

11/1/22 Tuesday

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Elon Musk Confirms \$8 Monthly Fee for Twitter Accounts to be Verified
By - Fantine Gardinier

Twitter's new owner, Elon Musk, confirmed widespread rumors on Tuesday, announcing that Verified accounts will be charged \$8 a month to retain their blue checkmark badges indicating their authenticity.

"Twitter's current lords & peasants system for who has or doesn't have a blue checkmark is bulls***," [Musk tweeted](#). "Power to the people! Blue for \$8/month," adding that the price would be adjusted by country according to their nation's purchasing power parity (PPP).

Musk also listed several other features that subscribers to the Blue service would get, including "priority in replies, mentions and search[es]," which he said is "essential to defeat spam/scam." Subscribers will also get the ability to post "long video and audio" , they would see only half as many ads as before, and would gain the ability to bypass paywalls with "publishers willing to work with us."

He added that this would "give Twitter a revenue stream to reward content creators." [Rumors have swirled](#) that Musk was planning to charge Twitter users for their Verified status since he finalized the deal to buy the social media giant last week, although most claims estimated a far higher monthly fee.

Verification is used to identify the accounts of public figures such as politicians, celebrities, and journalists, as well as institutions and corporations, as being the authentic accounts of those entities. The feature was first [implemented in 2009](#) in response to a lawsuit over a fake account that Tony la Russa, then the manager of the Arizona Cardinals professional baseball team, said was being allowed to impersonate him.

Twitter paused the feature in 2017 after protests over it giving a blue check to [Jason Kessler](#), a self-described leader of the "alt-right" who planned the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, which drew thousands of neo-Nazis, white supremacists, and fascists of other stripes. That rally resulted in widespread violence, including a car ramming attack into a crowd by an attendee that killed a counter-demonstrator. Verification was later revived in late 2021.

Musk bought Twitter last week for \$44 billion. He has pledged to combat spam bots and make the app financially solvent again, as well as to protect free speech on the platform. While he has said that former US President Donald Trump should not remain banned from Twitter forever, he has not announced plans to restore the former leader's account, either. Twitter deleted it in January 2021, claiming he was using it to promote violence after tweeting in support of the attack on the US Capitol by his supporters.

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Brazil's Bolsonaro Refrains From Either Recognizing Lula's Election Victory or Rejecting Results By - Fantine Gardinier

In his first public statement since the Brazilian presidential elections on Sunday, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro refused to either explicitly accept or reject the victory of his rival, former president Lula de Silva.

"I will continue respecting our constitution," Bolsonaro told reporters on Tuesday, adding that he would "authorize" the transition of power to Lula, who narrowly won the Sunday runoff vote. "it's an honor to be the leader of millions of Brazilians who, like myself, believe in economic freedom, religious freedom, free speech, honesty and the green and yellow colors of our national flag," he said.

However, Bolsonaro refused to call Lula, the candidate from the left-wing Workers Party, the victor in the election. Bolsonaro said his right-wing supporters have the right to demonstrate, but that they must be "peaceful" and not resort to what he called the "illegal methods of the left." Following [announcement of Lula's victory](#) on Sunday and massive celebrations in Brazil's major cities, Bolsonaro supporters reportedly began [blockading streets using trucks](#) in a manner of protest reminiscent of the anti-Covid lockdown protests by right-wingers in the US and Canada earlier this year.

Bolsonaro has often been compared to former US President Donald Trump, who rejected the results of the November 2020 US presidential elections after he lost them to Democratic challenger Joe Biden. It was anticipated that Bolsonaro might do the same, having [made similar overtures](#) about the potential for election fraud on electronic voting machines.

The right-wing leader came to power in 2018 elections after Lula, the front-runner in that race, was suddenly disqualified weeks before the vote. Lula had been convicted of charges of money laundering and corruption, [which were later annulled](#) after being found to have been politically motivated.

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China Pledges Cooperation With 'Comrade and Brother' Vietnam as Communist Party Chiefs Meet

By - Fantine Gardinier

For decades, Hanoi and Beijing were in rival socialist camps, even fighting a war in the 1970s. However, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the introduction of some capitalist market mechanisms to both countries' economies, they grew steadily closer, albeit not without unresolved differences.

Nguyen Phu Trong, general secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam, was the first world leader to meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping after the Chinese Communist Party's historic 20th Congress last month. The meeting saw the two leaders pledge greater cooperation between the socialist states.

Xi told Trong China would work to build a stable supply chain with its “comrade and brother” Vietnam, including encouraging Chinese tech companies to invest in Vietnam and promoting cooperation in healthcare, the digital economy, and efforts to combat climate change. Many of these would take place via the Two Corridors, One Belt (TCOB), part of the Belt and Road Initiative focused specifically on China and Vietnam.

“China is willing to accelerate linking development strategies with the Vietnamese side, promote connectivity between the two countries and jointly build a stable industrial chain supply chain system,” Xi said.

Trong pledged to remain unaligned in global affairs, telling Xi the Southeast Asian state would never allow a foreign military base on its soil or join an alliance against another country.

“Vietnam ... has made the development of friendship and cooperation with China the top priority in our foreign policy,” Trong told Xi at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.

The US has [worked to divide China](#) from its neighbors, especially in Southeast Asia and the Pacific region, as part of a strategy to “contain” Chinese “expansion,” which Washington characterizes as being done at the expense of other states. The Pentagon’s recently released [National Defense Strategy](#) calls for working with groups like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to build a “networked security architecture capable of deterring aggression, maintaining stability, and ensuring free access to common domains” - Washington shorthand for pushing nations to become hostile to China.

In the South China Sea, that has meant supporting other nations’ territorial claims against China’s, and characterizing ASEAN-China talks on writing a code of conduct for the waterway as Beijing bullying smaller nations. Washington has postured as willing to support ASEAN nations against Beijing, and [one influential policy think tank](#) even encouraged Washington to sabotage the ASEAN-China talks, then work with ASEAN to impose a new anti-Chinese document on Beijing.

By contrast, Xi and Trong agreed that “the Chinese and Vietnamese communist parties must ... make every effort to promote socialist modernisation, never letting anyone interfere with our advancement and never letting any force shake the institutional foundation of our development,” as Xi put it.

The two nations were once bitter enemies, with Vietnam siding with the Soviet Union after the USSR and China went their separate ways in the early 1960s. At the nadir of their relations, Vietnam invaded Chinese ally Cambodia in 1978 and deposed its nominally socialist government, and China launched a brief but bloody invasion of Vietnam the following year. However, after the USSR was dissolved and the Eastern European socialist governments were overthrown, China and Vietnam quickly drew closer together, re-establishing normal relations in 1991 and issued a joint statement on cooperation in 2000, when they settled their land border disputes. Last year, China was Vietnam’s largest trading partner, with \$165 billion in bilateral trade between them that year - a 24% increase over the previous year, [according to Hanoi’s statistics](#).

However, some disputes remain, [especially over an archipelago](#) in the South China Sea known in China as the Xisha Islands, in Vietnam as the Hoang Sa Archipelago, and to other nations by the English-language name Paracel Islands. The unsettled maritime dispute has led to clashes between their fishing and oil exploration vessels.

Xi is also due to receive several other world leaders later this week, including German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, and Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan.

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Democrats May Have 'Painful Midterm' Amid Economic Disarray in US - Ex-Texas Oil Regulator

WASHINGTON, November 2 (Sputnik) - Democrats are poised to potentially experience a painful midterm election as voters head to the polls amid record-high inflation in the United States causing economic troubles for Americans, a former commissioner in the Texas Railroad Commission, the oil regulator in the United States' top energy-producing state, told Sputnik. Inflation has hit 40-year highs, driving the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates significantly throughout the course of the year. The US inflation rate, currently running at 8.2%, is one of the top issues on voters' minds going into the November 8 midterm elections, according to polls. "Right now commodities are the things fueling inflation," former Texas oil regulator Ryan Sitton told Sputnik. "It's hurting people so hard that that is causing a real discomfort and that is changing people's voting habits. When going through all of these challenges, and continuing to pump money into the economy artificially, going hard against things like oil and gas, all of these problems are being laid at the feet of the President [Joe Biden] and I think it's hard to get around it. We sit in a real economic disarray. So I think it's going to be a pretty painful midterm for the Democrats."

Sitton said it appears the midterm elections will be "very good" for Republicans.

However, Sitton explained that despite which political party controls Congress after the midterms, he hopes that lawmakers can be constructive.

"I sure hope that we get some constructive things going on so that we actually move the ball as opposed to just political banter in DC, but that's probably overly optimistic," Sitton said.

US voters head to the polls for midterm elections on November 8 to determine who controls Congress, with Republicans poised to seize the House from the Democrats while the Senate struggle is expected to come down to the wire.

Thirty-five 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.

According to the averages of surveys gathered by poll aggregator RealClearPolitics (RCP), Republicans are likely to win 228 House seats, well over the 218 needed to win the majority. House Democrats are likely to win 174 seats while 33 are in the toss-up category, according to the RCP data.

If the Senate races ended today, the Republicans would likely end up with at least 48 seats, the Democrats 45, with 6-7 still too close to call, the data shows as of Tuesday.

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Price Cap Will Allow Russia to Sell More Oil, Invest in Industry - Ex-US Regulator

WASHINGTON, November 2 (Sputnik) - G7 plans to impose a price cap on Russian oil will allow Moscow to sell more supply in the global market and invest more in its energy industry, a former commissioner in the Texas Railroad Commission, the industry regulator in the United States' top oil-producing state, told Sputnik.

The Biden administration has been developing an international price cap coalition on Russian oil in an attempt to limit the Kremlin's revenue from energy exports. Details on the prospective price cap are not expected until after the November 8 US midterm elections, media reported on Friday.

"The price cap I think brings some stability, allows the Russians to sell more oil to those who haven't boycotted, [and] it allows them to invest," former Texas oil regulator Ryan Sitton said. However, long-term Sitton wondered if the world will be as reliant on Russia for oil.

"Do the Russians sell 11 to 12 million barrels of oil a day into the rest of the world. Is that a future scenario? It's getting harder and harder to see that that's a reality because they've had to curtail production, they're missing all those revenues," Sitton said. "I don't believe they can be investing in their facilities at the rate they used to."

Russia's oil industry could probably weather another six months to a year under restrictions from the West, but anything beyond may cause serious changes, Sitton said.

"This goes on for another year or two, then you're gonna have real problems, real infrastructure problems to lose that much product," Sitton said. "It's hard to say right now, though, there's so much disruption. There's no question it's going to be different, we'll see how much."

A possible plan to redirect the Russian gas transit from the Nord Stream pipelines through Turkey would bring stability to Europe's supply but Turkey and other countries in the region may begin to think whether that's in their long term interest, Sitton said.

Last month, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan discussed the idea that Moscow could redirect gas transit from the Nord Stream pipelines, damaged by an explosion classified by Russia as an act of terrorism, to Turkey. On October 14, Erdogan said that the two leaders instructed relevant institutions of the two countries to quickly begin work on the idea of creating a hub in Turkey for gas supplies to Europe.

"The Europeans in general, and certainly a lot of that region outside of Europe is so highly dependent on Russian natural gas... so will this bring stability to gas supply? For sure. No question it's going to do that," Sitton said. "The question is whether or not that's in their long term interest."

Time will tell how countries respond to a possible transit of Russian gas through Turkey, Sitton said.

Since 2021, energy prices have been surging worldwide as the global economy rebooted after the pandemic. The growth increased after the European Union and other Western states imposed sanctions on Russian oil and gas, disrupting supply chains amid surging demand. A price cap on Russian seaborne oil, suggested by the G7 and expected to be implemented in

December, and the decision by OPEC+ to curb production also strained the already tense global energy situation.

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Possible US Plan to Seek Oil From Venezuela May Discourage Investment - Ex-Texas Regulator

WASHINGTON, November 2 (Sputnik) - A potential plan by the Biden administration to ease sanctions on Venezuela in order to allow US companies to pump oil would likely discourage American energy companies from investing in boosting production in the United States, a former commissioner in the Texas Railroad Commission, the regulator of the top oil-producing state, told Sputnik.

