

10/18/22 Tuesday

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'People's Minds Are Made Up': Experts Predict 2023 Recession Fears Won't Impact Midterm Votes Much

By - Fantine Gardinier

On Tuesday, a preview of Fitch's forthcoming ratings report revealed yet another economic prediction that the United States will enter a recession early next year. This follows similar statements by S&P Ratings, JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon, and former US Treasury Secretary Larry Summers.

Several experts told Sputnik on Tuesday that the Biden administration has tried to put a positive spin on the ambiguous economic situation, but that it would have little effect on the upcoming midterm elections.

"It is important for the president of any country to build confidence in the markets or avoid any speech leading to panic in the markets," Ayse Kabukcuoglu Dur, Assistant Professor of Economics at the Poole College of Management, North Carolina State University, told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"The US economy is currently not in a recession. Its labor market is very strong, with low unemployment rates and job growth, like you said. One major problem however is high inflation rates and rising living costs, which led the Federal Reserve to take a strong action for. The Fed's policies will surely be restrictive for the economy," she said. "And if inflation cannot be brought down to the long-term target of 2% soon, Fed's policies may continue to contract the economy." Dur said that the stubbornness with which [high inflation has clung to the US economy](#), despite the Fed's steady interest rate hikes, has soured many an economist's outlook.

"[I]t is expected that the Fed will continue with [interest rate hikes](#) for a prolonged period of time, which increases the likelihood of a recession. But it is possible that, even if there is a recession, it may be a mild one because the labor market is already strong," she noted.

"It is hard to guess how these forecasts may affect the November midterms or how the president's campaigning may affect the elections," Dur told Sputnik. "But the economy is currently not in a recession, and this is probably all that matters for most people. Unfortunately, not everyone really reads about economics news or follows these forecasts. So voters may respond strongly only if there is a severe recession that can be felt deeply through high unemployment rates and high living costs in particular, and if they believe that the recession is the fault of the current administration."

However, financial and political commentator Tom Luongo dismissed that position as "word games" and "electioneering," telling Sputnik that "recession is already here. We've had 2 straight quarters of negative GDP growth, which has been their metric for an economic downturn for almost three generations."

Luongo said that Biden is “desperately trying to massage the message” three weeks away from the November 2022 midterm elections. “That he and his staff are still trying to convince people of this at this late date tells you they’ve seen the polling and it is terrible,” he added.

“All of the main issues the Democrats have tried to persuade voters on - abortion, Ukraine, gun control, January 6 - have failed to resonate. They rank as the lowest concerns among Americans coming into the election,” he said. “Trying to jawbone the economy is a signal they know they are going to lose and want to pivot after the vote to blaming it on the Republicans. Standard issue American politics.”

When asked how much damage [Fitch’s forecast](#) could do to Biden, Luongo replied: “Not much at this point. People’s minds are made up.”

He explained that the country’s unique unemployment problem - losing high-paying specialist positions while adding tons of working-class jobs - was masked by official statistics but was a reality Americans are confronting every day.

“No one is going to thank Joe Biden for giving them access to the fry cook job at the local Wendy’s when they used to run a factory,” he quipped.

Daniel Lacalle, chief economist and investment officer at Tressis Gestion, told Sputnik that Biden “is trying to give positive messages into the midterm elections. However, the data is concerning and the risks are real.”

“According to polls, the economy is the most crucial factor. Inflation, housing, and the decline in manufacturing are all key elements for voters,” Lacalle noted. “The employment situation is still positive but real wages are in negative territory, and this is more important for many voters than actual job creation.”

Lacalle predicted that “the recession is almost inevitable because the excess of stimulus of the past will generate a weaker economy,” adding that “if the US falls into recession, most emerging economies are likely to weaken as well.”

Michael R. Englund, principal director and chief economist for Action Economics, told Sputnik that “the administration’s focus on employment growth is also predictable, as rapid job growth in 2022 is the primary reason why the NBER [National Bureau of Economic Research] is unlikely to declare 2022 a recession-year, despite the quarterly declines for US GDP growth in Q1 and Q2 of -1.6% and -0.6%, respectively, after the upside pop of 7.0% in Q4 of last year. The NBER looks closely at labor market data to determine the timing of recessions and expansions.”

“The risks of recession in 2023 have certainly risen over the past month, due largely to upside surprises for most core inflation measures in September, after similar upside surprises in August, which have raised expectations of the ‘terminal rate’ for the Fed funds rate with the Fed’s current tightening cycle,” Englund explained.

“We currently peg this peak at a lofty 5.125% by January, before the Fed is able to pause its tightening path in the face of diminishing core inflation gains and a weakening economy,” he noted.

“One factor supporting US growth is the massive rise in demand for US food and energy products, which will provide a floor for the US economy in 2023. The US economy will also receive support through 2023 from a recovery in global travel, as the US historically runs a large surplus in tourist and business travel activity. A shortfall in US aggregate demand growth in 2023 will largely impact output in Asia, which is already struggling with China’s zero-covid strategy, and should have little impact on the economies of Europe.”

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As Nations Flee From Backing Western Sahara, South Africa Reaffirms Support 'Without Hesitation'

By - Fantine Gardinier

In the last few years, several nations have backtracked their support for the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), the government declared in the territory of Western Sahara by the indigenous Saharawi people, or for an independence referendum for the territory, which is currently under Moroccan control.

While hosting a visit by Brahim Ghali, leader of the Saharawi liberation group Polisario Front, on Tuesday, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said his government supports SADR "without hesitation."

"We are concerned about the continuing silence in the world regarding the struggle for self-determination of the people of Western Sahara," [Ramaphosa told Ghali in Pretoria](#).

"We believe that other struggles are expressed more loudly ... and that is why as South Africans we clearly state that we are firm and unwavering in ... our support for the Sahrawi people," he added.

"It is a just struggle, it is a noble struggle, it is an honorable struggle, a people that wants to decide its own destiny through self-determination," Ramaphosa said. He went on to compare the Saharawi struggle with the struggle against the white supremacist Apartheid movement that governed South Africa before 1994, depriving the indigenous Black population of political and social rights.

Mathu Joyini, South Africa's permanent representative at the United Nations, similarly said last week that "the inalienable right of the people of Western Sahara to self-determination and independence is not negotiable."

"The International Court of Justice has given credence to this position when it stated in its advisory opinion on 16 October 1975 that there were no links of territorial sovereignty between Morocco and the Western Sahara prior to the Spanish colonization of the Territory," [she recalled before](#) the UN 4th Committee on Decolonization.

Anti-Colonial Struggle

A former Spanish colony, Western Sahara broke free in 1975 due to anti-colonial resistance by indigenous Saharawi people and the Polisario Front. However, Morocco to the north then seized the land, claiming it was historically a part of Morocco, and Mauritania, to the south, also grabbed large parts of the territory. Polisario fought both groups, forcing Mauritania out and fighting Morocco to a standstill. A United Nations-supervised ceasefire in 1991 created MINURSO, a UN mission to oversee an independence referendum that has never happened. That ceasefire fell apart in late 2020, when Moroccan troops forcibly evicted a Saharawi protest encampment on a new border crossing to Mauritania.

A month later, the United States backtracked on its support for the UN mandate and sided with Morocco's claims, all as part of a deal to convince [Rabat to recognize Israel](#) and normalize relations.

In the nearly two years since, several other nations have also [reversed their support](#) for Polisario, [including Spain](#), Guyana, and Peru. Kenya temporarily ended its support last month when President William Ruto took office, but [immediately reversed it](#), reaffirming the country abides by the African Union's charter, which supports the "unquestionable and inalienable right of a people to self-determination."

As [Sputnik has reported](#), the human rights situation in Western Sahara has deteriorated precipitously since November 2020, although it was already dismal before the war reignited. Human rights defenders [have recorded numerous instances](#) of journalists and activists being harassed and assaulted, jailed without reason, besieged in their homes, and protests being suppressed.

Keeping to Africa's Non-Aligned Path

Since Russia launched its special operation in Ukraine in February, the US has tried to pressure other nations into condemning the operation and abiding by US sanctions against Moscow. That's especially true in Africa, where several senior US diplomats have toured in recent months trying to woo countries like South Africa, Rwanda, and Democratic Republic of the Congo away from their neutrality.

South Africa, a longstanding member of the Non-Aligned Movement, has stood firm. Foreign Minister [Naledi Pandor told US Secretary](#) of State Antony Blinken when he visited Pretoria in August that "We should be equally concerned at what is happening to the people of Palestine, as we are with what is happening to the people of Ukraine."

Ramaphosa reiterated the point during a US visit in September, [condemning a sanctions bill](#) being considered by the US Congress that would specifically target African nations for cooperating with Russia. Ramaphosa returned home to deal with an urgent domestic crisis rather than attend the UN General Assembly, but Macky Sall, who is both chairperson of the African Union and the President of Senegal, [said in no uncertain terms](#) that the continent "does not want to be the breeding ground of a new Cold War."

The AU also recognizes the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic as one of its member states. While Moscow has never recognized the SADR, it has strongly supported MINURSO. During a meeting last week with Staffan de Mistura, the personal envoy of the UN Secretary General for Western Sahara, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov "stressed the importance of achieving a just, long-term and mutually acceptable solution to the Western Sahara conflict on the basis of the relevant UN Security Council resolutions," according to a [foreign ministry readout](#).

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Biden Administration to Release 15 Million Barrels From US Strategic Oil Reserve
By - Fantine Gardinier

The White House announced on Tuesday that US President Joe Biden would "take additional action to strengthen energy security, address the supply crunch, and lower costs." Biden said he was ordering the US Department of Energy (DOE) to issue a notice of sale for 15 million barrels of crude oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) in December - the last of the 180 million barrels he [began introducing to the oil markets](#) in late March, following his announcement of a total boycott of Russian energy exports. However, [the White House noted](#) that the DOE would be "ready to move forward with additional significant SPR sales this winter if needed due to Russian or other actions disrupting global markets."

The White House further noted that it would soon begin the process of refilling the SPR "when prices are at or below about \$67-\$72 per barrel." About [a month ago, Bloomberg reported](#) the administration would do so when prices hit \$80 a barrel.

On Tuesday evening, Brent Crude from the North Sea was selling at \$90.03 per barrel, and West Texas Intermediate was selling at \$83.31 per barrel, [according to OilPrice.com](#). The prices of petroleum and gasoline have declined from their summer 2022 highs, but still remain problematic. According to US Energy Information Agency ([EIA](#)) data, the average retail gasoline price across all grades was \$3.871 per gallon on Monday - roughly where they were in the last week of February, immediately after Russia launched its special operation in Ukraine and just before Biden announced a retaliatory boycott of Russian energy exports and pushed the rest of the globe to do the same. For crude oil, [prices are where they were](#) in late January. However, unlike in February, the US is now facing down a possible recession in the near future, driven by inflation that has only slightly declined since the start of the year, despite hefty interest rate hikes by the US Federal Reserve, the country's central bank. The US is also holding legislative and gubernatorial elections in November, and it's unclear if Biden's Democratic Party [will be dealt a stinging defeat](#) by voters upset with the country's lackluster economic situation.

