

8/1/23 Tuesday

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Trump Marks Third Indictment After Four Charges Filed in Election Interference Case

Trump first received a target letter informing him last week that he was the subject of an investigation, a development that hinted a new spate of criminal charges were looming against the former president. At the time it was reported offenses included obstruction and conspiracy to defraud the US.

A third [indictment](#) was filed against former US President Donald Trump on Tuesday, revealing four new criminal charges tied to alleged efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 US election. The former president faces [charges](#) which include: conspiracy to defraud the United States, conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding, obstruction of and attempt to obstruct an official proceeding, and a conspiracy against rights.

"Despite having lost, the Defendant was determined to remain in power," the indictment said on Tuesday.

"So for more than two months following Election Day on November 3, 2020, the Defendant spread lies that there had been outcome-determinative fraud in the election and that he had actually won. These claims were false, and the Defendant knew that they were false."

The indictment lists six unnamed co-conspirators, including some attorneys and a Justice Department official who are alleged to have "enlisted" to assist Trump in his efforts to overturn the 2020 election and remain in power.

Those co-conspirators allegedly "pushed officials to ignore the popular vote" and organize "fraudulent slates of electors" in the states of Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, New Mexico, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, per the indictment.

"Trump, did knowingly combine, conspire, confederate, and agree with co-conspirators, known and unknown to the grand jury, to injure, oppress, threaten, and intimidate one or more persons in the free exercise and enjoyment of a right and privilege secured to them by the Constitution and laws of the United States — that is, the right to vote, and to have one's vote counted," the indictment reads.

No charges were brought against those six unnamed persons, and Smith declined to answer a reporter on Tuesday when asked why they were not charged.

Moments after the filing was made public, special counsel Jack Smith told reporters at a Tuesday conference that the Capitol riot events proved an "unprecedented assault on the seat of American democracy."

"As [described] in the indictment, it was fueled by lies," he said. "Lies by the defendant targeted at obstructing a bedrock function of the US government and the nation's process of collecting, counting and certifying the results of the presidential election."

"The men and women of law enforcement who defended the US Capitol on January 6 are heroes, they are patriots and they are the very best of us. They did not just defend a building or

the people sheltering in it. They put their lives on the line to defend who we are as a country and as a people," Smith continued.

"Since the attack on our Capitol, the Department of Justice has remained committed to ensuring accountability for those criminally responsible for what happened that day. This case is brought consistent with that commitment, and our investigation of other individuals continues. In this case, my office will seek a speedy trial, so that our evidence can be tested in court and judged by a jury of citizens."

Smith concluded by emphasizing the indictment is "only an allegation," and that the defendant must be presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law. A summons issued to Trump has since detailed the former president is scheduled to appear in court in Washington, DC, on Thursday. It remains unclear whether the appearance will be done in person or through video.

Trump has repeatedly condemned indictments and legal efforts filed against him. Just before news broke on the latest move by the special counsel, Trump [blasted](#) the filing as yet another add-on to efforts to crush his 2024 reelection campaign and labeled it "prosecutorial misconduct."

A [separate statement](#) issued by the Trump campaign referred to the filing as part of "un-American witch hunts" and the "latest chapter in the continued pathetic attempt by the Biden Crime Family and their weaponized Department of Justice."

The Tuesday filing marks the third time the former president has been criminally indicted.

In June, Trump was charged over the alleged mishandling of classified documents recovered by FBI agents at the former commander-in-chief's Mar-a-Lago residence in Florida in August 2022. In addition to that case, a Manhattan grand jury charged the former president for business fraud in March related to a hush money payment scheme involving adult film star Stormy Daniels.

Trump first announced on July 18 that he received a letter from Smith, notifying him that he was the target in a grand jury probe related to the January 6 attacks on Capitol Hill. Earlier Tuesday, members of the grand jury were reported to have met at the courthouse in Washington, DC. News of the indictment comes just a day after a judge in Fulton County, Georgia, rejected efforts made by Trump's legal team to toss out evidence in an ongoing criminal probe alleging interference in the 2020 election results in [the Peach State](#).

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NASA Picks Up Voyager 2 'Heartbeat' After Mistakenly Cutting Contact

The 46-year-old spacecraft lost contact with NASA after flight controllers sent the wrong command nearly two weeks ago, which cut off the spacecraft's communication with Earth.

The US' National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has finally detected a signal from Voyager 2 after losing contact with the spacecraft on July 21, it was recently revealed.

"We enlisted the help of the Deep Space Network and Radio Science groups to help to see if we could hear a signal from Voyager 2," said Suzanne Dodd, Voyager's project manager at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California.

“This was successful in that we see the ‘heartbeat’ signal from the spacecraft. So, we know the spacecraft is alive and operating. This buoyed our spirits.”

The mission team was stunned they were able to detect Voyager 2’s signal using the Deep Space Network ([DSN](#))—an “international array of giant radio antennas that supports interplanetary spacecraft missions,” as well as some of those that orbit Earth, according to NASA.

Commands sent to the spacecraft on July 21 caused the spacecraft’s antenna to point 2 degrees away from Earth, a significant enough shift that made it so the craft was unable to receive any commands from mission control or send data back to officials. Voyager 2 is located more than 12.3 billion miles (19.9 billion kilometers) away in interstellar space.

Flight controllers at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in California are now doing what they can to turn Voyager 2’s antenna back towards Earth.

“We are now generating a new command to attempt to point the spacecraft antenna toward Earth,” Dodd explained. “There is a low probability that this will work.”

If that fails, then controllers will have to wait for the spacecraft to reset its orientation on October 15. The team is hopeful the reset will allow communications to resume with the spacecraft.

“But that is a long time to wait, so (we) will try sending up commands several times prior to that date,” Dodd said.

While Voyager 2 is expected to remain on its planned trajectory, its twin Voyager 1, which is located almost 15 billion miles (24 billion kilometers) away, is operating as it should be and is in communication with the DSN.

The twin spacecrafts were first launched by NASA in 1977 from Cape Canaveral, Florida. According to NASA, they were originally designed to conduct closeup studies of Jupiter, Saturn and its rings, as well as the larger moons belonging to those planets.

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How Do World Leaders Vacation When ‘Leading’ Exactly?

While some world leaders may refer to their vacations as “working holidays,” it’s safe to say it doesn’t entirely stop them from enjoying their time in the sun.

US President Joe Biden, who is known for his love of ice cream, also knows how to find the time to enjoy the summer treat. In fact, the American president was reported to be seen relaxing on a beach in Delaware on Monday as part of a 10-day beach getaway.

The recent vacation taken by the president adds to the growing number of days he has already spent on holiday since taking office. According to reports, Biden has taken a total of 360 vacation days since taking office, amounting to nearly 40% of the time he has spent as US president.

Biden’s staff, however, has claimed the president continues his duties even when on taking some time off, with [reports](#) of the commander-in-chief being seen reading government documents while reclining on the beach.

Aides of former US President Donald [Trump](#) also claimed the former president was on a “working vacation” any time he was away from the White House. A data analysis published on in August 2020 revealed Trump spent all or a part of his 383 days of presidency at properties he or his private company owned, despite promises he made on the campaign trail prior to his election.

"I would rarely leave the White House because there's so much work to be done," Trump said to a news [outlet](#) in June 2015, the month he launched his first presidential campaign. "I would not be a president who took vacations. I would not be a president that takes time off."

Some of those locations include his Mar-a-Lago property in Palm Beach, Florida, or his golf club in Bedminster, New Jersey.

By comparison, French President Emmanuel Macron’s vacation in early August of last year sent environmentalists’ heads spinning when he was pictured jet skiing just weeks after calling on French citizens to conserve energy. On Bastille Day of that year, Macron told his citizens: “We must prepare for a scenario where we have to manage completely without Russian gas.”

Jet skis, however, can emit about [730](#) pounds of carbon dioxide (CO2) within three hours of use.

“This confirms the persistent impression that he does not understand climate change,” Green Member of Parliament Sandrine Rousseau said at the time of the jet ski drama. “And nowadays, it is criminal not to understand it.”

Recently, Macron, who enraged French citizens by using his constitutional powers to push through a controversial [pension](#) reform that would extend the retirement age, has told his ministers to keep their vacations modest this year in an effort to keep outraged voters calm. Ministers, according to a report, were requested to stay within two hours of the nearest government office and to not take vacations to any destination deemed “distant” or “exotic.” Elsewhere, Russian President Vladimir Putin, took his most recent vacation about two years ago in September of 2021. The Russian president is known to be an avid outdoorsman who prefers to spend his vacations close to home. In 2021, after a work-related trip to Russia’s Far

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East, Putin stopped for a few days in Siberia to enjoy hiking and fishing.

Hervé Pierre Braillard, the designer who was paid by super PAC Save America \$108,000 as a “consultant” for Melania Trump, has also designed inaugural ball gowns for Hillary Clinton, Laura Bush and Michelle Obama.

A political action committee or “super PAC” for former President Donald Trump, paid the former first lady’s stylist a total of \$108,000 in the first six months of 2023, according to filings released by the Federal Election Commission (FEC).

The figure brings the total dollar amount given to stylist Hervé Pierre Braillard by the super PAC to more than \$260,000 since the start of 2022. Incidentally, the massive payment to Pierre was marked down as “strategy consulting.”

“Mr. Pierre is a world-renowned artist. His work extends to many different fields, not just fashion design. His expertise is utilized for special projects and events,” a spokesperson for the fashion designer explained in August of last year when news of large [payments](#) to the stylist first broke. “As with every other first lady, there is an after-the-White House life, which involves many other aspects than fashion. I am lucky to have worked in prestigious houses, to have designed [costumes] for ballets and more recently to work in home decor. There are many upcoming projects in this after-the-White House [stage],” the stylist added.

However, some critics have been quick to point out Melania’s absence from the public eye amid her husband’s ongoing legal troubles, even as the former president continues his campaign for the US 2024 presidential election.

“Weird that a dude can make \$18k monthly to style a woman making virtually no public appearances,” Ellen Carmichael, the president of PR firm The Lafayette Company, [wrote](#). The filings also show that the PAC has spent about \$40 million on the former president’s legal fees during the first half of the year, which will undoubtedly continue to rise, with news breaking on Tuesday of Trump’s third indictment.

