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Biden's Public Health Emergency Extension Could be Last One, Imperiling Millions of Beneficiaries

By - Fantine Gardinier

US President Joe Biden recently extended the public health emergency with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic for another 3 months, until January 11, 2023. However, depending on how badly Covid hits the country this winter, it could be the last time he does so, health officials have said.

US Secretary of Health and Human Services [Xavier Becerra has said](#) that his department would give 60 days notice before ending the public health emergency that has been in place since the start of the pandemic in March 2020. Biden's recent extension of the status until January 11, 2023, means that Americans will find out on November 11 if its many benefits will imminently expire.

Those benefits include an expansion of Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program enrollment, as well as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), better known as food stamps.

As many as 14 million people have health coverage because of the expanded enrollment, according to [Kaiser Family Foundation](#) estimates. It's unclear how many would lose SNAP benefits, but the expansion in March 2020 immediately added 7 million people to the program, which gives households money that can only be used to buy food at grocery stores.

The DHHS' Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services [warned in August](#) about "creating a roadmap" for the end of the emergency, offering resources for beneficiaries to prepare for the loss of various benefits.

The White House is facing increasing pressure to end the public health emergency. US Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and 25 other GOP senators - more than half the party's presence in the upper chamber - [wrote a letter to Becerra](#) earlier this month asking for more information on how the DHHS will decide to "return to normalcy."

"As the American people return to normalcy, workers, families, frontline health care providers, and a range of other stakeholders need transparency and certainty regarding the path forward," the senators wrote.

"This unpredictable patchwork of mandates and questionable authorities will continue to erode the public's confidence in government health agencies. For frontline health care providers and patients, the administration's erratic approach to transitioning beyond a perpetual state of pandemic emergency could prove particularly problematic," they added.

Biden has overseen the elimination of most of the pandemic-era protections implemented by his predecessor, Donald Trump, intended to shield Americans from the economic and health disaster that afflicted the country in 2020. That includes a [moratorium on evictions](#) and

foreclosures, another on the payment of student loans, and [expansions of unemployment](#), Medicaid, SNAP, and other federal benefits programs.

Last month, Biden audaciously declared the pandemic "over," [even as an average of 400](#) Americans a day, or 12,000 per month, continue to die of the respiratory virus.

However, the decision will ultimately be based on how bad the outbreak gets in the coming weeks, as colder weather sets in across the United States and Americans move their activities indoors. Nearly the entire country has ended mandates on mask-wearing indoors, social distancing, and vaccination, although the Omicron variant has changed expectations regarding the extent to which the vaccine is able to prevent the spread of the virus.

A new Omicron subvariant, [BQ.1.1, has been spotted spreading](#) in the US in recent weeks. In New York City, it's believed to be responsible for more than one-third of cases in a growing outbreak, and for 11% of all cases in the US over the last week. Since BQ.1.1 derives from the older BA.5 subvariant of Omicron, the new bivalent booster shots released by Pfizer and Moderna that target BA.5 are expected to provide some protection against BQ.1.1 as well.

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Ex-Trump Adviser Steve Bannon Sentenced to Four Months in Prison for Contempt of Congress - Report

By - Fantine Gardinier

A federal judge has sentenced Steve Bannon, a far-right ideologue and adviser to former US President Donald Trump, to serve prison time and pay a fine for contempt of Congress.

However, the sentence is on hold, as Bannon appeals the verdict.

US District Judge Carl Nichols sentenced Bannon on Friday to four months in prison and to pay a \$6,500 fine for [failing to comply with two subpoenas](#) for his testimony issued by the US House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol. The US Department of Justice has sought six months in prison for Bannon - the harshest sentence allowed under the law.

However, Judge Nichols agreed to stay Bannon's serving of that sentence as [his appeal of the conviction](#) plays out in court. [Bannon had previously said](#) he was prepared to go to jail for supporting "Trump and the Constitution."

"We certainly fully respect the judge's decision but we will be filing a notice of appeal," Bannon's lawyer, David Schoen, told reporters shortly after the sentence. He added at that the stay of Bannon's sentence was an "extraordinary move."

The House committee was formed to investigate the origins of the insurrection staged by Trump supporters at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021. Immediately after a "Stop the Steal" rally hosted by Trump outside the White House, at which Trump claimed his loss in the November 2020 presidential election had been due to fraud, thousands of his supporters stormed through police barricades and into the US Capitol Building. While they temporarily dispersed Congress and halted certification of the election results, they failed at their goal of voiding that certification and of capturing US lawmakers. However, five people died in the assault.

Bannon, a close Trump supporter who served as his chief strategist early in his presidency, helped build support for the January 6 rally.

“It’s not going to happen like you think it’s going to happen,” [Bannon told listeners](#) of his radio show on January 5, the day before the riot. “It’s going to be extraordinarily different. And all I can say is: Strap in.”

Numerous other Trump affiliates have also been subpoenaed for testimony or documents, with several also being held in contempt of Congress for shirking the summons. Trump is also engaged in a lengthy legal battle over files held by the US National Archives that the January 6 committee wants to review, but Trump has argued are protected by Executive Privilege.

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Democrats Fret Over Polls Showing Once-Solidly Blue States at Risk of Flipping to GOP
By - Fantine Gardinier

With the 2022 midterm elections just a few weeks away, Democratic strategists are worried that several states where their victory could once have been taken for granted are at risk of being taken by Republicans, especially in New England. Many politicians feel US President Joe Biden’s lackluster performance is a drag on the Democrats’ popularity.

New polls in Oregon, New York and Rhode Island show GOP candidates gaining ground in congressional and gubernatorial races, with several showing the two parties’ candidates support within the poll’s margin of error.

New York

New York Governor Katy Hochul, a Democrat who was appointed to replace Andrew Cuomo after he resigned in disgrace last year, is leading her Republican challenger Lee Zeldin by just 4% in [a Quinnipiac poll](#) released on Tuesday. That poll showed 50% of polled voters saying they would vote for the incumbent, while 46% said they would vote for Zeldin.

“In the blue state of New York, the race for governor is competitive,” Quinnipiac University Polling Analyst Mary Snow said in a statement. “Democrats have cruised to victory in gubernatorial races since 2006, but Governor Hochul’s narrow edge puts Republican Lee Zeldin well within striking distance of her.”

Polled voters ranked crime, inflation, and the nebulous concept of “protecting democracy” as their most important issues in the election. All three are issues the GOP has hammered Democrats on, claiming their policies have encouraged a spike in crime, diluted the value of the US dollar with government spending and a boycott of Russian energy exports, and allowed election fraud to spread through heavy use of mail-in ballots.

US Sen. Chuck Schumer, who leads the Democrats in the Senate, led his challenger Joe Pinion by 12 percentage points in the Quinnipiac poll.

Rhode Island

In Rhode Island, a small but typically strongly liberal state, one of its two House seats is in danger of being seized by a Republican candidate.

A poll [released last week](#) by Suffolk University and the Boston Globe put Republican candidate Allan Fung, the former mayor of Cranston, ahead of Democrat Seth Magaziner, the state treasurer by 45% to 37%. The two men are running to replace Rep. James Langevin, a Democrat who has held the seat since 2000.

"There's plenty of awareness that this was going to be a close race," Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), told [Politico on Tuesday](#). "It could go either way at this point. At the end of the day if we're at all effective at helping people understand the difference between a mayor and a member of Congress, we make the connection with voters and we win this seat."

The paper noted that the Congressional Leadership Fund super PAC has poured some \$2 million into Fung's campaign.

Oregon

Across the country in Oregon, Democratic Governor Kate Brown is leaving office as the most unpopular governor in the country. Three women are racing to replace her. A poll conducted by Portland daily paper The Oregonian and [published on Thursday](#) showed Democrat Tina Kotek and Republican Christine Drazan "neck-and-neck" with 40% of polled voters supporting Kotek and 38% supporting Drazan - within the poll's margin of error.

Betsy Johnson, an independent who left the Democratic Party, was polling at 14%. Kotek's campaign has accused her of sapping liberal voters away, [according to The Hill](#).

Another [poll by Emerson College](#) published at the beginning of the month showed the same 2% gap between Kotek and Drazan, giving Kotek 36% and Drazan 34% support. It has also not elected a Republican governor since 1982. A third poll, released on Wednesday by [the Hoffman Research Group](#), put Drazan ahead at 37% and Kotek trailing at 35% - again, a 2% difference. Oregon has long been a Democratic stronghold, with Biden beating then-US President Donald Trump by 16% in the 2020 presidential election.

The outcome of congressional races is highly anticipated and very close, with projections shifting regularly between a Republican and a Democratic victory. Historically, the president's party performs worse in midterm elections, which happen two years after presidential elections.

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'Everyone Wants It Passed': Experts Predict Minimal Interference in Ukraine Aid if GOP Wins Midterms

By - Fantine Gardinier

On Thursday, US President Joe Biden said he was "worried" about the future of US aid to Ukraine, which has been fighting Russian forces since February. However, experts told Sputnik that while GOP lawmakers might change their method, US backing for Ukraine is something both parties will continue.

Biden's comment came after US House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA), who stands poised to become House Speaker if Republicans win a majority in the lower congressional chamber in the midterm elections next month, said he would be "unwilling to write a blank check" for Ukraine aid.

[NBC News reported](#) on Thursday that Democrats might try to rush passage of a massive \$50 billion Ukraine aid bill due to such fears. That is close to the \$65 billion Congress has allocated for Kiev since February, when Russia launched its special military operation in what was then eastern Ukraine with the aim of destroying neo-Nazi forces persecuting Russophones. Last month, four Ukrainian regions with Russian-speaking majorities voted to leave Ukraine and join the Russian Federation.

Professor David Woodard, Clemson University political scientist and former political consultant for Republican congressmen, told Sputnik on Friday that “many Republican legislators want to have their pictures taken in Ukraine next to American weapons shipped to destroy the Russians.”

“McCarthy was speaking to Biden and the Democrats, not to the Ukraine citizenry,” he asserted.

“American weapons in Ukraine have been successful and they will continue to be sent, and even increased. Believe me when I say that many Republican legislators want to have their pictures taken in Ukraine next to American weapons shipped to destroy the Russians.”

“The passage of the Ukraine package is not a matter of having the votes. Everyone wants it passed, but the problem is who will get credit given the looming midterm vote. Republicans do not want Biden to call a press conference to brag about his aid accomplishment. Public opinion polls show that Americans now believe that Ukraine will win the war against Russia, but the unending conflict drains political support. Americans like quick wars and immediate victories,” Woodard said.

“Remember it was Gen. Douglas MacArthur who told the American people in the 1950 that “the troops will be home by Christmas.” Instead, the [People’s Republic of China] massed a force that invaded before the end of the year and the troops stayed. That sudden offensive sent the US/UN troops reeling. The statement about Christmas became famous for what not to say about warfare.”

Woodard told Sputnik that while Americans might care about what’s going on in Ukraine, polls show their priorities are clearly focused on domestic concerns going into the November 8 elections.

“The rule of American politics - and politics in general - is that ‘domestic policy is more important than foreign policy.’ American voters feel the economy, inflation, rising crime and education disorder before they watch pictures about the disarray in Ukraine. The Ukraine package must be considered in the mix of other issues, but I believe the midterm result will have a good show of support for Ukraine. It will be politically popular to support and ship arms overseas after the vote.”

“The most dangerous issue in American politics is economic instability. It was that way in the 1930s, the 1950s and the period of instability in the post-Cold War era. Inflation poses a real danger to the ruling Democratic majority and I have told you before that I think the GOP could get 50 seats, well at least 30 seats, in the House,” Woodard added.

However, Timothy Hagle, a political science professor at the University of Iowa, pointed out that there are indeed some Republicans who will have at least some objections to any new aid bills for Ukraine.

“There are two dimensions to this. One is a concern about getting the US more deeply involved in the war. Some Republicans are hesitant to get the US more involved given the outcome in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts,” he told Sputnik. “A second concern of many Republicans is how

increased spending is hurting the economy. There is an intersection between the two concerns, but it is hard to say whether it would cause enough Republicans to oppose additional aid so that it would be blocked.”

“The possibility of passing such an aid package will depend in part on what happens in the midterm elections. If Republicans take control of both chambers, it might reduce the possibility. Democrats might try to pass such a package in the ‘lame duck’ session (i.e., before the new Congress takes office in January), but some who were defeated might not be interested in doing much during that time,” he explained.

“Once the new Congress is in place, if Republicans are in control of one or both chambers, there may be enough of them who are particularly concerned with increased spending that they may try to delay or stop such a package. In addition, if the situation changes in Ukraine dramatically in the next few months, it could change the possibility or size of an aid package.” Hagle said it was “hard to say” what specific policies Republicans might adopt if they win a majority.

“Even if Republicans gain control of both chambers of Congress, what they will be willing to do will depend on how large their majorities are and what the particular situation is in Ukraine at that time. Even so, one likely possibility is that the funds would be more targeted. By that I mean that the money or aid might be more specific or for more specific purposes. Some of this is done already, but more could probably be done to ensure that the aid is being used the way intended.”