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Xi Tells 20th Party Congress China Needs to Boost 'Strategic Deterrence' Amid Nuclear Buildup
By - Fantine Gardinier

Alongside India, China is one of two nations to maintain a "no first use" policy regarding nuclear weapons. The country largely dodged the massive nuclear buildup of the Cold War, having already broken with the Soviet Union by the time it became a nuclear power and orienting itself toward non-alignment.

In his [opening speech](#) at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of China, Chinese President Xi Jinping called for the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to increase its deterrence capabilities in the face of new threats.

"Achieving the goals for the centenary of the People's Liberation Army in 2027 and more quickly elevating our people's armed forces to world-class standards are strategic tasks for building a modern socialist country in all respects," Xi said.

“To this end, we must apply the thinking on strengthening the military for the new era, implement the military strategy for the new era, and maintain the Party’s absolute leadership over the people’s armed forces.”

Xi noted that the PLA would “continue integrated development of the military through mechanization, informatization, and the application of smart technologies and work faster to modernize military theory, organizational forms, personnel, and weaponry and equipment.”

“We will establish a strong system of strategic deterrence, increase the proportion of new-domain forces with new combat capabilities, speed up the development of unmanned, intelligent combat capabilities, and promote coordinated development and the application of the network information system,” he added.

The concept of “strategic deterrence” refers to a nation’s ability to pose a credible threat to an aggressor nation if attacked, sufficient to convince them that the costs of an attack would be too high. It is closely related to “second strike capability,” or the ability of a nation, through a diversified and largely hidden nuclear weapons arsenal, to guarantee its ability to respond to an attempted “decapitation” first strike by a nuclear-armed aggressor.

Minimum Strategic Deterrent

Since detonating its first nuclear weapons test [at Lop Nur in 1964](#), China has maintained a “no first use” policy regarding the destructive weapons - just one of two nations in the world with such a policy, with the other being India. Since then it has maintained a small arsenal of less than 300 nuclear weapons, mostly based in mobile ballistic missile launchers mounted on trucks or railcars, sufficient to establish a minimum strategic deterrent.

By comparison, the US maintains more than 5,428 nuclear warheads and Russia 5,977 warheads, mostly a legacy of the Cold War arms race, [according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute \(SIPRI\)](#). The other half-dozen nuclear powers maintain between several dozen and several hundred each.

Song Zhongping, a former People’s Liberation Army instructor, told the [South China Morning Post](#) (SCMP) on Tuesday that Xi’s statement meant the PLA would “strengthen its development of strategic nuclear forces,” including [its nuclear triad](#) composed of ballistic missile submarines, intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), and air-launched ballistic missiles.

“All of these require the PLA to have a modern nuclear-armed force ... and to moderately increase the nuclear arsenal,” he said.

However, Zhao Tong, a senior fellow at the Carnegie-Tsinghua Centre for Global Policy in Beijing, told the Hong Kong-based paper that Xi’s comments proved China’s policy of “a traditionally small nuclear arsenal and a very modest, self-restrained nuclear posture” had “become history now.”

Opposition to China’s Rise

A [November 2021 Pentagon report](#) to the US Congress on Chinese military power claimed that Beijing sought to increase its nuclear arsenal to 700 warheads by 2027 and 1,000 warheads by 2030. This rapid expansion was set in motion ahead of the 2020 elections in the United States, motivated by fears that then-US President Donald Trump, whose administration had seriously ramped up tensions with China by [labeling it a “malign actor.”](#) would attempt to start a war with China in an attempt to stay in power.

The fear was so great that all Chinese commands were [put on the highest alert](#) in the weeks before the election, prompting Pentagon leaders to reach out to their counterparts in the Chinese senior brass to reassure them that no, Trump was not about to launch an attack. Bizarrely, the report goes on to claim that China is showing a “greater willingness to confront the United States” based on a belief “that the United States seeks to prevent China’s rejuvenation,” referring to the East Asian country’s continued recovery in terms of economic, social, and political prestige from the “Century of Humiliation” that accompanied China’s domination by European imperialists and Imperial Japan.

In Chinese historiography, that period is said to have ended with the socialist revolution in 1949. [Xi’s administration has set a goal](#) of China becoming “a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious” by 2049 - the centenary of the revolution.

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US Jury Acquits Danchenko on All Charges of Lying to FBI During Trump-Russia Collusion Probe

ALEXANDRIA, Virginia (Sputnik) - A US jury has acquitted Russian national Igor Danchenko, finding him "not guilty" on all four counts of making false statements to the FBI during the Trump-Russia collusion probe, a Sputnik correspondent reported from the courtroom on Tuesday.

On Friday, a US federal judge dropped one of five counts against Danchenko, who in November pleaded "not guilty" to the charges of lying to the FBI about his role in the discredited "Steele dossier," which alleged collusion between former US President Donald Trump and the Kremlin during the 2016 US presidential election.

The Tuesday courtroom decision served as yet another blow to special counsel John Durham, who represented the prosecution in the case. The acquittal marks the second case tied to Durham's nearly 3.5-year-long investigation in which he has lost.

Shortly after the decision was issued by jurors, Durham told reporters that although the prosecution was "disappointed" with the outcome, "we respect the jury's decision."

After the earlier acquittal of cybersecurity lawyer Michael Sussman and now Danchenko, Durham's prosecution efforts tied to the Trump-Russia collusion probe are expected to come to an end. It's also anticipated that the special counsel will now be submitting a final report to the US Department of Justice summarizing its findings.

Taking the lead on the prosecution team, Durham alleged during the trial that Danchenko misled FBI agents when they inquired about the Russian analyst's sources in 2017 after it had been determined he was behind allegations made in the Steele Dossier. The since-discredited dossier had been used by the FBI to support its surveillance of former Trump campaign aide Carter Page.

The jury ultimately deliberated for about nine hours before handing in their verdict.

Durham was appointed by outgoing US Attorney General William Barr in 2019 to review the FBI probe into Trump's presidential campaign in 2016.

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Australia Officially Reverses Decision to Recognize Jerusalem as Israeli Capital

Earlier, the Guardian reported that the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs had deleted text from its website that described West Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, as well as language regarding a two-state solution.

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong announced Tuesday that the Albanese government would officially reverse a past decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, a move that was made during the Morrison administration.

Wong [told reporters](#) at a morning conference that former Aussie Prime Minister Scott Morrison made a "cynical play" that "put Australia out of step with the international community," underscoring that Jerusalem is a "final status issue" that should be negotiated between Palestinian and Israeli officials.

"Australia is committed to a two-state solution in which Israel and a future Palestinian state coexist, in peace and security, within internationally recognized borders," reads a [release](#) issued by Wong's office. "We will not support an approach that undermines this prospect."

"I regret that Mr. Morrison's decision to play politics resulted in Australia's shifting position, and the distress these shifts have caused to many people in the Australian community who care deeply about this issue."

Wong's announcement and clarification on the matter came shortly after reports surfaced earlier Monday that Australia had been dropping its recognition of Jerusalem in language used on government-operated websites.

The former prime minister announced the shift in Australia's recognition in 2018 but indicated that the nation's embassy would not be relocating from Tel Aviv. It was later determined that the Australian embassy would not be moved until Jerusalem's status was finalized under a peace settlement.

Morrison's own announcement followed the 2017 declaration by US President Donald Trump, who had in fact directed the US State Department to relocate the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Both Israel and Palestine claim Jerusalem as their rightful capital. Israel captured East Jerusalem from Jordan during the 1967 Six-Day War, with officials later adopting legislation in 1980 that proclaimed the city as the "complete and united" capital of the Israeli state.

UK Prime Minister Liz Truss recently came under fire after relaying to her Israeli counterpart Yair Lapid that she was considering relocating the UK embassy to Jerusalem. The UK's current position is that Jerusalem should be the shared capital of the Israeli and Palestinian states.

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Chilean Police Release Sputnik Mundo Correspondent Detained While Covering Protest Anniversary

The latest spate of demonstrations came weeks after Chilean residents voted against the proposed text of the country's new constitution, which was meant to replace the current governing document enacted under the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in 1980.

Chilean police detained on Tuesday Sputnik Mundo correspondent Carolina Trejo, who had been in the nation's capital Santiago to cover protests marking the third anniversary of the October 2019 social unrest. She has since been released.

Reports have indicated that Trejo was taken into custody by military police at about 8 p.m. local time near the Gabriela Mistral Cultural Center, just as the journalist was preparing to return home.

Video shared on social media appeared to show officials placing Trejo inside a police van as others outside the camera frame inform police they were detaining a journalist.

Moments before the arrest, Trejo was said to be covering demonstrations that were taking place in Chile's [Plaza Dignidad](#), which served as one of the main sites for protests during the October 2019 social movement.

Hours after the arrest, the Metropolitan Regional Council of the College of Journalist in Chile [confirmed](#) that Trejo had been released from custody.

The group earlier issued a statement condemning the South American nation's military police, underscoring that such incidents "prevents journalistic work."

"Informing is not a crime," the group stressed.

The Tuesday anniversary was marked by multiple protesters clashing with police. In some instances, cops responded to fires and rocks being thrown with gas and water cannons.

However, the day's events were not all violent.

"Perhaps there were people who did evil, destruction, but there are many of us who were - and are - asking for justice, dignity," Marco Valdebenito, whose brother died during the initial protests, told Reuters. "Those of us who fought are here."

The 2019 protests initially broke out across Chile in response to steep metro fare hikes but later went on to include calls for reforms of the nation's education system and health care programs, as well as pushing for improved wages. In fact, said protests paved the way for the Chilean government to replace the Pinochet-era constitution, which is currently being reviewed once again after the majority of Chileans [rejected](#) a recent effort to implement changes.

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Kiev Preparing for Clearing Ops in Occupied Areas According to US Army Methodology- Source

KHERSON (Sputnik) - The Ukrainian military told the Russian security services that the Kiev regime has formed police detachments for clearing and filtration at territories it intends to occupy, a Russian security service officer told Sputnik.

The official also indicated that training at courses that have started are to be carried out according to the standards and methodology of the US Armed Forces undertaken in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"According to information received from a source in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Ukraine's military and political leadership is preparing to regain control over the lost territories," the source said. "Police training for filtration and clearing of territories is carried out in line with US Army standards using methodology materials compiled by the US military."

The American standards were relayed through slides that included displays of both the American and Ukrainian flags with the inscriptions "Fearless Guardsman" and "Strong army, strong Europe." Names of US instructors were also included.

Some 11 training manuals had been provided to Russian security forces, with files ranging on evacuating the injured from the battlefield, ground sweeping, visual identifications of improvised explosive devices to countering drones, among other topics.

The official also stated that Ukrainian forces at training camps were also being trained on combating sabotage and reconnaissance groups, as well as the underground.

News of the findings come after regional authorities [announced](#) that Ukrainian troops would not be allowed to enter the city of Kherson despite the West's push for Kiev to implement military operations.

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Low US Water Levels Reveal Site of 1915 Shipwreck Along Mississippi River
By - Allison Dubois

The discovery is the latest caused by drought-battered water levels, which have plagued many parts of the country this summer — most notoriously Lake Mead, which has offered up several sets of skeletal remains during this year's dry season. The US Drought Monitor says that more than 55% of the US is experiencing drought.