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DPRK ‘Acknowledges’ UN Inquiry Into US Soldier Who Sprinted Across DMZ

To date, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) has offered up little information about a US soldier who crossed the demilitarized zone (DMZ) last month and entered the socialist state’s territory.

US officials revealed on Tuesday that North Korea “responded” to inquiries by the United Nations Command regarding Travis King, a US soldier who suddenly crossed into the DPRK while taking part in a tour of the heavily-guarded border area.

“I can confirm that the DPRK has responded to United Nations Command, but I don’t have any substantial progress to read out,” Pentagon spokesperson Brig. Gen. Patrick Ryder told reporters, adding it was “just an acknowledgment” of the UN inquiry.

On July 18, US Army Private Travis King [crossed the inter-Korean border](#) during a tour of Panmunjom, the neutral town where the ceasefire ending three years of fighting [was signed in 1953](#). King had been deployed with US forces in South Korea and recently disciplined, with more punishment [reportedly awaiting him](#) back at his home base in Texas.

The soldier was described as “willfully” crossing the border. It’s unclear if he intended to defect to the socialist state or was simply fleeing from South Korean authorities.

Experts told US media that how Pyongyang defines King’s entry into the country could dramatically change how long he is held, whether they see it as a trespassing incident that might result in his quick return, or as a defection from which the DPRK government might hope to learn about the US military or even deploy King in propaganda.

Other experts said it was unlikely North Korea would hold him for very long, given the low point in US-DPRK relations, since it would simply create another burden for Pyongyang’s extremely delicate foreign policy.

Diplomacy between the US and DPRK, which remain technically at war as a result of the lack of a permanent peace treaty concluding the 1950-53 conflict, is fraught at best, and even few diplomatic channels exist now than once did.

That is in part due to enduring COVID-19-related restrictions associated with the country's belated outbreak and difficulty addressing it, but also the steady deterioration of relations following the failed rapprochement of 2018 and 2019. Recent months have seen a slew of weapons tests by North Korea, which said it was protesting US-South Korean military drills rehearsing war against the DPRK.

Several US troops have defected to the DPRK in the 70 years since the ceasefire was signed, some of whom did so for ideological reasons and lent their support to the socialist government. However, several Americans have also been arrested and detained in the country, with some being sentenced to serve prison time for their crimes. One, a US college student named Otto Warmbier, became a focal point for anti-DPRK sentiment after he was returned to the US in a coma in 2017 following months in North Korean custody.

North Korean authorities said Warmbier had been sentenced to 15 years of labor for attempting to steal a propaganda poster from a restricted staff-only area of a building - a crime he admitted to in a video - and that his condition was a result of having contracted botulism, a food-borne illness, just weeks after his arrest in 2016. He died in the US after his feeding tube was removed, as per his family's wishes.

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Connecting Russia's Digital Ruble to Others Will Create SWIFT, Dollar Alternatives

A business expert told Sputnik that great potential for creating a new global currency system not centered on the West lies at the heart of the growing movement toward central bank digital currencies (CBDCs), such as Russia's digital ruble that launched on Tuesday.

A law creating a new digital ruble was recently approved by the Kremlin and has begun being rolled out. It is a [third form of the Russian national currency](#), alongside printed bank notes and non-cash bank cards. Despite some superficial resemblances to a cryptocurrency, the digital ruble's state backing gives it a stability and legitimacy that other highly unregulated digital currencies lack.

On August 1, bank-to-bank (B2B) transfers became the first part of the new currency format to be launched.

Paul Goncharoff, a management consultant at Dezan Shira & Associates in Moscow, told Sputnik that central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) have many of the advantages of other digital currencies but without many of their downsides.

Those include "fast transactions and lower transaction costs at a fee of 0.3%, with the benefit of being secured by the central bank. Unlike cryptocurrencies, the CBDC works entirely within the established financial system, which makes it systemic and government-friendly as opposed to possibly disruptive," he explained.

"I see positives for businesses in using the Ruble CBDC, which may not be as true for P2P [person-to-person] transactions when they are started sometime between 2025 and 2027 due to inherent privacy issues. That being said, on a broad economic level, it should be a positive step in simplifying business transactions both inside and, eventually, outside of the Russian Federation," Goncharoff noted.

He added that integrating Russia's CBDC with those of other countries will further allow the Russian economy to circumvent the restrictions created by Western sanctions, which include the SWIFT wire transfer system that's based in Brussels, a city also home to the European Union and the anti-Russian NATO alliance.

"While initially the ruble CBDC was intended for settlements within the Russian Federation and nearby countries to allow efficiencies in trade execution, it can be seen as Russia's litmus test for further expanding its CBDC use internationally," the expert explained.

Goncharoff noted that other members of the BRICS bloc - namely India, China, Brazil, and South Africa - are actively developing CBDCs as well, so "it should not be too long before interoperability among BRICS member nations occurs. Such digital expressions of these currencies should boost international trade while providing an alternative outside the Western-dominated financial system centered around the US dollar and its restrictively sanctioned environment."

"Russia's representative, when in New Delhi recently, proposed just such a unified digital currency for Russia, China, and India as a start. The initial goal is to enhance trade while complying with each country's regulations and reducing reliance on the US dollar or euro to reduce the effects of real or anticipated international sanctions using those fiat currencies. On the BRICS agenda this August in South Africa are discussions on how members are developing CBDCs, and the expected advantages of digital currencies in international trade and financial arenas, and potential cross-pollination," he explained.

Goncharoff noted that the US dollar would continue to dominate international trade for some time, but that trends such as the interconnectedness of new digital currencies would begin to dig the grave of old Western-centered systems like SWIFT.

"As President Putin once said 'cutlets on one side, flies on the other'. CBDCs are digital representations of established currencies. At the current time, the US dollar reigns supreme for most global settlements. Until such time that BRICS, for example, combine their respective national CBDCs onto an agreed interoperative platform, CBDCs are unlikely to make a significant market changing dent in the US dollar's role in the short term unless the US dollar and the [US Federal Reserve] shoot themselves in the foot, or a 'Black Swan' event. That being said, the digitization of sovereign currencies, when it happens worldwide, will see that service providers such as SWIFT will eventually disappear in their present form, but that won't be for a while yet."

"A US dollar CBDC will happen - it is a question of political time and is a hotly debated topic among a rather concerned public. Many are opposed, as they see that the use of CBDCs does reduce information privacy, especially concerning who, what, where, and for how much did a company or a person make a transaction? Essentially, the same data is collected by issuers every time anyone uses a credit or debit card. The difference is that this will be centralized information with the Fed. That being said, it will occur, it is a matter of time, and after going through all the bells and whistles of legislation."

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Biden, Trump Neck-and-Neck in 2024 Race as Other Contenders Trail Distantly - Poll

Polls conducted by the New York Times and Siena College have shed new light on the status of the presidential primary races in the Democratic and Republican Parties, revealing that despite the wide and diverse field, it's really only a two-man race.

One poll [focusing on the Democratic primary](#) found that support for both former US President Donald Trump and current US President Joe Biden in a hypothetical presidential election being held tomorrow was exactly the same, with each candidate capturing 43% of respondents' votes. It also found that opposition to Biden being the nominee among Democrats declined dramatically over the last year. Last summer, a NYT/Siena poll found 64% of Democrats did not want Biden to be the nominee in 2024, including 94% of Democrats under the age of 30. That has now declined to just half of Democrats.

Still, 30% of would-be Biden voters said they hoped the party would nominate someone else, and 51% said they would be satisfied but not enthusiastic about a Biden nomination. Just 20% said they would be enthusiastic about it.

About one-quarter of Democrats said they hoped Vice President Kamala Harris would be the nominee. In the 2020 primary race, Harris was forced to drop out after her support evaporated, and her pick as Biden's running mate raised eyebrows because of her unpopularity.

On top of that, Biden has an approval rating for his present administration of just 39%.

Still, Biden's lead over other Democratic rivals is powerful: 64% of Democrats intend to vote for him in the party's primary, while just 13% supported Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. and 10% supported Marianne Williamson.

The [NYT/Siena Poll on the GOP primary](#) field, likewise, showed Trump dominating the pack. Released a day prior, it showed 54% of GOP voters supporting the former president, while just 17% support Florida Governor Ron DeSantis. Several of the remaining candidates - former US Vice President Mike Pence, US Sen. Tim Scott (R-SC) and former US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley - each polled at 3%. Businessman Vivek Ramaswamy polled at 2%, and the rest were less than that.

According to pollsters, a commonly held attitude across the political spectrum is that Biden, 80, and Trump, 77, are both too old to be good candidates.

Many who expressed such ambivalence said they supported their candidate due to other trends, such as the status of the economy or the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, rather than specific enthusiasm for their candidate.

Biden and Trump previously faced each other in the November 2020 election, which Biden won by about 8 million votes and 74 Electoral College votes. However, many of the individual state races were extremely close, and Trump claimed to have lost several of them due to massive voter fraud, launching a campaign to challenge the election results that culminated in the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the US Capitol.

That effort by Trump's supporters to block the certification of the election results failed and Trump was impeached on charges of inciting the attack, although he was acquitted in a Senate trial that occurred several weeks after Biden was sworn in as president.

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Hubble Spots 'Toddler' Red Dwarf Star Blasting Away Planet's Atmosphere in 'Tantrum'

An unfortunate planet 32 light-years away is being pummeled with radiation by its host star, a red dwarf that's smaller than our sun but far more unstable.

The incredible episode was spotted in imagery by the Hubble Space Telescope and published by the discovering scientists in [The Astronomical Journal](#) last week.

AU Microscopii (AU Mic) is a temperamental stellar object. The tiny red dwarf is just 9% as bright as the sun and is located 31.7 light-years away. It is a variable star, meaning its brightness changes markedly with time due to huge flaring events. It's also extremely young, just 23 million years old. When it formed, the dinosaurs on Earth had been dead for 42 million years already.

Because of its youth, AU Mic still has a protoplanetary dust ring surrounding it, although astronomers have singled out three planets.