Last month, media reported that President Joe Biden's administration is considering easing sanctions on Venezuela in the wake of the OPEC+ decision to cut oil production by 2 million barrels a day due to declining demand caused by a slowing global economy.

"I have heard about that. I'm gonna say this pretty candidly, it's one of the stupidest ideas I've ever heard to open up the flow of oil from Venezuela," former Texas oil regulator Ryan Sitton said.

From a technical perspective, Sitton said, it makes sense to seek Venezuelan oil because it is actually a fairly good replacement for the United States for the heavier crude oil it previously bought from Russia.

"From that perspective, makes sense, which is why the president's considering it, the problem is.. well, basically, Venezuela is another country that is violating human rights acts, they've done bad business in the oil business for a long time, you're funding a really authoritarian communist regime," Sitton said.

Instead, the Biden administration should invest in boosting the United States' own energy infrastructure to provide some long-term stability, he added.

"There's a short term fix, which is let's buy a little more oil from Venezuela, but once again, you do that, and what does it say to the US producer? I will screw you and I will go buy oil from a communist regime in Venezuela," Sitton said.

Sitton also said the move "just further sends the message to US oil companies don't invest here [in US]. And it's just stupid."

Venezuela, an oil rich South American state, has been under the pressure of US sanctions for over a decade. In 2019, former President Donald Trump blacklisted PDVSA in a bid to topple Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro by straining Caracas cash-flow.

Since 2021, energy prices have been surging worldwide as the global economy rebooted after the pandemic. The growth increased after the European Union and other Western states imposed sanctions on Russian oil and gas, disrupting supply chains amid surging demand. A price cap on Russian seaborne oil, suggested by the G7 and expected to be implemented in December, and the decision by OPEC+ to curb production also strained the already tense global energy situation.

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White House Announces Over \$13Bln in Assistance to Lower Energy Costs for US Families

WASHINGTON, November 2 (Sputnik) - The White House announced more than \$13 billion in US government funding to help Americans pay for energy and heating bills, as well as make their homes more energy efficient.

"The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), through the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), today announced \$4.5 billion in assistance to help lower heating costs for American families this winter... DOE announced nearly \$9 billion in funding allocations for states and Tribes under new state- and Tribe-administered home efficiency programs established by President Biden's Inflation Reduction Act," the statement said.

The new program is expected to provide support to Americans, including home renovations to make them energy efficient.

Funds will also be allocated for workforce development programs to support energy efficiency and building upgrades funded by the Inflation Reduction Act and by the president's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Since 2021, energy prices have been surging worldwide as the global economy rebooted after the pandemic. Their growth accelerated after the West imposed sanctions on Russian energy, disrupting supply chains amid surging demand.

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US May Take Years to Replenish National Oil Reserve to Normal Level - Ex-Texas Regulator

WASHINGTON, November 2 (Sputnik) - The United States may take years to replenish the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) to a normal level after President Joe Biden released up to 200 million barrels in an attempt to lower US gasoline prices, a former commissioner in the Texas Railroad Commission, the industry regulator in the top oil-producing state, told Sputnik. Biden has authorized the withdrawal of more than 200 million barrels from the SPR since November 2021 and is prepared to release more throughout the winter if necessary. The US president has said his top priority is alleviating the hardship of Americans suffering from the worst inflation in 40 years, contributed significantly by high energy prices.

"I think it could take years to replenish to a normal level if people start to realize that that is going to push the price up even further, which makes it even harder to fill," former Texas oil regulator Ryan Sitton said.

Biden could have an exceptionally hard time working his way out of a dilemma if US gasoline prices soar despite additional release of oil from the national reserve, Sitton added.

US oil producing groups have advocated that the only solution to lowering US gasoline prices is by increasing domestic production.

These pro-oil and gas groups have asked the Biden administration to support more long-term energy policies that will encourage more investment in domestic oil production.

Last week, data from the Energy Information Administration showed that the US emergency oil reserve is less than 2 million barrels from breaking below the key 400-million-barrel level after the previous week's outflow of almost 3.5 million barrels.

Gasoline at the pump in the United States reached a record high of \$5 per gallon in mid-June but has come down since to an average of below \$4.

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US 'Delighted' That Russia Agrees to Participate Again in Grain Deal – US Envoy to UN

WASHINGTON, November 2 (Sputnik) – The United States is happy to see Russia resume its participation in the Black Sea grain deal, US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said on Wednesday.

"I was delighted to hear this news and I want to first commend the UN, the secretary general, in particular, for continuing to negotiate this important deal because it's providing needed food to the world," Thomas-Greenfield told CNN.

She added that the deal is beneficial to Russia, and Moscow "can't stand in the way of feeding the entire world."

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Biden's Release of Oil From US Reserve 'Political,' Signals Panic - Ex-Texas Regulator

WASHINGTON, November 2 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden's decision to release additional oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) ahead of the midterms was political and will not likely lower prices because it signals a panic, a former commissioner in the Texas Railroad Commission, the industry regulator in the top oil-producing state, told Sputnik.

Biden has authorized the withdrawal of more than 200 million barrels from the SPR since November 202 and is prepared to release more throughout the winter if necessary. The US president has said his top priority is alleviating the hardship of Americans suffering from the worst inflation in 40 years and high energy prices.

"Absolutely," former Texas oil regulator Ryan Sitton said when asked if Biden's decision was political. "In fact... prices aren't dropping very much as a result of that announcement. In fact, what you're going to see is they're going to go up because as Biden signals a panic, that's going to fuel the market saying maybe there really is demand, there is supply problems."

Biden is reinforcing the narrative that there is a supply problem when he releases additional oil from the US strategic reserve, Sitton said.

Sitton further said Biden's plan of releasing oil from the national reserve to lower gasoline prices is a bad strategy.

"When people start realizing how low the reserve is and in contrast that demand is not shrinking with the recession, we're gonna see incredibly high oil prices," Sitton said.

Last week, data from the Energy Information Administration showed that the US emergency oil reserve is less than 2 million barrels from breaking below the key 400-million-barrel level after the previous week's outflow of almost 3.5 million barrels.

Gasoline at the pump in the United States reached a record high of \$5 per gallon in mid-June but has come down since to an average of below \$4.

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Four in 10 Americans Will Cast Early Vote in Midterm Elections – Poll

WASHINGTON, November 2 (Sputnik) – Forty-one percent of US registered voters have voted or plan to vote before Election Day, according to a Gallup poll released Wednesday.

This represents an increase from earlier midterm elections since Gallup began measuring the trend in 2010. Early voting has typically been more common in presidential election years rather than midterm election years.

Gallup also found that voters living in the Western US — this year, 65% — are most likely to vote early, as are female voters or voters aged 65 and over.

Fifty-four percent of Democrats, compared to 32% of Republicans, said they would vote early, while there was little to no gap in previous midterm election years. Republicans, at 75%, are also much more likely than Democrats, at 56%, to vote in person this year. In comparison, 39% of Democrats said they would vote by mail, while only 18% of Republicans said they would.

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UN Welcomes Russia Resuming Participation in Grain Deal – Coordinator

WASHINGTON, November 2 (Sputnik) - The United Nations welcomes Russia resuming its participation in a deal to facilitate food and fertilizer exports from Ukraine, UN Coordinator for the Black Sea Grain Initiative Amir Abdulla said Wednesday.

Earlier in the day, Russia resumed its participation in the deal after Ukraine provided written guarantees not to use the grain corridor in the Black Sea for combat operations against Russia. Moscow had suspended the deal on Saturday following a drone attack by Ukraine targeting military and civilian ships in Crimea's Sevastopol.

"I welcome the return of the Russian Federation to the implementation of the #BlackSeaGrainInitiative to facilitate exports of food and fertilizer from #Ukraine. Grateful for the Turkish facilitation. Looking forward to working again with all parties in the Initiative," Abdulla wrote on social media.

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RPT: REVIEW - Polls Show Republican Edge in US Midterm Elections, But Races Still Competitive 1 Week Out

WASHINGTON, November 2 (Sputnik) - US voters cast final ballots in the midterm elections next week to determine control of Congress going into President Joe Biden's second term, with polls showing Republicans well-positioned to seize the House while the battle for the Senate appears likely to come down to the wire.

On November 8, all 435 seats in the House of Representatives and 35 seats in the Senate will be up for grabs as Democrats seek to keep their legislative majority and Republicans vie for the ability to implement a policy agenda of their own.

Polls and analysts trend towards giving the Republicans an edge one week out from midterms, although races remain competitive as issues like the economy, inflation and abortion, continue to factor into voters' decisionmaking leading up to Election Day.

With races so tight, officials are also taking steps to ensure that elections are held securely and without interference that could potentially impact results.

SENATE

Democrats currently maintain a majority in the Senate, with 48 party members, two independents and Vice President Kamala Harris' vote as president of the chamber putting them in control. Republicans hold 50 seats at the present time.

Democrats hold 14 of the Senate seats up for grabs in the midterms, while Republicans hold 21. Although 35 of the Senate's 100 seats will be contested during midterms, several key races are positioned to determine control of the chamber. Senate races are particularly close in state such as Arizona, Georgia, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, all of which are also traditionally considered "battleground" locations in presidential elections.

Current Pennsylvania Senator Pat Toomey, a Republican, announced in October 2020 that he would not seek re-election. Democrat John Fetterman, the state's lieutenant governor, now challenges Republican surgeon and television star Mehmet Oz for the seat.

The race between Fetterman and Oz remains close, with the RealClearPolitics' (RCP) average of the most recent polls for November 1 giving Fetterman a 1.5 point lead.

In Georgia, Democratic incumbent Raphael Warnock, elected during a special runoff election in 2021, faces Republican challenger Herschel Walker, a former National Football League player. RCP's average has Walker up 1.6 points over Warnock, predicting a December runoff due to the tight race. Under Georgia state law, a runoff election will occur on December 6 if no candidate

garners more than 50% of the vote, which is possible in this Senate race because of its competitiveness and the presence of Libertarian Party candidate Chase Oliver.

In Wisconsin, Republican incumbent Ron Johnson faces Democratic challenger Mandela Barnes. Johnson holds a 3.3 point lead over Barnes, according to RCP's average for November 1.

In Nevada, Democrat Catherine Cortez Masto defends her Senate seat against Republican Adam Laxalt, the state's former attorney general. The seat could swing either way, with the RCP average placing Laxalt ahead by less than 1 percent.

Other notable Senate races include the elections in Arizona and Utah. Arizona's Democratic incumbent, Mark Kelly, won a special election for the Senate seat in 2020. Republican entrepreneur Blake Masters is now challenging him for the position, but is down by 2.4 points. A Republican group dumped \$5 million into the race to run ads tying Kelly to Biden administration policies and inflation, Club for Growth told Axios on Saturday.

US Senator for Utah Mike Lee is being challenged for his seat not by a Democrat, but by Independent Evan McMullin, who would become the first non-Republican to represent the state in the Senate since 1977 if victorious.

However, an Emerson College poll released October 31 shows 49% of voters supporting Lee and 39% supporting McMullin.

HOUSE

Of the 435 House seats up for grabs, Democrats currently hold 220 while Republicans hold 212. There are also three vacant seats. A total of 218 seats are needed to obtain a majority in the lower chamber.

RCP lists 228 House seats as likely or leaning Republican, 174 seats likely or leaning Democrat and 33 seats as toss-ups. A majority of the toss-up seats, 28 of 33, are held by Democrats. Numbers in some House races are "not where they should be," former White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said in October. Democrats are worried and fearful of where the momentum is headed, Psaki said.

Control of the House is of particular importance for continuing elevated levels of security aid to Ukraine, following a statement by current House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy saying that Republicans will not continue to write Kiev a "blank check" if given a majority.

McCarthy is a favorite to become Speaker of the House if Republicans win control of the chamber.

Republican control of the House, as well as the Senate, could also impede Biden's efforts to codify federal abortion protections – legislation he promised to pass if Democrats retain their majority – and pass other governing priorities such as an assault weapons ban.