Archeologists believe a newly rediscovered Mississippi shipwreck to be the remains of the Brookhill Ferry, which transported people, wagons, and livestock from one side of the river to the other before the construction of major bridges — that is, until it sank during a storm in 1915.

Roughly one-third of the boat is said to be [visible](#) along the shoreline of Louisiana's Baton Rouge, which is significantly more than what was visible in the 1990s - the last time low waters exposed the wreckage, according to state archaeologist Chip McGimsey.

"They did some limited investigations and could look at very small pieces — basically sort of one or two foot wide parts of it — to try and get an understanding of how it was constructed and how old it was," McGimsey said.

"At that time, the vessel was completely full of mud and there was mud all around it so only the very tip tops of the sides were visible, so (archaeologists) really didn't see much. They had to move a lot of dirt just to get some narrow windows in to see bits and pieces."

The archaeologist also told local news agencies that the ship's hull, which is currently 90% exposed, would be studied and used to create renderings of how it was believed to have appeared in its prime.

"For the most part, there are not good documents on boat building, especially once you get back into the area of wooden ships," McGimsey told one [local agency](#) in an interview. "They have a lot of individuality in these boats, and there are so few of them remaining. This is a rare example of one from around 1900."

McGimsey has been surveying the wreck for the last two weeks, ever since Baton Rouge resident Patrick Ford spotted the ship along the edge of the river's receding waters. He [recounted](#) the experience to local authorities: "This past Sunday I was out here looking and realized the rest of the shore had washed away and there was an entire ship there ... I immediately texted friends and was like, 'Holy moly, I think I found a ship, a sunken ship!'"

According to McGimsey, the Brookhill was the night ferry, and it had a sister ship named the *thelstroma* that did the daytime runs across the Mississippi until a hurricane on September 29, 1915 sank both ships. The find is important, according to the scholar, because not many records or manuals exist detailing how wooden ships from that era were put together, and not many of them remain.

Renee Erickson, an archeologist who also works for the state of Louisiana, said that the remains of the ship comprise almost a [quarter](#) of what the ship was like when whole. Though the vessel – a steamer – wasn't very special, the scientists want to learn as much as they can about it before the water rises to cover it again.

Specialist Morgan Saltus, who focuses on boats, echoed those statements: "So many times you have a pile of boards. Well, that pile of boards represents history. We can't bring up every boat. We don't have places to put them, but we need to document them before they're lost."

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Former UK Military Pilots Reportedly Being 'Headhunted' by Chinese Military
By - Allison Dubois

China's President Xi Jinping has been eyeing a "modernization" of the People's Liberation Army by 2035. On Sunday, the Chinese leader promised to "never renounce the use of force" in his quest for "peaceful" reunification with Taiwan.

Some former UK pilots are reportedly being offered up to \$270,000 to teach the Chinese military the ways Western pilots and planes operate.

The UK government was [made aware](#) of a few former military pilots being recruited to assist Chinese forces as early as 2019, but had dealt with the issue "on a case by case basis."

However, now that the pandemic travel restrictions are being lessened, it appears the occurrences have increased, leading the UK to issue an intelligence alert warning pilots against working for the Chinese military.

"They are a very attractive body of people to then pass on that knowledge," a Western official said in a statement. "It's taking Western pilots of great experience to help develop Chinese military air force tactics and capabilities."

According to a spokesperson for the UK Ministry of Defense, the UK is "taking decisive steps to stop Chinese recruitment schemes attempting to headhunt serving and former UK armed forces pilots to train People's Liberation Army personnel in the People's Republic of China."

"We've seen it ramp up significantly," an official informed journalists at a briefing. "It is an ongoing issue."

Pilots are said to be recruited by third-party liaisons with ties to a "particular" South African flying academy, officials have detailed.

The pilots, who have experience on a vast array of different aircraft with the exception of F-35s, are being recruited from all over the UK military and are not limited to just the Royal Air Force. So far, there is no evidence suggesting that any former RAF pilot has broken the Official Secrets Act, which provides for the protection of state secrets and official information related to national security.

A warning issued by the UK government has urged British pilots against disclosing sensitive information to the Chinese military and asks anyone approached to report the encounter to the Ministry of Defense so that the situation can be monitored.

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Over 90% of US Voters Concerned About Economy, Inflation Weeks Ahead of Midterms – Poll

WASHINGTON, October 19 (Sputnik) – More than 90% of US voters express concerns over the state of the economy and rising inflation as the Election Day draws near, a Politico/Morning Consult poll showed on Wednesday.

Of those polled, 71% said they were "very concerned" about inflation, 5 percentage points up since August. Forty-two percent said that issues like jobs, taxes and unemployment are their top priority when choosing whom they want to vote for in November.

Seventy percent said that the country is going the wrong way. In this situation, Republicans see their support increase to 44%, while Democrats lose 1 percentage point to 45%, the poll said. US President Joe Biden's rating remains historically low, with 54% of respondents disapproving of his job and 44% approving of it.

The poll was conducted from October 14-16 among 2,005 registered voters. The margin of error is plus-or-minus 2 percentage points.

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White House Going All Out to Avoid Direct Biden-Putin Encounter at G20 - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 19 (Sputnik) - The White House is making every effort to prevent any direct encounter between Presidents Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin at the G20 summit in Bali in November, Politico reported on Wednesday, citing US officials.

Precautions are being taken to avoid even a hallway run-in or photo meeting between the two, the report said.

During his presidency, Biden has met with Putin only once – at a summit in Geneva in June of 2021.

Last week, Biden said he has no intention of meeting with Putin, but would do it if the Russian president were willing to talk about the release of American basketball player Brittney Griner, who is serving a nine-year sentence in Russia on drug charges.

Russia will consider the possibility of a meeting between the two leaders if the US makes such a request, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.

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Big Economic Losses Likely After Alaska's Bering Sea Snow Crab Season Closed - Trade Group

WASHINGTON, October 19 (Sputnik) - The US fishing industry is expected to suffer more than a billion dollars in losses after Alaska shut down its snow crab season in the Bering Sea for the first time in the country's history, Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers Executive Director Jamie Goen told Sputnik.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game announced last week that the US snow crab season in the Bering Sea will be closed this season due to a population decline in the region. It also said the red king crab season was going to be closed for the second year in a row.

"We're estimating the economic losses now that we've had two years of either closed fisheries, or record low harvests, at over 500 million US dollars that our fishermen are losing. And then when you consider the processors and fishing communities and support businesses, like fill docks and shipyards, we're estimating that impact is over a billion US dollars," Goen said.

The snow crab harvest in the Bering Sea last year of 5.6 million pounds was the smallest in more than 40 years, media reported.

Goen said the historic decision by Alaska's Department of Fish and Game will likely sink family businesses considering there is no immediate federal relief program to aid US fisherman in tight circumstances.

"We have 60 vessels in our fleet and so many of those aren't going to be able to weather this," Goen said. "The US government does not have relief for fishermen like it does for farmers in the US. When farmers have a crop failure, they get immediate financial relief. We don't have a program like that for our US fishermen."

There is a state financial relief program available for fisheries in Alaska, but it takes two to four years for them to get approved, Goen said.

"If it's a small family business, they can't weather two to four years without an income, so many of them are going to be facing bankruptcy this year, it's going to be devastating for our fleet," Goen said.

The Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers meeting trade association met with lawmakers in Congress on Monday to lobby for immediate financial relief, Goen said.

"We want a program on par with what farmers have in crop failure, or like what communities have after a hurricane or a flood comes through where they get immediate financial relief through programs like FEMA, or for farmers it's through the United States Department of Agriculture, USDA," Goen said.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game said in a press release that it understands the closing of this season's snow crab season in the Bering Sea will have substantial impacts on US harvesters, industry, and communities, but this measure was necessary for long-term conservation and sustainability of crab stocks in the area.

Efforts to understand the decline of the crab population in the region are underway, the state agency said.

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Biden to Release 15Mln Barrels From US Oil Reserve to Deliver in December - White House (Updates with details, background in paras 4-9)

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration will release 15 million barrels of oil from the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve and the deliveries are expected to take place in December, the White House said in a press release.

"The Department of Energy (DOE) is issuing a Notice of Sale tomorrow morning for 15 million barrels from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) to be delivered in December," the White House said in the release on Tuesday. "This sale will complete the historic, 180-million-barrel drawdown the President announced in the spring."

The United States intends to repurchase crude oil to replenish the SPR when prices are at or below \$67-\$72 range per barrel, the release said. Crude oil is currently at about \$83 per barrel, according to the West Texas Intermediate benchmark.

Biden's announcement is happening on the heels of ignored US requests to delay the decision by OPEC+ to slash oil production amid declining global demand.

The Biden administration is also asking US energy companies to sacrifice some of their profits by lowering the retail price of gasoline in the United States.

The White House noted it may take the United States several years to refill the SPR to its previous levels, but President Joe Biden is prepared to authorize the release of additional oil from the reserve into the global market in the coming months if necessary.

Moreover, the Biden administration will not hesitate to use any tools at its disposal to shore up the global supply of energy, support domestic inventory levels, and bring prices down in the United States, the release said. Among these options on the table is limiting US fuel exports, media reported.

At present, no decisions have been made with respect to punishing Saudi Arabia for its role in the OPEC+ move as the US government continues to contemplate how to best manage its core objectives in the Middle East together with responding to Riyadh, media reported.

Earlier in October, the OPEC+ group of countries agreed to cut oil production by 2 million barrels per day beginning in November and will take production levels agreed for August as a reference point. The move was made in response to uncertainty in global oil market outlooks, in large part caused by Western sanctions on Russian energy products and the G7 plans to introduce a price cap on Russian crude.

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Trudeau Knew of 'Feces' Comments Against Jews by Adviser, Kept Silent - Lawmakers

WASHINGTON, October 19 (Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his top ministers knew for more than a month that a consultant they had paid C\$500,000 (US\$363,800) to combat racism had publicly said Jews in Israel were "bags of human feces" and made other offensive remarks about Black people and French-speakers, but they did nothing until the scandal was made public, opposition members of parliament (MP) said.

Conservative MP Eric Duncan said on Tuesday that Trudeau had been informed of the comments by Laith Marouf, a consultant to the Community Media Advocacy Center, but he had done nothing about them for several weeks until the remarks were made public.

"It is clear that he [Trudeau] knew and did nothing until he was caught," Duncan said. "Shame on that government and shame on this prime minister."

Diversity Minister Ahmed Hussen said the government had ended its funding to the Community Media Advocacy Center and had demanded repayment of the sums already paid to it.

However, Conservative MP Melissa Lantzman said the government had only acted when the offensive remarks, which it had long known about, were made known to the general public. "They knew for a month. The Prime Minister knew. The Heritage Minister knew. The Diversity Minister knew. They continued to fund a well-known anti-Semite. ... Why is nobody being fired for this?" she asked.