The largest and closest to the star is a Neptune-sized planet known as AU Mic b, which orbits just 6 million miles away from AU Mic - that's just one-seventh the distance at which Mercury, the closest planet to our sun, orbits the sun.

At such a close distance, the planet is extremely vulnerable to its host star's flaring events. As the scientists found, those bursts of radiation are so violent they seem to be literally stripping away AU Mic b's atmosphere.

Keighley Rockliffe, an exoplanet researcher at Dartmouth College and the principal author of the study, [said that AU Mic](#) is "very, very young, basically a toddler star," and is behaving accordingly.

"Stellar astronomers are excited because AU Mic is an example of what the young, tantrum-like years of a red dwarf - the most common type of star in the Milky Way - are like," she said.

They figured out what was happening by watching the planet transit its host star, meaning it passed directly in front of it from the perspective of a viewer on Earth. Rather than crossing in front of AU Mic in an organized and predictable format, the astronomers found the planet was starting its transit early, dimming the star earlier than expected and in a bizarre and inconsistent way.

There could only be one explanation for this extra matter in AU Mic b's orbit: it must have escaped from the planet - or been blown away.

Rockliffe explained that while atmospheric escape isn't exactly new or novel, that doesn't mean their study of it happening on a planet so close to Earth isn't useful - in fact, far from it.

"AU Mic b is special because it is not special at all!" she said. "It is an example of the young stage of the most typical exoplanet-star system in the galaxy, and therefore gives us important

insight into what atmospheric escape looks like at this very critical and very common formative period of an exoplanetary system."

The cause of the atmospheric loss was deduced by the star's erratic behavior, but not exactly confirmed as of yet.

"My opinion, or intuition, is telling me this behavior is intricately tied to the atmosphere's interaction with AU Mic's stellar winds," Rockliffe said. "AU Mic's stellar winds might be causing turbulence as it interacts with the atmosphere, causing this time-variable burping of hydrogen gas."

Another possibility Rockliffe mentioned is that the atmosphere is being lost due to an internal planetary process, such as instabilities in the newly formed planet's core.

The temperamental nature of red dwarfs, as well as the tendency of their planets to form much closer to the star than is the case in larger celestial bodies, has led astronomers to conclude that life is unlikely to have formed on planets orbiting such stars. However, red dwarfs are the most prolific type of star in the galaxy.

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Third Trump Indictment Offers Hints About Identity of Alleged Co-Conspirators – Reports

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) – The third indictment of former US President Donald Trump on criminal charges related to the January 6 Capitol attack includes six unnamed, unindicted co-conspirators, but NBC News reported that the identities of at least five of them can be sussed out.

Five of the alleged co-conspirators appear to be lawyers Rudy Giuliani; John Eastman; Sidney Powell; Jeffrey Clark; and Kenneth Chesebro.

The indictment states that co-conspirator 1 is an "attorney who was willing to spread knowingly false claims and pursue strategies that the Defendant's 2020 re-election campaign attorneys would not." Giuliani appears to fit the description.

Co-conspirator 2 is "an attorney who devised and attempted to implement a strategy to leverage the Vice President's ceremonial role overseeing the certification proceeding to obstruct the certification of the presidential election." Eastman appears to fit the description.

Co-conspirator 3 promulgated claims of election fraud, which Trump "embraced and publicly amplified." The indictment alleges that this defendant privately acknowledged that these claims "sounded 'crazy.'" Powell appears to fit the description.

Co-Conspirator 4 is identified as "a Justice Department official who worked on civil matters" who attempted to open "sham election crime investigations." The individual "had not informed his leadership at the Justice Department of the meeting [on January 22] which was a violation of the Justice Department's written policy restricting contacts with the White House to guard against improper political influence." Clark appears to fit the description.

Co-Conspirator 5 is "an attorney who assisted in devising and attempting to implement a plan to submit fraudulent slates of presidential electors to obstruct the certification proceeding." Chesebro appears to fit the description.

Co-Conspirator 6 is "a political consultant who helped implement a plan to submit fraudulent slates of presidential electors to obstruct the certification proceeding. The identity of this individual remains unclear.

Prosecutors do not typically identify alleged co-conspirators until they are charged.

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US Supreme Court Approval Rating Drops to Record-Low 40% - Poll

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The approval rating of the US Supreme Court has dropped to a record low 40%, according to a Gallup poll published on Wednesday.

"The current rating ties the court's record-low job score first recorded in September 2021, which ticked up to 43% in July 2022 before dropping back to 40%," the poll said.

Since 2000, the level of confidence in the top court in the country has decreased by 22 percentage points. In the last three years, it has dropped by 18 percentage points, according to the pollster.

The overturning of abortion rights appears to be a major reason for such a decline. The rating plunged to 40% for the first time in September 2021 after the court allowed a restrictive Texas abortion law to stand, the pollster said.

"That ruling was a precursor to its June 2022 *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*; now, more than a dozen states have near-total bans on abortions," it added.

Republicans look much more supportive of the court (62%), than Democrats (17%). The 45-percentage-point party gap is the third largest in the last two decades. A 61-point gap (74% among Republicans, 13% among Democrats) was registered in 2022, after the court overturned *Roe v. Wade*. In 2015, when the court legalized same-sex marriage and supported Barack Obama's healthcare law, the gap was 58 points (76% among Democrats, 18% among Republicans).

At the same time, 43% of Americans approve of Chief Justice John Roberts' job performance, while 30% express the opposite opinion. Associate Justice Clarence Thomas, the longest-serving member of the court, got the support of 39%, while 42% view him negatively, the poll said.

"Americans continue to be critical of the Supreme Court, largely because of strongly negative views from Democrats and more negative than positive opinions from independents, which offset Republicans' generally positive opinions," the survey concluded.

The poll was conducted from July 3-27 via telephone interviews of 1,015 adults in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia.

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REVIEW - US Presidential Race and Ukraine: Where Do The Candidates Stand?

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - As Americans brace themselves for what is shaping up to be yet another monumental presidential election, rhetoric on Ukraine is already filling the airwaves, revealing sharp differences among candidates in both major parties, although it is questionable if the issue will be a priority in the minds of US voters when they cast ballots in 2024.

With the country at a crossroads, navigating through a host of complex challenges and shifting priorities, the forthcoming 2024 election promises to be a pivotal moment that will shape the trajectory of the nation and reverberate across the globe.

Although the primaries will not begin until February, and the party conventions are a about a year away, Democrats and Republicans are already gearing up for the fight, with the ongoing military conflict in Ukraine demanding the attention of candidates on both sides of the political divide.

THE HAWKS VS. THE PEACEMAKERS

Overall, more and more Americans are saying the US should back Kiev, although the intensity of this support seems to be waning among potential Republican voters. A Reuters/Ipsos survey published from June reported that 65% of the respondents favored US supplying weapons to Ukraine, a sharp increase from the 46% recorded in May. However, a Pew research poll in June found a rising percentage of Republicans believe the US is giving too much military aid too Ukraine.

There appears to be a clear divide among the Republican primary field, with hawkish anti-Russian sentiment on one end, and vows to end the conflict on the other.

Former President Donald Trump has repeatedly said he could end the war immediately, while at the same time criticizing the Biden administration for letting the Pentagon run out of ammunition. Along similar lines, entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy proposed a peace treaty that would freeze the current battle lines, establish a Korean-style armistice, and prohibit Ukraine from entering NATO.

Most Republican candidates, however, are in favor of the US continuing to send military aid to Ukraine. Trump's former vice president, Mike Pence, has made the conflict in Ukraine an equal priority to domestic issues like border security, urban crime, and the energy crisis. Pence is also aligned with President Joe Biden on sending cluster munitions to Ukraine while urging Kiev to be patient about entering NATO.

Trump's former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley, in full support of aiding Kiev, said the world needs to counter Russia effectively in order to send China a message not to invade Taiwan.

Meanwhile, Senator Tim Scott has also backed and applauded US military packages to Ukraine.

Former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie said Ukraine needs military hardware to ensure the conflict ends on terms acceptable to Kiev. Former Arkansas Asa Hutchinson and ex-congressman from Texas, Will Hurd, both back arming Ukraine with the latter even suggesting the U.S. government should be sending even more aid.

On the Democratic side, Biden, who of course is committed to sending as much aid to Ukraine as possible, faces little opposition, although Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. has surprised in early polling, and now has almost 15% of the vote, according to poll aggregator Real Clear Politics (RCP).

RFK has opposed the Russian special operation in Ukraine but said he realizes Washington

played a major role in provoking it. The campaign told Sputnik that RFK Jr., if elected, would seek a peace deal with Russia that respects both Ukrainian sovereignty and Moscow's security concerns, opposes Kiev joining NATO, and called Biden's decision to send cluster bombs to Ukraine a "reckless escalation."

WILL UKRAINE MATTER?

Despite the fact White House policy toward the Ukraine conflict will be critical to America's future, doubts loom as to whether it is or will be a priority in the minds of US voters come election time. Several experts told Sputnik that US elections won't be decided by a foreign war and that it is not much of a factor among the majority and certainly not with the Democrats.

Former CIA analyst and station chief Philip Giraldi thinks it all depends if the conflict is still ongoing and on the candidate.

"[It] depends on whether there is a candidate who is antiwar that would give voters, who are becoming tired of what is going on, an option to express their exhaustion with it," Giraldi said. "If not, and since both parties are pretty gung-ho for the war to defeat Russia, I would imagine it will be a non-issue in terms of who wins unless the GOP opts to play the card that Biden, or whoever replaces him, mishandled the conflict, just as the White House failed in the Afghanistan evacuation."

Former hedge fund manager and political analyst Gerald Celente believes it is too early to tell what will happen in Ukraine in the Presidential primaries in 2024.

"If the war is still dragging on during primary time if the issue is properly addressed and the candidate pledges that rather than going to war he/she would champion for peace and use the money for American prosperity rather than enriching the military-industrial complex," Celente said, "We believe those numbers would reverse and the candidate would get support from all parties and especially from millennials down."

Professor of African American History at the University of Houston Gerald Horne stated that much remains unclear but a lot depends on what happens on the battlefield and the survivability of the Kiev regime and if the conflict manages to capture headlines.