A Gallup poll on Tuesday found that approval of presidential and congressional job performances are at 40% and 21% respectively. The party of the incumbent president typically loses seats during midterm elections when the president's approval rating falls below 50% and Congress's approval rating below 35%, the poll noted.

SECURITY

The midterm will be the first nationwide, federal election since 2020, following which demonstrators stormed the US Capitol on January 6, 2021 to disrupt the certification of electoral results in favor of Biden.

The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is focused on securing both cyber and physical aspects of the nation's election system ahead of midterms, Rob Silver, DHS Under Secretary for Strategy, Policy, and Plans, said in October.

DHS is working on securing election infrastructure such as voter registration databases and voting equipment, Silvers said. The department is also addressing physical security concerns at polling places and vote tabulation centers amid threats to election administrators, Silvers added. On Election Day, DHS will run a 24/7 watch operation and maintain live contact with state and local election officials, according to Silvers.

Moreover, the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) has deployed 40 long-term observers across the US and 17 experts in Washington to monitor the midterm elections.

Voting rights in the US are subject to numerous restrictions, including restrictions on the voting rights of inmates, former felons and the disabled, an OSCE interim report analyzing the US electoral environment found. The Democratic and Republican parties are engaged in campaigns marked by "intensely divisive and at times inflammatory rhetoric," the OSCE also found.

With absentee voting by mail possible in all 50 states, claims continue to circulate that absentee ballots are more susceptible to fraud, impacting trust in the electoral process, the OSCE added. OSCE will release a report on its preliminary findings about the midterms on November 9.

Millions of Americans have already cast ballots through early voting across the US, with more than 7.8 million ballots cast as of October 24 – exceeding the previous record set during the 2018 midterms.

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RPT: REVIEW - China, Weather May Impact Near-Term Oil Prices More Than OPEC+ Cuts, US Reserves Release

WASHINGTON, November 2 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden keeps releasing emergency oil supplies to bring fuel prices down while OPEC+ carries out its biggest output cuts since the coronavirus outbreak to bring a barrel back towards \$100. Yet, two things might matter more in the near-term to crude prices: the weather and China.

In one of the most unseasonable starts to the pre-winter season in the Northern Hemisphere, the fall weather from September through October has been warmer than usual, setting up the possibility that December could extend the trend.

That could spell trouble for those betting on crude prices to surge from next month from North American and European demand for heating oil, which usually rises in December and peaks in January and February.

The other phenomenon is China, which continues to practice 2020-style COVID-19 lockdowns when the rest of the world has moved on from the pandemic. Millions of people have been trapped in whole Chinese cities - sometimes in the strangest of locations - under Beijing's controversial zero-Covid policy.

In Shanghai this week, the local outlets of Swedish furniture giant Ikea and Disney were among places targeted by China's COVID police. The lockdown of the theme park, particularly, made global headlines as people were told they wouldn't be allowed out until they could show a negative COVID test result.

However, according to media reports, an unverified note circulating on social media said a "Reopening Committee" formed by Chinese Politburo Standing Member Wang Huning was reviewing overseas COVID data to assess various reopening scenarios, including dropping most curbs by spring 2023.

Thus, warm US weather and lockdowns in China could influence crude prices more in the near term than the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, or SPR, release by the Biden administration as well as the 2-million-barrels-per-day cuts by the Saudi-and-Russia dominated Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies, also known as OPEC+, say analysts.

As of Monday's market settlement, Brent crude, the global benchmark for oil, was at \$94.83 per barrel. In March, right after the breakout of the Ukraine war which triggered an avalanche of Western sanctions against Russia and upended world crude supplies, Brent hit 14-year highs just short of \$140 per barrel.

West Texas Intermediate, the benchmark for US crude known simply as WTI, was at \$86.53 a barrel at Monday's close.

In September, Brent hit an eight-month low beneath \$83 while WTI reached under \$76 from the combination of China's lockdowns and fears of a US recession — the other variable analysts say could ultimately force oil prices to reach new lows in 2023.

"As far as oil prices are concerned now, it's push and pull, going in both directions," John Kilduff, partner at New York energy hedge fund Again Capital, told Sputnik. "OPEC+ and those betting on higher oil prices want a barrel at around \$100. But Biden keeps releasing SPR supplies, although they are just a sliver of what OPEC cuts. To make matters worse, China just keeps throwing COVID curveballs at the market, one after another."

There's reason for the market to be razor-focused on the United States and China.

Combined, the two countries consume nearly 35 million barrels of oil a day, more than a third of global demand. Even though the United States has become one of the world's largest oil producers, it is still the second-largest importer of crude, trailing only China.

As of two weeks ago, the Global Forecast System, or GFS, for US weather and the European Center for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts, or ECMWF, was indicating mild weather, those who tracked those models said.

"On the weather front, there continued to be only minor changes in the long-range data," energy analyst Leticia Gonzales said in a blog that appeared on naturalgasintel.com. "Both the American and European models project modest national demand for at least another two to three weeks. This suggests that it won't be until late November or early December before sustained cold invades the northern or eastern United States."

Since then, weather readings have suggested more chill in the near-term, hinting at a potential flip to colder conditions by the end of the first week of November, Houston-based energy markets consultancy Gelber & Associates said in a note.

Brian, [11/1/2022 4:33 PM]

"While the bigger-picture weather models have been inferring the potential for a relatively mild start to winter, Mother Nature is ultimately in control of the weather game," Gelber & Associates said, conceding that the readings could go either way.

For the record, December 2021 was the second-warmest December ever.

In the meantime, OPEC+ has raised concerns with how the United States has been influencing oil prices with the release of its reserves. Some say members of the alliance are privately mocking the Biden administration for creating long-term problems for America by draining down its emergency crude stockpiles when it might have a real emergency need later for those supplies.

Saudi Energy Minister Abdulaziz bin Salman's message to the United States from a fortnight ago seemed to have a combination of both - mild annoyance and derision - as he cautioned about the pitfalls of using emergency oil supplies to keep a lid on market prices of both crude and fuel.

"It is my profound duty to make clear to the world that losing [releasing] emergency stocks may be painful in the months to come," Abdulaziz said at an industry conference in Riyadh.

The Saudi minister's remarks also came after President Joe Biden announced two weeks ago the sale of an additional 15 million barrels from the SPR to follow through with some 180 million released from the reserve over the past six months by his administration.

The additional SPR release will coincide with the 2 million barrels per day cut in global oil supply announced by OPEC+ for November onwards. The Biden administration has drawn down almost 240 million barrels from the SPR over the past year, bringing its stockpile to just above 400 million barrels, its lowest level since May 1984.

Aside from trying to offset the impact of the OPEC+ production cut, Biden also appeared to be timing the new SPR release just before the November 8 US midterm elections, in order to appease Americans voters wary of high fuel prices.

The Saudis have had a trying relationship with the US since Biden took office despite the two nations being long-time strategic allies on energy and security. U.S. relations with both Russia and Saudi Arabia have hit their lowest in decades, as Biden approved sanctions against Moscow over the Ukraine conflict while accusing Riyadh of supporting the Kremlin's role in the war.

Biden has said the Saudis will have to bear the "consequences" of the OPEC+ production cuts. Minister Abdulaziz responded by saying the kingdom had been "the maturer" side in the spat with the US.

Biden's decision to release even more oil from the SPR was followed up by the Paris-based International Energy Agency, or IEA, which said its members also had emergency oil supplies available for release, if needed.

"We still have [a] huge amount of stocks to be released, in case we see supply disruptions," Fatih Birol, executive director of the IEA, said. "Currently it is not on the agenda, but it can come anytime."

Some analysts, however, believe oil prices will rise in coming months, regardless of the turn taken by the weather or China's lockdowns. They anticipate supply will tighten from Europe's impending ban on most oil imports from Russia and the West's move to restrict Russian shippers from the global shipping insurance industry.

The ban on Russian oil will conceivably tighten world shipping markets, which could also increase the price of oil. Many analysts believe Russia will be able to circumvent the measures, but it could still cause Moscow to cut between 1 million and 2 million barrels of daily production; it could also hit the distillates markets.

"Until 2024 we believe oil price will be strongly influenced by the availability of tankers that are willing to transport Russian oil rather than global supply-demand fundamentals, keeping oil price elevated," analysts at JP Morgan wrote.

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US Awards Lockheed Martin \$580Mln for Trident Missile Production, Support - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, November 2 (Sputnik) - Lockheed Martin won a contract modification worth more than \$580 million for Trident missile production and deployed systems support that will also benefit a foreign military sale to the UK, the Defense Department said in a press release. "Lockheed Martin Space, Titusville, Florida, is being awarded a \$581,181,943... contract for Trident II (D5) missile production and deployed systems support," the release said on Tuesday. "This contract award also benefits a foreign military sale to the United Kingdom."

US Navy maintenance and weapons procurement funds were obligated for the sole source contract, which is expected to be completed by September 30, 2027, the Defense Department said.

Strategic Systems Programs, Washington, DC, is the contracting activity, according to the release.

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Counter Ransomware Initiative Members Agree to Build Cyber Attack Resilience - Statement

WASHINGTON, November 2 (Sputnik) - The International Counter Ransomware Initiative (CRI) member states have agreed during their second summit in Washington to develop resilience to cyber attacks and hold those responsible for such attacks accountable, the member states said in a joint statement.

"At the Second CRI Summit, members re-affirmed our joint commitment to building our collective resilience to ransomware, cooperating to disrupt ransomware and pursue the actors responsible, countering illicit finance that underpins the ransomware ecosystem, working with the private sector to defend against ransomware attacks, and continuing to cooperate internationally across all elements of the ransomware threat," the joint statement, published by the White House, said on Tuesday.

The summit, which took place October 31-November 1, gathered CRI members Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Germany, India,

Israel, Italy, Japan, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States, Ukraine and the European Union.

The member states said in the joint statement that building their resilience to ransomware attacks requires effective policies and cooperation with trusted partners and that they seek to establish a task force achieve those goals.

"CRI members are building a network of trusted partners to share and disseminate ransomware-related threat information to increase our collective resilience to ransomware attacks. To that end, we intend to establish a voluntary International Counter Ransomware Task Force (ICRTF) to develop cross-sectoral tools and cyber threat intelligence exchange to increase early warning capabilities and prevent attacks, as well as consolidate policy and best practice frameworks," the joint statement said.

The ICRTF expects to produce public reports on tools, tactics and procedures to improve awareness to global stakeholders, promote and encourage membership of the CRI, the joint statement also said.

"We commit to establish processes to most effectively share information and analysis about specific strains of ransomware on an ongoing and enduring basis to improve our collective awareness and resilience," it said. "CRI members are committed to taking action, in line with national law and policy, to disrupt and degrade the ransomware ecosystem and hold accountable criminal ransomware actors based on our collective knowledge, expertise, authorities, and capabilities."

The members states also vowed to work together to prioritize "disruption targets" and increase the number and impact of their disruption actions.

"The CRI is committed not only to protecting ourselves and each other from ransomware, but also to helping other countries protect and disrupt so that ransomware is unable to gain traction worldwide. To that end, we intend to share technical and threat information and provide protection and remediation recommendations as broadly as possible," the joint statement said.

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UNSC to Vote Wednesday on Russian Proposal to Probe Ukraine Bio Lab Activities - Source

UNITED NATIONS, November 2 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council will vote on Wednesday on a proposal by Russia to launch an investigation into the activities of biological laboratories in Ukraine, a diplomatic source told Sputnik.

"There is a vote on the Russian Federation's text on bioweapons," the source said on Tuesday. The UN Security Council will vote on a draft resolution calling for an inquiry commission on Wednesday afternoon, the source said.

Last week, Russia sent a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and UN Security Council President for October, Michel Xavier Biang, requesting that a commission investigates compliance by the United States and Ukraine with their biological research obligations.

The commission would seek to clarify US biological research activities in Ukraine that Russia

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Ships With Ukrainian Grain Expected to Resume Passage via Black Sea Thursday - UN Official

UNITED NATIONS, November 2 (Sputnik) - Ships loaded with Ukrainian grain are expected to resume their passage in the Black Sea on Thursday under the terms of the UN-brokered grain exports agreement - formally known as the Black Sea Grain initiative - despite a pause in the passages the day before, United Nations Coordinator for the Joint Coordination Center (JCC) Amir Abdulla said.