By contrast, Woodard predicted that “if the Republicans win in November, they will rush to send aid to Ukraine.”

“Remember, these are conservatives, the people who hated the USSR in the Cold War, in Vietnam, in the European confrontations (remember Berlin) and they want to crush Putin in a war and prove that American ingenuity always was superior to Russian boasts,” he asserted.

“They remember the ‘Space Race’ against Russia, the ‘Backfire bomber’ the Soviets designed to shoot down outdated B-52 bombers and they paid for dozens of other ‘weapons systems’ to oppose the USSR. Now, they have a chance to show what US technology can do - they can’t wait to ship arms overseas.”

Dr. Harvey Schantz, professor of political science at the State University of New York at Plattsburgh, predicted that a GOP victory in November would mean that “Republicans will increase scrutiny of Biden Administration decision-making with respect to Ukraine, emphasizing the need for diplomatic solutions.”

However, Schantz said that much of the present ambiguity about that approach is derived from the contentious internal power struggle in the Republican Party.

“McCarthy’s number one personal goal is to be speaker of the House. In order to achieve this position, he needs the Republicans to gain a majority in the House. Quite likely, he needs to win a majority of the vote taken by secret ballot of the House Republican Conference meeting right after the midterm election, also likely but not inevitable. And finally, he needs a majority of the whole House of Representatives, most likely if he wins the nod of the Republican Conference,” Schantz said.

However, he noted that former US President Donald Trump, who has been outspokenly against US aid to Ukraine as well as McCarthy’s leadership in the House, could “throw a monkey wrench” into the California lawmaker’s plans.

“Trump, if he so chooses, could make it difficult for McCarthy to win a majority of the Republican Conference. The Republicans least inclined to support further aid to Ukraine are those most closely associated with Donald Trump and the Freedom Caucus, including Jim Jordan of Ohio, Matt Gaetz of Florida and Lauren Boebert of Colorado,” he noted.

“McCarthy is hedging his bets by obscuring what he would do about aid to Ukraine in order to insure that he is elected speaker of the House, hoping to placate Republicans holding various views on this issue. McCarthy’s statement about no ‘blank check’ is far from saying he will oppose all future money to Ukraine, yet it signals sympathy with Republican colleagues who are against further aid and taps into the general Republican hesitation for increased foreign aid.”

“McCarthy is saying we must be prudent in how Congress spends scarce resources and should keep oversight of the money to make sure that expenditures are used for the intended purposes, ideas to which all Republicans subscribe,” Schantz added.

Schantz agreed, however, that Ukraine aid is a minor issue for US voters, citing a recent [Morning Consult-Politico Poll](#) showing just 12% of voters said “security issues” were their top set of issues, while 41% said “economic issues” were.

“While aid to Ukraine is a contentious issue, it is far from the number one concern of American voters as we head into the midterm elections,” he said. “Moreover, Ukraine aid is not an issue that Republicans want to emphasize in the campaign stretch run, preferring to focus upon economic concerns. Overall issues of foreign policy are of secondary concern among the American public.”

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Independent Evan McMullin In Dead Heat With Republican Senator Mike Lee In Utah
By - Ian DeMartino

After the 2016 election, Republican Senator Mike Lee, disgusted where then President-elect Donald Trump led the party, revealed that he filled out a ballot for Evan McMullin, picking the independent candidate over his party’s nominee Donald Trump.

Now, six years later, while embroiled in scandal due to text messages he sent to Trump’s chief-of-staff inquiring about how to challenge the 2020 election results, [Lee may lose his seat](#) to the man he once voted for.

McMullin, a former Republican, ran in 2016 as an Independent, conservative alternative to Trump. He appeared on the ballot in eleven states, including his native Utah where he received a surprising 21.54% of the vote. By comparison, Gary Johnson, the third-place candidate in 2012, received less than 2% of the vote in Utah.

While Lee was leading comfortably in the polls for most of the election season, things have tightened after his texts were revealed during the House Select Committee investigations into the January 6 riots at the Capitol.

[The texts showed](#) Lee discussing ways to challenge the 2020 results, a massive change for the Senator who once urged Trump [to step down](#) as the Republican nominee.

After the text messages were revealed, the Democratic party in Utah backed McMullin instead of nominating a candidate. Recent polling has McMullin in a dead heat with Lee. One [recent poll](#) shows the candidates virtually tied with registered voters and Lee with an advantage over “likely” voters, while another poll, taken last week, shows [McMullin leading both](#) registered and likely voters.

Lee’s campaign is not playing the polls down either, a recent campaign email was titled “I’m losing” and on a recent appearance on Fox News, Lee publicly asked Utah’s other Senator, fellow Republican Mitt Romney to endorse him.

Lee has attempted to paint McMullin as a Democrat, despite [Lee’s 2016 vote](#). McMullin considers himself a conservative and insists that he will not join either party’s caucus if elected to the Senate. “I’m not going to Washington to play the party power game,” McMullin said. While Utah reliably votes Republican, the state has a growing distaste for Trump. According to the same poll that gave McMullin the lead in the Senatorial race, 57% of Utah voters have an unfavorable view of Trump, compared to 53.7% nationwide according to FiveThirtyEight. Last June, the same poll showed that only 50% of Utah voters had an unfavorable view of Trump. Trump also failed to gain the majority of votes in Utah in 2016, thanks in part to McMullin’s campaign, and Joe Biden performed better in the state in 2020 than any Democrat since 1964. If McMullin wins in November, it will be the first time a Utah Senator has been something other than a Republican since 1977 when Democrat Frank Moss lost to Republican Orrin Hatch, who held the post until 2019.

His vote could also be crucial to who controls the Senate after the 2022 midterm elections. There are two Independent Senators in Congress currently, Angus King of Maine and Bernie Sanders of Vermont. They both caucus with the Democratic party. If McMullin wins and does not caucus with either party he could be a crucial swing vote on a number of legislative bills.

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Red Bull Owner, Dietrich Mateschitz, Dead at 78
By - Ian DeMartino

Dietrich Mateschitz, the owner and co-founder of Red Bull died after battling a long illness. The news was confirmed by his Formula 1(F1) Racing Team and Redbull’s website on Saturday. Mareschitz is survived by his partner Marion Feichtner and his son Mark Gerhardt. He was 78. Mateschitz [co-founded Red Bull](#) with Chaleo Yoovidhya who had developed and sold a similar drink called Krating Daeng in Thailand. They modified the recipe for Western audiences. According to Red Bull’s website, 9.8 billion cans of Red Bull were sold in 2021. Mateschitz graduated from the Vienna University of Economics and Business in 1972, studying marketing. He then worked for Unilever and a cosmetic company before co-founding Red Bull with Yoovidhya in 1984. The first Red Bull was sold in 1987, Krating Daeng is still sold in Thai markets and still includes the same logo of a red bull that is seen on Red Bull cans in the West. Mateschitz owned 49% of the Red Bull brand.

The company's move into extreme sports, particularly F1 racing, was spearheaded by Mateschitz. Red Bull entered into F1 in 1995, initially partnering with Sauber. In 2004, Mateschitz purchased Jaguar Racing Team and renamed it Red Bull Racing. It has since won four constructor cups and may clinch a fifth on Sunday at the US Grand Prix. Red Bull Racing has [also captured](#) six drivers' titles during Mateschitz's ownership. Mateschitz also owns four soccer teams: Red Bull Salzburg, New York Red Bulls, Red Bulls Brasil, and Leipzig Football team, and two ice hockey teams: EHC München and EC Red Bull Salzburg.

"I am deeply saddened by the news that Dietrich Mateschitz, a hugely respected and much-loved member of the Formula 1 family has passed away," Formula 1 President and CEO, [Stefano Domenicali said](#). "He was an incredible visionary entrepreneur and a man who helped to transform our sport and created the Red Bull brand that is known all around the world."

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Early Voting High for Midterms; Increased Turnout Expected
By - Ian DeMartino

Twenty-seven states and Washington D.C. allow for "no-excuse" absentee voting. Another eight states automatically send mail-in ballots to registered voters. Forty-six states offer some form of early voting.

According to The New York Times, early voting for November's midterm elections is much higher than in 2018, leading most experts to predict a higher-than-normal turnout.

Just days into some states opening early voting, more than [5.5 million voters](#) have already cast their ballots for this year's midterm election. As of Saturday, 24 states, plus Guam and the US Virgin Islands have opened up early voting. Two states, Massachusetts and Nevada opened today.

In Georgia, early in-person voting is up 70% compared to the 2018 midterm election. In North Carolina, absentee voting is up 114%, and in Florida, the early vote is up 50% compared to this point in 2018.

Nationally, Democrats make up 51% of the early votes while Republicans make up 30%. That gap has narrowed from the 2020 election when Democrats made up 55% and Republicans made up 26%. That reflects early voting in Florida, where Democrats beat Republicans by 21 points in early voting in 2020, this year they only lead by 3.5 points.

One reason for that may be increased trust among Republicans about mail-in ballots and early voting. In the run-up to the 2020 Presidential election, former President Donald Trump consistently cast doubt on the [legitimacy of mail-in voting](#), leading many Republicans to distrust the system. That led to a flip on which party voted early or through the mail. In 2018, Republicans outnumbered Democrats in early voting in Florida by 7%.

While there has not been extensive polling on how Republicans feel about mail-in voting during this election cycle, not having the leader of the party espouse that the practice is illegitimate regularly could be a reason a higher percentage of mail-in votes are coming from Republicans.

It is also unclear if the increased early voting will portend a corresponding increase in overall turnout. It is safe to say there will be some increased turnout compared to the 2018 midterms but how much early voting can be attributed to higher turnout and how much to shifting habits due to the pandemic is unclear.

"I think we need to get past this potential Black Friday rush of voting that you get at the very beginning when the doors open," Michael McDonald, a turnout expert at the University of Florida, told The New York Times. "But the fact that you're even seeing it, that tells you that this isn't going to be a low-turnout election. It's just the question is going to be how high of a turnout election we'll get."

Mail-in and early voting was already on the rise, even before the pandemic. In 2000, 14% of voters [cast their ballots early](#). By 2016, that number had risen to 40%. The shift was put into overdrive as more states opened up their voting process, before and especially during the pandemic. In 2020, 72% of ballots were cast before election day.

The increase in early voting may indicate surprising enthusiasm by Democratic voters, which would bode well for the party. Typically, voters for the party who sits in the White House are comparatively apathetic during midterm elections. With Democrats outpacing Republican voters in early voting, it may show that issues such as Roe v Wade being overturned by the Supreme Court are motivating Democrats to enter the voting booth. Again, the question remains if early voting forecasts more voting or just changing habits.

At least in the first few elections with extensive no-excuse mail-in voting, [studies showed](#) that increased mail-in voting does not result in more Democrats voting than Republicans or give an advantage to Democratic candidates.

Mail-in voting is likely to increase the likelihood of delayed results. Mail-in votes must be opened and inspected before being counted and most states only allow votes to be opened a few days before election day, if at all.

In 2020, multiple states with close elections had their results delayed for days as absentee ballots were counted. The delays were exacerbated by some states allowing mail-in votes to be counted if they arrived after election day but were postmarked before.

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Lara Logan Banned From Newsmax for Bizarre Conspiracy Theory Rant About 'Satan's Way'
By - Mary Manley

The former CBS and Fox News journalist went on a bizarre QAnon-style rant on Newsmax while speaking with conservative political commentator Eric Bolling, during which she said the "open border" between the United States and Mexico is "Satan's way of taking control of the world." [Newsmax](#), the American rightwing cable news company, has decided to end its relationship with conservative pundit Lara Logan after her conversation about immigrants with Bolling, the host of Newsmax's "Eric Bolling The Balance," turned into a bizarre rant riddled with conspiracy theories.

Logan remarked that there was a hidden agenda to “infiltrate 100 million illegal immigrants” in order to “dilute the pool of patriots” and dismantle American patriotism. Logan said she knew of such a plan because she had spoken to “a man” at the “United Nations level.”

The South African journalist’s rant about immigrants being used to destroy American patriotism then tailspun into a religious rant in which she claimed that the US-Mexico border was controlled by Satan and that world leaders were conspiring to eat insects and drink the blood of children. “God believes in sovereignty and national identity and the sanctity of family, and all the things that we’ve lived with from the beginning of time,” said [Logan](#). “And he knows that the open [southern US] border is Satan’s way of taking control of the world through all of these people who are his stooges and his servants.”

“And they may think that they’re going to become gods. That’s what they tell us... You know, the ones who want us eating insects, cockroaches and that while they dine on the blood of children? Those are the people, right? They’re not going to win. They’re not going to win,” said Logan before she was cut off by Bolling, who asked for her “final thought.”

