantees," Zhang told a UNSC meeting.

China, he noted, has pursued an "objective and impartial approach" since the onset of the Ukraine crisis, proceeding from historical developments and the merit of the issue itself.

The UNSC meeting was requested by Albania and the US. It is the first meeting of the top UN body since the Black Sea Initiative to facilitate exports of food and fertilizers from Ukraine and

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Pelosi Declines to Comment About Possible Taiwan Trip Due to Security Issues

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi on Friday refused to comment during a press briefing about her possible trip to Taiwan allegedly due to security issues.

"I don't ever talk about my travel because of some of, you know, it's a security issue for every member of Congress," Pelosi said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

White House Says 'Gratifying' That Lavrov Willing to Hear US Proposal for Prisoner Swap

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) – The United States is pleased that Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is willing to hear its proposal for a prisoner exchange, White House National Security Council Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Friday.

"It is certainly gratifying to hear that Mr. Lavrov is willing to listen to our proposal," Kirby told a briefing. "It is a serious proposal, we hope that the Russian side will take it seriously." Lavrov said on Friday that he is ready to listen to US State Secretary Antony Blinken's
This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

White House Says 'Safe to Assume' US Will Soon Announce More Military Aid to Ukraine

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Council Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Friday it would be safe to suggest that Washington will soon unveil another drawdown to allocate military assistance to Ukraine. "It's certainly safe to assume that there will be additional presidential drawdown announcements with respect to Ukraine, I fully expect that." Kirby said. "I think you are going to see another one relatively soon."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden Directs \$600M In for Youth Mental Health Programs - White House

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has directed \$600 million to fund two programs to address a national mental health crisis affecting young people in the United States, the White House said on Friday.
"Today, the Biden-Harris administration announced two new actions to strengthen school-based mental health services and address the youth mental health crisis," the White House said in a press release. "Awarding the first of nearly \$300 million the President secured through the FY2022 bipartisan omnibus agreement to expand access to mental health services in schools." The Department of Education will begin disbursing next week \$300 million that Congress allocated from the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act and the fiscal year 2022 Omnibus bill, both of which will help schools hire more mental health professionals and build a robust pipeline of professionals to assist students during the coming school year, the release said.
"More than 40 percent of teenagers state that they struggle with persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, and more than half of parents and caregivers express concern over their children's mental well-being," the release added.
President Joe Biden announced in his first State of the Union speech a comprehensive national strategy to mitigate the United States' mental health emergency and is advancing what he described as a major transformation in how mental health is understood, accessed and treated.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Charges Russian With Conspiracy to Have Americans Act as Illegal Agents of Russia Gov't

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) - The United States has charged Russian national Alexander Ionov, the founder and president of the Anti-Globalization Movement of Russia, with conspiring to have US citizens act as illegal agents of the Russian government, the Justice Department said on Friday.

"An indictment was unsealed today in Tampa, Florida, charging a Russian national, working on behalf of the Russian government and in conjunction with the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), with allegedly orchestrating a years-long foreign malign influence campaign that used various U.S. political groups to sow discord, spread pro-Russian propaganda, and interfere in elections within the United States," the press release said.

The indictment alleges that from at least December 2014 until March 2022, Ionov together with at least three Russian officials, "engaged in a years-long foreign malign influence campaign targeting the United States." It also argues that Ionov utilized the Anti-Globalization Movement of Russia to carry out "Russia's influence campaign."

Ionov is charged with "conspiring to have U.S. citizens act as illegal agents of the Russian government." If convicted, he faces up to five years in prison.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Says No Tangible Indications of Chinese Troop Movements With Respect to Taiwan

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) - The United States has seen no tangible indications of Chinese troop movements with respect to Taiwan, US National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Friday.

"We've seen no physical tangible indications of anything [from China] with respect to Taiwan," Kirby said when asked whether the United States has seen any Chinese troop movements over the last couple of days toward Taiwan.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Russia Was Ready to Sign Grain Agreement in April But West Sabotaged Deal - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, July 29 (Sputnik) - Russia was ready to sign the agreement on grain and fertilizer exports in April but Ukraine tried to sabotage the deal, Russian Deputy Representative to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Friday.

"I would like to underscore that we were prepared to resolve these issues back in April after they were discussed at the meeting in Moscow ... but Kiev and its Western backers tried to sabotage the package nature of the agreements, overemphasizing only the parts that are related to Ukrainian grain," Polyanskiy said during a UN Security Council meeting on Ukraine.

Russia was ready to pursue the deal even though the amount totaled only 5 millions tonnes, which is less than 1% of the total grain supply globally, Polyanskiy added.

The meeting was requested by Albania and the United States, the penholders of Ukraine, seeking to focus attention on the implications of the crisis in that country on the UN Charter and the protection of civilians.

This was the UN Security Council's first meeting since the so-called Black Sea Initiative on grain and fertilizer exports via the Black Sea was signed on July 22 and the first formal meeting on Ukraine in July.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Consumer Sentiment Remains Near All-Time Lows as Recession Bites - UMich Poll

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) - US consumer sentiment hovered near all-time highs toward end-July, the University of Michigan said in its closely-followed consumer poll on Friday as Americans' purchases were restrained by fears of a recession that came true in second quarter economic data.