"Exports of grain and foodstuffs from Ukraine need to continue. Although no movements of vessels are planned for 2 November under the Black Sea Grain Initiative, we expect loaded ships to sail on Thursday," Abdulla said via Twitter on Tuesday.

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US, Ecuador to Establish Fair Trade Working Group - US Trade Representative

WASHINGTON, November 2 (Sputnik) - The United States and Ecuador agreed on Tuesday to establish a Fair Trade Working Group and to explore negotiations on digital trade, labor, and environment, according to a statement released by US Trade representative Katherine Tai.

"The leaders agreed to establish a Fair Trade Working Group and explore potential negotiations on labor, environment, and digital trade. In addition, Ambassador Tai and Minister Prado agreed to consider possible sectoral approaches in future engagement," according to the statement.

The agreement comes after a meeting between Tai and Prado in Washington last Friday.

"The protocol is a centerpiece of the bilateral work achieved under the Trade and Investment Council (TIC) and new negotiations intend to pursue a worker-centered trade policy that fosters greater trade, investment, and cooperation between both countries," the USTR said in its statement.

The sides also agreed to hold a new Trade and Investment Council meeting in the first half of 2023 to review developments.

The Trade Investment Council between Ecuador and the US was established in 1990 and updated in 2021, with some of the top US imports from Ecuador including petroleum fuels, fish, and edible fruits.

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US Launches Demining Training Project in Ukraine Worth \$47.6Mln - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 2 (Sputnik) - The United States has launched a demining training project in Ukraine by awarding \$47.6 million to Tetra Tech, Inc., the US State Department said.

"On September 30, the Department awarded \$47.6 million to Tetra Tech, Inc. of Pasadena, California to provide urgent humanitarian demining assistance to Ukraine," the State Department said in a press release on Tuesday.

Tetra Tech will assist the government of Ukraine in strengthening its capacity to locate and remove landmines, unexploded and abandoned ordnance, improvised explosive devices and other explosive hazards from civilian areas, the release said.

The company will train the Ukrainian government and explosive ordnance disposal teams to international standards and provide them with the necessary tools, the release said.

The new funding is a part of a total of \$91.5 million in demining assistance that the State Department is planning to provide to Ukraine over the coming year, the release added.

Last week, the United States announced a new \$275 million military assistance package for Ukraine that includes ammunition for HIMARS launchers, 500 precision-guided 155mm artillery rounds, 2,000 155mm rounds of Remote Anti-Armor Mine systems, 1,300 anti-armor systems, 125 High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles.

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REVIEW - China, Weather May Impact Near-Term Oil Prices More Than OPEC+ Cuts, US Reserves Release

WASHINGTON, November 2 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden keeps releasing emergency oil supplies to bring fuel prices down while OPEC+ carries out its biggest output cuts since the coronavirus outbreak to bring a barrel back towards \$100. Yet, two things might matter more in the near-term to crude prices: the weather and China.

In one of the most unseasonable starts to the pre-winter season in the Northern Hemisphere, the fall weather from September through October has been warmer than usual, setting up the possibility that December could extend the trend.

That could spell trouble for those betting on crude prices to surge from next month from North American and European demand for heating oil, which usually rises in December and peaks in January and February.

The other phenomenon is China, which continues to practice 2020-style COVID-19 lockdowns when the rest of the world has moved on from the pandemic. Millions of people have been trapped in whole Chinese cities - sometimes in the strangest of locations - under Beijing's controversial zero-Covid policy.

In Shanghai this week, the local outlets of Swedish furniture giant Ikea and Disney were among places targeted by China's COVID police. The lockdown of the theme park, particularly, made global headlines as people were told they wouldn't be allowed out until they could show a negative COVID test result.

However, according to media reports, an unverified note circulating on social media said a "Reopening Committee" formed by Chinese Politburo Standing Member Wang Huning was

reviewing overseas COVID data to assess various reopening scenarios, including dropping most curbs by spring 2023.

Thus, warm US weather and lockdowns in China could influence crude prices more in the near term than the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, or SPR, release by the Biden administration as well as the 2-million-barrels-per-day cuts by the Saudi-and-Russia dominated Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies, also known as OPEC+, say analysts.

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Western States Want to Use Outer Space as Arena for Military Operations - Foreign Ministry

UNITED NATIONS, November 2 (Sputnik) - The countries of the collective West are trying to use outer space as an arena for confrontation and to conduct military activities, Russian deputy representative at the UN First Committee on Disarmament Konstantin Vorontsov said.

"We see in this approach, the attempt of Western states to consolidate the use of outer space as an arena for confrontation and possible military activities or in other words - regionalize the possibility of the use of force and carrying out military operations in outer space as provided in the doctrines of these states," Vorontsov said on Tuesday.

Russia calls on member states to adopt commitments that favor weapons-free outer space, Vorontsov added.

Earlier on Tuesday, the UN First Committee adopted three resolutions proposed by Russia on activities in outer space. The resolutions call on states to explore outer space in accordance with international law and prevent arms race in the interest of international peace. The resolutions also state that the current regime does not prevent the possibility of a war in outer space and urge them to come up with a consolidated plan to address the issue.

The UN First Committee - one of six United Nations committees - focuses its work on the issue of disarmament. The UN committees typically start their work after the end of the High Level Week in November or December.

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Suspect in Pelosi Attack Pleads "Not Guilty" to Charges - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) --David DePape, the suspect in the attack on Paul Pelosi, was arraigned on Tuesday afternoon in San Francisco, where he pleaded "not guilty" to charges of attempted murder, among others, according to the San Francisco Standard.

DePape's public defender, Adam Lipson, spoke at a press conference on Tuesday following DePape's court hearing, announcing that DePape had waived his right to a hearing within 10 days.

DePape, who suffered a dislocated shoulder during his arrest, signed a protective order agreeing to stay away from the speaker and her husband.

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Paul Pelosi Hammer Attack Suspect Held Without Bail, Hearing Set for Friday - Attorney

WASHINGTON, November 2 (Sputnik) - The suspect charged with attacking Paul Pelosi, husband of US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, will be held without bail ahead of a court session on Friday to set further appearances, defense attorney Adam Lipson said following an arraignment hearing.

David DePape, 42, is being charged with crimes including attempted murder, assault with a deadly weapon and elder abuse for allegedly attacking Pelosi with a hammer, San Francisco District Attorney Brooke Jenkins announced on Monday.

"[DePape] is currently being held without bail. Friday is the setting of the preliminary hearing," Lipson said on Tuesday. "The bail hearing will probably be set in conjunction with the preliminary hearing at some later date."

DePape is facing both state and federal charges for the alleged attack, meaning that federal authorities would arrest DePape even if San Francisco were to release him, Lipson said.

DePape is being charged with one count of assault of an immediate family member of a US official with intent to retaliate on account of official duties, as well as one count of attempted kidnapping of a US official on account of their duties, the Justice Department also announced on Monday.

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Two US Police Officers Shot While Serving Warrant Tuesday in New Jersey - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 2 (Sputnik) - Two police officers were shot in New Jersey earlier in the day while serving a warrant, NBC reported citing law enforcement sources.

The report said on Tuesday that the officers were shot by a suspect armed with a long gun who fled to the top of a nearby building.

One officer was shot in the neck while the other was hit in the leg, but both officers are expected to survive, the report said.

The suspect only fired two shots from an elevated position near the home where officers were serving a warrant, the report said.

The suspect is not in custody, but officers are believed to have a building surrounded where the suspect may be inside, the report said.

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UN First Committee on Disarmament Adopts 3 Russian Resolutions on Outer Space - Vorontsov

UNITED NATIONS, November 2 (Sputnik) - The UN First Committee on Disarmament on Tuesday adopted three resolutions submitted by Russia on activities in outer space, Russia's deputy representative on the Committee Konstantin Vorontsov said.

The resolutions call on states to explore outer space in accordance with international law and prevent an arms race in the interest of international peace. The documents also note that the current regime does not prevent the possibility of a war in outer space and urge the states to come up with a consolidated plan to address the issue.

"Our position of principle throughout several decades remains unchanged - ensuring that this goal is achieved as possibly only by developing a multilateral legally binding agreement that would be comprehensive in nature and would be aimed strictly at preventing an arms race in outer space," Vorontsov said on Tuesday.

Earlier in the day, the UN First Committee did not adopt a resolution proposed by Russia to prohibit the use of chemical, biological and toxin weapons and bring any violators to justice. The UN First Committee - one of six United Nations committees - focuses its work on the issue of disarmament. The UN committees typically start their work after the end of the High Level Week in November or December.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY
WASHINGTON, November 2 (Sputnik) -

GRAIN EXPORTS AGREEMENT

* The United States continues to see ships carrying grain leaving Ukraine and considers that to be a "good thing" after Russia suspended participation in the grain exports agreement, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Tuesday.

* The suspension of ship traffic under the Black Sea grain agreement for November 2 is a temporary and extraordinary measure after Russia halted its participation in the agreement, United Nations deputy spokesperson Farhan Haq said.

* Russian President Vladimir Putin informed Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan about the reasons for Russia's decision to suspend the grain agreement, the Kremlin's press service said.

* Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu confirmed during a phone conversation the need to obtain guarantees that humanitarian maritime corridors would not be used for military purposes, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS

* Western countries are pushing the world toward a global war, only a complete and final victory of Russia is a guarantee against global conflict, Russian Security Council Deputy Chairman Dmitry Medvedev said on Tuesday.

* Ukraine must provide guarantees that the humanitarian corridor in the Black Sea will not be used for military purposes, Russian Foreign Ministry said.

* US Assistant Secretary for European Affairs Karen Donfried is paying a two-day visit to Ukraine for talks with senior leaders aimed at highlighting Washington's "unwavering support," the State Department said.

* The US Defense Department will continue to work closely with Congress on securing funding for Ukraine security aid despite concerns that a Republican-led US House of Representatives could be less willing to provide assistance to Kiev, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder told reporters.

TURKEY-RUSSIA TALKS

* Russian President Vladimir Putin confirmed to his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Russia's readiness to supply significant volumes of grain and fertilizers to Africa free of charge, the Kremlin said on Tuesday.

* Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan discussed the results of the Russia-Azerbaijan-Armenia summit in Sochi, the Kremlin said.

* Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu discussed the situation around the grain deal by phone with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, the Turkish Foreign Ministry said.

* During a telephone conversation with Erdogan, Putin underscored the need to carry out a detailed investigation of the incident in the Black Sea and receive guarantees of Kiev's compliance with Istanbul agreements, the Kremlin's press service said.

* Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan discussed the results of the Russia-Azerbaijan-Armenia summit in Sochi, the Kremlin said.

US-CHINA RELATIONS

* The United States has seen no indications that China has supplied or intends to supply any military capabilities to aid Russia in the conflict with Ukraine, US Defense Department spokesperson Gen. Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.

* The United States is still working on the modalities of a potential meeting between US President Joe Biden and his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, during the G20 summit in Bali this month, Kirby said.

GLOBAL ENERGY markets

* Oil production in Russia amounted to 9.9 million barrels per day in October, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said on Tuesday.

* Russia's Rosneft announced on Tuesday that it had fulfilled all its obligations to pay dividends for 2021 to all shareholders, including UK energy giant BP.

* Russia and Iran have already started swap deliveries of energy resources, in particular petroleum products, and have agreed to expand the list of supplied goods, Novak said.

* Japan Oil, Gas and Metals National Corporation (JOGMEC) maintains interest in the Russian-led liquefied natural gas project, Arctic LNG 2, and continues to finance it, JOGMEC CEO Tetsuhiro Hosono said.

* Gazprom's exports to non-CIS countries decreased by 42.6% year-on-year to 91.2 billion cubic meters of gas over 10 months, the company said.

NORD STREAM PIPELINES INVESTIGATION

* Russia has just begun to examine the Nord Stream pipelines, there are no official results yet, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said on Tuesday.