In a bid to quell any backlash, Newsmax issued a statement clarifying that it has no intentions on booking Logan for its programs, adding that her remarks were “reprehensible.”

“Newsmax condemns in the strongest terms the reprehensible statements made by Lara Logan and her views do not reflect our network,” the network told [Daily Beast](#) in a statement. “We have no plans to interview her again.”

[Logan](#), 51, first rose to prominence as a war correspondent during the American invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. She then began working as a correspondent for CBS News in 2002 and worked there for 16 years before leaving in 2018.

In 2020, she had her own show on Fox News where she first began voicing strange statements such as accusing communists of attacking white police officers and suggesting that the Biden administration was “hiding evidence” of side effects caused by the COVID-19 vaccine.

Logan was eventually booted by Fox after she compared Dr. Anthony Fauci—the chief medical adviser to the US president, and the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) since 1984—to Josef Mengele, the Nazi doctor who conducted inhumane medical experiments on prisoners at Auschwitz.

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Photos: Nightmare Buenos Aires-Bound Flight Leaves Passenger With a Broken Nose
By - Mary Manley

The plane was about seven hours into its 12-hour journey when it ran into severe turbulence. The Airbus A330, a twin jet-engined plane, was carrying 271 passengers and 13 crew members about 38,000 feet (11,500 meters) over the Atlantic Ocean when it began to violently shake. On [Tuesday](#), at least 12 people were injured—with three people having to be hospitalized—after a flight leaving Madrid hit extreme turbulence. The flight was bound for Buenos Aires’ Ezeiza airport and left at around 8:00 p.m local time.

But seven hours into the journey, the Aerolíneas Argentinas AR1133 flight came into contact with turbulence so extreme that Esperanza Borrás, a passenger on the flight who had unbuckled her seatbelt for a brief moment, was left with a broken nasal septum after she hit her head on the ceiling.

"The plane started to move a lot and I said to my colleagues, 'how much turbulence, buckle up'. As I fumbled for my seat belt, the plane encountered severe turbulence," said Adrian Torres, another passenger on the flight, told the Spanish newspaper El País. But Torres said the plane suddenly dropped, leaving him with a small bruise.

"We had flown about seven hours and almost all of us slept, because at that time it was almost three in Spain," Torres added.

Other passengers were left with cuts and bruises and at least three passengers had to be hospitalized while nine other people were treated for "light injuries."

Aerolíneas Argentinas has claimed that the seatbelt signs had been turned on before their flight ran into turbulence. The airline company is also saying they warned passengers with an announcement, though traveler on Twitter are contradicting the airline's version of the story.

"According to the information given by the crew, the safety belt lights were on and the corresponding announcement was made," Aerolíneas Argentina said in a [statement](#). "The passengers that were more injured, and those that had to be transferred, were not wearing the safety belt at the moment of the turbulence."

"Well there was some turbulence during which we were not told to put on the security belt and everyone just went flying," wrote one [passenger](#) on Twitter, who said the flight was a 'nightmare.' Even the stewardesses were on the ground."

A statement released by the airline later detailed that the aircraft itself did not show "significant" damages to its structure.

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Kanye West Screamed About Pete Davidson's '10-Inch Manhood' Says Charlamagne Tha God By - Mary Manley

The 45-year-old rapper and designer has been making headlines with controversy including a t-shirt design that read "White Lives Matter" for Paris Fashion Week, and was banned from Twitter and Instagram after making antisemitic remarks. But this week, radio host Charlamagne tha God is revealed even more West drama.

[Charlamagne](#), 44, decided to air out some dirty laundry on his podcast "Brilliant Idiots" - but not his own. In this week's episode of the podcast, the radio host claimed that rapper Kanye West "screamed" at him for defending comedian Pete Davidson, 28, and his "10-inch penis."

The argument between the rapper and the TV personality reportedly happened in November 2021 after West wanted Charlamagne to "s**t" on his friend Davidson once the comedian had started to date West's ex-wife Kim Kardashian, 42.

"When me and Kanye got into an argument he called me last November. He's basically trying to get me on board to s**t on someone he knows is my friend: Pete Davidson. He's like, 'Uh, you

know, we gotta save the new Marilyn Monroe,' talking about Kim," said Charlamagne in response to a comment made by West on an upside of "Drink Champs" in which West wondered why Charlamagne was discussing the comedian's penis size.

"My wife is out here f***** a white boy with a 10-inch penis and you won't help me?!" exclaimed Charlamagne during an impression of West.

"What am I supposed to do but laugh at that?" asked the radio host. "The reason I keep bringing up Pete's penis on the radio is because I know it f**** with you, and you said that to me, but he gets on the interview and acts like he doesn't know where that came from."

"The motherf***** is a master manipulator."

West's latest series of outbursts, which have occurred over less than a month's time, seems never-ending. As a result of the recent [scandals](#) West has embroiled himself in, Adidas placed their business partnership with the rapper under review, while JP Morgan Chase dropped the rapper altogether. West's spokesman Jason Lee quit following West's Paris Fashion week show where he unveiled his "White Lives Matter" [t-shirt](#).

Lee said West was "gaslighting Black people and empowering white supremacy." The rapper also had his Instagram account restricted after he claimed Sean 'Diddy' Combs was controlled by Jewish people.

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RPT - Russia Requests UNSC Meeting on Tuesday After Calls to Probe Alleged Iran Drones - Source

(Repeats to fix the lede)

UNITED NATIONS, October 24 (Sputnik) - Russia has requested a UN Security Council meeting for October 25 to discuss risks to the integrity of the UN Charter after Western member states asked the UN Secretariat to investigate the country's alleged use of Iranian drones in Ukraine, a UN source told Sputnik.

"In light of the letter by the UK, France, and Germany S/2022/781 and the US letter S/2022/782, we request to convene early next week a briefing under agenda item MIPS in relations to the risks to the integrity of the UN Charter, to the Organization and to the ability of the Security Council to perform its main function posed by the attempts of certain Member States to influence the UN Secretariat in the discharge of its responsibilities in violation of Article 100 of the UN Charter," a UN source told Sputnik.

Russia requests the UN Legal Counsel to brief, the source added.

Last week, Western countries requested the UN Secretariat to conduct an investigation into Iran allegedly supplying drones to Russia for use in Ukraine. Russian Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia dismissed the allegations in a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. Nebenzia also criticized the UN Secretariat for siding with the West and stated it has no legal mandate to conduct such an investigation.

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Russia Requests UNSC Meeting on Tuesday After Calls to Probe Alleged Iran Drones - Source UNITED NATIONS, October 24 (Sputnik) - Russia has requested a UN Security Council meeting to discuss risks to the integrity to the UN Charter after Western member states asked the UN Secretariat to investigate the country's alleged use of Iranian drones in Ukraine, a UN source told Sputnik.

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US Oilfield Services Giant Schlumberger Rebrands as SLB in Push for Low Carbon Future

WASHINGTON, October 24 (Sputnik) - Texas-based Schlumberger, the world's largest oilfield services company, announced on Monday rebranding itself as SLB in an effort to reflect its ambition for a low carbon future.

"Schlumberger (NYSE: SLB) today announced its new name—SLB—underscoring the company's vision for a decarbonized energy future and affirming its transformation from the world's largest oilfield services company to a global technology company focused on driving energy innovation for a balanced planet," the company said in a press release.

Starting today, Schlumberger and almost all of its affiliated brands will become one under the new SLB brand, which represents an updated visual identity, including a new company logo, according to the release.

SLB, formerly Schlumberger, is the world's leading provider of integrated reservoir evaluation, well construction, production management and processing technologies. It operates in more than 100 countries. The company has headquarters in Paris, Houston, London and The Hague. The company's net income doubled year-on-year in the first three quarters of 2022 to \$2.4 billion.

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China May Narrow Advantage US Has as Leading Global Arms Exporter - Ex-Military Officials

WASHINGTON, October 24 (Sputnik) - China could potentially narrow the United States' lead as the top exporter of arms around the world, former US military officials told Sputnik.

"I think that is a concern, that's always a concern," Hallman said. "I think our systems are still qualitatively better, although China has closed the gap on that."

Hallman, a 27-year Air Force veteran, served in the Pentagon for the Joint Chief of Staff's strategic plans and policy directorate and as the Chief Air Force Liaison to the House of Representatives where he worked with lawmakers on national security matters.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin recently established a task force responsible with overhauling the US process to sell arms around the world, a move meant to help improve the speed of US efforts to supply military equipment to Ukraine.

Many countries have complained about the bureaucracy that prolongs the US process of selling arms around the world, Hallman said.

"One thing that many countries have complained about over the years is the plotting timeline of our Foreign Military Sale system that comes with a whole lot of strings attached," Hallman said.

"What you get with, especially with China or something, is you don't get the same strings.

They're not supplying to as many [countries], they have probably more free production availability."

The United States also has restrictions in place to ensure US arms do not end up in the wrong hands, but the risk is always there, including with respect to Ukraine, Hallman said.

"Yeah, of course, but... we have severe restrictions on third party transfers, we have severe restrictions on where and how this stuff can be used, we have stringent rule sets on that, and we follow up on that to make sure that to the maximum extent possible that doesn't happen, but that risk is always there," Hallman said.

Hallman pointed out that a competitive advantage about US foreign military sales is that it comes with a system to help countries maintain equipment they purchase from the United States.

"When we deliver capabilities, we don't just plop it down in the country, it comes with a whole sustainment system, it comes with training, comes with a lot of stuff to make it so it's not just a static display in that country," Hallman said.

The United States must exploit advantages it has over China in military sales, Hallman said. Florida State University business professor David King, who previously managed aircraft procurement for the US Air Force, told Sputnik Chinese weapons represent a potential alternative to US weapon systems in the long-term.

"China is focused on developing advanced weapons, and its weapons programs represent a potential counter or alternative to US weapons long-term," King said.

The United States was the top arms exporter in the world, accounting for 39% of the total from 2017 to 2021, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

Russia is the second leading arms exporter, responsible for 19% of global arms exports around the world, the SIPRI said.

China was the fourth leading arms exporter during the same period with a 4.6 percent share of the global arms export market, according to SIPRI.

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US Military Aid Sent to Ukraine Burdening American Defense Industry - Ex-Pentagon Official

WASHINGTON, October 24 (Sputnik) - US efforts to provide Ukraine with some \$17.6 billion worth of military equipment so far is stressing the American defense industry's ability to replenish stockpiles, former Pentagon official Wesley Hallman told Sputnik.

"I was talking to somebody that works at a company that produces some of those munitions that we're depleting because we're giving a lot of it to Ukraine right now, and I said, 'How long is it going to take you to get your line up and running,' they said it's gonna be about two years," Hallman said. "When I interacted with that executive a couple of weeks ago, that guy was telling me it was gonna take two years, two years until they could get to the rate of production where they could start truly replenishing at the rates needed. That's a long time."

Hallman, a 27-year Air Force veteran, served in the Pentagon for the Joint Chief of Staff's strategic plans and policy directorate and as the Chief Air Force Liaison to the House of Representatives where he worked with lawmakers on national security matters.

The Biden administration's decision to provide Ukraine with some \$17.6 billion worth of US military assistance is most definitely straining the US stockpile, Hallman said.

"It 100 percent is," Hallman said. "My understanding is that it has depleted not just ours, but those allies that have ponied up as well - the Brits [UK], the Poles [Poland], the Germans - so yeah, it is affecting that."

Moreover, Hallman believes the depletion of US stockpiles is affecting the US military's readiness for certain operational plans.

"I'm not privy to what the readiness levels are right now because I'm no longer wearing an Air Force uniform, but it just has to," Hallman said. "You can't transfer that much and it not affect your stockpiles."

The US military's operational plans include a timeline for its capacity to transport units and supply, which all depends on the availability of military equipment stockpiles, Hallman said.

"What you're expending in peacetime is radically different than what you expend in a wartime scenario," Hallman said. "If you don't have that material already available, then that is going to change your plan."

Hallman pointed out that the conflict in Ukraine may have bought the United States some time to strengthen its defense industrial base ahead of other potential global security challenges against US interests.

"When you're talking deterring the Chinese, I think they're doing a reassessment vis-a-vis Russia's experience in Ukraine, I think they know that they're not ready yet," Hallman said with respect to Taiwan. "So, I think we have some breathing space, but we need to take advantage

of it to be able to produce what we need and, frankly, make sure Taiwan has what it needs to make it a very, very unappetizing thing for China to consider digesting."

The United States has delivered to Ukraine approximately \$17.6 billion in military assistance, which includes High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) and ammunition, howitzers and 155mm artillery ammunition, among other equipment.

US lawmakers recently introduced new legislation to ensure the United States has sufficient munitions stocks and is ready for potential overseas contingencies amid the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and increased tensions around Taiwan. They hope it can be included in the Senate's defense spending bill that will be taken up for votes after the midterm elections in November. In August, the United States announced a new \$2.98 billion package of military aid to fund the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI), which finances the US defense industry to boost production of certain weapons.

Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Colin Kahl said deliveries of military equipment in the \$2.98 billion package will begin in the next several months and continue into the coming years.

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US Defense Industrial Base Constrained by Lack of Skilled Workers - Ex-Military Officials

WASHINGTON, October 24 (Sputnik) - The US defense industrial base is being constrained by a shortage of talent, from software engineers to trade workers, as the administration tries to push the pace and scale of production of equipment and weapons, former military officials told Sputnik.

The United States' ongoing efforts to arm Ukraine with \$17.6 billion worth of military equipment to date, on top of other global security challenges, has exposed vulnerabilities in the US defense industrial base.

"The fact is that when I started flying fighter jets for the Air Force, we were two, to two-and-a-half generations ahead of anybody else, and now, we're roughly a half to three quarters of a generation ahead, and that gap is closing precipitously ever faster," former Pentagon official Wesley Hallman told Sputnik.

Hallman, a 27-year Air Force veteran, served in the Pentagon for the Joint Chief of Staff's strategic plans and policy directorate. Hallman, who is currently running for a US House seat in this year's midterm elections to represent California's 28th congressional district, also worked as the Chief Air Force Liaison to the House of Representatives where he worked with lawmakers on national security matters.

"If you look across the board at the defense industrial base, it's a time of great change," Hallman said. "It's a great change that hadn't been really factored in or considered when we were developing the current workforce that's coming online now."

The bottom line, Hallman said, is that the United States has not invested in the workforce to match the scale and pace that is required.

Hallman said Assistant Secretary of Defense for Acquisition Ellen Lord used to say in the future US military capabilities were going to be "software-defined and hardware-enabled."

US defense companies are trying to compete for software engineers who are mostly lured by startups and other big names in tech, he said.

"So the competition for those folks is high for a supply that is low," Hallman said.

Hallman also explained that the United States has spent the last two generations bombarding parents and kids about the need to pursue a four-year education at a university, ignoring the need to maintain a relevant workforce with trade skills.

"So we've got the software engineers and the techies that we're going to need to be able to design and code and do all that other stuff to make sure that we're getting what we need as a defense industrial base, and then on the other side, we have under invested and really de-incentivized those jobs that actually build things," Hallman said.

US companies in general are having a really hard time getting the metal vendors, the welders, the plumbers, the electricians, Hallman added.

"You can see that in shipbuilding... and then in Northrop trying to hire for the B-21 program," Hallman said. "What you get is a lot of poaching within the defense industrial base, because there's just not enough of those people to go around."

Florida State University business professor David King, who previously managed aircraft procurement for the US Air Force, said the problem is the demographics of people working for defense contractors and a skill gap for manufacturing.

"A decade ago the average age of defense workers were nearing retirement. Based on our observation of defense firm complaints, that problem has arrived," King said.

IMPACT ON STOCKPILES, DETERRENCE

King also said the skill gap in the trades is an ongoing concern that can impact US weapons production.

Hallman believes the workforce issues will affect the US military's ability to replenish stockpiles and those of allies, including Ukraine. Hallman said one defense contractor told him it could take two years to get a line up and running for some munitions.

The former military official, however, said the United States should be able to maintain an ability to deter China and Russia with respect to conventional warfare.

Russia's experience in Ukraine, he added, may have given China pause, but has not changed Beijing's long-term goals.

The United States will need to focus on developing enough capacity to surge military equipment to allies and partners in the Western Pacific region, Hallman said, adding that it is a bit of a challenge that the United States is facing.

"We've had a low-risk mentality on doing these things, we have to regain an appetite for smart failure, and we have to regain an appetite for moving fast," Hallman said. "We really need to get after that if we're going to maintain the advantages that we've enjoyed post-World War II."

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RPT - Russian Crab Firms Say They Aren't Affected as US Crab Industry Strained in Bering Sea

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - Russian fishing firms told Sputnik they are not facing any issues harvesting crab in the Bering Sea unlike US fishermen that are seeing disruptions to their supply in the same region.

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.

"In 2022, the Russian Crab group of companies has 434 tons of opilio and more than 100 tons of bairdi available for fishing in the subzones of the Bering Sea," a Russian Crab company spokesperson told Sputnik. "Thus, at present, snow crab condition in the Bering Sea does not cause concern to our fishermen."

In 2022, the total allowable catch of opilio snow crab in the Karaginsky subzone of the Bering Sea increased by 128 tons and the harvest of bairdi snow crab increased by 79 tons, the spokesperson said.

Scientists with the Russian Federal Research Institute of Fisheries and Oceanography (VNIRO) closely monitor conditions of population of valuable biological resources in the Bering Sea and make recommendations based on resource studies to correct the Total Allowable Catch of crab in the region, the spokesperson said.

Norebo Management Company, one of the largest fish holding companies in Russia, also indicates the Russian fishing industry seems to have no issues with snow crab harvests in the Bering Sea.

"I haven't heard about any drastic decline in snow crab stock abundance in Russian part of the Bering Sea," Norebo Management Company spokesperson Sergey Sennikov told Sputnik.

Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers Executive Director Jamie Goen told 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.

"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 fishermen in tight circumstances. Alaska has some 60 vessels in its fleet that conducts snow crab fishing in the Bering Sea, she added.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game said in a press release that efforts to understand the decline of the crab population in the region is underway.

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 that 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 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 it was a necessary measure for long-term conservation and sustainability of crab stocks in the area.

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RPT - Truss Was Toppled in 'Moderate Coup,' UK Ruling Conservative Party Now Doomed - Experts

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - Toppled UK Prime Minister Liz Truss was the victim of a coup by her country's moderate establishment and her failure means the ruling conservative Tory Party is now doomed in the next general election, experts told Sputnik.

Truss resigned on Thursday after only 44 days in office, the shortest term of any UK prime minister since the position was created 300 years ago.

UK political commentator and former diplomat Peter Ford said her rapid fall was caused by radical policies that outraged the country's liberal political consensus.

"There has been a coup by the 'moderate' establishment, heralded by the BBC, just as there was a coup against [former Labor Party leader Jeremy] Corbyn," Ford said. "The Tories are now doomed."

Unable to offer the electorate real conservatism, Ford said Tories are bound to be "decimated" at the next general election by ultra-moderate Labor.

In today's UK, Ford added, corporate media will conspire to bring down any politician who deviates from the series of "moderate" beliefs, shared by MPs of all parties.

The former British diplomat described what happened to Truss as a "speeded-up mirror version of what happened to Corbyn."

"Both were chosen by enthusiastic party memberships - one to bring socialism back to [former prime minister Tony] Blair's Labor, one to bring back real conservatism - low taxes especially - to

the Tories - and both were upended by revolts by MPs of what I would call the extreme center," Ford said.

Ford also said Truss undermined herself by continuing the fierce anti-Russian policy she inherited from her old boss and predecessor Boris Johnson that seriously weakened the UK's own domestic economy.

"One of the ironies here is that Truss was to some extent responsible for her own failure because as Foreign Secretary she co-authored with Boris Johnson the policy of sanctions on Russia which have backfired so spectacularly on the UK and EU economies," he said.

The resultant spike in energy prices, Ford added, proved to be the last straw that broke those economies after years of spending and borrowing that had laid the groundwork for a takeoff in inflation. Ford said these, among other establishment policies, have crippled the UK.

"Unswerving devotion to recklessly high public spending funded by money creation and borrowing, a cult of the National Health Service, climate alarmism, social liberalism undermining the family, and of course worship of 'defense' and NATO... have brought the country to its knees," Ford said.

Former US Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Chas Freeman, said Truss appears to be the perfect embodiment of the "Peter Principle" whereby people are promoted above their levels of experience and competence.

"Her ideological approach to policy making confirmed the impression many had of her as a bit of a dimwit with delusions about the freedom of maneuver Britain had gained from Brexit,"

Freeman said. "So she had to go."

From an American point of view, the speed with which she fell is both inspiring and dispiriting, Freeman added.

"Many here [in the US] wish that our system would permit an equally expeditious dispatch of elected leaders who have proven their ignorance and ineptitude beyond a reasonable doubt," Freeman said. "But it won't."

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Biden in Reply to Republican Bid to Limit Ukraine Aid Says Its Critical For Western Europe

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden, in response to possible Republican efforts to scale back aid for Ukraine, said current efforts to provide billions of dollars worth of military equipment to Ukraine is critical for NATO and Western Europe as well.

"I can understand somebody having that view, who's uninformed and believes it because it costs so much money to help them, we spent a lot of money helping the Ukrainians, but it's so much more than Ukrainians. It's about NATO. It's about Western Europe. It's about it's about making sure that that [Russian President Vladimir] Putin is not able to succeed," Biden said during an interview that aired on MSNBC on Friday.

US House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy has pledged that if the Republicans become a majority in the lower chamber of Congress in the midterms, Ukraine will not get a "blank check" for assistance given the looming recession in the United States.

US lawmakers are looking to pass a new \$50 billion military aid package for Ukraine before January amid concerns that the upcoming midterm elections in November could usher in a new Congress less willing to prop up Kiev, NBC reported on Thursday, citing legislators and aides familiar with the effort.

Congress has approved some \$70 billion in aid to Ukraine since the beginning of Russia's special military operation on February 24.

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US Appeals Court Temporarily Blocks Biden's Student Loan Forgiveness Plan - Filing WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - A US federal appeals court temporarily blocked President Joe Biden's student loan forgiveness plan while it considers a request from six Republican-run states seeking to terminate the program, a court document revealed.

"Appellants' emergency motion for an administrative stay prohibiting the appellees from discharging any student loan debt under the Cancellation program until this Court rules on the appellants' motion for an injunction pending appeal is granted," the US Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals said in a court filing on Friday.

The group of Republican-run states includes Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska and South Carolina.

The White House announced last month that student loan payments will resume next year and at least \$10,000 of student loan debt will be canceled for each eligible borrower. An additional \$10,000 of debt will be canceled for eligible borrowers who also received a federal Pell grant.

The states argue that the Biden administration acted without Congressional approval.

"Determined to pursue across-the-board debt cancellation and stymied by repeated failures to achieve that goal through legislation, the Administration resorted to a federal law whose purpose is to provide relief to individuals who have suffered from an emergency like the 9/11 terrorist attacks or who must serve their country overseas in the military," the filing said.

The overall cost of implementing the Biden administration's initiative could rise to more than \$1 trillion, according to the lawsuit.

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Russian Embassy Says Canada Spreading Fake News About Mass Graves in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - The Russian Embassy in Canada accused the Canadian government of spreading fake news after the foreign affairs office made a social media post claiming Russia killed scores of Ukrainian civilians.

"Another fake intentionally spread by CanadaFP," the Russian Embassy said via Twitter on Friday. "The West and [Prime Minister] Justin Trudeau cabinet are perfectly aware - the real perpetrator of the crimes against civilians is Ukraine they cynically back up."

The Russian Embassy also said the atrocious nature of the Ukrainian regime will eventually be revealed to the world.

Earlier on Friday, the Canadian government posted on Twitter that mass graves were discovered in the Ukrainian cities of Izium, Lyman and Bucha with bodies of civilians who were allegedly killed by Russian forces.

The post included a video that showed men digging several empty graves in an unconfirmed location with no bodies in sight.

On February 24, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine after the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics requested help to defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. Canada and the countries of the collective West have imposed comprehensive sanctions against Russia and have provided multiple billions of dollars of military and other aid to Ukraine.

Russia has denounced the flow of weapons to Ukraine, saying it only adds fuel to the fire, and has warned that any arms shipments on Ukrainian territory would be considered "legitimate targets."

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Protester Interrupts Canadian Defense Minister's Event While Talking About Aid to Ukraine

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - Canadian Defense Minister Anita Anand's remarks on Ukraine during a panel discussion in Toronto were disrupted by a protester urging Canada to stop supplying aid to Ukraine and to instead seek peace with Russia.

The protester's sign read: "Stop Lying. Stop Sending Weapons. Stop NATO. Stop the War. Peace in Ukraine. Peace With Russia."

Anand said on Friday the aid Canada has sent to Ukraine was in support of democracy and sovereignty and of the rules based international order.

"That same order that has kept you, everyone in this room, and our country and countries safe since the end of the Second World War," she said.

The sign was directed at Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, Foreign Affairs Minister Melanie Joly as well as Anand.

On February 24, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine after the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics requested help to defend them against intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. Canada and the countries of the collective West imposed comprehensive sanctions on Russia and has provided tens of billions of dollars of military and other aid to Ukraine.

Moscow has denounced the flow of weapons to Ukraine from its Western allies, saying it fuels the conflict and warned that any arms shipments on Ukrainian territory would be "legitimate targets."

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Alleged Michigan School Shooter Set to Plead Guilty, No Plea Deal So Far - Prosecutor

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - The teenage suspect charged with 24 crimes for his alleged role in a school shooting in Michigan in November is set to plead guilty to all counts with no plea deal arranged so far, Oakland County Chief Assistant Prosecutor David Williams confirmed to Sputnik.