According to political analyst and former FBI special agent Coleen Rowley, while the ongoing conflict does figure as an election issue, not all of the candidates bring it up.

"Only two of the leading presidential candidates even talk about the war," Rowley said. "Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has done a good job of explaining its factual history and promising to end it while Trump, in his usual double-talk way, has bragged that he could quickly resolve the situation. Biden and the other Republican candidates strongly support continuing to arm Ukraine to fuel more war."

Head of the Independent Institute Center of Peace and Freedom Ivan Eland, also thinks the issue will most likely be a minor factor in the 2024 race.

"Republicans have a difficult time taking any advantage of Joe Biden's support for Ukraine because their party is divided on the issue," Eland said. "A small minority is against Ukraine and the rest of the party is egging Biden on by saying Ukraine needs more weapons faster to win—for example, F-16s and ATACMS."

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with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

UPDATE 2 - Trump Charged With 4 Criminal Counts Over Alleged Role in January 6 Riot - Indictment

(Adds reaction from Pence, lawmakers after para 5)

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump has been charged with four criminal counts over his alleged role in trying to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election, court documents revealed.

"Despite having lost, the Defendant was determined to remain in power. So for more than two months following Election Day on November 3, 2020, the Defendant spread lies that there had been outcome-determinative fraud in the election and that he had actually won. These claims were false, and the Defendant knew that they were false," the indictment said on Tuesday.

Trump is charged with one count of conspiracy to defraud the United States, one count of conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding, one count of obstruction of and attempt to obstruct an official proceeding and one count of conspiracy against rights.

Court documents also showed that there are six co-conspirators in this case.

Trump's new indictment comes amid a number of other probes into potential misconduct by Trump, including on his alleged mishandling of classified documents, as well as in the middle of the 2024 presidential race, in which he has established himself as the Republican Party's leading candidate.

Former Vice President Mike Pence, who is running against Trump in the Republican primary, took the opportunity to remind voters that he was the one that "chose the Constitution" when pressed by Trump during the riot.

"Today's indictment serves as an important reminder: anyone who puts himself over the Constitution should never be President of the United States," Pence said in a tweet. "Our country is more important than one man. Our constitution is more important than any one man's career."

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer in a statement said the charges illustrate in detail that the January 6 riots were the culmination of a "months-long criminal plot" to overturn the will of the voters.

Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy said Smith's indictment is nothing more than an attempt by the Biden administration to distract attention from the corruption probe involving Hunter Biden.

Republican congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene vowed to introduce an amendment to the budget that defunds Smith's office.

"This isn't just an indictment against President Trump, but against all his supporters and the fundamental rights of Americans. If an innocent former president can be targeted, then no American is truly safe," Greene warned in a twitter post.

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US Orders Construction of Nine Guided-Missile Destroyers - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The US Navy has ordered nine new DDG51 Arleigh Burke class missile cruisers from two American shipyards in Maine and Mississippi, the Department of Defense announced in press releases.

"Bath Iron Works [in] Bath, Maine is awarded a... contract for construction of three DDG 51 class ships – one each in fiscal 2023, 2024, and 2026," the first of the two releases, both on Tuesday, said.

Huntington Ingalls Shipbuilding in Pascagoula, Mississippi also received a contract to build six more of the DDG 51 Arleigh Burke class AEGIS missile destroyers - one in fiscal 2023, one in fiscal 2024, two in fiscal 2025, one in fiscal 2026, and one in fiscal 2027, the Defense Department said.

The Pentagon did not reveal the total value of the contracts. According to the US Naval Institute's news site, USNI, these types of ships are estimated to cost about \$2 billion each.

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US Military Suspended Training With Niger's Armed Forces Amid Unrest - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The US military suspended its training program with Niger's armed forces after unrest broke out in the country, Pentagon Press Secretary Brig. Gen. Patrick Ryder said during a press briefing.

"We continue to stay in contact with the Niger military, but in terms of training, for example, those types of things, that's been suspended," Ryder told reporters on Tuesday.

Ryder declined to comment on whether the United States has suspended any intelligence operation in Niger.

Last Wednesday, Niger's presidential guard detained President Mohamed Bazoum. The guard's commander, Gen. Abdourahmane Tchiani, proclaimed himself the country's new leader. France's foreign ministry said that President Emmanuel Macron had spoken to Bazoum on Friday and that Paris continued to recognize him as the only legitimate leader of the African country.

On Saturday, France suspended all financial aid to Niger until constitutional order is restored. On the next day, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) gave Niger's coup leaders one week to reinstate the detained president to power saying that it could use "all measures," including military, to restore order in the country.

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US Arms Firms Received \$9.7Bn So Far to Replace Weapons Sent to Ukraine - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The US defense contractors have received nearly \$10 billion in new Department of Defense weapons orders to replace systems sent as aid to Ukraine, US media reports said.

The Defense Department has currently used \$9.7 billion to replenish its depleted weapons and ammunition stockpiles, out of a total \$26 billion already approved for that purpose by the US Congress, Bloomberg News said on Tuesday in a report citing official Defense Department figures released on the same day.

Lockheed Martin is already getting almost \$2.3 billion of a potential \$6 billion committed to it as well as \$1.4 billion out of an eventual total \$1.9 billion more for its joint venture with RTX , previously known as Raytheon Technologies to refill its arsenal of Javelin anti-armor weapons, the report said.

Lockheed is also going to receive \$1.4 billion of a potential \$5.2 billion to replace guided missiles for the Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System (GMLRS), the report said. RTX will get another \$844 million to replace the Patriot PAC-3 MSE anti-aircraft and anti-missile systems that have been sent to Ukraine, it said.

RTX will get \$581 million of a potential \$624 million to replace US armed forces supplies of Stinger anti-aircraft missiles and Congress also has appropriated \$18.6 billion to provide for Ukraine's long-term defense needs. So far, \$7 billion of that money has been obligated to US companies, the report added.

RTX has Pentagon commitments for \$1.2 billion of a potential \$1.4 billion to supply Ukraine with its long-range NASSAM air defense systems. General Dynamics and other contractors companies will receive \$901 million out of a likely \$1.4 billion to supply Kiev with more 155mm howitzer ammunition, the report said.

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Obama-Era Judge Tanya Chutkan to Oversee Trump January 6 Indictment Case - Filing

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - Federal judge Tanya Chutkan, who was nominated by then-President Barack Obama, has been assigned to oversee former President Donald Trump's case involving his alleged role in attempting to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election, court documents revealed.

Court documents on Tuesday showed that new charges have been filed against Trump in this criminal case, which includes one count of conspiracy to defraud the United States, one count of conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding, one count of obstruction of and attempt to obstruct an official proceeding and one count of conspiracy against rights.

Chutkan is the only federal judge in Washington to issue sentences to January 6 rioters that were longer than prosecutors had requested, according to media reports.

Chutkan also handled the case involving Russian national Maria Butina, who was sentenced to 18 months in prison after being convicted of "conspiring to work for a foreign government."

To reduce a much longer prison time, Butina had to plead guilty to one count of conspiracy to act as a foreign agent. The Russian national was deported home in October 2019 after her

sentence was slightly reduced for good behavior.

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White House Says Disagrees With Fitch Decision to Downgrade US Credit Rating

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration strongly disagrees with a decision by Fitch Ratings to downgrade the United States' credit rating from AAA to AA+, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said in a statement.

"We strongly disagree with this decision," the statement said on Tuesday.

Fitch's decision "defies reality" at a moment when US President Joe Biden has delivered strong economic recovery, the statement added.

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen also released a statement expressing disagreement with Fitch's decision.

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Trump Charged With 4 Criminal Counts Over Alleged Role in January 6 Riot - Indictment

(Updates with details, background in paras 4,5)

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump has been charged with four criminal counts over his alleged role in trying to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election, court documents revealed.

"Despite having lost, the Defendant was determined to remain in power. So for more than two months following Election Day on November 3, 2020, the Defendant spread lies that there had been outcome-determinative fraud in the election and that he had actually won. These claims were false, and the Defendant knew that they were false," the indictment said on Tuesday.

Trump is charged with one count of conspiracy to defraud the United States, one count of conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding, one count of obstruction of and attempt to obstruct an official proceeding and one count of conspiracy against rights.

Court documents also showed that there are six co-conspirators in this case.

Trump's new indictment comes amid a number of other probes into potential misconduct by Trump, including on his alleged mishandling of classified documents, as well as in the middle of the 2024 presidential race, in which he has established himself as the Republican Party's leading candidate.

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Fitch Downgrades US Credit Rating, Citing Fiscal Deterioration Over Next 3 Years

(Updates with more details, background in paras 3-9; modifies lede)

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - Fitch Ratings announced that it has downgraded the credit rating of the United States from AAA to AA, citing fiscal deterioration over the next three years.

"The rating downgrade of the United States reflects the expected fiscal deterioration over the next three years, a high and growing general government debt burden and the erosion of governance relative to 'AA' and 'AAA' rated peers over the last two decades that has manifested in repeated debt limit standoffs and last-minute resolutions," Fitch said in a statement on Tuesday.

The downgrade comes on the heels of the "negative watch" assigned by Fitch in June on the United States' AAA rating. Fitch said it was studying the fallout from events leading to the higher debt ceiling agreed in late May between President Joe Biden and rival Republicans.

Fitch noted then that the deal to suspend the previous debt ceiling of \$31.4 trillion had passed the Senate and only needed President Joe Biden's signature to become law.

However, it took issue again with the matter in Tuesday's statement, saying there has been a steady deterioration in standards of governance over the last 20 years, including on fiscal and debt matters, notwithstanding the June bipartisan agreement to suspend the debt limit until January 2025.

"The repeated debt-limit political standoffs and last-minute resolutions have eroded confidence in fiscal management. In addition, the government lacks a medium-term fiscal framework, unlike most peers, and has a complex budgeting process," the statement said.

These factors, along with several economic shocks as well as tax cuts and new spending initiatives, have contributed to successive debt increases for the United States over the last decade, the statement said.

"Additionally, there has been only limited progress in tackling medium-term challenges related to rising social security and Medicare costs due to an aging population," the statement added.

There was no immediate reaction to the downgrade from the White House on Tuesday.