* A conclusion on the possibility of repairing the Nord Stream gas pipelines should be given by specialists, so far, there are no decisions on this matter, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said

* It is necessary to first systematize all data concerning the sabotage at the Nord Stream gas pipelines, Peskov said, commenting on a possibility of Russia turning to the UN Security Council over the matter.

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Blinken to Discuss Range of Iran-Related Issues at G7 Ministerial Meeting - US State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will discuss anti-government protests in Iran and other issues pertinent to the situation in that country, among other issues, during the upcoming Group of Seven (G7) ministerial meeting in Germany, Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for International Organizations Affairs Nerissa Cook said on Tuesday.

Blinken will visit Germany from November 3-4 for the G7 foreign ministers' meetings on topics including Iran, the conflict in Ukraine, climate change and global health security, the US State Department said earlier in the day.

"On Friday, November 4, the Secretary will attend morning meetings focused on the ongoing protests in Iran and the violent response by the regime," Cook said during a press briefing. "I would not be surprised if other elements of Iran are discussed, but we do not want to prejudge how that discussion goes."

The discussion on Iran comes amid public protests around the country, sparked by the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini. Demonstrators allege Amini was beaten by Iran's so-called Morality Police, while the government contends she suffered a heart attack while in custody and has provided video evidence to that effect.

The Biden administration has expressed support for the protesters in Iran and taken steps to try to bolster internet access in the country, while also sanctioning a number of Iranian officials. The G7 meeting comes amid allegations of Iran provisioning drones for use by Russia in Ukraine, which both Moscow and Tehran deny.

The meeting also comes amid stalled negotiations that intended to revive the Iran nuclear agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The Biden administration claims that Iran has not come forward with a constructive response to its proposals, while Iran asserts that it is ready to resume negotiations on the nuclear deal as soon as the United States is willing to do so.

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Elon Musk Says Twitter to Charge \$8 Per Month for Verified Account

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - Elon Musk on Tuesday suggested that Twitter could soon charge users \$8 per month for the platform's blue checkmark badge indicating their account has been verified, with the price to be adjusted by country.

"Twitter's current lords & peasants system for who has or doesn't have a blue checkmark is bullshit. Power to the people! Blue for \$8/month," Musk tweeted.

The price of the service, he said, will be "adjusted by country proportionate to purchasing power parity."

Twitter currently charges users \$4.99 per month for its so-called "Blue" subscription service that includes additional features such as access to free articles and an "undo" tweet.

But Musk appeared to indicate that users who are currently verified would lose this status unless they enroll in the newly priced Blue subscription service.

Musk said verified Twitter users would gain priority in replies, mentions and searches as well as the ability to post long video and audio.

"There will be a secondary tag below the name for someone who is a public figure, which is already the case for politicians," Musk said.

Musk last week closed a \$44 billion deal to purchase Twitter after starting negotiations with the social media company in April.

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Saudi, US Forces on High Alert Over Threat of 'Imminent' Iranian Attack - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - The United States has been warned by Saudi Arabia via shared intelligence of an "imminent" attack from Iran in a move that put the American military and other militaries in the Middle East on an "elevated alert" level, The Wall Street Journal reported on Tuesday, citing Saudi and US officials.

According to Saudi officials, in order to distract attention from domestic protests, Iran is poised to carry out attacks on the kingdom and Iraq's Erbil, where Americans troops are based.

The White House National Security Council expressed concern over the warnings and said that it was ready to respond if Iran went forward with an attack.

"We are concerned about the threat picture, and we remain in constant contact through military and intelligence channels with the Saudis," a National Security Council spokesperson said, as quoted in the report. "We will not hesitate to act in the defense of our interests and partners in the region."

Iraq has already been under fire by Iran, which has utilized "dozens" of ballistic missiles and armed drones since September, the report noted.

Tehran has publicly placed blame for the unrest at home on the shoulders of alleged Iranian Kurdish separatist groups based in Erbil. Iran has also accused Israel, the US, and Saudi Arabia of instigating the ongoing demonstrations.

Iran has seen a wave of protests following the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in the custody of the morality police in September. Protesters accuse law enforcement officers of beating the young woman. Iranian authorities say she had a heart attack, after which she was immediately taken to a nearby hospital.

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Canada to Impose Sanctions to Hold Iran Accountable for Human Rights Violations - Minister

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - Canada will continue to impose sanctions on Iran in order to hold Tehran accountable for engaging in human rights violations, Foreign Minister Melanie Joley said on Tuesday.

"We are going to announce more sanctions, we will work on implementation of sanctions, we will announce more funding to do so," Joley informed lawmakers in Parliament.

Joley characterized the human rights situation in Iran as being "completely unacceptable."

The Canadian government is taking "strong measures" against the authorities in Iran, including sanctions, she said.

On Monday, Canada announced implementing new sanctions on four Iranian individuals and two entities for alleged involvement in human rights violations and malign foreign activities. The sanctions come in response to the suppression of anti-government protests in Iran, sparked by the death of 22-year old Mahsa Amini in police custody.

While demonstrators have claimed that Amini died because she was beaten by Iran's so-called Morality Police, the Iranian authorities have said she died of a heart attack and provided video footage of Amini collapsing in a detention processing facility.

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REVIEW - Polls Show Republican Edge in US Midterm Elections, But Races Still Competitive 1 Week Out

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - One week from today US voters cast final ballots in the midterm elections to determine control of Congress going into President Joe Biden's second term, with polls showing Republicans well-positioned to seize the House while the battle for the Senate appears likely to come down to the wire.

On November 8, all 435 seats in the House of Representatives and 35 seats in the Senate will be up for grabs as Democrats seek to keep their legislative majority and Republicans vie for the ability to implement a policy agenda of their own.

Polls and analysts trend towards giving the Republicans an edge one week out from midterms, although races remain competitive as issues like the economy, inflation and abortion, continue to factor into voters' decisionmaking leading up to Election Day.

With races so tight, officials are also taking steps to ensure that elections are held securely and without interference that could potentially impact results.

SENATE

Democrats currently maintain a majority in the Senate, with 48 party members, two independents and Vice President Kamala Harris' vote as president of the chamber putting them in control. Republicans hold 50 seats at the present time.

Democrats hold 14 of the Senate seats up for grabs in the midterms, while Republicans hold 21. Although 35 of the Senate's 100 seats will be contested during midterms, several key races are positioned to determine control of the chamber. Senate races are particularly close in state such as Arizona, Georgia, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, all of which are also traditionally considered "battleground" locations in presidential elections.

Current Pennsylvania Senator Pat Toomey, a Republican, announced in October 2020 that he would not seek re-election. Democrat John Fetterman, the state's lieutenant governor, now challenges Republican surgeon and television star Mehmet Oz for the seat.

The race between Fetterman and Oz remains close, with the RealClearPolitics' (RCP) average of the most recent polls for November 1 giving Fetterman a 1.5 point lead.

In Georgia, Democratic incumbent Raphael Warnock, elected during a special runoff election in 2021, faces Republican challenger Herschel Walker, a former National Football League player. RCP's average has Walker up 1.6 points over Warnock, predicting a December runoff due to the tight race. Under Georgia state law, a runoff election will occur on December 6 if no candidate garners more than 50% of the vote, which is possible in this Senate race because of its competitiveness and the presence of Libertarian Party candidate Chase Oliver.

In Wisconsin, Republican incumbent Ron Johnson faces Democratic challenger Mandela Barnes. Johnson holds a 3.3 point lead over Barnes, according to RCP's average for November 1.

In Nevada, Democrat Catherine Cortez Masto defends her Senate seat against Republican Adam Laxalt, the state's former attorney general. The seat could swing either way, with the RCP average placing Laxalt ahead by less than 1 percent.

Other notable Senate races include the elections in Arizona and Utah. Arizona's Democratic incumbent, Mark Kelly, won a special election for the Senate seat in 2020. Republican entrepreneur Blake Masters is now challenging him for the position, but is down by 2.4 points. A Republican group dumped \$5 million into the race to run ads tying Kelly to Biden administration policies and inflation, Club for Growth told Axios on Saturday.

US Senator for Utah Mike Lee is being challenged for his seat not by a Democrat, but by Independent Evan McMullin, who would become the first non-Republican to represent the state in the Senate since 1977 if victorious.

However, an Emerson College poll released October 31 shows 49% of voters supporting Lee and 39% supporting McMullin.

HOUSE

Of the 435 House seats up for grabs, Democrats currently hold 220 while Republicans hold 212. There are also three vacant seats. A total of 218 seats are needed to obtain a majority in the lower chamber.

RCP lists 228 House seats as likely or leaning Republican, 174 seats likely or leaning Democrat and 33 seats as toss-ups. A majority of the toss-up seats, 28 of 33, are held by Democrats. Numbers in some House races are "not where they should be," former White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said in October. Democrats are worried and fearful of where the momentum is headed, Psaki said.

Control of the House is of particular importance for continuing elevated levels of security aid to Ukraine, following a statement by current House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy saying that Republicans will not continue to write Kiev a "blank check" if given a majority.

McCarthy is a favorite to become Speaker of the House if Republicans win control of the chamber.

Republican control of the House, as well as the Senate, could also impede Biden's efforts to codify federal abortion protections – legislation he promised to pass if Democrats retain their majority – and pass other governing priorities such as an assault weapons ban.

A Gallup poll on Tuesday found that approval of presidential and congressional job performances are at 40% and 21% respectively. The party of the incumbent president typically loses seats during midterm elections when the president's approval rating falls below 50% and Congress's approval rating below 35%, the poll noted.

SECURITY

The midterm will be the first nationwide, federal election since 2020, following which demonstrators stormed the US Capitol on January 6, 2021 to disrupt the certification of electoral results in favor of Biden.

The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is focused on securing both cyber and physical aspects of the nation's election system ahead of midterms, Rob Silver, DHS Under Secretary for Strategy, Policy, and Plans, said in October.

DHS is working on securing election infrastructure such as voter registration databases and voting equipment, Silvers said. The department is also addressing physical security concerns at polling places and vote tabulation centers amid threats to election administrators, Silvers added. On Election Day, DHS will run a 24/7 watch operation and maintain live contact with state and local election officials, according to Silvers.

Moreover, the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) has deployed 40 long-term observers across the US and 17 experts in Washington to monitor the midterm elections.

Voting rights in the US are subject to numerous restrictions, including restrictions on the voting rights of inmates, former felons and the disabled, an OSCE interim report analyzing the US electoral environment found. The Democratic and Republican parties are engaged in campaigns marked by "intensely divisive and at times inflammatory rhetoric," the OSCE also found.

With absentee voting by mail possible in all 50 states, claims continue to circulate that absentee ballots are more susceptible to fraud, impacting trust in the electoral process, the OSCE added. OSCE will release a report on its preliminary findings about the midterms on November 9.

Millions of Americans have already cast ballots through early voting across the US, with more than 7.8 million ballots cast as of October 24 – exceeding the previous record set during the 2018 midterms.

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RECAST - US Engages With Russia on Normalization of Work of Embassy in Moscow - State Dept.

(Recasts to fix quote; adds details in lede, paras 2, 4)

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - The United States has contacted Russia to keep its embassy in Moscow operational despite tensions, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday.

Price stressed that the viability of the embassy in Moscow is "of the utmost importance" to the United States, especially in times of tension and conflict.

"The US Embassy in Moscow, the Russian Embassy here in Washington, they both remain operational of course. It has not been without challenges. The Russians, we believe, had imposed onerous restrictions. But we have engaged with Moscow to try to address some of those restrictions to maintain our ability to operate the embassy in Russia so that we can continue that vital line of communication and that vital line of dialogue with the government of Russia," Price told a briefing.

The US embassy is in a position to address a number of bilateral issues on a day to day basis, whether it's consular issues or issues related to Americans "unlawfully detained" in Russia or any other bilateral issues, Price said.

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US Arms Inspection Personnel in Ukraine Will Not Be Sent to Frontline - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - The arms inspections of the military capabilities supplied to Ukraine will be carried out by US embassy personnel in Kiev and far away from the frontline amid Russia's special military operation in that country, Defense Department spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.