"We can confirm that the shooter is expected to plead guilty to all 24 charges, including terrorism, and the Prosecutor has notified the victims. There have been no plea deals, no reductions, and no sentencing agreements," Williams said on Friday in a statement.

The plea hearing is scheduled for Monday morning at 8:30 a.m. Eastern Standard Time (1230 GMT). Defendant Ethan Crumbley will not assert an insanity defense, Williams added.

Crumbley's lawyers previously notified the court of his intention to claim an insanity defense.

Crumbley is accused of killing four students and wounding several others in a shooting at Oxford High School in Michigan in November. His parents, James and Jennifer Crumbley, are also being charged with four counts of involuntary manslaughter each for their alleged role in obtaining the gun used in the shooting and failing to prevent the incident.

The couple did not take seriously reports from school staff about their son's behavior, prosecutors allege. Crumbley was returned to classes on the day of the shooting after his parents attended a meeting earlier that day to address disturbing drawings made by their son. Williams declined to comment on the current status of the case against James and Jennifer Crumbley.

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Pennsylvania Man Sentenced to 34 Months for January 6 Attack on Reporter - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - A Pennsylvania man has been sentenced to 34 months in prison after being found guilty of attacking police officers and a member of the media during the events at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, the US Justice Department said.

"Alan William Byerly, 55, of Fleetwood, Pennsylvania, pleaded guilty on July 25, 2022, in the District of Columbia to assaulting, resisting, or impeding law enforcement officers and striking, beating, or wounding an individual on federal grounds," Justice Department said in a press release on Friday.

Byerly illegally entered the Capitol grounds and went to the Lower West Terrace joining other protesters during which time he pulled an Associated Press journalist - who was carrying a camera and wearing a helmet-style gas mask and a lanyard with Associated Press lettering - down a flight of stairs leading to the western front of the Capitol, the release said.

Later, while he was still on the Lower West Terrace, Byerly walked up to law enforcement officers and fired a stun gun, the release said.

Some officers wrestled the stun gun from Byerly, but he continued to charge fight them, the release added.

Byerly was arrested on July 7, 2021, in Fleetwood, Pennsylvania and he will be placed on three years of supervised release and has been ordered to pay \$2,000 in restitution after he serves his prison sentence.

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Door to Political Settlement in Ukraine Must Stay Open - Chinese Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, October 22 (Sputnik) - The door to reaching a political settlement in Ukraine must stay open, Chinese Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Geng Shuang said.

"No matter how great the difficulties are, the door to political settlement can not be closed. The process of diplomatic negotiations can not be stored," Geng told the UN Security Council on Friday.

Block confrontation and political isolation are not effective ways to resolving the crisis, Geng added.

China has evacuated about 5,200 of its nationals from Ukraine since the start of Russia's special military operation in the country and reiterated its calls for an immediate departure of any remaining Chinese citizens.

On Wednesday, the Chinese embassy in Ukraine published instructions for evacuation from the country. The embassy has prepared charter buses to transport Chinese nationals from assembly points in Kiev, Odessa and Lviv, and relocate them to other countries.

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Missouri AG Says US Court Granted Request to Depose Psaki, Fauci Over Censorship Collusion

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - A US federal court granted a request by the State of Missouri to depose several top Biden administration officials, including presidential medical adviser Anthony Fauci and former White House spokesperson Jen Psaki, over possible collusion with tech companies to censor speech, Missouri Attorney General Eric Schmitt announced.

"The court has granted our request to depose Dr. Anthony Fauci, former White House Press Secretary Jennifer Psaki, FBI Supervisory Special Agent Elvis Chan and other Biden administration officials relating to collusion with social media to suppress free speech," Schmitt said on Friday, sharing a copy of the court order.

The US District Court for the Western District of Louisiana granted Missouri's request to depose Fauci, Psaki, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency Director Jen Easterly and

Surgeon General Vivek Murthy among other senior Biden administration officials, according to the filing.

The lawsuit cites alleged suppression of the Hunter Biden laptop story before the 2020 presidential election, the COVID-19 "lab leak" theory and concerns about election integrity as examples of the defendants colluding with or coercing social media companies to censor speech they did not favor.

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UN Secretariat Has No Mandate to Probe Russia's Alleged Use of Iranian Drones - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, October 22 (Sputnik) - The UN Secretariat has no mandate to investigate Russia's alleged use of Iranian drones during its special military operation in Ukraine, Russian Ambassador to the world body Vassily Nebenzia said in a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

"We would like to express our most serious concerns regarding the attempts of certain member states to give instructions to the UN Secretariat in violation of Article 100 of the United Nations Charter, as manifested in the letter from the Permanent Representatives of France, Germany and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations dated 21 October 2022, as well as the statements of some Secretariat officials about their intention to accept these instructions," the letter said on Friday.

No mandate has ever been given to the UN Secretariat by the UN Security Council for any investigation in the context of resolution 2231 on the Iran nuclear issue, the letter said.

In particular, the Russian mission to the United Nations is dissatisfied with Stephane Dujarric, spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General, who said the UN Secretariat action is based on the Charter and on instructions given to them from member states.

In addition, the letter also criticized the bias of UN Undersecretary for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo - formerly a US official - for openly taking the side of the collective West regarding Ukraine.

Russia believes the statements and actions of these officials represent a blatant violation of the UN Charter, which states that the United Nations staff should not receive instructions from member states or other organizations, the letter said.

Nebenzia also called on United Nations member states to reject attempts by certain missions to undermine the integrity of the UN Charter and of the UN Security Council as well.

On Wednesday, Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said that any investigative action will result in reassessing and worsening Russia's ties with the UN Secretariat.

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American Who Returned to US After Detention in Ukraine Says Exposed Corruption - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - Kurt Groszhans, a farmer from the US state of North Dakota who returned home after being detained in Ukraine for a year, said he was put in detention for exposing embezzlement, the radio station KFGO reported.

Groszhans said he went to Ukraine to build a farming business, the report said on Friday. He described himself as a strong supporter of Ukraine and emphasized the need for the world to back the Ukrainians amid Russia's special military operation, the report said.

Groszhans said he was detained under charges that he was plotting to kill Ukraine's former Agriculture Minister Roman Leschenko.

The discovery of embezzlement and corruption at the highest levels of the Ukrainian government prompted the authorities to file false charges, Groszhans said.

The man who was at the center of the embezzlement and who caused the arrest served in President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's cabinet, he added.

Leshchenko served as Minister of Agrarian Policy and Food from December 2020 to March 2022.

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Russia Expects UN Will Not Probe Allegations of Iranian Drones In Ukraine - Nebenzia

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) - Russia is awaiting confirmation from the UN Secretariat that it will not launch an investigation into allegations that Iranian drones are being used in Ukraine, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Friday.

"We expect that the Secretariat will provide us with its definitive confirmation that they do not intend to follow the instructions of western countries in violation of the Charter and will not conduct an investigation," Nebenzia said. "If experts of the UN ... nonetheless start conducting a pseudo investigation baselessly referring to Resolution 2231, we can reconsider the entire package of our relationship with the UN Secretariat, because in this case it will not be possible to call it impartial."

Nebenzia said in a letter to UN chief Antonio Guterres earlier on Friday that the UN Secretariat does not have a mandate under Resolution 2231, which endorsed the Iran nuclear deal, to investigate Russia's alleged use of Iranian drones in the Ukraine conflict.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) -

NEW GOVERNMENT IN ITALY

* Italian President Sergio Mattarella on Friday instructed Brothers of Italy leader Giorgia Meloni to form a new government and she already presented its composition.

IRAN

* The European Union will begin weighing sanctions against Iran on Monday in connection with the country's alleged supply of drones to Russia, French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna said on Friday.

* The United States continues to have an interest in returning to the Iran nuclear deal, but sees no prospect for an agreement at this moment, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

US-RUSSIA RELATIONS

* The United States will consider every means to advance diplomacy with Russia if it sees a chance for it to succeed amid tensions over Ukraine, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Friday.

* The US Department of Defense welcomes maintaining an open line of communications with Russia following the call, first in months, between the two defense chiefs on Friday, Deputy Pentagon press secretary Sabrina Singh said.

* Russia was not allowed to participate in International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) conference in the United States, state-run atomic energy agency Rosatom said.

AUSTIN'S TALKS WITH RUSSIAN, UKRAINIAN COUNTERPARTS

* US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin in a call with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu emphasized the importance of keeping lines of communication between the two countries open amid the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the Pentagon said on Friday.

* Shoigu discussed the situation in Ukraine by phone with Austin, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

* The US Department of Defense welcomes maintaining an open line of communications with Russia following the call, first in months, between the two defense chiefs on Friday, Deputy Pentagon press secretary Sabrina Singh said.

* Austin in a call with his Ukrainian counterpart reiterated the unwavering US commitment to supporting Ukrainian forces, Pentagon spokesperson Pat Ryder said.

UK GOVERNMENT CRISIS

* UK House of Commons leader Penny Mordaunt has announced her candidacy for the post of leader of the Conservative Party and UK Prime Minister.

* The possible nomination of former UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson for the post of head of the UK government is an internal affair of the island country, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

* UK Defense Secretary Ben Wallace said he would not run for prime minister, but would support the candidacy of Johnson.

GLOBAL ENERGY MARKETS

* Europe is considering supply options in case if Turkey becomes a gas hub, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Friday.

* The parliament of the self-proclaimed Republic of Transnistria approved on Friday the introduction of an economic state of emergency due to a reduction in gas supplies, the press service of the republic's leader said.

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Wall Street Has Biggest Week Since June on New Speculation of US Rates Slowing by Year-End

NEW YORK, October 21 (Sputnik) - Wall Street had its biggest week since June as airline to technology stocks surged Friday on renewed speculation that the Federal Reserve would slow or stop rate hikes altogether by next year, despite the central bank not giving any indication it will not back off till it had the runaway US inflation under control.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average, Wall Street's broadest equities indicator comprising stocks of 30 large US corporations, closed up 740 points, or 2.4% at 31,074 points. The Dow has risen for three straight weeks now, racking up 8%. The current week's gain of 5% was its largest since the week ended June 17.

The S&P 500 Index, which represents the top 500 US stocks, finished the day up 87 points, or 2.4%, at 3,753. The S&P rose 5% on the week, its most since the week to June 17.

The Nasdaq Composite Index, which comprises marquee names in technology such as Amazon, Apple, Facebook, Netflix and Google, settled Friday's trade up 246 points, or 2.3%, at 10,860. For the week, it jumped 5%, also its most since the week to June 17.

Stocks rallied after a Wall Street Journal report cited officials with apparent knowledge of the Federal Reserve's thinking as saying that the Fed bankers "have begun signaling their desire both to slow down the pace of [rate] increases soon and to stop raising rates early next year". The report added that the Fed bankers "want to reduce the risk of causing an unnecessarily sharp slowdown".

Economist Adam Button said investors probably took the Journal report more seriously than necessary to bump up a stock market that had spent a nerve-racking September.

"Either we reach a super restrictive level [on rates] to quell inflation, which would likely lead to a recession, or there is an expected pause in rates near the Fed's current target range," said Button.

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 2% per year and it has said it will not back off on interest rate hikes until it achieves its aim. Since March, the central bank has raised rates by 300 basis points from an original base of just 25. The Fed intends to add another 125 basis points to rates before the year-end.

Economists have accused the Fed of being slow to the inflation-fight and say its move to overcompensate for its earlier inaction with aggressive rate hikes will trigger a recession. Most of the US central bank's senior officials refute that assertion.

The US economy could land in 1990-style of a mild recession by spring next year as unyielding inflation and the Fed's interest rate hikes come to a head, Fitch Ratings said in a report on Tuesday.

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NASA Launches Project to Start New Unidentified Aerial Phenomena Research - Statement

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) - NASA has created an independent study team to study unidentified aerial phenomena (UAP), including what have long been called unidentified flying objects (UFO), the US space agency announced in a press release on Friday.

"NASA has selected 16 individuals to participate in its independent study team on unidentified aerial phenomena (UAP)," the release said. "Observations of events in the sky that cannot be identified as aircraft or as known natural phenomena are categorized as UAPs."

The new project will commence operations on Monday and over the following nine months, it will lay the groundwork for future study on the nature of UAPs for NASA and other organizations, the release said.

"To do this, the team will identify how data gathered by civilian government entities, commercial data, and data from other sources can potentially be analyzed to shed light on UAPs. It will then recommend a roadmap for potential UAP data analysis by the agency going forward," the release added.

The study will focus solely on unclassified data and a full report containing the team's findings will be released to the public in mid-2023, according to the release.

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Twitter Tells Workers Not to Believe Rumors of Layoffs After Musk Acquisition - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) - Twitter told employees to be on the alert for rumors about the company amid a looming acquisition by billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk, who reportedly plans to downsize the company's workforce by nearly 75%, NBC News reported on Friday.