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Inspector General Scrutinizes Suspension of US Diplomat's Security Clearance - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 2, (Sputnik) - State Department acting Inspector General Diana Shaw is scrutinizing the suspension of a senior US diplomat's security clearance, Politico reported.

The investigation concerns the suspension of the security clearance of Robert Malley, who serves as a US Special Representative for Iran, the report said.

The State Department placed Malley on leave last month under unclear circumstances that prompted Republicans on the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee to demand action from the State Department in the form of a letter, the report said on Tuesday.

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) considers several factors when determining whether to

initiate work, including statutory requirements, available resources, jurisdictional authority and the existence of criteria against which to measure the State Department's actions, the report said.

Considering these factors and the circumstances detailed in the letter, the OIG plan to begin a preliminary review, Shaw said in a letter responding to the Republicans on the Foreign Relations Committee and quoted in the report.

Preliminary reviews are part of the early fact-finding process conducted by an inspector general and may include informal talks with individuals connected to the events under investigation, the report said.

Malley is also at the center of an FBI investigation looking into his handling of classified information, the report added.

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Special Counsel Jack Smith Says Seeking 'Speedy Trial' in Trump January 6 Case

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - Special Counsel Jack Smith said in a press conference that he will seek a speedy trial in the criminal case involving former US President Donald Trump's alleged involvement in efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 US presidential election.

"In this case, my office will seek a speedy trial so that our evidence can be tested in court and judged by a jury of citizens," Smith said on Tuesday.

Earlier in the day, Smith released an indictment charging Trump with one count of conspiracy to defraud the United States, one count of conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding, one count of obstruction of and attempt to obstruct an official proceeding and one count of conspiracy against rights.

The charges in the indictment remain allegations until determined otherwise in a court of law, Smith added.

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Trump Summoned to Make Initial Court Appearance in January 6 Case on August 3 - Order

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump has been summoned to appear in federal court in the US capital on Thursday to face new charges alleging he attempted to overturn the results of the 2022 presidential election, a court order revealed.

"It is further ordered that in the interim, the Government is authorized to make limited disclosure of the fact that the Grand Jury has returned an indictment and there will be an initial court appearance on August 3, 2023," US Judge Moxila Upadhyaya stated in the court order on Tuesday.

Trump is charged with one count of conspiracy to defraud the United States, one count of conspiracy to attempt to obstruct an official proceeding, one charge of obstructing the aforesaid proceeding, and conspiracy to impede a person's right to vote.

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Trump Says Indictment Latest Attempt by 'Biden Crime Family' to Interfere in 2024 Election

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump said that the newly unveiled indictment against him is the latest attempt by the "Biden crime family" and the weaponized US Justice Department to interfere in the 2024 presidential election.

"This is nothing more than the latest corrupt chapter in the pathetic attempt by the Biden crime family and their weaponized Department of Justice to interfere with the 2024 election," Trump said via Truth Social on Tuesday evening.

The statement comes moments after Trump was indicted on charges linked to the alleged efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 US presidential election.

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Trump Charged With 4 Criminal Counts Over Alleged Role in January 6 Riot - Indictment

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump has been charged with four criminal counts over his alleged role in trying to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election, court documents revealed.

"Despite having lost, the Defendant was determined to remain in power. So for more than two months following Election Day on November 3, 2020, the Defendant spread lies that there had been outcome-determinative fraud in the election and that he had actually won. These claims were false, and the Defendant knew that they were false," the indictment said on Tuesday.

Trump is charged with one count of conspiracy to defraud the United States, one count of conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding, one count of obstruction of and attempt to obstruct an official proceeding and one count of conspiracy against rights.

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Trump Says He Heard Will Be Charged in January 6 Investigation at 5:00 p.m. ET
(Updates with more details in paras 3-6)

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump said that he heard he will be charged at 5:00 p.m. ET (9:00 pm GMT) in the investigation into the events at the US Capitol

on January 6, 2021 and called the move an attempt to interfere in the 2024 US presidential election.

"I hear that deranged [prosecutor] Jack Smith, in order to interfere with the presidential election of 2024, will be putting out yet another fake indictment of your favorite president, me, at 5:00 p.m. Why didn't they do this 2.5 years ago? Why did they wait so long? Because they wanted to put it right in the middle of my campaign. Prosecutorial misconduct!" Trump said on Truth Social. Trump accused his political opponents of imposing a fake indictment a day after what he called "one of the biggest scandals" related to President Joe Biden emerged.

On Monday, Hunter Biden's associate Devon Archer provided testimony to lawmakers on President Joe Biden's involvement in his son Hunter's questionable business activities.

Archer told lawmakers that the president joined Hunter and his business associates more than 20 times via speakerphone or in person.

In light of what he considers to be a politically-motivated prosecution, Trump called the United States "a nation in decline."

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Trump Indicted for Alleged Role in Efforts to Overturn 2020 US Election - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump was indicted on charges linked to the alleged efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 US presidential election, ABC News reported, citing a source with direct knowledge of the matter.

The charges come as part of Special Counsel Jack Smith's probe into the alleged efforts and marks the third time Trump has been indicted on criminal charges, the report said on Tuesday.

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Fitch Downgrades US Credit Rating, Citing Fiscal Deterioration Over Next 3 Years

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - Fitch Ratings downgraded the credit rating of the United States from Triple-A to Double-A, citing fiscal deterioration over the next three years in the world's largest economy.

"The rating downgrade of the United States reflects the expected fiscal deterioration over the next three years, a high and growing general government debt burden, and the erosion of governance relative to 'AA' and 'AAA' rated peers over the last two decades that has manifested in repeated debt limit standoffs and last-minute resolutions," Fitch said in a statement on Tuesday.

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with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Government, Hunter Biden Agree to Docket Proposed Plea Agreement - Filings

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - US Attorney for the District of Delaware David Weiss and Hunter Biden agree to docket a proposed plea deal and pre-trial diversion agreement between prosecutors and the president's son, according to court documents.

"Defendant does not object to the Memorandum of Plea Agreement being docketed, and... consents to the public disclosure of that document," a document filed by Biden attorney Christopher Clark said on Tuesday.

A judge ordered both Biden and the government to provide their opinions on docketing the agreements by the end of the day Tuesday.

Biden and prosecutors "expressly agreed" that the agreements would be made public, Weiss said in the government's filing.

The government has no objection to docketing the proposed plea and diversion agreements, the filing said.

The plea agreement would resolve tax charges against Biden, while the pre-trial diversion agreement would resolve a firearms offense.

However, a judge with the US District Court for the District of Delaware rejected the proposed deal last week, characterizing it as atypical.

On Monday, the leaders of the US House committees on Ways and Means, Oversight and Judiciary sent a letter to US Attorney General Merrick Garland requesting information on the agreements. The lawmakers expressed concerns about potential preferential treatment of Biden by the Justice Department.

The probe also comes amid investigations by House lawmakers into other alleged criminal activity by Hunter Biden, as well as President Joe Biden, including allegations of foreign bribery and influence peddling.

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Trump Says He Heard Will Be Charged in January 6 Investigation at 5:00 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump said that he heard he will be charged at 5:00 p.m. ET (9:00 pm GMT) in the investigation into the events at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, and called the move an attempt to interfere in the 2024 US presidential election.

"I hear that deranged Jack Smith, in order to interfere with the presidential election of 2024, will be putting out yet another fake indictment of your favorite president, me, at 5:00 p.m. Why didn't they do this 2.5 years ago? Why did they wait so long? Because they wanted to put it right in the middle of my campaign. Prosecutorial Misconduct!" Trump said on Truth Social.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) -

POLAND-BELARUS TENSIONS

- * The Polish Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday that two Belarusian helicopters violated the country's airspace and as a result it summoned the Belarusian Charge d'Affaires.
- * Polish Defense Minister Mariusz Blaszczak ordered increasing the number of troops on the border with Belarus due to the alleged airspace violation, the Polish Defense Ministry said.
- * The Belarusian Defense Ministry said that there was no violation of the Polish border by Belarusian helicopters and Warsaw needs to use such allegations as an excuse to justify its buildup of troops at the border.
- * Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko denied Warsaw's claim about movement of fighters of the private military company Wagner Group to the Belarusian-Polish border.

NIGER DEVELOPMENTS

- * The United States is not aware of any "specific threats" posed by the private military company Wagner Group to NATO member states, National Security Council Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Tuesday.
- * The Biden administration has not made any decisions regarding the potential use of US military forces in Niger to support evacuations from the country amid a military coup, Kirby said.
- * The European Union has decided to evacuate all its citizens from Niger in light of the recent military coup in the country, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said.
- * State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller declined to disclose what contingency plans the United States has should Niger President Mohamed Bazoum not return to power, but underscored that the future of US assistance to the country is at stake amid the ongoing coup.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

- * The Ukrainian military lost more than 345 soldiers in the Donetsk area in the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Tuesday.
- * Ukraine tried to attack Russia's civil ships in the Black Sea by using unmanned boats but the latter were destroyed by Russian combat ships, the Defense Ministry said.

GRAIN EXPORTS AGREEMENT

- * The United States has seen signs that Russia may be willing to return to discussions on the grain deal, US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield said on Tuesday.
- * Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative annuls the commitments related to facilitating the country's grain and fertilizer exports, Thomas-Greenfield said.

DRONE ATTACKS ON MOSCOW

* The threat of drone attacks on Moscow is real and the necessary measures are being taken to address it, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Tuesday.

* The United Nations is against all attacks on civilian facilities and urges stopping them - including those that target Moscow, UN spokesperson Farhan Haq said.

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US Approves \$395M In Sale of Multiple Launch Rocket System Upgrade to Finland - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The US State Department approved a possible sale of an upgrade of the M270A1 Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (MLRS) and related equipment to Finland for an estimated cost of \$395 million, the US Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Tuesday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Finland of a M270A2 Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS) upgrade and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$395 million," DSCA said in a press release.

The upgrade will include intercom systems, radio communication mounts, machine gun mounts, battle management system vehicle integration kit, spare parts, services, support equipment and other related elements of program and logistics support, the release added.