"The final July reading showed little change in consumer sentiment from its historic low in June," the UMich Consumer Survey said.

The latest reading for the UMich Consumer Sentiment Index stood at 51.1 versus last month's all-time low of 50, while the one-year economic outlook fell to its lowest reading since 2009, the survey said.

The UMich survey said an easing of global economic reasons had helped American consumer sentiment only a little in July. "This easing provided some limited support to buying conditions for durables, which remained near the all-time low reached last month, as well as a modest retreat in long run inflation expectations. However, inflation continued to dominate consumers' attention, and labor market expectations continued to soften."

Consumer sentiment accounts for 70% of US gross domestic product.

The latest UMich survey results came after the Commerce Department reported on Thursday that US GDP posted a negative 0.9% growth in the second quarter, after a contraction of 1.6% in the first quarter. The back-to-back negative quarters technically place the economy in a recession.

Separately, the Commerce Department said Friday that the Personal Consumption Expenditure (PCE) Index — an inflation indicator closely followed by the Federal Reserve — grew 6.8% in the year to June after being dormant in two earlier months, intensifying the central bank's fight against price growth.

With the PCE's uptick for June, it indicated that inflation was relentless at four-decade highs, and that the Fed may not be done yet with the super-sized rate hikes it has carried out this year to fight price growth. The central bank has raised rates four times already this year since March, with the latest two increases of 75 basis points being the highest of their kind in 28 years.

The combination of inflation and the rate hikes meant to curb such price growth had combined to weigh on US consumer sentiment, analysts said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Extends Temporary Protected Status for Syrians Through March 31, 2024 - DHS

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) – The United States is extending temporary protected status for Syrians until March 31, 2024, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said on Friday. "The DHS today published a Federal Register notice extending for an additional 18 months Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for eligible Syrians already in the United States, from Oct. 1, 2022, to March 31, 2024, due to ongoing armed conflict and extraordinary and temporary conditions in Syria that prevent individuals from safely returning. In addition, TPS was redesignated for the same reason, now allowing Syrians residing in the United States as of July 28, 2022 to be eligible for TPS," the statement read.

DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas explained that this measure will allow Syrians to stay in the US until the situation in their country improves. "We are committed to protecting Syrian nationals in the United States as the ongoing civil war in Syria persists, leading to continued destruction and despair," he said.

The extension of TPS for Syrians allows approximately 6,448 current beneficiaries to retain TPS through March 31, 2024, if they meet eligibility requirements, according to the statement. The DHS estimates that approximately 960 additional individuals may be eligible to stay in the US under this status.

"This population includes nationals of Syria (and individuals without nationality who last resided in Syria) in the United States in nonimmigrant status or without immigration status," the statement added.

The armed conflict in Syria has been going on since 2011, with different insurgent groups, including terrorist organizations, fighting the Syrian army in order to topple the government of President Bashar Assad. In late 2017, the Islamic State terrorist group (banned in Russia) was declared defeated in Syria and Iraq, but counterterrorism mop-up operations continue.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Imposes Russia-Related Sanctions on 2 Persons, 4 Entities - Treasury

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed a new round of Russia-related sanctions on two individuals and four entities, the US Treasury Department Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) said on Friday.

The two designated individuals are Natalya Burlinova and Aleksandr Ionov, OFAC said. According to OFAC, three of the four companies that were sanctioned are linked to Ionov, including the Stop-Imperialism Global Information Agency, Ionov Transcontinental and Anti-Globalization Movement of Russia.

OFAC also believes that Burlinova is allegedly linked to the fourth Russian entity on the list - the Center for Support and Development of Public Initiative Creative Diplomacy.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Air Force Grounds F-35 Fleet Over Ejector Seat Component Failure Concerns - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) - The US Air Force has grounded its entire fleet of fifth-generation F-35 Joint Strike Fighter jets because a faulty component was found in its Martin-Baker ejection seat that could prevent pilots from safely being shot out of the aircraft during an emergency, US media reported on Friday.

Air Combat Command spokeswoman Alexi Worley confirmed the grounding of the entire fleet, which was described as a temporary stand down, in an email to the Breaking Defense publication.

The stand down was part of a process initiated on July 19 to check all the cartridge accentuated devices, or CADs used to shoot the ejection seats and pilots safely out of the aircraft if required, Worley told the publication.

On Thursday, the Air Force Education and Training Command also grounded almost 300 training aircraft due to the same ejector seat expulsion cartridge issue and on Wednesday, the US Navy confirmed it too had grounded an unspecified number of training and combat aircraft for this reason, the report said.

Similar problems have affected the United Kingdom's Eurofighter Typhoon force and its Red Arrow air show demonstration team, according to reports.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Blinken to Visit Cambodia on August 3-5 for ASEAN, East Asia Meetings - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will visit Cambodia on August 3-5 to attend ASEAN and East Asia Summit meetings, as part of his bigger tour of Asia and Africa, State Department spokesman Ned Price said on Friday.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will likewise travel to Cambodia on August 4-5 to take part in Russia-ASEAN, East Asia Summit and ASEAN Regional Forum meetings. Lavrov and Blinken are expected to hold a phone call in the coming days to discuss a US prisoner exchange offer, the State Department said earlier in the week.