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US Jury Acquits Danchenko on All Charges of Lying to FBI - Sputnik Correspondent
(Updates with more details, background in paras 3-9)

ALEXANDRIA, Virginia, October 19 (Sputnik) - A US jury has acquitted Russian national Igor Danchenko, finding him not guilty on all four counts of making false statements to the FBI during the Trump-Russia collusion probe, a Sputnik correspondent reported from the courtroom. On Friday, a US federal judge dropped one of the five counts against Danchenko, who pleaded "not guilty" in November to the charges of lying to the FBI about his role in the discredited "Steele dossier," which alleged collusion between former US President Donald Trump and the Kremlin during the 2016 US presidential election.

"We knew all along that Mr. Danchenko was innocent. We're happy now that the American public knows that as well. We thank these jurors for their hard work and deliberation in reaching the right result. That's all we have at this time," one of Danchenko's defense counsels, Stuart Sears, said on Tuesday following the verdict announcement.

Special Counsel John Durham, who led the prosecution in the case, refused to provide any comments when leaving the court building, but provided a written statement identical to the one he used after the acquittal of former lawyer for the Hillary Clinton presidential campaign, Michael Sussmann, in May.

"While we are disappointed in the outcome, we respect the jury's decision and thank them for their service. I also want to recognize and thank the investigators and the prosecution team for their dedicated efforts in seeking truth and justice in this case," the Special Counsel said.

The legal battle against Danchenko lasted almost a year, starting in November when he first appeared in court and was released on bail pending trial while pleading not guilty to all five counts.

The trial began last Tuesday while the jury deliberations started Monday afternoon after nearly four days of considering the evidence presented by the parties.

The prosecution insisted that Danchenko lied to the FBI about the sources of information given to former British spy Christopher Steele concerning alleged contacts between the Trump campaign and Russian officials, including information that the Kremlin may have facilitated Trump's election. The indictment states that Danchenko did not receive such information from anyone and fabricated it.

Danchenko provided the information to Steele, who used it to prepare the Trump dossier, which served as a guide for US authorities to investigate the alleged ties between the Trump campaign and Russia. A subsequent Special Counsel investigation proved no collusion between Trump and Russia.

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US Building Levee in Mississippi River to Block Infusion of Saltwater From Gulf

WASHINGTON, October 19 (Sputnik) - The US Army Corps of Engineers said it is constructing an underwater levee in the Mississippi River to block saltwater from the Gulf moving up the river and threatening freshwater treatment facilities in New Orleans.

"The Mississippi River's volume of water has fallen to a level that allows salt water to intrude upstream. Saltwater from the Gulf of Mexico moves upriver in a wedge shape that may stretch up approximately 20 miles from the bottom to the surface of the river," the Corps said in a press release. "To stop the salt water from moving upriver and reduce the risk to freshwater intakes, the New Orleans District began construction of an underwater barrier sill... to arrest the progression of saltwater intrusion."

The greatest risk associated with the saltwater intrusion, the release added, is the appearance of unsafe salinity levels at the intakes of municipal drinking water intakes in Plaquemines Parish. The sill is being created using sediment dredged from upstream, according to the release.

CNN earlier on Tuesday said the sill will be about 40-50 feet high underwater, constructed in a location where the water is approximately 90 feet deep.

Ricky Boyett, the public affairs chief for the New Orleans District, told the news outlet it will take another week of work until the temporary sill can be built high enough to block the saltwater intrusion.

And according to US News and World Report, Heath Jones, the Corp's emergency management director of its New Orleans office, said the project should cost about \$10 million. Work is slated to begin in three weeks and should take about 15 days to be completed. Jones said the sill will be built in 5-foot increments. If the saltwater is blocked at a height of 45 feet or below, construction will stop but if it reaches 45 feet, larger ships may have to unload at some of their cargo below New Orleans.

Officials in New Orleans said the salt already present in the river's lowest areas might affect the smell, taste and color of drinking water but does not pose a health threat to residents.

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US to Provide \$2Mln in Funding for Emergency Relief in Hurricane-Hit Cuba - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 19 (Sputnik) - The United States will provide Cuba with humanitarian aid worth \$2 million to mitigate the consequences of the devastating impact of hurricane Ian, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said in a statement.

“Following the devastating impact of Hurricane Ian, the United States is providing to the Cuban people critical humanitarian aid to trusted international partners working directly with Cubans whose communities were devastated by the storm. The United States ... will provide \$2 million in funding for emergency relief to those in need in Cuba,” the statement said on Tuesday. The United States is planning to work with trusted organizations to provide the assistance, including the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the statement said.

Hurricane Ian made landfall in the US state of South Carolina on September 30, after causing major destruction in Florida. It was then downgraded to a post-tropical cyclone and moved into south-central Virginia on Saturday. Hurricane Ian claimed the lives of 109 people, according to US media reports.

Massive power outages occurred both in Cuba and the United States as a result of hurricane Ian's impact.

Hurricane Ian claimed the lives of at least two people in the western Cuban province of Pinar del Rio and forced over 50,000 people in western and central Cuba to leave their homes.

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Russia to Organize Meeting on US Biological Laboratories' Activities in Ukraine - Official

UNITED NATIONS, October 19 (Sputnik) - Russia will conduct a consultative meeting under the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) to discuss the United States' activities in military-biological laboratories in Ukraine, the Russian delegation deputy head at the UN First Committee on Disarmament and International Security Konstantin Vorontsov said.

"We have not received exhaustive explanations that could completely allay any of the doubts concerning these activities and thus straightened out the situation that had prompted the Russian side to convene a consultative meeting under BTWC Article 5," Vorontsov told the members of the UN First Committee on Tuesday.

The US representative at the First Committee said that Russia's allegations about United States' activities in Ukraine are "unfounded."

The Russian mission to the United Nations has presented on several occasions evidence about the United States using biological facilities in Ukraine for the purpose of conducting experiments with various agents.

In September, the Russian Defense Ministry in Geneva presented evidence of the United States' military-biological activity in Ukraine.

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Biden Says US Midterm Outcome Critical to Congress Codifying Federal Abortion Protections

WASHINGTON, October 19 (Sputnik) - The outcome of the upcoming midterm elections is critical to enabling Congress to codify federal abortion protections in the United States after the Supreme Court overturned the landmark Roe v. Wade decision and returned regulatory authority to the states, US President Joe Biden said during remarks on abortion policy.

"The Court got Roe right nearly 50 years ago, and I believe Congress should codify Roe once and for all. Right now, we're short a handful of votes," Biden said on Tuesday. "That's why, in these midterm elections, it's so critical to elect more Democratic senators to the United States Senate and more Democrats to keep control of the House of Representatives."

The first bill the administration would send to Congress if they solidify a majority in both chambers would be to codify federal abortion protections, Biden said, promising to sign the legislation as early as January if passed.

Earlier this year, the Supreme Court overturned the Roe v. Wade decision and instead ruled that states have the authority to regulate abortion. A number of states immediately enacted restrictions on abortion in response to the decision, causing the Biden administration to issue explicit protections for women who travel between states for an abortion.

In September, Biden promised to veto a nationwide ban on abortion should Republicans gain control of Congress in the midterms and pass such legislation.

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Western States Call for UN Security Council Meeting on Iranian Drones Used in Ukraine

UNITED NATIONS, October 19 (Sputnik) - The United States, France and the United Kingdom have called for a UN Security Council meeting to be held on Wednesday on Russia's alleged use of Iranian military drones in Ukraine, a United Nations source told Sputnik.

"[A meeting has been] called tomorrow by France, United States and the United Kingdom. The topic: Transfer of Iranian unmanned aerial vehicles to Russia and their use in Ukraine," the source said on Tuesday.

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Opposition MPs Slam Trudeau Over Plans to Triple Canada's Energy Taxes - Debate

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - Canadians face widespread winter hardship because of the tripling of energy taxes to promote so-called green policies and the market backlash of the policies of sanctioning Russia's oil and gas exports, political opponents said in the House of Commons in Ottawa on Tuesday.

"When will the prime minister abandon his plan to triple taxes on [energy], hearing and groceries," Conservative Member of Parliament (MP) Mark Strahl asked.

The government of Prime Minister Justine Trudeau has announced tax credit relief for poorer families but critics say it is only a drop in the ocean and will be dwarfed by the huge increases in food and energy costs that the expanded carbon taxes will generate.

Natural gas prices are rising 153% this month, Conservative MP Jasraj Singh Hallan told the House of Commons, adding that he is calling for canceling the government's carbon tax.

Trudeau's government "has reduced Europe to its knees by blocking 15 liquefied natural gas (LNG) projects since it came to power, Conservative Party leader Pierre Poilievre said.

More than half of all Canadians were now only C\$200 away from insolvency - Conservative MP Matt Jeneroux said.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY
WASHINGTON, October 19 (Sputnik) -

GLOBAL ENERGY MARKETS

* Gas futures in Europe are falling by 16%, below \$1,100 per thousand cubic meters for the first time since June 15, according to data from the London-based ICE exchange.

* US crude hit the lower end of \$80 per barrel amid reports that the Biden administration planned to sell more of the nation's emergency oil reserve to counter output cuts announced by producer alliance OPEC+ that could jeopardize the president and his party in elections next month.

* The European Commission has proposed to put in place a mechanism to limit gas prices via the TTF exchange that can be triggered when necessary, the commission said.

* Turkey and Russia are in contact on the issue of gas supplies, there are no problems, Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said.

SITUATION IN KHERSON REGION

* The situation in the Kherson region is dangerous for the locals residents as Ukrainian forces regularly target the civilian infrastructure, Gen. Sergei Surovikin, who commands all units in the special military operation zone, said on Tuesday.

* Kherson Region Acting Governor Vladimir Saldo said he decided to move residents from some areas of the region to the left bank of the Dnieper river.

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS

* The Russian aviation and air defense systems have proven themselves during the military operation in Ukraine, Sergei Surovikin, the general of the armed forces and the commander of all units in the special military operation zone, said on Tuesday.

* The situation in the zone of Russia's special military operation is tense as Ukrainian forces keep making attempts to attack Russian positions, Surovikin said.

* The United States is working swiftly to disburse \$4.5 billion in recently-approved budget support for Ukraine, the Treasury said after a virtual meeting between Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal.

FOOD SECURITY

* Turkey has received US guarantees on the entry of Russian agricultural products to global markets and urged Washington to make it public, Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said on Tuesday.

* The United States is making every effort to secure an extension of the Black Sea grain deal, US Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs Karen Donfried said.

NORD STREAM PIPELINES PROBE

* The Kremlin is not surprised by the first conclusions of European states in the Nord Stream investigation that the explosions were sabotage, this is what Russian intelligence said immediately after the incidents, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

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White House Opposes Funding for Nuclear Sea-Launched Cruise Missile in 2023 Defense Bill

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration strongly opposes a provision in the Senate's 2023 defense spending bill proposal that would fund the nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile because it is unnecessary and may potentially distract from addressing defense priorities, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) said on Tuesday. "The Administration strongly opposes continued funding for the nuclear sea-launched cruise missile (SLCM-N) and its associated warhead," the OMB said in a press release. "The President's Nuclear Posture Review concluded that the SLCM-N, which would not be delivered before the 2030s, is unnecessary and potentially detrimental to other priorities."

The release said the United States has sufficient capabilities for deterring an adversary's use of nuclear weapons, such as the W76-2 low-yield submarine-launched ballistic missile, which is armed with a thermonuclear warhead, an air-launched cruise missile and the F-35A fighter jet that can be equipped with nuclear gravity bombs.