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US Judge Sets Arraignment Date in Trump's Classified Documents Case for August 10 - Filing

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - A US judge scheduled the initial court appearance for former President Donald Trump and his assistant Waltine Nauta in the case of allegedly mishandling classified documents for August 10, according to a court document published on Tuesday.

"Order as to Donald J. Trump and Waltine Nauta. The Arraignment on the Superseding Indictment is set for 8/10/2023 at 10:00 a.m. in the Fort Pierce Division before US Magistrate Judge Shaniek Mills Maynard at the Alto Lee Adams, Sr. United States Courthouse, 101 South US Highway 1, 4th Floor - Courtroom 4074, Fort Pierce, FL," the document said.

In June, the US government released an indictment against Trump and Nauta. Prosecutors charged Trump with 37 counts of willful retention of national defense information, one count of conspiracy to obstruct justice, one count of withholding a document or record, one count of corruptly concealing a document or record, one count of concealing a document in a federal investigation, scheming to conceal and making false statements and representations.

In the original indictment, Nauta was facing six charges, including conspiracy to obstruct justice, false statements and withholding and concealing documents.

Both Trump and Nauta pleaded not guilty to the charges in June.

Last week, prosecutors unsealed a superseding indictment that contains additional charges against Trump and Nauta, and added a new defendant - Mar-a-Lago property manager Carlos De Oliveira.

The new indictment charges the defendants with conspiracy to obstruct justice, making false statements and altering, destroying, mutilating or concealing an object.

Taking into account the new indictment, the total number of charges against Trump has increased to 40.

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Facebook Says Ending News Availability in Canada to Comply With New Media Law

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The social media platform Facebook (owned by Meta, banned in Russia as an extremist organization) has begun ending news availability in Canada in order to comply with the country's new online media law, the company said on Tuesday.

"In order to comply with the Online News Act, we have begun the process of ending news availability in Canada. These changes start today, and will be implemented for all people accessing Facebook and Instagram in Canada over the course of the next few weeks," Facebook said in a policy update.

News content posted by Canadian publishers and broadcasters will no longer be viewable by people in Canada, the statement said. Content from international news outlets will also no longer be viewable in Canada, the statement said.

Canada's laws are based on an "incorrect premise" that Meta benefits unfairly from news content shared on its platforms, the statement said, adding that the reverse is true.

The Canadian government implemented the measure with the intent of compensating Canadian news organizations for using their content on social media, most notably on Meta and on Google platforms.

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Russia Exit From Grain Deal Annuls Grain, Fertilizer Export Commitments - US Envoy to UN

(Updates with background in paras 3-5)

UNITED NATIONS, August 1 (Sputnik) - Russia's withdrawal from the grain exports agreement, formally known as the Black Sea Initiative, would annul the commitments related to its grain and fertilizer exports, US Permanent Representative to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said on Tuesday.

"The Secretary-General [Antonio Guterres] is continuing his efforts to find a path forward to bring the Russians back into the deal, which was to provide some support for Russia's fertilizer to get to the market. If they are not in the deal, that part of the deal is no longer working,"

Thomas-Greenfield told reporters.

According to US media reports, the Biden administration allowed the private bank JPMorgan Chase to facilitate payments with the Russian Agricultural Bank (Rosselkhozbank) related to agreement. However, a JPMorgan Chase spokesperson declined to comment on the matter.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Vershinin said in late June that the United Nations admitted it can do nothing regarding three of the five key issues Russia wants resolved in order to extend the grain deal, including reconnecting the Rosselkhozbank to the SWIFT payment system.

On July 22, 2022, the United Nations and Turkey brokered the agreement with Russia and Ukraine to establish a humanitarian maritime corridor to transport grain and fertilizer from the Ukrainian Black Sea ports. Moscow has since agreed to extend the agreement several times despite criticizing the non-implementation of the portions of the agreement pertaining to Russia, but it then decided to let it expire on July 17.

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US Intends to Follow Its UNSC Plan of Action Despite Russia's Objections - Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, August 1 (Sputnik) - The United States Mission to the UN plans to go by its Security Council program of work, which it created as part of its Presidency, despite objections from Russia, the US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield said on Tuesday.

Earlier today, the Russian Mission to the United Nations blocked the US program of work due to proposed meetings on Syria and Ukraine. Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy said there is a long-standing tradition and understanding that the items being included into the formal document are consensual for all UNSC members.

"I was a little stunned... but it will not interfere, it will not stop us from carrying out our responsibilities in the council and completing our plan work of action during our this month as president," Thomas-Greenfield told a briefing about Russia's decision. "So, we will conduct ourselves appropriately during this month and put the agenda on a daily basis on the table that we intend to follow."

The US assumed its Presidency of the UN Security Council beginning August.

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Pentagon Says Being More Secretive About Taiwan Security Aid Due to Operational Concerns

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The United States is revealing fewer details about its latest security aid package to Taiwan due to operational and diplomatic concerns, Defense Department Press Secretary Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.

"The reason why we are being more circumspect on this is due to operational security on the

part of the Taiwanese, as well as sensitivity to the diplomatic situation," Ryder said during a press briefing.

Last week, the Biden administration announced a \$345 million drawdown of military aid for Taiwan.

The package will include intelligence and surveillance assets, missiles, firearms and air defense systems, according to US media reports.

The package is the first for Taiwan to take equipment directly from the US military stocks instead of procuring through contracts, which mirrors the method used to arm Ukraine.

The package comes amid increasing US security engagement with Taiwan as the Biden administration continues to advocate against any unilateral changes to the status quo across the Taiwan Strait.

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Pentagon Declines to Comment on Reports of Ukraine Using North Korean Rockets

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder on Tuesday declined to comment on reports of Ukraine using North Korean rockets against Russian forces, citing a lack of information and referring questions on the matter to Ukrainian officials.

"I've seen the press reports, I don't have anything," Ryder said during a press briefing, when asked about the reports. "I'd have to refer you to the Ukrainians."

Ukraine has fired North Korean munitions using Soviet-era multiple-launch rocket systems (MLRS) in the area around Artyomovsk, the Financial Times reported last week.

Many of the North Korean rockets were made in the 1980s and 1990s, making them prone to misfires or duds and disfavored among Ukrainian forces, the report said.

The munitions were seized from a vessel by a friendly country, the Ukrainian soldiers reportedly said.

It is unlikely that Pyongyang intentionally provided the munitions, given its ties to Moscow, the report added.

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Pentagon Says North Korea Responded to UN Command Message Regarding Detained US Soldier

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - North Korea responded to a message from the United Nations Command regarding the detention of US Army private Travis King, Defense Department Press Secretary Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.

"I don't have any updates on Private King's status," Ryder said during a press briefing. "United Nations Command did communicate or provide some communication via well-established

communications channels through the joint security agency. I can confirm that the DPRK [North Korea] has responded to United Nations Command, but I don't have any substantial progress to read out."

Last month, North Korea detained King after he illegally crossed the border from South Korea during a tour of the demilitarized zone.

Ryder said North Korea responded to United Nations Command by acknowledging that they received the message.

The United Nations Command has also begun discussions with North Korea on King's detention, Ryder added.

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US Sees Indications Russia May Be Willing to Return to Talks on Grain Deal - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, August 1 (Sputnik) - The United States has seen signs that Russia may be willing to return to discussions on the grain deal, US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield said on Tuesday.

"We have seen indications that they [Russia] might be interested in returning to discussions. We will wait to see whether that actually happens," Thomas-Greenfield told a briefing.

If Russia wants to get their fertilizer back to market, they will have to return to negotiations, she said.

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US Escalates Battery, Microchip Minerals to Critical Status - Energy Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The US moved to critical status several key materials used in batteries and microchip due to their importance to green transition technologies and vulnerability to supply disruptions, the Energy Department said in a new assessment.

The report comes a month after Beijing, in retaliation to US restrictions targeting Chinese technology, unveiled new export controls on gallium and germanium, key elements used in semiconductors, including microchips found in military applications. The measures went into effect on Tuesday.

"Materials used in batteries for EVs and stationary storage are now considered to be critical," the report, released on Monday, said. "Lithium becomes critical in the medium term due to its broader use in various battery chemistries and the rampant growth of the EV industry. Natural graphite is a new addition in this assessment and is also found to be critical."

Major materials like aluminum, copper, nickel, and silicon, the report added, moved from noncritical in the short term to near critical in the medium term due to their importance in electrification.

The list also reiterates the critical status of gallium, cobalt, and rare earth elements that are indispensable for commercial and military applications, such as jet engine magnets and wind turbine generators.

Several materials identified in the report are not on the USGS critical minerals list because the Energy Department's study is focused on clean energy technologies rather than the economy in general.

China produces 80% of the world's gallium, 60% of its germanium, and is the leading supplier of rare earth elements. China is also the leading source of critical minerals the United States is greater than 50% net import reliant.

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Russia Exit From Grain Deal Annuls Commitments to Facilitate Its Exports - US Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, August 1 (Sputnik) - Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative annuls the commitments related to facilitating the country's grain and fertilizer exports, US Permanent Representative to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said on Tuesday.

"The Secretary-General is continuing his efforts to find a path forward to bring the Russians back into the deal, which was to provide some support for Russia's fertilizer to get to the market. If they are not in the deal, that part of the deal is no longer working," Thomas-Greenfield told reporters.

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Trump, Aides Prepare for Indictment to Be Filed in Election Interference Probe - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump and his advisers early this week prepared a plan to respond to a potential federal indictment that may soon be filed in connection to special counsel Jack Smith's election interference probe, CNN reported on Tuesday.

According to CNN, citing sources familiar with the matter, Trump and his advisers spent Monday and Tuesday morning to prepare for an indictment to be filed in Smith's probe into Trump and his allies' alleged efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election.

The Trump campaign, the report said, has set up surrogates, influencers and allies to immediately respond to the possible indictment once it is filed.

The campaign also has pre-written statements and videos ready to be published in response to any new charges that may be filed soon, the report added.

On Monday, Trump said that he expects the new federal indictment to be filed any day now.

Trump's spokesperson and attorney did not immediately respond to Sputnik's request for comment on this matter.

The potential indictment would come amid a number of other probes into potential misconduct by Trump, including on his handling of classified documents, as well as in the middle of the 2024 presidential race, in which he has established himself as the Republican Party's leading candidate.