The warning comes following US media reports on Thursday purporting that Musk plans to slash the social media company's workforce by nearly 75%, from approximately 7,500 workers to just over 2,000.

Twitter's current management likewise plans to reduce the company's payroll by approximately \$800 million by the end of 2023, setting up nearly a quarter of the workforce to be cut, the Thursday report also said.

In response, Twitter general counsel Sean Edgett sent an email to the company's employees warning them about "rumors and speculation," the report said, citing a copy of the email confirmed accurate by a Twitter spokesperson.

Twitter does not have any confirmation of Musk's plans following completion of the acquisition deal and advises workers to wait for facts from the company and Musk directly, Edgett said. Musk's acquisition of Twitter, first announced in April, has faced months of delays over lawsuits related to concerns by Musk about the number of fake accounts on the platform. Earlier this month, Musk said he would go through with the deal as part of a larger plan to create "X, the everything app."

It is not clear when the purchase will be finalized, but a Delaware state judge gave the two parties until October 28 to settle their differences, lest they face a trial on the matter in November, the report added.

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US House Committee Subpoenas Trump to Testify on His Role in January 6 Events
WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) – The US House committee investigating the January 6 Capitol riot requested that former President Donald Trump appear before it to testify, according to a subpoena published by the committee on Friday.

"This subpoena hereby orders the production of relevant documentary materials [...] by November 4, 2022, followed by your participation in one or more days of deposition testimony, beginning on or about November 14, 2022, and continuing on subsequent days as necessary," the subpoena said.

On October 13, the committee voted unanimously to issue the subpoena to the former US president.

The committee admitted that a subpoena to a former president is a "significant and historic action," but noted that Trump would not be the first former US president to testify before Congress.

According to the committee, Trump allegedly played a "central role" in organizing and orchestrating the unrest of his supporters at the Capitol building on January 6, 2021, after he lost the election to incumbent Joe Biden.

On January 6, 2021, pro-Trump demonstrators breached the Capitol complex and delayed the certification of 2020 presidential election results in favor of Joe Biden. Hundreds of individuals have since been charged with crimes related to the riot.

Earlier in the day, former Trump administration adviser Steve Bannon was sentenced to four months in prison and a \$6,500 fine on two counts of contempt of Congress for refusing to comply with a subpoena from the select committee.

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Truss Was Toppled in 'Moderate Coup,' UK Ruling Conservative Party Now Doomed - Experts

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) - Toppled UK Prime Minister Liz Truss was the victim of a coup by her country's moderate establishment and her failure means the ruling conservative Tory Party is now doomed in the next general election, experts told Sputnik.

Truss resigned on Thursday after only 44 days in office, the shortest term of any UK prime minister since the position was created 300 years ago.

UK political commentator and former diplomat Peter Ford said her rapid fall was caused by radical policies that outraged the country's liberal political consensus.

"There has been a coup by the 'moderate' establishment, heralded by the BBC, just as there was a coup against [former Labor Party leader Jeremy] Corbyn," Ford said. "The Tories are now doomed."

Unable to offer the electorate real conservatism, Ford said Tories are bound to be "decimated" at the next general election by ultra-moderate Labor.

In today's UK, Ford added, corporate media will conspire to bring down any politician who deviates from the series of "moderate" beliefs, shared by MPs of all parties.

The former British diplomat described what happened to Truss as a "speeded-up mirror version of what happened to Corbyn."

"Both were chosen by enthusiastic party memberships - one to bring socialism back to [former prime minister Tony] Blair's Labor, one to bring back real conservatism - low taxes especially - to the Tories - and both were upended by revolts by MPs of what I would call the extreme center," Ford said.

Ford also said Truss undermined herself by continuing the fierce anti-Russian policy she inherited from her old boss and predecessor Boris Johnson that seriously weakened the UK's own domestic economy.

"One of the ironies here is that Truss was to some extent responsible for her own failure because as Foreign Secretary she co-authored with Boris Johnson the policy of sanctions on Russia which have backfired so spectacularly on the UK and EU economies," he said.

The resultant spike in energy prices, Ford added, proved to be the last straw that broke those economies after years of spending and borrowing that had laid the groundwork for a takeoff in inflation. Ford said these, among other establishment policies, have crippled the UK.

"Unswerving devotion to recklessly high public spending funded by money creation and borrowing, a cult of the National Health Service, climate alarmism, social liberalism undermining the family, and of course worship of 'defense' and NATO... have brought the country to its knees," Ford said.

Former US Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Chas Freeman, said Truss appears to be the perfect embodiment of the "Peter Principle" whereby people are promoted above their levels of experience and competence.

"Her ideological approach to policy making confirmed the impression many had of her as a bit of a dimwit with delusions about the freedom of maneuver Britain had gained from Brexit," Freeman said. "So she had to go."

From an American point of view, the speed with which she fell is both inspiring and dispiriting, Freeman added.

"Many here [in the US] wish that our system would permit an equally expeditious dispatch of elected leaders who have proven their ignorance and ineptitude beyond a reasonable doubt," Freeman said. "But it won't."

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FBI Says Iran-Backed Hacker Group May Be Threat Ahead of US Midterm Vote

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) - The FBI issued an alert claiming that the Iranian-backed hacker group Emennet Pasargad may present a threat to US entities ahead of the midterm elections in November.

"Within the past year, the FBI has identified a destructive cyber attack against a US organization – indicating the group remains a cyber threat to the United States," the FBI said in a report.

"According to FBI information the Iranian cyber threat group Emennet Pasargad has been conducting hack-and-leak operations against organizations primarily in Israel."

Although Emennet's latest attacks have primarily targeted Israel, the FBI judges the hacker group may potentially target US entities as seen during Emennet's cyber-enabled information operation that targeted the 2020 US presidential election, the report said.

The FBI assesses that Emennet aims to undermine public confidence in the security of their victims' network and data, as well as embarrass victim companies and targeted countries, the report said.

In 2021, the US Treasury Department sanctioned Emennet and six Iranians with ties to the hacker group, accusing them of meddling in the 2020 US presidential election.

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White House Reiterates Objection to OPEC+ Cuts Amid Claims US 'Bullying' Saudi Arabia

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) - White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre on Friday reiterated the Biden administration's objections to the OPEC+ decision to cut oil production starting in November, when asked about comments by Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu accusing the United States of "bullying" Saudi Arabia over the decision.

"We've been very clear about the OPEC+ decision and how we found it to be short-sighted, especially in the time of what we're seeing with our global markets. So, we believe that it was a mistake," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing. "It's going to hurt the countries who have lower economies, and middle economy countries."

Biden will reevaluate the US-Saudi relationship in a bipartisan and strategic way, Jean-Pierre added.

The Biden administration has condemned the OPEC+ decision to cut oil production as a boon to Russia, whose energy market the collective West targeted with sanctions in response to the special military operation in Ukraine.

The US's particular criticism of Saudi Arabia for the decision unanimously agreed upon by OPEC+ amounts to "bullying," Cavusoglu said on Friday during a news conference in Turkey. Turkey does not believe it is right for the US to continue pressuring Saudi Arabia as it has, Cavusoglu said.

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Russian Crab Firms Say They Aren't Affected as US Crab Industry Strained in Bering Sea

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) - Russian fishing firms told Sputnik they are not facing any issues harvesting crab in the Bering Sea unlike US fishermen that are seeing disruptions to their supply in the same region.

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.

"In 2022, the Russian Crab group of companies has 434 tons of opilio and more than 100 tons of bairdi available for fishing in the subzones of the Bering Sea," a Russian Crab company spokesperson told Sputnik. "Thus, at present, snow crab condition in the Bering Sea does not cause concern to our fishermen."

In 2022, the total allowable catch of opilio snow crab in the Karaginsky subzone of the Bering Sea increased by 128 tons and the harvest of bairdi snow crab increased by 79 tons, the spokesperson said.

Scientists with the Russian Federal Research Institute of Fisheries and Oceanography (VNIRO) closely monitor conditions of population of valuable biological resources in the Bering Sea and make recommendations based on resource studies to correct the Total Allowable Catch of crab in the region, the spokesperson said.

Norebo Management Company, one of the largest fish holding companies in Russia, also indicates the Russian fishing industry seems to have no issues with snow crab harvests in the Bering Sea.

"I haven't heard about any drastic decline in snow crab stock abundance in Russian part of the Bering Sea," Norebo Management Company spokesperson Sergey Sennikov told Sputnik. Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers Executive Director Jamie Goen told 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.

"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 fishermen in tight circumstances. Alaska has some 60 vessels in its fleet that conducts snow crab fishing in the Bering Sea, she added.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game said in a press release that efforts to understand the decline of the crab population in the region is underway.

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 that 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 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 it was a necessary measure for long-term conservation and sustainability of crab stocks in the area.

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UN Secretariat Has No Mandate to Probe Russia's Alleged Use of Iranian Drones - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, October 21 (Sputnik) - The UN Secretariat has no mandate to investigate Russia's alleged use of Iranian drones in the Ukraine conflict, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said in a letter to UN chief Antonio Guterres on Friday.

"We would like to express our most serious concerns regarding the attempts of certain Member States to give instructions to the UN Secretariat in violation of Article 100 of the United Nations

Charter, as manifested in the letter from the Permanent Representatives of France, Germany and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations dated 21 October 2022, as well as the statements of some Secretariat officials about their intention to accept these instructions," the letter said.

No mandate has ever been given to the UN Secretariat by the Security Council for any "investigation" in the context of UNSC resolution 2231 on the Iran nuclear issue, the letter added.

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CORRECTION - France's Top Diplomat Says EU Weighing Iran Sanctions Over Alleged Drone Supply to Russia

(Corrects to read that the EU has already begun weighing sanctions, not will begin weighing)

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) - The European Union has begun weighing sanctions against Iran in connection with the country's alleged supply of drones to Russia, French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna said on Friday.

"On Monday, we decided to start working on what could be done if and where necessary," Colonna said at a joint press conference with Secretary of State Antony Blinken, when asked whether the European Union is considering more sanctions amid reports of Russia's alleged use of Iranian UAVs.

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US Eyeing Price Cap on Russia Oil Above \$60 in Bid to Encourage Continued Output - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) – The United States is considering setting a price cap for Russian oil above \$60 per barrel, instead of the previously discussed \$40 to \$60 range, in an effort to ensure continued output, Bloomberg reported on Friday, citing officials' speeches and historical pricing data.

The US believes the price should be high enough to cover production costs and encourage continued output, according to the report.

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Ukraine Saying Russian Language Should Be Abolished 'Unhelpful Rhetoric' - UN Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, October 21 (Sputnik) - The United Nations has observed a great deal of "unhelpful rhetoric" regarding the conflict in Ukraine, including the statements by Ukrainian

official Oleksiy Danilov to abolish the Russian language in Ukraine, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Friday.

"Since the start of the conflict, we have seen a lot of rhetoric, which to say the least, is not helpful," Dujarric said during a press briefing.

Dujarric said that words - and actions - matter, and the words used by Danilov, head of the Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council, regarding the Russian language and Russians in Ukraine were particularly troublesome.

Earlier on Friday, Danilov said the Russian language should be completely abolished in Ukraine for being "an element of hostile propaganda" and reaching an understanding with the Russian-speaking part of the Ukrainian population poses a threat to the state. Danilov also said learning English should be compulsory in Ukraine in addition to learning the Ukrainian language. In the 2001 census, more than 14.3 million Ukrainians, or almost 30% of the population, called Russian their native language. Since the US-supported Maidan coup in 2014, Kiev has adopted a number of policies aimed at regulating and restricting the use of the Russian language on television and in public places, including in the education and service sectors.

The discrimination against the Russian-speaking population led to a civil war in Ukraine, which resulted in the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics declaring independence and appealing to Russia for help to defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops.

Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on October 14 that the very question about abolishing the Ukrainian language in Russia is illegal.

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France's Top Diplomat Says EU to Weigh Iran Sanctions Over Alleged Drone Supply to Russia

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) - The European Union will begin weighing sanctions against Iran on Monday in connection with the country's alleged supply of drones to Russia, French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna said on Friday.

"On Monday, we decided to start working on what could be done if and where necessary," Colonna said, when asked whether the European Union is considering more sanctions amid reports of Russia's alleged use of Iranian UAVs.

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US Budget Deficit Halved After Record Reduction in Fiscal 2022 - Treasury

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) - The US budget deficit fell by a record \$1.4 trillion for fiscal year 2022 as COVID-related spending dried up while revenue from wage and employment gains boosted the government's coffers, Treasury Department data showed Friday.

The budget deficit for the fiscal year through September was practically halved to \$1.38 trillion, from a revised \$2.78 trillion the previous year, the data showed.

Before the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, the deficit totaled \$980 billion during fiscal year 2019.

Analysts observed that the latest numbers would have been even lower if not for the student loan forgiveness program – where President Joe Biden’s executive order canceled up to \$10,000 in student loans for borrowers under a certain income threshold, and up to \$20,000 for other qualified recipients.