Further investments in developing the nuclear sea-launched cruise missile would divert valuable resources from other modernization priorities that are needed to upgrade US strategic nuclear capabilities, the release said.

In April, the US Navy, in its 2023 budget request, eliminated funding for development of the nuclear sea-launched cruise missile because the project was too expensive and take too long to develop. and the acquisition schedule would have delivered capability late to need." According

to the Navy, this cancellation would save \$199.2 million in Fiscal Year 2023 and \$2.1 billion over the next five years.

Moreover, the Biden administration also opposes provisions in the proposed bill that would require the Missile Defense Agency to conduct cybersecurity operations on US ballistic missile defense systems, and another measure that would seek to significantly increase the US inventory of next generation interceptors.

The White House explained it opposed both provisions because the Missile Defense Agency has no expertise or authority to conduct cybersecurity operations, and with respect to the interceptors, the Defense Department is exploring more cost-effective approaches to address the nuclear threat from North Korea.

The US House of Representatives already passed its version of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for 2023, but the Senate is expected to take up its version of the NDAA after the midterm elections on November 8.

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US Jury Acquits Danchenko on All Charges of Lying to FBI - Sputnik Correspondent

ALEXANDRIA, Virginia, October 18 (Sputnik) - A US jury has acquitted Russian national Igor Danchenko, finding him "not guilty" on all four counts of making false statements to the FBI during the Trump-Russia collusion probe, a Sputnik correspondent reported from the courtroom on Tuesday.

On Friday, a US federal judge dropped one of five counts against Danchenko, who in November pleaded "not guilty" to the charges of lying to the FBI about his role in the discredited "Steele dossier," which alleged collusion between former US President Donald Trump and the Kremlin during the 2016 US presidential election.

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Biden Seeks Authorities From Congress to Improve US Weapons Export Ability - White House

WASHINGTON, October (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is hoping Congress uses the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to grant it new authorities to bolster the US weapons export process for arming countries like Ukraine, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) said on Tuesday.

"The administration seeks two new authorities, the Critical Munitions Acquisition Fund and the Defense Exportability Transfer Account, based on lessons learned from the ongoing efforts to provide Ukraine with additional capability as quickly as possible," OMB said in a statement. The Critical Munitions Acquisition Fund, a measure lawmakers are attempting to add as an NDAA amendment, would enable the Secretary of Defense to improve management and bolster munitions production lines to ensure military readiness.

The proposed measure comes amid concerns by lawmakers about depleted US munitions stockpiles as domestic supplies are surged to Ukraine.

The Defense Exportability Transfer Account would provide funds for the Defense Department to develop program protection strategies for systems identified as possible future exports, incorporate exportability features into such systems during the research and development phase, and integrate design features that enhance system interoperability with partner countries.

Both measures could be added to the NDAA currently under development by the Senate. Voting on the legislation is not expected to begin until November.

The OMB oversees the performance of US federal agencies and administers the federal budget.

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State Dept. Says Iranian Drone Transfers Violate UNSC Resolution Regardless of Recipient

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The United States considers transfers of certain Iranian unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs, drones) a violation of the UN Security Council resolution on the 2015 nuclear deal, no matter whether they are sent to Russia or the Houthis, State Department Principal Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Tuesday.

"Iran's supply of these specific types of UAVs to Russia is a violation of UN Security Council Resolution 2231... We would have said they were a violation then too," Patel said during a press briefing, when asked why the US did not raise the issue with more urgency prior to the use of such UAVs in Ukraine.

The same drones have been used in other countries including Yemen and Syria, where Iranian-backed factions operate.

"The transfer of these specific UAVs by Iran would be a violation whether they were sent to the Houthis, whether they were sent to Russia," Patel said.

Patel was questioned about whether the US was less vocal about the issue in an attempt to salvage the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), also known as the Iran nuclear deal. The US is currently working with partners and allies, including at the UN, to address escalating threats posed by Russia and Iran, Patel said.

The US assesses that Russia is using Iranian-made drones as part of its special military operation in Ukraine, both for kinetic and surveillance purposes, according to the Pentagon.

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US Confirms Detention of American in Saudi Arabia - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) – The US government confirmed the detention of American citizen Saad Ibrahim Almadi in Saudi Arabia, State Department spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Tuesday.

"We can confirm the detention of Mr. Almadi in Saudi Arabia. We have been following the case closely," Patel told reporters.

US diplomats repeatedly raised their concerns over this case both in Washington and Riyadh, and discussed the situation with the Saudis last time on Monday, he added.

"Exercising the freedom of expression should never be criminalized," Patel said.

The Washington Post reported on Monday that 72-year-old Almadi was arrested in Saudi Arabia for his critical posts about the local government. He was sentenced to 16 years in prison earlier in October, according to the reports.

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US Consular Officer Spoke With Russia Detainees Griner, Whelan - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - A US consular officer spoke with two Americans imprisoned in Russia, Brittney Griner and Paul Whelan, as part of the Biden administration's effort to free them from what the United States considered wrongful detention, State Department Principal Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Tuesday.

"The US government continues to urge Russia to release wrongfully detained US citizens Brittney Griner and Paul Whelan," Patel said during a press briefing. "A consular officer had the opportunity today to speak with Brittney briefly on the phone. A consular officer also had the opportunity to briefly speak with Paul Whelan as well."

Last week, US President Joe Biden said he would consider meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the upcoming G20 summit if he were willing to talk about Griner's release. Griner was sentenced to nine years in prison and given a \$16,576 fine for attempting to smuggle narcotics into the country.

Whelan is serving a 16-year prison sentence on espionage charges for which he was sentenced in June 2020.

The Biden administration proposed a substantial offer for their release to the Kremlin in June, to which they claim not to have received a serious counteroffer to date.

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White House on Work of US Firms in S. Arabia: Companies to Make Own Decisions

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - It is up to US firms to decide whether they will be based and where they will invest, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said in a press

briefing on Tuesday when asked whether it was appropriate for the US businesses to work in Saudi Arabia now.

"American companies will make their own decisions about their presence and where to invest taking into account a range of factors including legal constraints of the business environment, and reputational concerns that can arise from public policy choices made by host countries," Jean-Pierre said.

Media reported earlier that Biden administration officials are considering discouraging US companies from expanding business ties with Saudi Arabia in response to Riyadh's alleged role in the recent OPEC+ decision to cut oil production.

However, the Biden administration has not yet conveyed its advice to US companies to dissuade them from doing business in Saudi Arabia, the report cited Adrienne Watson, spokesperson for the White House National Security Council, as saying.

In addition, the Biden administration is not planning to send any US officials to Saudi Arabia's annual Future Investment Initiative conference that is scheduled to take place in Riyadh next week, the report said.

At present, no decisions have been made with respect to punishing Saudi Arabia for its role in the OPEC+ move as the US government continues to contemplate how to best manage its core objectives in the Middle East together with responding to Riyadh, the report said.

Earlier in October, the OPEC+ group of countries agreed to cut oil production by 2 million barrels per day beginning in November and will take production levels agreed for August as a reference point. The move was made in response to uncertainty in global oil market outlooks, in large part caused by Western sanctions on Russian energy products and the G7 plans to

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Lockheed Martin to Boost HIMARS Production to 96 Launchers Per Year – CEO

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) – Lockheed Martin, a major military contractor in the United States, has made the necessary arrangements to ramp up the production capacity of High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) to 96 units per year due to the high demand for the systems being used by Ukraine in the conflict with Russia, CEO Jim Taiclet said on Tuesday.

"On HIMARS specifically, we've already met with our long-lead supply chain to plan for increasing production to 96 units per year," Taiclet said during a third-quarter earnings call. At present, Lockheed Martin produces some 60 HIMARS systems per year.

Lockheed Martin began communicating with the US Department of Defense 6-7 months ago following the beginning of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine concerning possible ways to increase production capacity for HIMARS, Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System (GMLRS), and Javelins, Taiclet stated.

Lockheed Martin has invested \$65 million in shortening the systems' manufacturing time and is currently able to produce them even though the company did not have any sort of contract for them at the time, Taiclet added.

Additionally, Lockheed Martin opened a new modern manufacturing facility and got it up and running early to meet the growing demand for the products, Taiclet said.

To date, the United States has committed to Ukraine 20 HIMARS with the relevant munitions. In September, the Biden administration announced that it plans to supply Ukraine with 18 additional HIMARS over the next few years as part of its strategy to meet the country's long-term defense needs.

The year 2022 has seen a surge in demand for HIMARS after the systems received publicity during their combat deployment in Ukraine. Several countries at once announced their intention to purchase this type of weaponry from the United States, including Poland, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Australia.

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US Committed to Israel-Lebanon Maritime Deal, Urges 'Minor Reforms' - Special Envoy

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The United States is committed to the maritime agreement between Israel and Lebanon, but calls on Beirut to implement "minor reforms" in the energy sector, US Special Envoy for Energy Affairs Amos Hochstein said on Tuesday.

"The US has always been committed to getting that deal through. We would like to see that happen," Hochstein said during the virtual conversation at the Middle East Institute.

Hochstein pointed out that the United States will be working with the World Bank and other organizations in support of the maritime agreement.

The US official also urged Beirut to implement several "minor reforms" in the energy sector related to tariffs and a new electricity regulator.

The maritime agreement is divvying up energy resources in disputed waters in the Mediterranean Sea with Israel receiving control over the Karish gas field with estimated reserves of 1.75 trillion cubic feet and Lebanon being able to develop the Qana gas field.

Hochstein declined to provide specifics when and how Lebanon can be supplied with energy, but noted that the process will take several years.

"[W]e can get to a point where we can get much gas into Lebanon from Egypt and electricity from Jordan in the meantime. I think that would be very important," he said.

The negotiations on the demarcation of land and maritime borders between Israel and Lebanon were ongoing since 1996 on the basis of a memorandum of understanding under United Nations auspices and US mediation. Israel and Lebanon approved the maritime deal last week.

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US Learned From Ukraine Conflict Hypersonics Not Always Best Weapon to Use - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The United States learned from Russia's special military operation in Ukraine that hypersonic missiles are not always the best weapon of choice in an armed conflict, US Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering Heidi Shyu said during a virtual panel discussion on Tuesday.

"Not everything needs a hypersonic," Shyu said when asked about lessons learned about Russia's use of hypersonic weapons in Ukraine. "A hypersonic as you can see from the conflict is not necessarily the best use."

Although hypersonic missiles are one weapon system within the United States' vast arsenal, it is important for US military capabilities to match those of its adversaries, Shyu said.

Congress must approve President Joe Biden's request to boost spending to enhance the United States' testing capability of weapons it is developing such as hypersonic missiles, Shyu also said.

The United States is aware of what it needs to detect, track and counter hypersonic missile threats, Shyu added.

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Biden to Speak With Mexican President Today on Range of Issues - White House

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden is set to have a phone call with his Mexican counterpart, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, later on Tuesday, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said.

"The president is going to speak with the president of Mexico today on a range of issues from US-Mexico priorities," Jean-Pierre told a briefing.