On Sunday, The Wall Street Journal reported, citing sources, that Trump's team spent more than \$40 million in legal fees to protect Trump himself, his advisers and others in the first half of 2023. The newspaper also said the former US president is creating a legal defense fund as he is under several criminal investigations.

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US Presidency of UNSC Plans to Hold Meeting on Ukraine on August 24 - Program of Work

UNITED NATIONS, August 1 (Sputnik) - The United States, which holds the presidency of the UN Security Council for the month of August, plans to hold a UN Security Council meeting on Ukraine on August 24, according to the program of work published on Tuesday.

Earlier in the day, Russia rejected the US's proposed program for the month of August and opposed any scheduled meetings on Ukraine.

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State Department Says Future of US Assistance to Niger at Stake Amid Coup

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller on Tuesday declined to disclose what contingency plans the United States has should Niger President Mohamed Bazoum not return to power, but underscored that the future of US assistance to the country is at stake amid the ongoing coup.

"I don't want to talk about what specifically we might do if President Bazoum not restored to authority but certainly our aid or assistance is at stake, but again, I think it's premature to speculate what that might look like at this point," Miller said during a press briefing.

Miller also echoed that the United States sees no evidence indicating that Russia is behind the coup in Niger, which White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby also affirmed earlier in the day.

Kirby added that the Biden administration believes there is still a window for diplomacy in Niger. Last Wednesday, Niger's presidential guard detained Bazoum. The guard's commander, Gen. Abdourahmane Tchiani, proclaimed himself the country's new leader. France's foreign ministry said that President Emmanuel Macron had spoken to Bazoum on Friday and that Paris continued to recognize him as the only legitimate leader of the African country.

On Saturday, France suspended all financial aid to Niger until constitutional order is restored. On the next day, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) gave Niger's

coup leaders one week to reinstate the detained president to power saying that it could use "all measures," including military, to restore order in the country.

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US Senators Introduce Bill to Support Ukraine's Energy Sector, Europe's Energy Security

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - US Senators Jim Risch and Robert Menendez announced in a statement on Tuesday that they have introduced legislation to support US investments in Ukraine's energy infrastructure and boost Eastern European energy security.

"The Responding to the Energy Security Crisis in Ukraine and Europe (RESCUE) Act will address Ukraine's urgent fuel needs while helping it reconstruct and modernize its energy infrastructure. It will also provide investment and technical assistance across Eastern and Southeastern Europe to reduce regional reliance on Russian energy resources," the statement said.

The bill would help increase Eastern European energy inter-connectivity, improve diversification of energy sources and addresses human health and nuclear safety concerns in Ukraine, the statement said.

"There is authorized to be appropriated \$1,880,000,000 for the Secretary of State and the Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development to carry out the programs and functions of this Act," the statement added.

Most of the funds should be authorized for activities related to supporting Ukraine's energy sector reconstruction and modernization as well as for efforts to reduce the European Union's reliance on Russian energy, according to the statement.

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US Army General, Professor Conduct Unofficial Probe Into Military Whistleblower - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - A US Army general and a professor at the service's West Point military academy conducted an unofficial probe into a whistleblower who criticized the US military and government online, Breitbart reported on Tuesday.

US Army Lt. Gen. Maria Gervais and Maj. Jessica Dawson utilized their military authorities and access to investigate and publicly identify the service member, the report said, citing private emails and text messages.

Gervais, the deputy commander of the US Army's Training and Doctrine Command, partnered with Dawson, an information warfare researcher at the Army Cyber Institute, to conduct the unauthorized investigation.

The two Army officials accused the whistleblower of being a counterintelligence threat to the United States from the inside, the report said. The accusations appear to have been part of an

effort to get the Army Criminal Investigative Division to open an official probe into the matter, according to the report.

The nearly year-long investigation led to the public identification of the whistleblower, who then had an inspector general complaint filed against them, the report said. The probe also led to an investigation by the whistleblower's chain of command, the report said.

The alleged whistleblower, Army Chief Warrant Officer 2 Samuel Shoemate, was found to have violated Uniform Code of Military Justice provisions banning service members from posting derogatory and disrespectful materials online toward senior US officials and military leaders, the report said.

The probe resulted in a letter of reprimand, although Shoemate retired from the US Army on Tuesday.

"A lieutenant general colluding with various other senior officials to conduct their own unofficial investigation, with the use of government resources, is emblematic of larger, systemic abuses observed within the DOD in recent years," Shoemate is quoted as saying in the report.

It appears that senior officers and officials are allowed to act with impunity, Shoemate said.

Gervais and Dawson's unofficial investigation into Shoemate constitutes an "unlawful command influence" and tainted the official probe, civilian defense attorney and Navy reservist Pat Wier also reportedly said.

US Congressman Matt Gaetz is now investigating the matter as a potential abuse of official resources, the report said. Gaetz believes the matter warrants an inquiry by the full House Armed Services Committee and will be urging the panel's chairman to pursue such an investigation, the report said.

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UN, Russia Discuss Commercial Air Operators' Services for UN Field Operations

UNITED NATIONS, August 1 (Sputnik) - The United Nations and Russia held talks in Moscow on Tuesday to discuss issues related to the aviation services provided by Russian commercial air operators to UN field operations, spokesperson Farhan Haq said.

The UN was represented by Atul Khare, under-secretary-general for operational support. The Russian delegation was led by Alexander Neradko, director general of the Federal Air Transport Agency.

"The United Nations and the Russian Federation held the Ninth Annual Aviation Talks on 1 August 2023 in Moscow ... The two sides discussed issues related to the aviation services provided by commercial air operators registered in the Russian Federation to United Nations field operations," Haq said in a statement.

The Russian side during the talks highlighted the longstanding cooperation between Russian commercial aviation providers and the UN, according to the statement.

Khare expressed his satisfaction with the contributions of the Russian companies, particularly during special situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic, Haq added.

In 2020, the United Nations expressed gratitude to Russia for being the first air carrier to agree

to transfer COVID-19 patients on UN medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) flights.

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US Awaiting on Allies to Finalize F-16 Training Plan for Ukrainian Pilots - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The United States is still awaiting its European allies to finalize their plan for training Ukrainian pilots to use F-16 fighter jets, CNN reported on Tuesday. European officials have yet to submit a final plan to train Ukrainian pilots on F-16 fighter jets, which the United States will have to approve before the program can begin, the report said, citing officials familiar with the matter.

The United States is currently trying to decide whether to send US pilots to help train Ukrainian pilots to operate F-16 jets, but no final decision has been made yet.

The State Department did not immediately respond to Sputnik for comment on this issue.

US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan recently said that training for Ukrainian pilots would begin in the coming weeks. Sullivan also said the United States was working with its European allies to determine the location and dates of the training.

In mid-July, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that the delivery of F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine would lead to a further escalation in the conflict because the aircraft have a modification that makes them nuclear-capable and represent direct threat to Russia.

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El Salvador Deploys 7,000 Soldiers to Fight Gangs in Cabanas - President

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele announced on Tuesday that he has ordered the deployment of 7,000 soldiers and 1,000 police officers to establish a security perimeter in the country's department of Cabanas.

"Since dawn, 7,000 soldiers and 1,000 policemen have established a security perimeter around the entire department of Cabanas. Their task will be to impede the exit of gang members out of the department, and to cut all the supply routes of the terrorist groups," Bukele said via Twitter.

Bukele noted that the government is waging war on gangs in El Salvador's 14 departments and gang members have moved to Cabanas to hide due to the rural landscape of the area, making it the department with the most terrorist cells.

The president said the perimeter will remain in place until the troops and police successfully remove all individuals related to gangs.

"We will not lift the perimeter until we apprehend all the criminals," Bukele said.

Residents and foreign tourists alike can adhere to their usual normal activities, Bukele added.

At the end of March 2022, the Salvadoran assembly approved a state of emergency to tackle the mounting violence by Central America's largest gang - MS-13. The assembly has extended

the measure several times, resulting in the reduction of the number of murders to zero.

More than 60,000 people have been arrested during the state of emergency, according to official data.

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UN Against All Attacks on Civilian Facilities, Wants Them to Stop - UN Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, August 1 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is against all attacks on civilian facilities and urges them to stop - including if they target Moscow, the UN Spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Tuesday.

"We don't have any firsthand information about the sending of drones, but clearly, we're against all attacks on civilian facilities wherever they are held. So if they were, for example, civilian buildings in Moscow, we're against that and we would want that to stop," Haq told a briefing.

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Blinken Says US Commends Kenya for Considering Lead Role in Haiti Response Force

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The United States commends Kenya's decision to consider leading a multinational force in Haiti to address gang violence in the island country, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday.

"The United States commends the Government of Kenya for responding to Haiti's call and for considering to serve as the lead nation for a multinational force in Haiti to assist in addressing insecurity caused by gang violence," Blinken said in a statement.

The US looks forward to working with partners of Haiti to advance the process, including through a UN Security Council resolution to authorize the multinational force, the statement said.

The US calls on stakeholders in Haiti to take urgent steps to expand political consensus and restore a democratic order, the statement added.

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UN Not to Participate in Ukraine Peace Talks in Saudi Arabia 'At This Stage' - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, August 1 (Sputnik) - The United Nations will not participate "at this stage" in the Ukraine peace talks in Saudi Arabia, UN spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Tuesday.

"I am not aware of any UN participation at this stage. If that changes, I will let you know," Haq

said during a press briefing.

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Russia Blocks US Presidency Program for UN Security Council - Deputy Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, August 1 (Sputnik) - Russia has blocked the United States' proposed program during the time Washington presides over the UN Security Council this month, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Tuesday.

"I decided to explain the reasoning why Russia didn't support the US presidency program for this month," Polyanskiy told reporters. "The presidency program is a very informal indicative document, which has no formal nature. It's just an outline for the work of the Security Council. ... But there is a long-standing tradition and understanding that the items that are being included into the formal document, first of all, are consensual for all Council members."

Polyanskiy said Russia made the decision because of two "stumbling blocks" - the proposed meetings on Syria and Ukraine.