The student loan forgiveness program carries a \$430 billion impact on the deficit in the month of September and has drawn sharp criticism from Republicans opposed to President Biden for its cost and scale.

With inflation stubbornly hovering near 40-year highs despite aggressive rate hikes that economists warn could push the economy into a recession, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen acknowledged that the budget deficit needed to come down further.

“It is important to have a credible fiscal policy and to make sure the debt is sustainable over time,” Yellen told reporters on Friday.

As a share of gross domestic product, the deficit came in at 5.5%. The GDP-deficit ratio hit a record 15% in 2020 on pandemic relief spending. Before the crisis, in 2019, the deficit was 4.7% of GDP. That had widened by a percentage point from 2017, the year before tax cuts under former President Donald Trump took effect.

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US Remains Interested in Return to JCPOA, But No Prospect for Agreement Now - Blinken

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) – The United States continues to have an interest in returning to the Iran nuclear deal, but sees no prospect for an agreement at this moment, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Friday.

"We continue to believe that diplomacy is the best way to do that. But in this moment, there's no prospect for an agreement again, because Iran continues to inject extraneous issues into the conversations that we've had in the European Union," Blinken said at a press conference with his French counterpart.

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US to Explore Every Means to Advance Diplomacy With Russia If Sees Chance – Blinken

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) – The United States will consider every means to advance diplomacy with Russia if it sees a chance for it to succeed amid tensions over Ukraine, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Friday.

"We consider and will consider every means to advance diplomacy if we see an opening to advance it by whatever means. Of course, we'll always look at it, Blinken said during a press briefing. "At this moment, Russia shows no signs of being willing to engage in meaningful diplomacy by any means."

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Documents Seized by FBI at Trump Residence Related to Iran, China - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) - The documents seized by the FBI from the Florida residence of former US President Donald Trump contained information about Iran and China, the Washington Post reported on Friday.

Some of the materials included sensitive intelligence about Iran and China, the report said, citing anonymous sources, who specified that at least one secret document concerned Iran's missile program.

A number of other documents contained intelligence about China, the report said.

The disclosure of information contained in the documents could potentially pose a number of potential problems - from the identification of US intelligence officers to information gathering methods and the potential threat of retaliation by other countries, the report added.

In August, Trump sued the US Justice Department after the FBI searched his Florida residence, where investigators seized several dozen boxes with about 11,000 documents. The Trump team also asked Judge Aileen Cannon to appoint a special master to review the seized materials for any privileged documents and prohibit Justice Department investigators from using the materials in their probe until they were reviewed.

Trump said he declassified all the documents he took to his residence in Florida upon leaving the White House, noting that the president can do this just by thinking about it.

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Ethiopians to Be Able to Stay in US for 18 Months Amid Conflict, Humanitarian Crisis - DHS

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) - Ethiopian nationals currently residing in the United States will be eligible to stay in the country for 18 months following the designation of Ethiopia as a Temporary Protected Status nation amid the conflict and a humanitarian crisis there, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said on Friday.

"Ethiopian nationals currently residing in the US who cannot safely return due to conflict-related violence and a humanitarian crisis involving severe food shortages, flooding, drought, and displacement, will be able to remain and work in the United States until conditions in their home country improve," DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said in a statement.

Only Ethiopians who entered the United States prior to the announcement will be eligible for Temporary Protected Status, the statement said.

The US government designates countries for Temporary Protected Status when armed conflict, environmental disaster or other extraordinary conditions prevent their nationals from safely returning to home, the statement added.

Ethiopia has been engulfed in a violent internal conflict since November 2020, when the government accused the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) of attacking one of its military bases and launched an anti-terrorist operation in the Tigray region. In June 2021, TPLF rebels seized the city of Mekelle and the government declared an unconditional ceasefire.

However, the rebels launched a new offensive soon after and took control of southern parts of Tigray and the neighboring Amhara region. The ongoing conflict has claimed tens of thousands of lives, displaced millions of people and caused a dire humanitarian crisis across the country.

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White House, Elon Musk Discuss Possibility of Getting Starlink Internet to Iran - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration and billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk have engaged on the possibility of providing the Starlink satellite internet service to Iran amid anti-government protests in the country, CNN reported on Friday.

White House officials have talked with Musk about providing Iran the internet service, which has also been provided to Ukraine, as a way of supporting the protest movement, the report said. Public demonstrations began across Iran following the death of 22-year old Mahsa Amini in September, allegedly at the hands of the country's so-called Morality Police for improperly wearing of a hijab. The Iranian authorities contend Amini died of a heart attack.

However, getting terminals needed to activate Starlink into Iran will be a bigger and more dangerous challenge than it was in Ukraine, the report said. Musk noted last week that there are "very few" Starlink terminals operating in Iran at present.

Smuggling the terminals into Iran and keeping their presence unnoticed by the Iranian authorities could prove challenging as the systems' signals could be easily detected, the report said.

The discussions come following a back-and-forth between Musk and the Defense Department over payment for the Starlink systems being used in Ukraine, which Musk claimed was costing the company millions of dollars. Musk later withdrew a request to have the cost subsidized by the US government.

The incident caused concerns about Musk's reliability as a partner of the US government, with one senior defense official calling the billionaire entrepreneur a "loose cannon," the report said.

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UK, France, Germany Request UN Probe of Russia's Alleged Use of Iranian Drones - Letter

UNITED NATIONS, October 20 (Sputnik) - France, Germany and the United Kingdom sent a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres asking the United Nations to investigate Russia's alleged use of Iranian military drones in Ukraine.

"We are deeply concerned by the transfer of unnamed aerial vehicles (UAVs) from Iran to Russia in violation of UN Security Council Resolution 2231 (2015). These UAVs are being used by Russia in its war of aggression against Ukraine in attacks against civilian infrastructure," the letter, seen by Sputnik, said. "We would welcome an investigation by the UN Secretariat team responsible for monitoring the implementation of UNSCR 2231 and stand ready to support the work of the Secretariat in conducting its technical and impartial investigation."

There is significant open source evidence, including photographs and videos, of Russia's use of Iranian military drones in Ukraine, the letter said.

On Wednesday, the Russian mission to the United Nations said Russia is using its own drones and the United Nations has no legal mandate to conduct an investigation on its own.

Iran's Ambassador to the United Nations Saeed Iravani said that Tehran rejects as unfounded the claims it is providing military drones to Russia to use in Ukraine.

Also on Wednesday, European Union spokeswoman Nabila Massrali said the bloc collected evidence of Iran's alleged supply of military drones to Russia and is preparing a response.

The allegation that Russia had purchased combat drones from Iran was also voiced by US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan in July.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said the allegations about the drone sales were purposely spread by US media. In addition, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani denied the US media reports, reiterating Iran's official position that Tehran was not exporting weapons to any party to the conflict.

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Canada's Freeze on Handgun Sales, Transfers Takes Effect Today – Trudeau

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) – Canada's national freeze on all sales and transfers of handguns introduced in response to a rise in gun violence goes into effect on Friday, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced.

"Today, our national freeze on handguns is coming into force. From today forward, it is no longer legal to buy, sell or transfer a handgun in Canada. We have frozen the market for handguns in this country," Trudeau said.

He also recalled that the ban on handgun imports that Canada imposed in August remains in place.

Trudeau noted that the number of handguns in Canada has increased by 70% in the past 12 years, and firearms-related homicides have gone up nearly 40% since 2011.

"Our goal overtime is to see gun violence reduced," Trudeau stated.

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McConnell Says Senate Republican Majority to Focus on Delivery of Weapons, Aid to Ukraine

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) - US Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said on Friday that should Republicans become the majority in the midterms elections in November, they will focus their attention on providing timely delivery of weapons and greater allied assistance to Ukraine.

"A Republican majority in the Senate will focus its oversight on ensuring timely delivery of needed weapons and greater allied assistance to Ukraine," McConnell said in a statement. The Minority Leader also vowed that Republicans will concentrate their efforts on rebuilding and modernizing the US military, as well as on confronting terrorist states, including Iran, and shoring up defenses in Asia.

In addition, McConnell accused Russia of "weaponizing" energy resources and called unacceptable the Biden administration drawing oil from the United States' Strategic Petroleum Reserve to improve Democrats' low approval ratings ahead of midterm elections.

"Draining the Reserve to the lowest point in decades and strangling our domestic energy production capacity will make America more vulnerable to disruptions and manipulations of global energy markets," McConnell said.

The Democrats are risking US national security to try to cover the losses of their own energy policies, he added.

President Joe Biden recently announced the sale of an additional 15 million barrels from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, completing the release of 180 million barrels authorized by him in March. The releases created additional supply to refineries, bringing down fuel prices that at one point hit record high of over \$5 per gallon.

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Biden Says Would Not Support Permanent Repeal of Debt Ceiling

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Friday he would not support a permanent repeal of the debt ceiling.

When asked whether he would support a permanent repeal of the debt ceiling, Biden stated, "No."

"It'd be irresponsible," he said.

The United States national debt reached a new historic milestone as it topped \$31 trillion for the first time in history, Treasury Department data showed at the beginning of the month.

The new record-high comes after the debt level rose above \$30 trillion for the first time in February 2022, reaching \$30.012 trillion as government spending surged amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Biden Says Democrats May Take Lead Over Republicans in Polls Near End of Midterm Elections

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Friday that he believes Democrats will take a lead over Republicans in the polls as the November 8 midterm elections approach.

"It's been back and forth with them ahead, us ahead, them ahead, back and forth, the polls have been all over the place, I think that we're going to see one more shift back to our side in the closing days," Biden said during a press conference.

The US president said the US economy has improved as evidenced by decreasing gas prices and lower unemployment rates.

Biden also said the midterm elections do not constitute a referendum, but represent a choice, and deflected criticism of his administration's economic record by blaming the situation on what he inherited from the Trump administration.

Republicans would threaten the US economy if they take control of Congress in November, Biden added.

Thirty-four of the 100 seats in the US Senate and all 435 House seats are up for election this year, in addition to state and local positions.

The Democrats currently control the House of Representatives by eight seats while the Senate is split 50-50 with Vice President Kamala Harris representing the tie-breaking vote in her role as president of the upper chamber.

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US Has Means, Will to Support Ukraine in Conflict With Russia - Biden

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) - The United States has the means and the will to support Ukraine in the ongoing conflict with Russia, President Joe Biden said on Friday.

When asked whether the United States has the means and the will to support Ukraine, Biden stated, "Yes."

"Because when we support Ukraine, we're supporting all of Europe. We're supporting NATO," Biden said. "I don't understand the threat that they're [Republicans] are saying they may have to stop funding Ukrainians in their war against this brutal dictator."

Biden said on Thursday he is "worried" that further US military assistance for Ukraine may not get approved if Republicans win control of Congress in the midterm elections in November.

US House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy has pledged that if the Republicans become a majority in the lower chamber of Congress in the midterms, Ukraine will not get a "blank check" for assistance given the looming recession in the United States.

Biden said the Republicans have "no sense of American foreign policy."

US lawmakers are looking to pass a new \$50 billion military aid package for Ukraine before January amid concerns that the upcoming midterm elections in November could usher in a new Congress less willing to prop up Kiev, NBC reported on Thursday, citing legislators and aides familiar with the effort.

Congress has approved some \$70 billion in aid to Ukraine since the beginning of Russia's special military operation on February 24.

US voters go to the polls on November 8 to cast ballots in the midterm elections, with the Democratic Party's narrow control of Congress hanging in the balance. All the 435 House seats and 34 of the 100 seats in the Senate are up for election this year, in addition to statewide and local positions.

The Democrats currently control the House by eight seats while the Senate is split 50-50 with Vice President Kamala Harris representing the tie-breaking vote in her role as president of the upper chamber.

Poll aggregator Real Clear Politics (RCP) has Republican candidates ahead in 221 contests, Democrats leading in 176, with 38 considered "toss ups." 218 are needed to win control of the lower chamber. If the races ended today, Republicans would end up with 47 seats in the Senate, the Democrats 46, with seven races in the toss-up category.

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Ex-Trump Adviser Bannon Sentenced to 4 Months, \$6,500 Fine for Contempt of Congress
(Updates with more details in paras 3-6, adds quote in para 2)

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) - Former Trump administration adviser Steve Bannon has been sentenced on Friday to four months in prison and a \$6500 fine on two counts of contempt of Congress for refusing to comply with a subpoena from the Select Committee investigating the events at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021.

"I respect the judge, the sentence he came down with today is his decision," Bannon told reporters shortly after the sentence was handed down.

Bannon added that there would be "a very vigorous appeal process" and also noted that there are "multiple areas of appeal."

Judge Carl Nichols said he is suspending the prison sentence until the appeals process is complete.

Bannon did not produce any documents in response to the subpoena, claiming executive privilege. The Justice Department had called for Nichols to sentence Bannon to six months in prison and impose a \$200,000 fine.