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US, Russia Had Contact in Recent Days in Bid to Secure Release of Griner, Whelan - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The United States and Russia have been in contact in recent days as part of an effort to secure the release of Americans Brittney Griner and Paul Whelan, CNN reported on Tuesday citing a senior US administration official.

The report said conversations between the United States and Russia have not been lacking since Washington proposed a so-called substantial offer to Moscow in June.

However, the United States has not received a serious counteroffer from Moscow to date, the report said. The Russians are not non-responsive on this matter, but they continue to discuss something that is not feasible or available, the report added.

The United States and Russia have conducted talks in person, by phone and through other forms, the report said.

In addition, the United States has considered multiple ideas that could urge a serious response from Russia, the report said.

Last week, President Joe Biden said he does not intend to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the upcoming G20 summit but would consider meeting Putin if he was willing to talk about Griner's release.

In August, Griner was sentenced in Russia to nine years in jail and a \$16,576 fine on charges of bringing drugs illegally into the country. The basketball player pleaded guilty but insisted that she did not intend to break the law.

Whelan is serving a 16-year prison sentence after a Moscow court sentenced him in June 2020 on charges of espionage. Whelan has denied the charges but did not challenge the verdict in the hope of being part of a potential prisoner exchange between the United States and Russia.

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Growing Staff Attrition Critical Issue Amid US Hypersonic Arms Development - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - Growing attrition rates in the US defense industrial base are a critical issue that the United States is facing as it develops hypersonic weapons, US Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering Heidi Shyu said during a virtual panel discussion on Tuesday.

"The staffing is obviously a critical issue that all of industry has faced, no matter who I talk to, they've described that they have faced doubling of attrition rates since pre-COVID, so staffing is a workforce, the staffing is a critical issue that we have to take a look at moving forward," Shyu said when asked what are the biggest hurdles facing the US development of hypersonic weapons.

Moreover, Republican Congressman Doug Lamborn, who is a ranking member of the House Strategic Forces Subcommittee, said the United States is facing a shortage of highly qualified people to work in the US defense industrial base. The United States needs to act now to get young people well trained and motivated to become part of the US defense industry workforce. Shyu added that another critically important issue to address in the coming years is driving costs down as the United develops hypersonic weapons.

US Democratic Congressman Donald Norcross said he thinks the United States will be able to develop hypersonic weapons within the timelines set by the Pentagon.

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Austin Discusses Ukraine Support, Security Cooperation With UK Counterpart - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin met with UK counterpart Ben Wallace in Washington to discuss support for Ukraine and security cooperation amid Russia's special military operation, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said on Tuesday. "Secretary Austin hosted his UK counterpart, Secretary of State for Defense Ben Wallace, today in the Pentagon to discuss the ongoing support to Ukraine by our two nations, as well as the continued importance transatlantic and regional security cooperation play in light of Russia's attack in Ukraine," Ryder said during a press briefing.

The meeting comes as the United States and United Kingdom lead efforts by the collective West to impose sanctions on Russia in response to the conflict in Ukraine.

Rising energy and food costs linked to the sanctions regime on Russia have significantly increased cost of living in the UK, leading to just 10% approval rating for new Prime Minister Liz Truss after her economic plan to address the turmoil failed to come to fruition.

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US Sees No Indication of Russian Intention to Use Nukes, But Ready for Incident - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The United States is completely prepared to respond to the potential use of nuclear weapons by Russia despite not presently seeing any signs they intend to do so, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.

"We are completely ready, I can tell you that. We continue to monitor the situation very closely," Ryder said during a press briefing, when asked about the Pentagon's readiness for a nuclear action by Russia.

The US has not yet seen any indication that Russia intends to use nuclear weapons, Ryder added.

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US Intercepts 2 Russian Bombers Near Alaskan Coast, Posed No Threat - NORAD

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The United States detected and intercepted two Russian Tu-95 Bear-H bombers earlier this week near the Alaskan coast, the Alaskan North American Aerospace Defense Region (NORAD) said on Tuesday.

"On 17 October, the Alaskan North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) Region detected, tracked, positively identified and intercepted two Russian Tu-95 Bear-H bombers entering and operating within the Alaskan Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ)," NORAD said in a press release.

Two US F-16 fighter aircraft intercepted the Russian bombers, the release said.

The Russian aircraft remained in international airspace and did not enter US or Canadian sovereign airspace, the release added.

The Russian bombers did not pose a threat or incite any provocation, according to the release.

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Pentagon Says Can Not Corroborate Reports of Iran Planning to Provide Missiles to Russia

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department has no information at present to confirm the reports that Iran is planning to provide surface-to-surface missiles to Russia, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said in a press briefing on Tuesday.

"I've seen the press reports on that. I don't have any information to corroborate that at this time," Ryder said, commenting on media reports that Iran is allegedly planning to provide surface-to-surface missiles to Russia.

On Sunday, the Washington Post reported, citing US intelligence sources, that Iran was going to send missiles to Russia, including its short-range Fatah-110 and Zolfgar as well as export military drones.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani on Monday denied the US media reports alleging that Iran is sending weapons to Russia for use during the special military operation in Ukraine. Kanaani reiterated the government's position that Iran will not export weapons to any party to the conflict.

Earlier this month, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian said Iran did not supply Russia with weapons to be used in Ukraine.

In late August, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said that the topic of Russia's alleged purchase of combat drones from Iran was artificially spread by US media.

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US Announces First-Ever Offshore Wind Lease Sale in Pacific - Interior Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has announced its first-ever offshore wind lease sale on the west coast of the United States and the first-ever US sale to support potential commercial-scale floating offshore wind energy development, the Interior Department said Tuesday.

"In a new development in the pursuit of a clean energy future ... the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) will hold an offshore wind energy lease sale on Dec. 6, 2022, for areas on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) off central and northern California," the Interior Department said in a statement.

The sale will be critical to achieving the Biden administration's deployment goals of 30 gigawatts (GW) of offshore wind energy by 2030 and 15 GW of floating offshore wind energy by 2035, the statement said.

BOEM will offer five Outer Continental Shelf lease areas that total approximately 373,268 acres with the potential to produce over 4.5 GW of offshore wind energy, power more than 1.5 million homes, and support thousands of new jobs, the statement said.

To date, the BOEM has held 10 competitive lease sales and issued 27 active commercial wind leases in the Atlantic Ocean from Massachusetts to North Carolina.

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RPT - US Snow Crab Prices to Rise Due to Lack of Supply From Russian Ban, Climate - Trade Group

(Repeats to fix first name in lede)

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The price of snow crab in the United States is expected to rise due to the ban on Russian seafood products and a shortage of snow crab in the Bering Sea, which is believed to be exacerbated by the effects of climate change, Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers Executive Director Jamie Goen told Sputnik.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game announced last week that the US snow crab season in the Bering Sea will be closed this season for the first time in US history due to a population decline in the region.

"For king crab and snow crab because of the ban with Russia, and then we're closed down in the US, [US businesses] they're going to be getting it from Norway and Canada is my understanding of the supply, I would imagine the price is going to be a premium," Goen said. In March, President Joe Biden announced a ban on US imports of seafood, alcohol, and diamonds from Russia over Moscow's special military operation in Ukraine.

Goen said climate change may be causing the decline of the snow crab population in the Bering Sea.

In 2018, we had record high recruitment, which means there are a lot of small crab out in the ocean. But also the Bering Sea was warmer that year. So the crab, needed to burn more calories and have more food to survive. And there were so many of them out there, they think the stock just collapsed on itself," Goen said.

Moreover, Goen said the red crab population in the Bering Sea has been in a steady downward decline for 12 to 15 years now, but the issue is not directly climate related.

"They're not sure what's happening," Goen said. "So the [red crab] females are full of eggs and they're fertilized eggs. They release them, but then they never grow up to be bigger crab to harvest by our fishermen. So something's happening in the middle there."

Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers and other US fishermen have been calling for additional conservation measures, like those implemented by Russia and Canada, to protect the crab population in the region.

"When they're molting and mating crab get in a soft shell condition, so they're very vulnerable to high mortality, say if a patrol net comes through and runs over them, there's high mortality," Goen said. "My understanding is Russia and Canada have protections for crab when they're molting and mating, and we don't have that in the US. That's one of the things our fishermen

have been advocating for that we could manage them better, to protect them, to help them rebuild."

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game said in a press release that it understands the closing of this season's snow crab season in the Bering Sea will have substantial impacts on US harvesters, industry, and communities, but this measure was necessary for long-term conservation and sustainability of crab stocks in the area.

Efforts to understand the decline of the crab population in the region are underway, the state agency said.

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The Alaska Department of Fish and Game announced last week that the US snow crab season in the Bering Sea will be closed this season due to a population decline in the region. It also said the red king crab season was going to be closed for the second year in a row.

"We're estimating the economic losses now that we've had two years of either closed fisheries, or record low harvests, at over 500 million US dollars that our fishermen are losing. And then when you consider the processors and fishing communities and support businesses, like fill docks and shipyards, we're estimating that impact is over a billion US dollars," Goen said.

The snow crab harvest in the Bering Sea last year of 5.6 million pounds was the smallest in more than 40 years, media reported.

Goen said the historic decision by Alaska's Department of Fish and Game will likely sink family businesses considering there is no immediate federal relief program to aid US fisherman in tight circumstances.

"We have 60 vessels in our fleet and so many of those aren't going to be able to weather this," Goen said. "The US government does not have relief for fishermen like it does for farmers in the US. When farmers have a crop failure, they get immediate financial relief. We don't have a program like that for our US fishermen."

There is a state financial relief program available for fisheries in Alaska, but it takes two to four years for them to get approved, Goen said.

"If it's a small family business, they can't weather two to four years without an income, so many of them are going to be facing bankruptcy this year, it's going to be devastating for our fleet," Goen said.

The Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers meeting trade association met with lawmakers in Congress on Monday to lobby for immediate financial relief, Goen said.

"We want a program on par with what farmers have in crop failure, or like what communities have after a hurricane or a flood comes through where they get immediate financial relief through programs like FEMA, or for farmers it's through the United States Department of Agriculture, USDA," Goen said.

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US House Minority Leader Says No 'Blank Check' for Ukraine Amid Looming Recession
-Reports

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - US House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy has pledged that if the Republicans become a majority in the lower chamber of Congress in the midterm elections, Ukraine will not get a "blank check" for assistance given a looming recession in the United States, The Hill reported on Tuesday.

According to a recent Real Clear Politics (RCP) poll, the Republican Party is poised to seize both chambers of US Congress in the November 8 midterm elections, with a commanding edge in a sufficient number of House races, while the Senate map looks like a toss-up.

Changes in the balance of power in Congress could seriously complicate the Biden administration's efforts to send generous packages of military and other assistance to Ukraine, which has already received well over \$18 billion from US taxpayers.

People are not going to sit in a recession writing a blank check to Ukraine, they will just not do it, the report cited McCarthy as saying.

Only 218 seats are required to win the majority in the House of Representatives, which the Democrats currently control by a majority of eight seats. The Senate is currently split 50-50 but the Democrats have the edge with Vice President Kamala Harris representing the tie-breaking vote.

Last week, the Biden administration announced another \$725 million in military assistance package for Ukraine that includes more ammunition for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) and additional 155mm artillery rounds.