"In terms of personnel that is conducting these inspections, my understanding is they would be well far away from any type of frontline actions. We're relying on the Ukrainians to do that," Ryder said during a press briefing. "These are [US embassy] personnel that are going out in areas where they're not going to be in harm's way to conduct these types of inspections." Ryder could not clarify whether the inspections in Ukraine will be conducted by military or civilian personnel but added that no combat squads will be taking part in them.

On Thursday, the US State Department launched a plan to address the potential flow of weapons sent to Ukraine into the illegal arms trade.

A US Defense Department official said last week that the United States is working with Ukraine to ensure internal monitoring of weapons from logistics hubs to the frontline. Washington is also working with other allies to strengthen external controls on arms, the official said.

US personnel are engaged in on-site inspections of weapons stocks when and where security conditions allow it, the official added.

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BAE Systems Opens New \$100Mln Navigation, Sensors Systems Complex in US State of Iowa

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - The British arms and aerospace company BAE Systems has opened a new \$100 million complex as the center for its navigation and Global Positioning System (GPS) sensors business in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, the company announced in a press release on Tuesday.

"The company invested more than \$100 million to build the state-of-the-art facility," the release said. "The site is home to BAE Systems' Navigation and Sensor Systems (NSS) business, a leader in advanced GPS technology."

The 278,000-square-foot (25,827 square meter) facility combines BAE's design and production employees into a single center with modern manufacturing, engineering and office space, release said.

"Its design will provide flexible product flow to optimize efficiency, with room for growth. More than 800 BAE Systems employees will work at the Cedar Rapids site as the company continues to expand its workforce to accommodate business growth," the release added.

BAE Systems designs and produces advanced GPS technology that also improves security and anti-jamming capabilities for critical defense applications, according to the release.

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Pentagon Says Fiscal Year 2022 US Military Intelligence Budget Totaled \$24.1Bln

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - The United States' Military Intelligence Program budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 totaled \$24.1 billion, \$800 million more than requested, the US Department of Defense said in a statement on Tuesday.

"The Department of Defense released today the Military Intelligence Program (MIP) appropriated top line budget for FY 2022. The total MIP budget was \$24.1 billion and is aligned to support the National Defense Strategy," the statement said.

Last June, the Defense Department said it requested \$23.3 billion in MIP funding for FY 2022. However, the Defense Department requested in March \$26.6 billion in FY 2023 MIP funding. MIP accounts for less than half of US intelligence community funding, with the National Intelligence Program (NIP) requesting \$62.3 billion for FY 2022 and receiving \$65.7 billion, according to data from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

The Defense Department requested \$67.1 billion in NIP funding for FY 2023.

MIP is run by the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence, while the NIP is managed by the Director of National Intelligence. NIP funds the CIA and strategic-level activities of the National Security Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency and National Geospatial Intelligence Agency. MIP funding goes toward tactical or operational-level requirements specific to the Defense Department.

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US Embassy in Ukraine Now Increased to Dozens of Personnel - State Dept

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - The US Embassy in Kiev has now increased its number of personnel, which now stands in the dozens, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday.

"Since we reinitiated operations out of our embassy in Kiev, that number, of course, has increased. It's now, fair to say, it's in the dozens," Price said. "We can confirm there is a marine security guard attachment in Kiev working with the diplomatic security service to assist with Embassy security duties."

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. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special military operation is solely targeting Ukraine's military infrastructure.

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US Engages With Russia on Normalization of Work of Embassy in Moscow - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - The United States has contacted Russia regarding the normalization of work of its embassy in Moscow, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday.

"In Moscow, the Russian embassy here in Washington, they both for me operational. Of course, it has not been without analysis, the Russians, we believe, had imposed restrictions. But we have engaged with Moscow to try to address some of those restrictions to maintain our ability to operate the embassy in Russia so that we can continue that vital line of communication and that line of dialogue with the government of Russia," Price told a briefing.

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State Dept. Says Expects No Discussions With Russia at G20 Summit

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - The United States does not expect any contacts between the American and Russian delegations at the upcoming G20 summit in Bali, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday.

"I don't expect that there will be discussions between the United States and Russia in the context of the G20," Price told a briefing. "But it is fair to say that the viability of our embassy in Moscow is of the utmost importance to us principally because we believe that even in times of tension ... it is vitally important that we'd be able to communicate, and we'd be able to communicate openly with one another."

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Us has contacted Russia regarding normalization of work of embassy in Moscow - State Department
Sputnik

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US Has Inspected 10% of Weapons Sent to Ukraine Requiring Special Oversight - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - US personnel have only inspected approximately 10% of weapons provided to Ukraine requiring special oversight, The Washington Post reported on Tuesday, citing US officials familiar with the matter.

About 10% of the 22,000 weapons requiring special monitoring have been inspected by US officials in-person, the report said. Certain weapons considered at heightened risk of diversion, including Stinger surface-to-air missiles and Javelin anti-armor missiles, require increased monitoring, according to the report.

The report comes following the release of a State Department plan last week to address the potential flow of weapons sent to Ukraine into the illegal arms trade. While the US has not seen evidence that any of its weapons have been diverted from Ukraine, officials are aware of the risk of arms there ending up on the black market, a senior defense official said on Monday.

The US recently resumed on-site inspections of weapons stocks in Ukraine by embassy personnel, the senior defense official said. The inspection teams are not combat groups intended for deployment to the frontlines, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.

US officials have conducted just two in-person inspections of arms requiring special monitoring since the beginning of Russia's special military operation in February, the report said.

The US hopes to reach a reasonable level of compliance with oversight rules for high-risk items, the report said. However, officials acknowledge that 100% completion of normal checks and inventories is unlikely, the report also said.

The Biden administration is seeking to reform oversight rules as US aid to Ukraine increases and congressional scrutiny into the funding grows, the report added.

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US Deploying Nuclear Bombers to Australia Sends Message to Indo-Pacific Region - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - The planned deployment of nuclear-capable B-52 bomber aircraft by the United States to Australia sends a message of the US military capability to partners and potential adversaries in the Indo-Pacific region, Defense Department spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.

On Monday, Australian media reported that the United States plans to develop a facility at the Tindal Air Base in Australia that is the capable of housing up to six B-52 bombers.

“When it comes to aircraft rotating through Australia, we have a long-standing relationship with Australia and it’s not uncommon for us to send aircraft through to participate in joint exercises, combined exercises with Australia,” Ryder said during a press briefing. “It does send a clear signal to countries in the region, first of all, that the US is a reliable partner and that we do maintain capabilities to be available to respond to a variety of contingencies worldwide.”

The rotation also sends a clear message that the United States maintains the ability to deter and engage adversaries in the region, Ryder added.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said the deployment of the B-52 aircraft to Australia undermines peace and stability in the region and could also provoke an arms race.

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Biden, His Top Advisers Quietly Preparing for Re-Election Bid - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - Biden has been meeting privately with a very small group of senior advisers at the White House residence to prepare for a potential 2024 re-election campaign, The Washington Post reported on Tuesday, citing multiple people familiar with the planning.

Biden, who would turn 86 years old before completing a second term in office, has not yet formally announced any plans to run for re-election.

But according to the report, Biden has been involved in planning discussions with his top White House advisers Anita Dunn and Jen O'Malley Dillon, both of whom played senior roles in his 2020 election campaign.

Dunn and O'Malley Dillon have also been in contact with veterans from the re-election campaigns of two past Democratic presidents, Barack Obama and Bill Clinton, according to the report.

The White House strategy is to do everything to prepare for a potential re-election bid, even if Biden decides to pull back from the race at the last minute.

According to the report, Biden will be more likely to run if Trump enters the race, as Biden and many other Democrats consider him the best candidate to defeat his predecessor, as he did in the 2020 election.

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US, Albania to Convene UN Security Council Meeting Wednesday on Iran Protests - Statement

UNITED NATIONS, November 1 (Sputnik) - The United States and Albania are convening a UN Security Council meeting on November 2 to discuss the ongoing protests in Iran, the US mission to the United Nations said in a statement on Tuesday.

"The United States and Albania will co-host a UN Security Council Arria-formula meeting on November 2 to highlight the ongoing repression of women and girls and members of religious and ethnic minority groups in Iran and underscore ongoing unlawful use of force against peaceful protesters," the statement said. "The meeting will also identify opportunities to promote credible, international, independent investigations into the Iranian government's human rights violations and abuses."

The United States will continue to condemn Iran's violent repression of women and peaceful protesters through the UN system and will keep pursuing options to hold the Iranian government accountable, the statement added.

Experts expected to brief the US Security Council include Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Iran Javaid Rehman as well as Iran human rights defender and Nobel Peace Prize Winner Shirin Ebadi.

In September, riots erupted in Iran in connection with the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, who passed away while in police custody after being detained for improperly wearing a hijab. The rioters attacked members of Iran's security forces, killing an as of yet undetermined number.

The Iranian government has said the unrest was planned and supported by Western powers who seek regime change in Tehran.

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US Goal Remains Seeing Black Sea Grain Initiative Resume - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - The United States' objective is to see the grain exports agreement, formally known as the Black Sea Initiative, resume, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday.

"It is our goal to see this Initiative that is to save the ability of ships to leave Ukrainian ports... to see that resumed," Price said during a briefing.

On October 29, the Russian Defense Ministry said that Moscow was suspending its participation in the grain agreement after Ukrainian drones attacked military and civilian ships in Sevastopol. The Defense Ministry said the preparations for the attacks were carried out under the guidance of United Kingdom specialists with Ukraine using the grain agreement's security corridor in the Black Sea.

On July 22, Russia and Ukraine signed agreements brokered by the United Nations and Turkey to ensure the safe exports of grain and fertilizer from three Ukrainian ports via the Black Sea after the world body sounded an alarm over a looming global food crisis.

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Pentagon Says Engaged With Ukraine, Companies to Satisfy Kiev's Satellite Internet Needs

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - The United States remains engaged with the Ukrainian government and with private satellite internet companies to provide Kiev with the needed communications capabilities, US Defense Department spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.

"We continue to discuss Ukraine's satellite communication needs with Ukraine and companies like SpaceX and others," Ryder said during a press briefing.

However, there are no announcements regarding potential contracts or future agreements on the matter, Ryder added.

SpaceX, owned by billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk, continues to provide Ukraine with satellite internet services out of pocket amid Russia's special military operation in the country. SpaceX withdrew an earlier request to the Defense Department asking for compensation for their efforts.

The Defense Department welcomes Musk's continued support and is considering paying SpaceX for their services, a Pentagon spokesperson told Sputnik.

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US Job Openings Spike in September Toughening Federal Reserve Inflation Fight

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - The number of available jobs in the United States came in well above expectations in September, with nearly two positions for every job-seeker, the US Labor Department said on Tuesday in the latest monthly data that appeared to complicate the Federal Reserve's fight with inflation.

A robust labor market has been one the greatest redeeming qualities of the US economy over the past two years. But it is also an anathema for the Fed as robust wage growth has added to the worst inflation in four decades. The Labor Department's Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS) said there were 10.72 million available positions in September, above the estimated 9.85 million.

The JOLTS reading "reverses a recent decline and raises the risk of a tight jobs market for longer and the Fed needing to hike more", economist Adam Button said in a post on the ForexLive forum, noting that there were 1.9 positions available for every job-seeker.

The Fed is all but certain to deliver a 75-basis-point rate hike on Wednesday, the fourth of its kind, as the US central bank keeps to a series of interest rate increases to get inflation back to its target of 2% per year.

Inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index, stood at 8.2% during the year to September, not too far from the 40-year peak of 9.1% noted in the 12 months to June.

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

The JOLTS data came ahead of Friday's more important non-farm payrolls report for October, which the Fed uses as a key benchmark for rate decisions. Economists expect the US Labor Department to report that the United States added 191,000 non-farm jobs last month, versus September's growth of 263,000.

In addition to fighting inflation, the Fed also mandated to ensure "maximum employment" for Americans, which further adds to the central bank's headache in ensuring a balance between the two priorities even as it tries to cool employment in order to get price pressures down. Under the Fed's definition, maximum employment is achieved when the monthly jobless rate is at 4% or below. The central bank has scored full points on this task since the start of this year, as unemployment hit 4% in January and has stayed below that level.