Bannon dedicated his remarks to the upcoming November 8 midterm elections, calling them a judgment day for the "illegitimate Biden regime," Nancy Pelosi and the Select Committee. He also said US Attorney General Merrick Garland would be brought up on impeachment charges and removed from office.

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Pentagon Says Welcomes Maintaining Open Line of Communications With Russia

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Defense welcomes maintaining an open line of communications with Russia following the call, first in months, between the two defense chiefs on Friday, Deputy Pentagon press secretary Sabrina Singh said.

"Today provided an opportunity to connect. It was something that the [US] Secretary [of Defense Lloyd Austin] initiated. It was an opportunity to have a call with [Russian] Minister [of Defense Sergei] Shoigu. We welcome maintaining an open line of communication. Dialogue is good here," Singh said during a press briefing.

Earlier on Friday, Austin in a call with Shoigu emphasized the importance of keeping lines of communication between the two countries open amid the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

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Austin Initiated Call With Shoigu, Gave Leaders Chance to Connect - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) - A call initiated by US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu provided a good chance for the two top military officials to connect amid tensions arising from the conflict in Ukraine, Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said on Friday.

"Today provided a good opportunity to connect," Singh said during a press briefing when asked about the talks. "Secretary Austin initiated the call."

Austin emphasized the importance of maintaining lines of communication during times of active conflict, the Pentagon said in a readout of the call.

Austin also spoke with Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov on Friday, the Pentagon also said.

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US Air Force Confirms B-1 Bombers Deployed to Guam, Says Not Tied to Any Country or Threat

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) - The US Air Force confirmed to Sputnik that B-1 bombers recently deployed to Guam for routine mission flights, but added that they are not in response to any country or threat.

Flight tracker data shows that four B-1 bombers recently deployed to Andersen Air Force Base in Guam following a series of ballistic missile launches by North Korea, including one that flew over Japan earlier this month.

"In response to your inquiry concerning the B-1B Lancers in Guam, Bomber Task Force activities are routine and are not tied to any one country or threat," a US Air Force spokesperson said. "The acceleration of strategic competition has bolstered the need to strengthen alliances and recruit new partners, increase lethality and interoperability, and deter, deny, and dominate aggression, to promote the collective goal of a free and open Indo-Pacific." The spokesperson added that Bomber Task Force missions support the larger US strategy to uphold a free and open Indo-Pacific and are not in direct response to another country's actions. North Korea has carried out eight missile test launches since September 25 and more than 25 since the beginning of 2022. Pyongyang has emphasized that its test launches are carried out in response to the refusal by the United States and South Korea to stop joint military exercises that Pyongyang says threaten regional stability.

US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman will meet with Japanese and South Korean counterparts in Tokyo on October 24-26 to discuss the latest North Korean missile test launches, according to a senior US administration official.

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One in 9 Kids in Pakistan's Flood-Affected Areas Suffer From Severe Malnutrition - UNICEF

UNITED NATIONS, October 21 (Sputnik) - At least one in nine children in the areas of Pakistan impacted by the recent floods are experiencing severe acute malnutrition, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said in a release on Friday.

"In the aftermath of the devastating floods in Pakistan, health facilities are reporting alarming levels of severe acute malnutrition among children in affected areas," the release said. "More than one in nine children under five admitted to health facilities in flood-affected areas of Sindh and Balochistan were found to be suffering from severe acute malnutrition."

UNICEF said of the 22,000 children screened by health professionals since September 2022 at health facilities in flood-affected regions, more than 2,630 were diagnosed with "severe acute malnutrition."

The estimates are based on the pre-existing malnutrition prevalence of the latest National Nutrition Survey and show that some 1.6 million children could be suffering from severe acute malnutrition and are in need of urgent treatment in flood-affected areas of Sindh and Balochistan provinces, the release said.

Over 25 million children and women across Pakistan, including more than 7 million children and women in flood-affected areas, require immediate access to essential nutrition services, the release also said.

UNICEF is working to expand nutrition services through 73 mobile health teams in the 84 flood-affected districts, the release added.

Since June, heavier than average monsoon rain has caused severe flooding across much of Pakistan resulting in death of 1,700 residents. In late August, the authorities declared a state of emergency and called on other countries and international organizations to provide all possible assistance to the population.

According to the Pakistani authorities, over 33 million people, or one in seven Pakistanis, have been affected by the devastating floods.

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Former Trump Adviser Bannon to Appeal Contempt of Congress Sentence - Lawyer

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) - Former Trump adviser Steve Bannon plans to appeal his sentence of four months in prison and a \$6,500 fine that was handed down Friday by a federal judge over his contempt of Congress in the January 6 probe, according to his lawyer.

"We certainly fully respect the judge's decision but we will be filing a notice of appeal," Bannon's lawyer David Schoen told reporters shortly after the sentence.

He added that the judge's decision to suspend the prison sentence until the appeals process was completed was an "extraordinary move."

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Federal Jury Convicts 2 Texas Men of Bribing Weslaco City Officials - US Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) - A federal jury has convicted two Texas men for conspiring to pay bribes to two city commissioners in Weslaco, Texas, in an effort to secure contracts, the US Justice Department said on Friday.

"Richard Quintanilla, 57, of Weslaco, and former Hidalgo County Commissioner Arturo C. Cuellar Jr., 68, of Hidalgo County, agreed with others to bribe two Weslaco City Commissioners, John Cuellar and Gerardo Tafolla, in exchange for official actions favorable to engineering companies seeking large contracts with the city," the Justice Department said in a press release. From approximately March 2008 through December 2015, one of the participants in the scheme received approximately \$4.1 million from two engineering companies and shared nearly \$1.4 million with Cuellar, the release said.

Cuellar also used a company he controlled to facilitate the payment of approximately \$405,000 in bribes to his cousin, John Cuellar, which were disguised as legitimate legal expenses, the release said.

In exchange for these payments, John Cuellar engaged in activities which served to benefit the companies, including helping to award a \$38.5 million contract to rehabilitate Weslaco's water treatment plant, while Quintanilla also paid Tafolla other bribes, the release said.

Arturo Cuellar was convicted of conspiracy to commit honest services wire fraud, four counts of honest services wire fraud, federal program bribery, conspiracy to commit money laundering, 26 counts of money laundering and 26 counts of using a facility in interstate commerce to facilitate unlawful activity, the release said.

Quintanilla was convicted of conspiracy to commit honest services wire fraud, four counts of honest services wire fraud, federal program bribery, conspiracy to commit money laundering, and seven counts of money laundering, the release added.

Cuellar and Quintanilla face up to 20 years in prison each and their sentencing is set for January 18, 2023, according to the release.

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Russia Says UNSC Unanimity on Haiti Sanctions Shows Consensus Possible Even in Tough Times

UNITED NATIONS, October 21 (Sputnik) - The unanimous adoption of a resolution to sanction Haiti gangs demonstrates that UN Security Council members are capable of reaching a consensus even during difficult times, Russian deputy envoy to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Friday.

Earlier in the day, the UN Security Council voted unanimously to adopt a resolution to impose sanctions for at least a year against the leader of the federation of criminal groups in Haiti, Jimmy Cherizier, as well as against those who threaten the country's security.

"Consensus on this resolution showed that even in today's circumstances the Council is able to achieve good results if a responsible approach is taken and if we are responsible to the positions of colleagues and if there's a real desire to find a compromise for the sake of solving difficult problems," Polyanskiy told UN Security Council members.

The resolution also calls for an immediate end to violence and criminal activity in Haiti. The document urges all political actors to engage in meaningful negotiations to overcome the current political stalemate in order to allow the holding of inclusive and fair elections as soon as the local security situation permits.

Haiti is experiencing a long-term socio-political crisis, which worsened after the assassination of President Jovenel Moise in 2021. Over the past year, the inaction of the authorities has reportedly led to an unprecedented increase in the influence of the armed gangs that engage in extortion and kidnapping for ransom.

The country's government has asked the international community to send troops to curb criminal activity. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has also called for armed action to help the Haitian people.

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Bannon Sentenced to 4 Months in Prison, \$6,500 Fine for Contempt of Congress – Reports

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) - Former Trump adviser Steve Bannon was sentenced Friday to four months in prison and a \$6,500 fine for two counts of contempt of Congress after refusing to comply with a subpoena from the committee investigating the January 6 Capitol attack, CBS News reported.

Bannon did not produce a single document, claiming executive privilege. The Justice Department had called for Federal Court Judge Carl Nichols to sentence Bannon to six months and a \$200,000 fine.

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Macron's Talks With Putin 'Not Easy' But Dialogue Crucial - French Foreign Minister

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) – French President Emmanuel Macron's conversations with Russian President Vladimir Putin are "not easy," but it remains crucial to keep a communication channel with decision-makers in Russia amid the ongoing Ukraine conflict, French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna said on Friday.

"They are not easy conversations. You can imagine that. They might be difficult sometimes, and they don't produce all the results. We would like to see that's clear but we absolutely think it is crucial to keep a channel of communication with those making the decisions in Russia, including President Putin," Colonna said during a Center for Strategic and International Studies event. Colonna noted that Macron's conversations with Putin are "fully coordinated" with France's allies and partners.

According to the minister, reinforcing what she says is Putin's "very strange" vision of the world by isolating Russia is not a good option in the current circumstances.

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IMF, Ukraine Officials Discuss Macro-Financial Developments, 2023 Budget

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) – An International Monetary Fund (IMF) team has met with senior Ukrainian officials to discuss macro-financial developments, the 2023 budget and other issues, the IMF said on Friday.

The meeting took place in Vienna from October 17-20. The IMF mission discussed its findings with Finance Minister Serhii Marchenko and Governor of the National Bank of Ukraine Andriy Pyshnyy.

"The discussions focused on recent macro-financial developments and outlook, the budget for 2023 and associated external financing needs, financial sector issues and the mix of policies to

support macroeconomic stability," IMF's mission chief for Ukraine Gavin Gray said in a statement released by the fund.

Gray commended the Ukrainian authorities for "having maintained an important degree of macro-financial stability in these extremely difficult circumstances." He also noted that they are encouraged to refrain from measures that erode tax revenues.

Both sides agreed to continue discussions in the coming weeks in light of Kiev's request for Program Monitoring with Board Involvement (PMB).

"The PMB will lay out the authorities' policy intentions to support macroeconomic and financial stability and present an assessment of external financing needs for 2023. As such, the PMB will also provide a strong anchor for macroeconomic policies, further catalyze donor support, and help pave the way toward a fully-fledged Fund program," Gray said.

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said earlier in October that the fund and Ukraine will begin in-person discussions on the 2023 budget requirements for the country that are projected to be up to \$4 billion per month.

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UN Security Council Adopts Resolution Imposing Sanctions on Haitian Criminal Groups

UNITED NATIONS, October 21 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council voted unanimously on Friday to adopt a resolution to impose sanctions for at least a year against the leader of the federation of criminal groups in Haiti, Jimmy Cherizier, as well as against those who threaten the country's security.

A list of persons subject to restrictive measures will be determined by a special committee, according to the resolution, which as drafted by the United States and Mexico. Sanctions include account freezes, travel bans, and arms embargoes.

The resolution calls for an immediate end to violence and criminal activity in Haiti. The document calls on all political actors to engage in meaningful negotiations to overcome the current political stalemate in order to allow the holding of inclusive and fair elections as soon as the local security situation permits.

Haiti is experiencing a long-term socio-political crisis, which worsened after the assassination of President Jovenel Moise in 2021. Over the past year, the inaction of the authorities has reportedly led to an unprecedented increase in the influence of the armed gangs that engage in extortion and kidnapping for ransom.

At the beginning of October, the situation was complicated by the outbreak of cholera, which has already claimed the lives of 16 people, as of October 14.

The country's government has asked the international community to send troops to curb criminal activity. The United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has also called for an armed action to help the Haitian people.

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Austin in Call With Reznikov Reiterates US Commitment to Supporting Ukraine – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin in a call with his Ukrainian counterpart reiterated the unwavering US commitment to supporting Ukrainian forces, Pentagon spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Friday.

"Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III spoke with Ukrainian Minister of Defence Oleksii Reznikov to reiterate the unwavering U.S. commitment to supporting Ukraine's ability to counter Russia's aggression," Ryder said in a statement.

Austin underscored the international community's continued support in "building Ukraine's enduring strength" and safeguarding Kiev's ability to defend itself in the future, he added. Earlier in the day, Austin spoke by phone with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu.

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Austin in Call With Shoigu Emphasizes Importance of Communication Amid Ukraine Conflict

WASHINGTON, October 21 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin in a call with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu emphasized the importance of keeping lines of communication between the two countries open amid the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the Pentagon said on Friday.

"On October 21, Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III spoke by phone with Russian Minister of Defense Sergey Shoygu. Secretary Austin emphasized the importance of maintaining lines of communication amid the ongoing war against Ukraine," the department said in a press release.