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US Says Working Swiftly to Disburse \$4.5Bln in Recently-Approved Budget Support for Kiev

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The United States is working swiftly to disburse \$4.5 billion in recently-approved budget support for Ukraine, the Treasury said on Tuesday after a virtual meeting between Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal.

"Secretary Yellen reaffirmed the United States' commitment to supporting Ukraine's brave resistance against Russia's illegal war, including Russia's latest barbaric attacks on civilians, and noted the United States is working swiftly to disburse \$4.5 billion in recently-approved budget support, bringing total U.S. economic assistance to \$13 billion, all in grants," the press release said.

Yellen acknowledged Ukraine's significant financing needs next year for critical government services and urgent recovery projects. She also stressed the need for inclusive coordination across international partners to help Ukraine begin to rebuild and recover, according to the release.

Last week, Yellen said the US will begin to disburse the \$4.5 billion that Congress allocated in direct budget support for Ukraine in the coming weeks. In late September, President Joe Biden signed a stopgap funding bill passed by Congress to avoid a US government shutdown and provide \$12.4 billion in new spending on areas related to the Ukraine conflict, including \$4.5 billion in economic assistance.

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Lafarge Cement Company to Plead Guilty to Collaborating With Terrorists - US Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The cement company Lafarge has agreed to plead guilty to making payments to terrorist organizations, including the Islamic State (banned in Russia), in order to continue operations at their plant in Syria, the US Justice Department announced on Tuesday.

"A global building materials manufacturer and its subsidiary pleaded guilty today to a one-count criminal information charging them with conspiring to provide material support and resources in Northern Syria from 2013 to 2014 to the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham and the al-Nusrah Front (ANF)," the Justice Department said in a statement. "US District Judge William F. Kuntz II sentenced the defendants to terms of probation and to pay financial penalties, including criminal fines and forfeiture, totaling \$777.78 million."

The principal executives are also open to prosecution in their native France, Attorney for the Eastern District of New York Breon Peace said during a press conference.

The Justice Department said the company has admitted to paying the terrorist organizations to safely continue operations at the cement plant in Syria, and, as the business relationship evolved, Lafarge and the Islamic State also developed a revenue-sharing agreement for their mutual economic advantage.

The relationship enabled Lafarge Cement Syria to obtain over \$70 million in revenue after it paid nearly \$6 million to the two terror organizations between August 2013 and October 2014 as part of their arrangement, the statement said.

Moreover, the Islamic State took possession of the cement plant after the company evacuated in September 2014, yielding them approximately \$3.2 million, the statement said.

“Many companies made the right choice - the only lawful choice: to leave the region rather than join hands with the terrorists. Lafarge made a different decision: to go into business with ISIS and al-Nusrah - two of the world’s most notorious and brutal terrorist organizations,” the statement added.

Lafarge was acquired by Switzerland’s Holcim in 2015. Company executives did not disclose their ties to the terrorist groups to the successor company and the successor company did not conduct due diligence of operations in Syria before or after acquisition, according to the statement.

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US Court Delays Civil Case Against Russian National Vinnik Pending Criminal Case - Filing

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The US District Court for the Northern District of California is delaying the civil case against Russian national Alexander Vinnik for alleged financial regulation violations pending a criminal case against him for money laundering charges tied to his cryptocurrency trading platform, BTC-e, according to a court document filed Tuesday. Earlier this month, Vinnik requested that the civil case against him be delayed until his criminal case is resolved – a request to which the government was amenable, the filing said. Magistrate Judge Kandis Westmore then granted the request in the Tuesday filing.

Vinnik is accused of financial crimes, including money laundering through BTC-e. Prosecutors allege the platform enabled criminal activity by obscuring and anonymizing transactions and sources of funds.

Vinnik faces upwards of 50 years if convicted on the criminal charges, which he denies. Additionally, Vinnik and BTC-e face civil penalties for alleged violations of the Bank Secrecy Act. BTC-e is accused of failing to register as a Money Services Business, failing to establish anti-money laundering systems and failing to file suspicious activities reports.

The US Treasury Department’s Financial Crimes Enforcement Network assessed monetary penalties of \$12 million against Vinnik and over \$88 million against BTC-e for the alleged violations. The civil case seeks to enforce those penalties.

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Americans' Trust in Media Remains Near Record Low – Poll

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) – The trust Americans have in the media remains near a record low, with those having no trust at all outnumbering for the first time those who have either a great deal or a fair amount of confidence in newspapers, TV and radio, according to a Gallup poll released Tuesday.

"Just 7% of Americans have 'a great deal' of trust and confidence in the media, and 27% have 'a fair amount,'" Gallup said, noting that this figure (34%) is just two points higher than the 2016 record low. "Meanwhile, 28% of U.S. adults say they do not have very much confidence and 38% have none at all in newspapers, TV and radio. Notably, this is the first time that the percentage of Americans with no trust at all in the media is higher than the percentage with a great deal or a fair amount combined."

Seventy percent of Democrats, 14% of Republicans and 27% of independents say they have a great deal or a fair amount of confidence in the media, but political partisans remain sharply divided in their views of the media, with most Democrats versus few Republicans trusting it. These divisions are entrenched and show no signs of abating, Gallup said.

For the third straight year, Gallup noted, a majority of Republicans say they have no trust at all in the media. This figure jumped 10% in 2020 and has remained at or near 60% since then. In 2022, 57% of Republicans polled expressed no confidence, with 29% indicating they do not have very much trust in the media.

Meanwhile, independents have a mere 27% confidence in the media, the lowest point in the trend. This is the first time their confidence level has fallen below 30%, researchers said.

Forty-one percent of independents say they have no trust at all and 32% have little confidence.

"The current level of public trust in the media's full, fair and accurate reporting of the news is the second lowest on record," the pollster said. "This new confidence reading follows Gallup's historically low confidence in both TV news and newspapers in June and a new low in December's annual rating of the honesty and ethics of television reporters. Newspaper reporters received similarly low ratings in the same poll."

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US to Sanction Any Country That Provides Military Assistance to Russia - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The United States will target anyone with sanctions if they provide military assistance to Russia, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Karen Donfried said on Tuesday.

"The United States will impose sanctions on anyone who is helping Iran provide this sort of military support for Russia's war against Ukraine," Donfried said during a briefing. "We will

continue to vigorously enforce US sanctions on both, the Russian and Iranian arms trade. We'll make it harder for Iran to sell these weapons to Russia and we will stand with our partners throughout the region against this Iranian threat."

On Monday, Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau announced the European Union's plans to investigate the possible use of Iranian combat drones by Russia in Ukraine.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said that the topic of Russia's purchase of Iranian drones had been artificially hyped by US media. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the Russian government had no information about supplies of Iranian drones and such questions should be directed to the Russian Defense Ministry.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani denied media reports about the deliveries of Iranian weapons to Russia for alleged use in Ukraine.

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Adeyemo to Push for Price Cap on Russian Oil at APEC Ministerial in Thailand - Treasury

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) – US Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Wally Adeyemo heads to Thailand on October 19-20 for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Finance Ministers' Meeting, where he is going to discuss Russia sanctions and the price cap on Russian oil, the Treasury Department said on Tuesday.

"The Deputy Secretary will also discuss the historic sanctions and export controls placed on Russia by a global coalition of more than 30 countries in response to Russia's unjust war on Ukraine. During meetings with government and business counterparts, the Deputy Secretary will explain how the price cap will help keep low-priced Russian oil flowing onto global markets to put downward pressure on energy prices, primarily benefiting emerging markets, while also cutting into Putin's primary source of revenue," the press release read.

Adeyemo will participate in official events and bilateral meetings, including with Thai Minister of Finance Arkhom Termpittayapaisith.

On October 21, Adeyemo will travel to Singapore, where he plans to meet with Singapore Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance Lawrence Wong, Minister for Trade and Industry Gan Kim Yong, Managing Director of the Monetary Authority of Singapore Ravi Menon, and other government officials. He will also participate in discussions with business leaders from the financial services, shipping, and petroleum industries.

"Throughout his trip, Adeyemo will reaffirm the United States' commitment to the Asia-Pacific region. He will advance the Biden-Harris Administration's engagement in the region, including through APEC, the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII), and continued friend-shoring with trusted trading partners," the release said.

Adeyemo also plans to expand the coordination of individual and collective responses to global economic headwinds caused by the global pandemic, the conflict in Ukraine and other challenges, it added.

Last week, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said that the Group of Seven countries, the European Union and Australia are still trying to determine a suitable price cap to place on Russian oil. She suggested that a price cap in the \$60-a-barrel range would likely be sufficient to reduce Russia's energy revenues while allowing oil to continue to flow to the global market. Russian President Vladimir Putin has said Moscow will not supply oil to countries that choose to impose the price cap.

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Biden Admin. Weighs Discouraging US Firms From Business in Saudi Arabia - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - Biden administration officials are considering discouraging US companies from expanding business ties with Saudi Arabia in response to Riyadh's alleged role in the recent OPEC+ decision to cut oil production, NBC reported on Tuesday.

However, the Biden administration has not yet conveyed its advice to US companies to dissuade them from doing business in Saudi Arabia, the report cited Adrienne Watson, spokesperson for the White House National Security Council, as saying.

In addition, the Biden administration is not planning to send any US officials to Saudi Arabia's annual Future Investment Initiative conference that is scheduled to take place in Riyadh next week, the report said.

At present, no decisions have been made with respect to punishing Saudi Arabia for its role in the OPEC+ move as the US government continues to contemplate how to best manage its core objectives in the Middle East together with responding to Riyadh, the report said.

The news comes after National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Wednesday that US President Joe Biden began to reevaluate the United States' relationship with Saudi Arabia after the OPEC+ group decided to cut oil production.

Earlier in October, the OPEC+ group of countries agreed to cut oil production by 2 million barrels per day beginning in November and will take production levels agreed for August as a reference point. The move was made in response to uncertainty in global oil market outlooks, in large part caused by Western sanctions on Russian energy products and the G7 plans to introduce a price cap on Russian crude.

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US Congressman Urges Arms Production Increase as Taiwan, Ukraine Run Low on Munitions

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The United States should focus on bolstering its defense industrial base and replenishing its arsenals as the Pentagon looks to continue arming Ukraine and Taiwan despite dwindling domestic stockpiles, US Rep. Mike Gallagher said on Tuesday.

"We are running low on the munitions that are essential to both Ukraine and Taiwan," Gallagher, a member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence and the Armed Services Committee, said during remarks at the Heritage Foundation. "To fix this, the Pentagon should stop buying minimum sustaining rates of critical munitions and start maxing out the capacity of active production lines through multi-year procurement contracts."

The US could modernize the Defense Production Act and use it to provide direct project financing, permit fast tracking and investments in defense workforce training, Gallagher said. Republican members of the House will pursue an agenda focused on developing the country's warfighting capabilities if they win control of the chamber in the upcoming midterm elections, Gallagher added.

Gallagher's remarks come following the release of the Heritage Foundation report that rated the US' overall military posture as "weak." The US is at growing risk of not being able to defend vital national interests due to years of underfunding, shifting security policies and poorly defined priorities, the report said.