"Secretary Blinken will first travel to Phnom Penh, Cambodia, August 3-5 to participate in the U.S.-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, the East Asia Summit Foreign Ministers' Meeting, and the ASEAN Regional Forum," Price said. "At each ministerial, the Secretary will emphasize the United States' commitment to ASEAN centrality and successful implementation of the ASEAN

Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. He will also address the COVID-19 pandemic, economic cooperation, the fight against climate change, the crisis in Burma, and Russia's war in Ukraine." While in Cambodia, Blinken will hold bilateral meetings with Prime Minister Hun Sen and Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn and engage with alumni of the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative, Price said.

"In Manila, the Philippines, on August 6, the Secretary will meet with President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr. and Secretary of Foreign Affairs Enrique Manalo to discuss bilateral efforts to strengthen the U.S.-Philippines alliance, including through increased cooperation on energy, trade, and investment, advancing our shared democratic values, and pandemic recovery," Price said.

Then, Blinken will travel to South Africa from August 7- 9 to launch the US Strategy for Sub-Saharan Africa.

"In Pretoria, he will lead the U.S. delegation to the U.S.-South Africa Strategic Dialogue to reinforce and deepen our commitment to bilateral cooperation on global issues as well as a wide range of shared priorities, including health, infrastructure, trade and investment, and climate," he added. "In Johannesburg, he will join in the South African celebration of National Women's Day."

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo on August 9-10, Blinken will meet with senior government officials and members of civil society.

His final stop will be Rwanda on August 10-12, where he will discuss shared priorities, including peacekeeping, and raise democracy and human rights concerns.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Austin Names Abraham Denmark as New Senior Adviser on AUKUS - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin announced on Friday that Abraham Denmark will serve as his senior adviser on the Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) trilateral partnership, Defense Department acting spokesperson Todd Breasseale said on Friday.

"Today, Secretary Austin named Abraham Denmark to serve as his senior adviser on AUKUS," Breasseale said in a statement. "In this role, Mr. Denmark will advise the secretary and coordinate efforts across the [Defense] Department to move rapidly in delivering on the promise of this historic partnership to help Australia establish a conventionally armed, nuclear powered submarine capability and to accelerate development of advanced capabilities to serve security and stability in the Indo-Pacific,"

Denmark already served at the Defense Department from 2015-2017 as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asia, the statement said.

In the past several years, Denmark worked as vice president of programs at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars in Washington, the statement added.

Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom announced the AUKUS trilateral defense partnership last September.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Trial for Twitter's Lawsuit Against Elon Musk to Start October 17 – Reports

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) – The trial for Twitter's lawsuit against Elon Musk over his reneging on his \$44 billion acquisition of the social media platform has been scheduled for the week starting October 17, The Wall Street Journal reported on Friday.

The chief judge of Delaware Chancery Court, Chancellor Kathaleen St. Jude McCormick, granted Twitter's request last week to fast-track the five-day trial, agreeing that the public company could be damaged by prolonged uncertainty about its future.

Musk has yet to formally respond to the lawsuit filed on July 12, although his legal team had opposed Twitter's request to fast-track the trial. He has argued that the volume of fake accounts on Twitter is higher than the 5% that the company had reported as a basis for the deal that he had agreed to in April.

The takeover was approved by Twitter's Board of Directors in June, but Musk attempted to terminate the deal in early July, prompting Twitter to file a lawsuit to compel him to follow through on his purchase.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

UN Political Chief Says Grain Deal Indicates Russia, Ukraine Can Engage in Dialogue

UNITED NATIONS, July 29 (Sputnik) - The recent grain deal proves that negotiations between Russia and Ukraine are still possible, UN Under Secretary-General for Political Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo said on Friday.

"The grain agreement is a sign that dialogue between the parties is possible," she said.

7/29/2022 10:22:15 AM -04:00

Pelosi Likely to Visit Taiwan Next Week Despite Repeated Warnings From China – Reports

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) – US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is expected to visit Taiwan next week amid mounting tensions between Washington and Beijing over the island, a Washington Post columnist reported on Friday, citing diplomatic sources.

Pelosi is expected to make a stop in Taiwan as part of her Asia tour, the report said. The trip, however, has not been confirmed.

Earlier this month, media reported that Pelosi is set to visit Taiwan in August, drawing a backlash from Beijing. The Chinese Foreign Ministry said that in the event of Pelosi's visit, Beijing will definitely take decisive measures to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the US will be fully responsible for all the serious consequences resulting from the visit.

On Thursday, US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping held a phone conversation, discussing, among other topics, Taiwan. The White House said that Biden underscored that the US policy on Taiwan remains unchanged and Washington continues to

oppose any unilateral efforts to alter the existing status quo. China's state media meanwhile reported that Xi, while speaking about Taiwan, warned Biden that "one who plays with fire will certainly get burned."