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US Concerned About Threat Situation in Middle East, Engaged With Saudi Partners - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - The United States remains concerned about the security environment in the Middle East amid reports of escalated threat levels in the region emanating from Iran, US Defense Department spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.

"I'm not going to talk about specific force protection levels. I can say that we do remain concerned about the threat situation in the region," Ryder said during a press briefing when asked about the reports of raised threat levels in the Middle East.

The United States maintains regular contact with its Saudi partners on threat information that they may provide, Ryder added.

Earlier on Tuesday, US media reported that Saudi Arabia, the United States and several other countries in the Middle East raised threat levels due to the potential for imminent attacks by Iran.

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Ghana Wants to See Grain Exports Agreement Continue - Ambassador to UN

UNITED NATIONS, November 1 (Sputnik) - Ghana would like to see ships continue carrying grain safely via the Black Sea and Russia to rejoin the grain exports agreement, formally known as the Black Sea Grain Initiative for November 2, Ghanaian Ambassador to the United Nations Harold Agyemag said on Tuesday.

"We want to see it [Black Sea Grain Initiative] continue. And we hope that the Russians will be able to come back to the negotiating table," Agyemag, who presides with the UN Security Council during the month of November, said.

The fact that ships are still moving carrying grain is a good sign for many developing countries who would otherwise not have the opportunity to obtain grain, Agyemag added.

Earlier on Tuesday, UN deputy spokesperson Farhan Haq said that the Ukrainian, Turkish and United Nations delegations agreed not to plan any movement of vessels under the Black Sea Grain Initiative for November 2.

On October 29, the Russian Defense Ministry said that Moscow was suspending its participation in the grain agreement after Ukraine's drone attack targeting military and civilian ships in Sevastopol. The Defense Ministry said the preparabtions for the attacks were carried out under the guidance of United Kingdom specialists with Ukraine using the grain deal security corridor in the Black Sea.

On July 22, Russia and Ukraine signed agreements brokered by the United Nations and Turkey to ensure the safe exports of grain and fertilizer from three Ukrainian ports via the Black Sea after the world body sounded an alarm over a looming global food crisis.

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Pentagon Says Will Continue Working With Congress on Ukraine Aid as Elections Approach

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department will continue to work closely with Congress on securing funding for Ukraine security aid despite concerns that a Republican-led US House of Representatives could be less willing to provide assistance to Kiev, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder told reporters on Tuesday.

"I don't want to get ahead of the midterm elections or speculate on the outcome. I will say, we've had excellent bipartisan support to date when it comes to Ukraine. So, the Department will continue to work closely with Congress on this important issue," Ryder said during a press briefing when asked about concerns of potential funding challenges by Republicans.

US House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, a favorite to become a speaker if Republicans win control of the chamber, said lawmakers cannot keep giving Ukraine a blank check, sparking concern in the Biden administration.

However, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said he has vowed the upper chamber will continue working to get security assistance from the United States and its allies to Ukraine.

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Democrats Lose Lead Week Before Midterms, Parties Now Tied - Morning Consult Tracker
WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - The Democrats have lost their edge over the Republican Party, with US voters now equally split 46% to 46%, according to Morning Consult's Midterm Tracker report released on Tuesday.

The survey marks a low for the Democrats, who were sitting at 49% last month, and an increase for the Republicans from 44%. Morning Consult noted that Republican enthusiasm about voting has trended upward in recent weeks, and Republicans have a 3-point advantage over Democrats in terms of those who will "definitely" vote this year.

While Biden's approval rating has gone down to 42%, 56% of voters currently disapprove of the president's job performance. Seven percent of Republicans approve of his performance, and only 41% of Democratic voters "strongly approve" of the president, matching an October 21 low point.

Concerns about the economy remain the most important issue when deciding whom to vote for in the 2022 elections for 77% of voters, followed by crime (66% think it's "very important"), and gun policy (53%). Abortion is "very" important to half of voters. Morning Consult noted that the importance of violence and abortion issues could benefit the Democratic Party.

Republicans are more trusted by the electorate to handle the economy, which is by far the most important electoral issue, but overall the Democrats have held onto their narrow advantage in terms of voter trust in Congress, the findings also show.

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US Sees No Indications China Has Supplied Military Capabilities to Russia - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - The United States has seen no indications that China has supplied or intends to supply any military capabilities to aid Russia in the conflict with Ukraine, US Defense Department spokesperson Gen. Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.

"We don't have any indications at this time that China has supplied or is intending to supply any capabilities to Russia," Ryder said during a press briefing.

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Pentagon Anticipates Russia to Seek More Iranian Drones, Missiles

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) – The United States anticipates Russia will seek more Iranian drones and other capabilities, including surface-to-surface missiles, amid its ongoing conflict with Ukraine, Defense Department spokesperson Gen. Pat Ryder said on Tuesday. "We do know that Iran has provided Russia with UAVs [unmanned aerial vehicles], which we anticipate they'll likely seek more of those. We do have concerns that Russia may also seek to acquire additional advanced munition capabilities from Iran, for example, surface-to-surface missiles to use in Ukraine," Ryder said during a press briefing.

The United States will do everything possible to shed light on Russia's usage of surface-to-surface missiles on the battlefield in Ukraine, Ryder added.

Moscow and Tehran have repeatedly rejected claims that Iranian drones are being provided to Russian forces for use in Ukraine.

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 of the conflict.

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White House Still Working on Modalities of Potential Biden-Xi Meeting - Kirby

(Updates with background info in paras 3, 4)

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - The United States is still working on the modalities of a potential meeting between US President Joe Biden and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping during the Group of Twenty (G20) summit in Bali later this month, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"Our two staffs are still working out the modalities of a potential meeting between the President and President Xi," Kirby said during a press briefing. "I don't have one to announce today but there's still some staff level work going on."

Last week, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin did not confirm or deny the possibility of a meeting between Xi and Biden on the sidelines of the upcoming G20 summit. Also last week, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said that the United States and China were considering the possibility of a meeting between Xi and Biden on the sidelines of the G20 summit, which will be held in Bali from November 15-16.

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US Continues to See Ships Carrying Grain From Ukraine After Russia Quit Deal - White House

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - The United States continues to see ships carrying grain leaving Ukraine and considers it a "good thing" after Russia suspended participation in the grain

exports agreement, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"We continue to see ships leaving Ukraine full of grain, including today, and that's a good thing," Kirby said during a press briefing.

Earlier on Tuesday, UN deputy spokesperson Farhan Haq said that the Ukrainian, Turkish and United Nations delegations agreed not to plan any movement of vessels under the Black Sea Grain Initiative for November 2.

On October 29, the Russian Defense Ministry said that Moscow was suspending its participation in the grain agreement following Ukraine's drone attack targeting military and civilian ships in Sevastopol. The Defense Ministry said the preparations for the attacks were carried out under the guidance of United Kingdom specialists, with Ukraine using the grain deal security corridor. On July 22, Russia and Ukraine signed agreements brokered by the United Nations and Turkey to ensure the safe exports of grain and fertilizer from three Ukrainian ports via the Black Sea after the world body sounded the alarm over a looming global food crisis.

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Russians Sailing on Historical Boat Replica Say Alaskans Helped Them Keep Warm

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - The United States and Russia may be experiencing tensions in their bilateral relations, but ordinary Americans and Russians are treating each other with respect, Russian sailor and voyager Sergey Sinelnik told Sputnik after his recent trip from Alaska to Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula on the wooden boat Pilgrim.

"We began preparing our boat for the trip at a big dock in the US city of Homer, where the Pilgrim was stationed during winter. All the people who were near us treated us very well. Alaskans are hard workers and they have no time to think about politics: everyone needs to catch the summer season that feeds them during the entire year," Sinelnik said.

A dock guard, who had previously served in the US military, asked the Russian crew not to come back to Russia out of concern for their well-being.

"Do not go there, it is dangerous, I am worried about you," the guard said.

However, Sinelnik said he was determined to follow his plan to return to Russia.

"How is that possible? Russia is my motherland and I will go there," Sinelnik answered.

The guard then said he would pray about the Pilgrim team's safety and for peace in the region.

"I am praying for you and for peace," he said.

Sinelnik noted the guard was so determined to help that he even stopped cutting the electricity supply during his night shifts so that the crew of the Pilgrim could sleep in warmer conditions and other guards also began doing so.

The Pilgrim team experienced numerous other examples of hospitality by ordinary Americans. The Russian old believers, who have lived in the United States for decades, invited the Pilgrim crew to their school. The local administration provided water, while others shared fish, fishing rods and additional supplies.

“Although nature there is harsh, the locals’ attitude was the warmest and this is very important. If, after the current events in the world, people were also evil, then it would be three times harder for us,” Sinelnik said.

Sinelnik also recalled how warmly the crew was treated when they stopped near a small village on the island of Kodiak.

“All the locals were very welcoming, and even invited us to the bathhouse. However, this bathhouse was cold and opened to all winds, but probably it is the norm for Alaska,” Sinelnik said.

The Pilgrim, a 40-foot sailboat, started its voyage around the world in 2017 from the city of Petrozavodsk in Russia’s Karelia region. En route to the United States, the vessel visited multiple European countries, the Canary and Caribbean islands and Cape Verde.

This year, the Pilgrim completed the route from the city of Homer in Alaska to the Russian city of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy.

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Substantial Number of Ransomware Attacks Against US Linked to Russian Actors - Treasury

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - A substantial number of ransomware attacks against the United States in the latter half of 2021 were likely linked to Russia-based cyber actors, according to data released by the US Treasury Department Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) on Tuesday.

Ransomware is malicious software that encrypts and holds data hostage until a ransom is paid to hackers, often in cryptocurrency.

FinCEN released a Financial Trend Analysis report covering pertinent ransomware activities for calendar year 2021, focused on the second half of the year. The report comes in response to an increase in the number and extent of ransomware attacks on US critical infrastructure since late 2020, it said.

“Of the 793 ransomware-related incidents reported to FinCEN in Bank Secrecy Act data that occurred between 1 July 2021 and 31 December 2021, 75% (or 594) had a nexus to Russia, its proxies, or persons acting on its behalf,” the report said.

All of the top five highest grossing ransomware variants in the review period were connected to Russian cyber actors, the report said.

Russia-related ransomware accounted for 69% of ransomware incident value, with ransomware-related incidents generating a mean average monthly revenue of \$81.4 million during the review period, the report added.

While attribution of malware is difficult, Russian variants were identified by their Russian-language code, advertisement on Russian-language websites and the fact that they were designed not to attack targets in Russia and other post-Soviet states, according to the report.

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Russian Sailors on Historical Boat Replica Pilgrim Complete Trip From Alaska to Kamchatka
WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - A crew of Russian and US voyagers who are traveling around the world on the Pilgrim — a replica of the 18th century wooden Pomor boat — completed another stage of their trip by sailing from Alaska to Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula, the team captain Sergey Sinelnik told Sputnik.

"This year, we covered a distance of more than 2,000 miles from the US city of Homer in Alaska to the Russian city of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy," Sinelnik said.

The 40-foot sailboat Pilgrim started the voyage around the world in 2017 from the city of Petrozavodsk in Russia's Karelia region. On the way to the United States, the vessel visited 12 countries during its trip around Europe, and then Cape Verde, the Canary and Caribbean islands. While in North America, Pilgrim navigated through the Great Lakes and sailed along Canada's West Coast.

The boat spent the winter in Alaska while the crew went home. Sinelnik hoped to start the trip this year as early as possible, but issues related to the current geopolitical situation forced him to change his initial plans.

"My US visa was about to expire so I wanted to fly to the United States early. However, when my Aeroflot flight was canceled, I decided to stay at home with my family for some time," he said.

In April, Sinelnik finally came to the United States, where he met his chief mate Alexii Volchok, a Russian-American from Florida. Both men drove across the country to Seattle and then flew to Alaska.