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Congressman Says US Should Use 'Hard Power' Approach to Deter China on Taiwan

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The United States should better utilize its hard power capabilities to deter China from taking military action in Taiwan after the Biden administration's approach to deterrence in Ukraine failed, US Congressman Mike Gallagher said on Tuesday. "We don't lack options, we lack leadership. We lack leadership in the Pentagon capable of bending the bureaucracy to their will in service of a defense strategy that prioritizes hard power. We lack leadership in the White House that understands the paradox at the heart of deterrence: that to avoid war, you must convince your adversary that you are both capable and willing to wage war," Gallagher said during remarks at the Heritage Foundation.

The Biden administration's approach to deterrence in Ukraine failed due to signaling their unwillingness to put US hard power in Russia's way, Gallagher said. The US should put hard power between China and Taiwan before it's "too late," Gallagher said.

The United States will embolden China and invite war if it ignores lessons about hard power, continues down a path of disarmament and allows fear of escalation to dominate decision-making, Gallagher said.

Specifically, Gallagher recommended that the United States develop what he called an "anti-navy" in order to counter Chinese ships and landing craft, as well as bolster munitions production as stockpiles run low amid shipments to Ukraine.

Gallagher's remarks come following the release of a Heritage Foundation report on US military power, which rated the country's overall posture as being "weak." While the US Marine Corps and nuclear forces were rated highly, the Army, Navy, Air Force and Space Force all received ratings between "very weak" and "marginal," the report said.

The United States is at growing risk of not being able to defend vital national interests due to years of underfunding, shifting security policies and poorly defined priorities among other challenges, the report added.

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US Crude at \$80 Lows as Biden Said to Mull More Emergency Oil Sale to Counter OPEC+ Cuts

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - US crude hit the lower end of \$80 per barrel Tuesday amid reports that the Biden administration planned to sell more of the nation's emergency oil reserve to counter output cuts announced by producer alliance OPEC+ that could jeopardize the president and his party in elections next month.

West Texas Intermediate (WTI), the benchmark for US crude, had surged to as high as \$93.64 per barrel by October 10, after the production cut of 2 million barrels per day from November onwards that OPEC had announced on October 5. Prior to that, WTI had hit an 8-month low beneath \$75 per barrel. The OPEC+ driven rally of the past two weeks had started pushing up pump prices of US fuel as well, which was bad news for President Joe Biden and Democrats ahead of the November 8 mid-term elections.

Both Bloomberg and Reuters reported on Tuesday, citing sources, that the Biden administration plans to sell an additional 26 million barrels from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) for fiscal year 2023. Before that, the administration has another 14 million barrels to clear from the SPR under a campaign to sell 180 million barrels over six months.

SPR inventories have fallen to their lowest since 1984 from the administration's aggressive moves to bring pump prices of gasoline down before the election. On Tuesday, the average pump price was at \$3.87 per gallon versus \$3.92 a week ago. In mid-June, it was at a record high of \$5.

Biden's critics from the Republican party have accused him of putting the nation's emergency oil reserve at immense risk for the sake of trying to hold on to the Democrats' control of the US Congress and Senate. Under general SPR policy, the reserve is meant for mitigating pure shortages of oil in the domestic market and not for reducing energy prices, Republicans said. Biden has argued that the welfare of Americans, struggling with the worst inflation in four decades due to high energy prices, was a bigger priority.

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US Believes Ukraine Conflict Will End at Negotiating Table - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The United States believes that the conflict in Ukraine will end at the negotiation table, however, Russia must show that it is ready to negotiate in good

faith, US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Karen Donfried said on Tuesday.

"We believe that this war will end at the negotiating table, but Russia needs to indicate that it is ready to sit down and engage in good faith," Donfried told reporters.

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US Working Very Hard to Extend Black Sea Grain Deal – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) – The United States is making every effort to secure an extension of the Black Sea grain deal, US Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs Karen Donfried said on Tuesday.

"We are working very hard on the extension of this agreement. I think there is evidence that that agreement has been good for Russia. And it has also been good for the world," Donfried told a briefing.

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US Welcomes Musk's Intention to Continue to Fund Starlink Services in Ukraine - State Dept

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The United States welcomes Elon Musk's statement that he will continue to fund the Starlink satellite internet service in Ukraine, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs Karen Donfried said on Tuesday.

"We have see Starlink playing great difference for Ukraine providing that internet access and we certainly welcome Elon Musk's comments that SpaceX is willing to continue to fund the provision of Starlink to Ukraine," Donfried told a briefing.

SpaceX CEO Elon Musk recently requested the Defense Department to help pay for the Starlink services, which is currently provided to Ukraine at a loss to his company.

The US Defense Department is considering paying for SpaceX's Starlink services in Ukraine, a Pentagon spokesperson told Sputnik on Monday.

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Lafarge Cement to Plead Guilty to ISIS Payments, Pay \$700 Fine on US Charges – Reports

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) – Lafarge Cement agreed on Tuesday to plead guilty to US federal criminal charges related to the nearly \$17 million it paid to the Islamic State terror

group (banned in Russia) from 2012-2014 to keep its plant in Syria going, CNBC reported on Tuesday.

The French company will pay a fine of more than \$700 million.

The investigation is still ongoing and no individuals have been charged so far.

Lafarge was bought by Switzerland's Holcim in 2015. Lafarge was indicted by French authorities in 2018 on charges of being complicit in crimes against humanity.

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Over 500 US Military Retirees Worked for Foreign Governments Since 2015 – Reports

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) – More than 500 retired US military personnel have worked for foreign governments since 2015, often enjoying six-figure consulting contracts, according to an investigation by The Washington Post that involved a two-year legal battle to obtain documents under the Freedom of Information Act.

Most of the personnel have worked as civilian contractors to help upgrade the militaries of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and other Gulf countries. Aside from Russia, the released documents did not show that retired military personnel worked for governments categorized by the US government as "foreign adversaries."

Since 2016, 15 retired US generals and admirals have worked for Saudi Arabia's Defense Ministry, including retired Marine Gen. James Jones, a former national security adviser under Obama; retired Army Gen. Keith Alexander, head of the National Security Agency under Obama and Bush; a retired four-star Air Force general; and a former commanding general of US troops in Afghanistan. A former Navy SEAL worked as a special operation advisor for \$258,000 per year.

The Gulf aside, there are many other cases of foreign governments hiring retired military personnel. Several former senior Navy officials secured consulting deals with Australia worth more than \$10 million. A consulting firm owned by former Pentagon officials won a \$23.6 million contract with Qatar that later fell through.

A former Air Force general consulted for Azerbaijan at a daily rate of \$5,000. Retired Army Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, a former national security adviser under Trump, earned \$449,807 from Russian and Turkish interests in 2015 without seeking clearance. Of the more than 500 cases reported since then, only one involved Russia, in which a retired Air Force colonel secured a \$300,000 executive position with a satellite-launch company in the US that was majority-owned by the Russian government, the report said.

While retired military personnel are permitted to work for foreign governments if they obtain approval from their armed forces branch and the State Department, the US government largely withheld information about them until the Washington Post sued the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps and the State Department. The newspaper was also given documents secured through a similar lawsuit by The Project On Government Oversight.

The newspaper found that approval is nearly automatic, with 95% of the more than 500 requests submitted since 2015 accepted. Moreover, the armed forces rely on the retired

personnel to self-report their intention to work for foreign governments. There is no criminal penalty for violating the law, which is rarely enforced.

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Lockheed Martin Reports Net Sales of \$16.6Bln, Net Earnings of \$1.8Bln in Q3 of 2022

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) – Lockheed Martin recorded increased net sales and net earnings in the third quarter of 2022, the American aerospace and defense giant said on Tuesday.

"Lockheed Martin Corporation [NYSE: LMT] today reported third quarter 2022 net sales of \$16.6 billion, compared to \$16.0 billion in the third quarter of 2021. Net earnings in the third quarter of 2022 were \$1.8 billion, or \$6.71 per share, compared to \$614 million, or \$2.21 per share, in the third quarter of 2021," the company said in a press release.

Cash from operations totaled \$3.1 billion, compared to \$1.9 billion during the same period of last year, while free cash flow rose from \$1.6 billion to \$2.7 billion in Q3 of 2022, according to the release.

Lockheed Martin President and CEO James Taiclet stressed the company's continuing ability to invest in new technologies.

"These technologies include hypersonics, directed energy, and autonomy, as well as cutting edge digital capabilities in our evolving 5G.MIL open standards-based architecture. In addition, we are investing in production and sustainment capacity for the solutions needed now to defend our allies and our nation, including F-35, Javelin and HIMARS," Taiclet said, as quoted in the release.

Aeronautics' net sales for the quarter rose by \$521 million, or 8% year-on-year. They increased by about \$425 million for the F-35 program.

"MFC's [Missile and Fire Control] net sales during the quarter ended Sept. 25, 2022 increased \$50 million, or 2%, compared to the same period in 2021," the company said. "The increase was primarily attributable to higher net sales of approximately \$95 million for integrated air and missile defense programs due to higher volume (Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3))."

Space's net sales were up by \$183 million in the third quarter of this year, or 7%, compared to the same period in 2021.

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Fitch Projects 1990-Style Mild Recession in US by Spring 2023 - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 18 (Sputnik) - The American economy could land in a 1990-style mild recession by spring next year as unyielding inflation and the Federal Reserve's response of

jumbo-sized interest rate hikes come to a head, CNN said Tuesday in a preview of a forthcoming Fitch Ratings report.

Fitch, in that report, slashed its US growth forecasts for 2023 and 2024, citing one of the most aggressive inflation-fighting campaigns in Fed history. US Gross Domestic Product is forecast to grow by 0.5% next year, versus its June forecast of 1.5%, Fitch said.

High inflation will "prove too much of a drain" on household income next year and shrink consumer spending to the point it causes a downturn by the second quarter, Fitch added.

The Fitch forecast comes on the heels of projections by Bloomberg economists on Monday that a US recession is effectively certain over the next year.

Investors, economists and business leaders have warned for a while that the world's largest economy was on the verge of a downturn — just 2.5 years after the last recession that broke out with the coronavirus pandemic in mid-2020.

What is standing in favor of the US economy this time is a runaway jobs market. The labor market has been the juggernaut of the US economy, spearheading its recovery from the two-year long coronavirus pandemic.

Joblessness among Americans reached an all-time high of 14.8% in April 2020, with the loss of some 20 million jobs after the COVID-19 breakout. Since then, the Labor Department's non-farm payrolls report has reported hundreds of thousands of job additions every month. US average hourly earnings have risen without stop since June 2021.

Inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index, stood at 8.2% for the year to September, not too far from the 40-year peak of 9.1% during the 12 months to June. The Fed's target for inflation is a mere 2% a year and it has said it will not back off on interest rate hikes until it achieves its aim.

Former economic adviser to the US government Larry Summers said in a blog post on Monday wage inflation will have to come down significantly if the Fed's 2% target is to be attained. "I do not understand the basis for believing this is likely without a meaningful recession," Summers wrote.

Since March, the Fed has raised rates by 300 basis points from an original base of just 25. The central bank intends to add another 125 basis points to rates before the year-end, with economists expecting further hikes in 2023.