With this trip, Sinelnik fulfilled his long-term dream to cross on foot the Mojave Desert and Death Valley in California.

Sinelnik was surprised that even in the desert it is rare to find an area without civilization. Almost everywhere one can see ranches, albeit abandoned, he said.

"You can still find places where you walk tens of kilometers and do not meet a single person," Sinelnik said. "There are mountains from the west and from the east and you walk along the salt flats where there is a danger that one can drown."

Sinelnik pointed out that he understood why it is called Death Valley.

"I walked over these bumps, they are not high, but there are so many of them that you can tear all your shoes. So, you walk along those bumps that are smaller, or you choose places where the water washed them out a little," he said.

After their desert adventure, Sinelnik and Volchok flew to Alaska and began preparing the Pilgrim for the next part of the maritime trip. They covered the wood with linseed oil, replaced broken sensors, mended sails, changed sheets and rigging and removed any mold inside the boat hull.

"The Bering Sea is one of the harshest seas in the world and the route from the Alaska Peninsula through the Aleut and the Commander Islands to Kamchatka is among the 14 darkest places in the world. Now, after sailing this route, I can fully agree with that," he said.

Sinelnik noted that only few vessels from Russia sailed this route between the 1990s and 2010s, and two of them had sunk. The route is known for strong winds and heavy streams, he said.

Sailing in such "dark corridors" may be dangerous even in relatively calm weather, according to Sinelnik. An additional challenge is that this area is uninhabited.

"We sailed 770 miles from Adak Island in Alaska to Russia's Commander Islands and did not see even a single inhabited island," Sinelnik said.

The crew was unable to replenish gas supplies on the island of Adak — the last inhabited island on the way to Russia — and did not meet a single person after that point, he said, adding that they had to restrict the use of their heater by using it occasionally to dry clothes.

"People are already used to the fact that everyone has Internet, WhatsApp, Telegram, and here you fall out of all this for three weeks, not just somewhere on warm islands but in the most severe places on the planet," Sinelnik said.

Russian border guards allowed the Pilgrim to enter the country via the Commander Islands although it should have gone to Chukotka or directly to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, where it is impossible to sail without encountering strong headwinds.

Having completed the trip, Sinelnik is already thinking about the next trip and dreaming of more desert voyages.

"My brother Alexander and I want to return to the Namib Desert and cross the Kalahari once again. We have already assembled a team, but let's see how it will work out," he said.

Speaking of his future plans to sail on the Pilgrim, Sinelnik said he does not want to look too far ahead.

"Probably it will be the Northern Sea route, but most likely we will go along the Kuril Islands to Sakhalin and Vladivostok," he said.

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US Can Not Conform Reports of Russian Deploying Hypersonic Missiles to Belarus - Kirby

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - The United States is unable to confirm the reports that Russia is allegedly deploying hypersonic missiles to Belarus, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"I can't confirm reports that you laid out that hypersonics are being deployed in Belarus," Kirby said.

In mid-October, Belarusian Defense Ministry international military cooperation chief Valery Revenko said that up to 170 tanks, 200 armored vehicles and 100 mortars and guns will arrive from Russia to Belarus as part of the deployment of a joint regional military grouping.

Revenko also said that some 9,000 Russian soldiers are expected to arrive in Belarus in October as part of the joint regional military group.

The decision by Belarus to unroll a joint military grouping with Russia was due to the fact the countries of the so-called collective West rejected under various pretexts most of Minsk's proposals on the need for dialogue and de-escalation.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said in October that Minsk and Moscow agreed on deploying a joint military group as the security situation on the western border of the Union State - a supranational union between Belarus and Russian founded in 2000 - was deteriorating. Russian soldiers began arriving in Belarus in mid-October and then the Belarusian defense ministry said that elements of the air force part of the joint regional military group also began to arrive from Russia.

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Kirby Says Does Not Believe Probe Into Conduct of US Troops in Afghanistan Warranted

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) – The United States does not believe that the conduct of American forces in Afghanistan warrants an investigation by the International Criminal Court (ICC), White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Tuesday. "We are not aware of any effort by the ICC to investigate the behavior of US forces in Afghanistan," Kirby said during a press briefing. "We don't believe that investigation into the conduct of US forces in Afghanistan is warranted." On Monday, ICC reopened the investigation into war crimes in Afghanistan, including into potential wrongdoings by US troops.

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UN Says Suspension of Ship Traffic Under Black Sea Grain Deal for November 2 Temporary

UNITED NATIONS, November 1 (Sputnik) - The suspension of ship traffic under the Black Sea grain deal for November 2 is a temporary and extraordinary measure after Russia halted its participation in the agreement, UN deputy spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Tuesday. "The UN Secretariat reiterates that movements and inspections carried out after the Russian Federation suspended its participation in implementation activities at the Joint Coordination Centre is a temporary and extraordinary measure," Haq said in a statement. Haq said the Ukrainian, Turkish and United Nations delegations agreed not to plan any movement of vessels in the Black Sea Grain Initiative for November 2. The UN coordinator for the Black Sea Grain Initiative, Amir Abdulla, in close cooperation with the Turkish delegation at the Istanbul-based Joint Coordination Council, is exerting all efforts to resume full participation at the JCC, according to Haq. "The JCC can best deliver on its mandate with the full and active participation of all four delegations," the UN official stressed.

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UN First Committee on Disarmament Did Not Adopt Russia's Resolution on Chemical Weapons

UNITED NATIONS, November 1 (Sputnik) - The UN First Committee on Disarmament on Tuesday did not adopt the resolution proposed by Russia to prohibit the use of chemical, biological and toxin weapons as well as bring any violators to justice.

Thirty countries voted in favor of the resolution, 65 countries voted against and 77 abstained from voting.

The resolution said it recognized "the common interest of all mankind in completely excluding the possibility of using chemical, bacteriological biological (biological) and toxin weapons" and proposed to "bring to justice" any perpetrators who would use such weapons, regardless of who they are and why they used them.

The majority of the countries comprising the collective West voted against the resolution. In trying to explain why they voted so, some countries said Russia is not a credible country to propose such a resolution given the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

Russia has said that the Western countries are not serious regarding their commitments against the use of chemical and biological weapons.

The UN First Committee - one of six United Nations committees - focuses its work on the issue of disarmament. The UN committees typically start their work after the end of the High Level Week at end in November or December.

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White House Still Working on Modalities of Potential Biden-Xi Meeting - Kirby

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - The United States is still working on the modalities of a potential meeting between US President Joe Biden and his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, during the G20 summit in Bali this month, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"Our two staffs are still working out the modalities of a potential meeting between the President and President Xi," Kirby told a briefing. "I don't have one to announce today but but there's still some staff level work going on."

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US Imposes Sanctions on 8 Individuals, 1 Entity in Somalia for Arms Trafficking - Treasury

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed sanctions on eight individuals and one entity in Somalia for their alleged involvement in weapons trafficking for the Islamic State of Somalia terror group (banned in Russia), the US Department of the Treasury said in a press release on Tuesday.

"Today, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) took action against the Islamic State in Somalia (ISIS-Somalia), its first designations against this affiliate of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)," the release said.

The US government believes that the sanctioned persons are critical elements of a weapons trafficking network that operates primarily between Yemen and Somalia and maintains strong ties with Al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab (both banned in Russia), the release said.

The list of sanctioned individuals includes Liibaan Yousuf Mohamed, Abdirahman Mohamed Omar, Mahad Isse Aden, Isse Mohamoud Yusuf, Abdirahman Fahiyeh Isse Mohamud, Mohamed Ahmed Qahiye, Ahmed Haji Ali Haji Omar and Osama Abdelmongy Abdalla Bakr, the release said.

The United States has designated Abdirahman Mohamed Omar as being the most active arms importer in Puntland, Somalia, who executed transactions in the amount of more than \$2 million over a four-year period as of 2020, the release said.

Liibaan Yousuf Mohamed has been sanctioned for being al-Shabab terror group senior operative and kidnapping facilitator in 2013, as well as an Islamic State-Somalia-associated businessman, the release said.

The United States has also designated Liibaan General Trading Co., where Liibaan Yousuf Mohamed is registered as the manager, the release said.

Ahmed Haji Ali Haji Omar was an Islamic State-Somalia commander in charge of weapons smuggling in Bari, Somalia in 2019, the release also said.

Osama Abdelmongy Abdalla Bakr is believed to be a vital supporter of Islamic State in Brazil, who was unsuccessful in his attempts to purchase lightweight weaponry and anti-drone technology from North Korea in 2016 for the benefit of terror group, the release added.

The Treasury Department cited the recent terror attack that took place on Saturday at the Sobe junction in Mogadishu, near the education ministry, and claimed the lives of at least 120 people, as the main reason for the designations, according to the release.

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Toronto Stock Exchange Briefly Halts Trading on All Marketplaces Due to Technical Issue

NEW YORK, November 1 (Sputnik) - Trading was temporarily suspended on all marketplaces of the Toronto Stock Exchange due to a technical issue, Canada's stock exchange operator TSX said in a statement Tuesday.

"TSX has halted trading on all issues on all marketplaces," the statement said. "The trading system is currently down."

TSX later said that the technical issue was resolved.

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US Supreme Court Temporarily Blocks House Panel From Accessing Trump Tax Returns - Order

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - US Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts temporarily blocked a House committee from accessing former President Donald Trump's tax returns on Tuesday, according to a court order.

"It is ordered that the mandate of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, case No. 21-5289, is hereby stayed pending further order of the undersigned or of the Court," the order read.

The House Committee on Ways and Means must file a response to the application by November 10.

Trump, who has refused to make his tax returns public per the norm for US presidents, had appealed to the Supreme Court to dodge the committee's request. The committee had argued that it needs his tax returns as part of its investigation into the IRS' auditing process for presidents.

The US Court of Appeals had upheld a previous court ruling allowing the committee to access Trump's records. Without Roberts' intervention, the ruling would have gone into effect Thursday.

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UN Says 3 Outbound Vessels Transiting Grain Deal Corridor, Russia Has Been Informed

UNITED NATIONS, November 1 (Sputnik) - Three outbound vessels are sailing through the maritime humanitarian corridor in the Black Sea on Tuesday, the Office of the UN Coordinator for the Black Sea Grain Initiative said in a new update after Russia suspended its participation in the deal.

"The UN Secretariat at the JCC reports that today three outbound vessels are transiting the maritime humanitarian corridor. The movement of these vessels has been agreed by the Ukrainian, Turkish and UN delegations to the JCC. The Russian delegation to the JCC has been informed," Ismini Palla said in a statement.

The vessels are carrying a total of 84,490 metric tons of grain and food, the statement added. On October 29, the Russian Defense Ministry said that Moscow was suspending its participation in the grain deal following Ukraine's drone attack targeting vessels of the Russian Black Sea Fleet as well as civilian ships in Sevastopol. The ministry said that preparations for the attacks were carried out under the guidance of UK specialists, with Ukraine using the Black Sea grain deal security corridor.

On Monday, the Istanbul-based Joint Coordination Center said that Ukraine, Turkey and the United Nations agreed on the traffic route for 16 vessels in the Black Sea on October 31 under the grain agreement.

Russia has said that the movement of ships along the security corridor in the Black Sea is now unacceptable, since Kiev uses it to conduct military operations against Russia.

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Falcon Heavy Booster Launches Pentagon Classified Satellites Into Orbit - SpaceX

WASHINGTON, November 1 (Sputnik) - US Space Systems Command and Elon Musk's SpaceX successfully launched on Tuesday a Heavy Falcon booster carrying a classified Department of Defense payload of several satellites into orbit, according a live broadcast, The launch took place on schedule at 9:41 a.m. EDT (13:41GMT) from Launch Complex 39A at Kennedy Space Center.

The mission, named US Space Force (USSF)-44, was the first National Security Space Launch (NSSL) on the Falcon Heavy and was the fourth Falcon Heavy since debut of the vehicle, and the first Falcon Heavy to launch since June 2019. Both jettisoned side boosters landed on target and were successfully recovered. USSF-44 will also place multiple satellites in orbit for Space Systems Command's Innovation and Prototyping Delta, SpaceX said.