Russia considers that holding one meeting on Syria is enough rather than the proposed three, which would be futile and a waste time and resources, Polyanskiy said.

However, the biggest stumbling block is the United States' obsession to organize meetings on Ukraine in a situation in which "there is no mandate cycle, no request of the UN Secretary-General to brief the Security Council," Polyanskiy added.

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US Job Openings Hit 2-Year Low as Labor Market Cools Amid Federal Rate Hikes - Labor Dept.

WASHINGTON, Aug 1 (Sputnik) - US job openings hit two-year lows in June, the Labor Department said in its monthly Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS) report on Tuesday.

Job openings grew by 9.582 million on the last day of June, down 34,000 from the previous month - the lowest level since April 2021, the report said.

Even so, there were fewer layoffs in June, with 1.53 million reported versus May's 1.55 million, the report said.

Economists are watching the data closely to guess the path the Federal Reserve would likely take regarding monetary policy after carrying out interest rate hikes over the past 18 months to rein in runaway inflation. To keep inflation down, the Fed needs to keep a lid on US jobs and wages growth.

"We still have a long way to go, and we still have a very high number of openings, especially as compared to where we were pre-pandemic," Rachel Sederberg, senior economist at the labor analytics firm Lightcast, said in comments carried by CNBC. "But we're heading in the right

direction and we're doing so in a calm manner, which is what we want to see."

The JOLTS report came ahead of Friday's important non-farm payrolls report for July.

Economists are forecasting a growth of 200,000 non-farm payrolls on the average for last month versus June's 209,000. The June figure was particularly an important one for the Fed as it came below economists' estimates for the first time in 16 months, signaling progress in the Fed's inflation-fighting efforts.

Inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index, hit a four-decade high of 9.1% per year in June 2022 in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic and the trillions of dollars of relief spending for that.

The Federal Reserve responded by adding 525 basis points to rates from a previous 25.

Inflation subsequently eased, falling to as low as 3% in the Consumer Price Index reading for July. But that is still well above the Fed's long-term target of 2%, with officials at the central bank saying they feared renewed spikes if consumers start spending big again.

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US Congressman Says Introduced Bill to Abolish USAID to Cut Spending, Reform Diplomacy

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Matt Gaetz introduced a bill on Tuesday to abolish the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in a bid to cut government spending and reform the United States' diplomatic approach.

"I found a way to cut spending," Gaetz said in a statement via Twitter, sharing a report with a copy of the new bill text.

The legislation would prevent federal funds from being made available to USAID to carry out its functions, according to the bill text. The bill also rescinds unobligated funds and transfers USAID's assets and liabilities to the State Department.

US diplomacy, the bill added, should not undermine the culture or tradition of other countries, the bill said. However, USAID uses tax dollars to push "radical, leftist ideology" and undermine foreign governments that do not adhere to the ideas it espouses.

The bill also said USAID "meddles" in local elections by promoting the interests of certain groups over the interests of countries' citizenries.

"USAID does not act in the best interest of the United States or its people, nor the foreign nations it purports to support," the bill said.

The legislation is reportedly cosponsored by House lawmakers including Andy Biggs, Paul Gosar, and Marjorie Taylor Greene.

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Global Warming, Climate Change Greatest Threat Humanity Has Ever Faced - US Senator

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - Rising global temperatures and climate change is the biggest threat the human race has ever had to face, Senator Jeff Merkley said on Tuesday.

"This is the biggest threat humanity has ever faced," Merkley, a Democratic senator from Oregon, said on a Washington Post podcast. "July 4 was the hottest day in human history."

The United States and President Joe Biden had to provide leadership on the issue by acting decisively and boldly to stop using all fossil fuels immediately, Merkley insisted.

"The United States has to set the example. ... What matters now is a fast pivot. We have not even made a start on ending the acceleration of carbon into our atmosphere. ... Those [zero carbon emission] goals for 2035 and 2050 are meaningless. ... We are hurtling towards a 1.5-degree Centigrade temperature rise. ... Biden has given no signs he is prepared to fight this battle," he said.

In October 2018, a Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5 degrees Centigrade was published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

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White House Unaware of Any 'Specific Threats' to NATO Members by Wagner Group - Kirby

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The United States is not aware of any "specific threats" posed by the private military company Wagner Group to NATO member states, National Security Council Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"We're not aware of any specific threat posed by Wagner to Poland or to any of our NATO allies," Kirby said during a press briefing.

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White House Says Will Not Speculate About Potential 'Domino Effect' From Niger Coup

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration will not speculate about a potential domino effect in the Sahel region of Africa following the military coup in Niger last week, National Security Council Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"I can't speculate about a domino effect in the region, we're focused on what's going on in Niger right now," Kirby said during a press briefing. "It's difficult to speculate that there's going to be some sort of, as you put it, domino effect. That's not what we're seeing at this time."

Last Wednesday, the Nigerian presidential guard detained President Mohamed Bazoum. Presidential guard leader Gen. Abdourahmane Tchiani subsequently declared himself the new ruler of Niger.

The Biden administration believes there is still a window for diplomacy in Niger and wants to

see Bazoum's leadership respected, Kirby said.

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No Indication Russia, Wagner Group Responsible for Niger Military Coup - White House

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - There is no indication that Russia or the private military company Wagner Group are responsible for last week's military coup in Niger, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"In our view, there is no indication that Russia was behind this, Russia's materially supporting it in any way, or in any way effectively supporting it, and that somehow Russia is responsible for what's happening," Kirby said during a press briefing.

There is also no indication that Wagner Group is responsible for the coup, Kirby said.

Last Wednesday, Niger's presidential guard detained President Mohamed Bazoum. The leader of the presidential guard, Gen. Abdourahmane Tchiani, subsequently declared himself the new ruler of Niger.

Russia calls on the conflicting parties in Niger to show restraint and urges them to restore the rule of law as soon as possible, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Monday.

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White House Working to Secure Release of US Citizen Kidnapped in Haiti - Kirby

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is working to secure the release of US citizen Alix Dorsainvil and her child, who were kidnapped in Haiti, National Security Council Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"The president has been briefed and is aware of her case, and all I can tell you is that we're working on this as hard as we can. We want to see her released," Kirby said during a press briefing.

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White House Says Has Not Made Decision to Use US Troops to Aid Niger Evacuation Efforts

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has not made any decisions regarding the potential use of US military forces in Niger to support evacuations from the country amid a military coup, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"We've got a thousand or so military on the ground there. They are there for counterterrorism purposes and partnership building capacity... There's been no decision to use them in any way to support evacuation efforts by other countries," Kirby said.

The United States has also not made any decisions regarding the repositioning of US forces for that purpose, Kirby also said.

The Biden administration believes that there is still a window for diplomacy in Niger, Kirby said. The US wants to see the administration of Nigerien President Mohamed Bazoum respected, Kirby added.

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White House Says No Direct Threats to US Citizens, Facilities in Niger – Kirby

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) – National Security Council Coordinator John Kirby said on Tuesday that the US does not currently have any indication of direct threats to its citizens or facilities in Niger.

"We don't have any indications of direct threats to US citizens or to our facilities. And so we've not changed our posture with respect to our presence in Niger at this time, but again, we're monitoring it literally by the hour," Kirby said at a press briefing.

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US Launches New Bureau to Foster Global Cooperation Against Health Threats - Blinken

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The US State Department has launched the Bureau of Global Health Security and Diplomacy in order to strengthen global health security and foster international cooperation against health threats, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday.

"The bureau's overarching mission is to fortify the global health security architecture to effectively prevent, detect, control and respond to infectious diseases, including HIV/AIDS," Blinken said.

Blinken explained the bureau aims to enhance the protection for the United States and the global community against health threats by leveraging and coordinating US foreign assistance and fostering robust international cooperation.

US Ambassador-at-Large John Nkengasong will lead the new bureau and will also serve as US global AIDS coordinator as well as senior official for global health security and diplomacy, Blinken said.

The secretary of state emphasized that the United States must play a vital role in addressing global health issues.

The new bureau will integrate global health security as a core component of US national security and foreign policy, Blinken added.

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US Donates \$100,000 to Canadian Communities for Wildfire Relief Efforts - Embassy

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The United States has donated \$100,000 in relief aid to the Canadian communities affected by the ongoing wildfires, the US embassy in Ottawa said on Tuesday.

"Today, the U.S. Government, through the U.S. Agency for International Development, donated \$100,000 (USD) to ADRA International. This funding will support relief, recovery, risk reduction, and resilience efforts for communities affected by wildland fires in Canada, with a specific focus on the most vulnerable populations," the embassy said in a statement.

Since the beginning of Canada's wildfire season, the US has dispatched 2,600 firefighters and material assistance to assist its northern neighbor in mitigating fires.

As of July 31, there were 1,032 active wildfires across Canada, with 653 of them being out of control, according to the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre. A total of 13 million hectares of forest land have been destroyed by fire since the beginning of the year.

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US Sanctions 2 Chinese Companies Over Forced Uyghur Labor - Homeland Security

(Updates with more details in paras 1, 3-6)

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The US Forced Labor Enforcement Task Force, chaired by the Department of Homeland Security, sanctioned on Tuesday two Chinese companies over their use of forced Uyghur labor, according to a release.

"Effective August 2, 2023, goods produced by Camel Group Co., Ltd. and Chenguang Biotech Group Co., Ltd. and its subsidiary Chenguang Biotechnology Group Yanqi Co. Ltd. will be restricted from entering the United States as a result of the companies' participation in business practices that target members of persecuted groups, including Uyghur minorities in the PRC," the release said.

Camel Group is headquartered in Xiangyang City, Hubei province, and is among China's largest lead-acid battery manufacturers.

Chenguang Biotech Group is headquartered in Handan, Hebei province, and produces plant-based extracts, food additives, natural dyes, pigments and supplements from agricultural products. Its subsidiary Chenguang Biotechnology Group Yanqi Co. Ltd. is located in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in China.

This latest action brings the total number of companies on the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention

Act Entity List to 24.

The act was signed by President Biden into law in December 2021 and prohibits the importing of in the United States that are either produced in Xinjiang or produced by entities identified on the list.

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Canada to Invest \$1.1Mln to Preserve Habitats of Species at Risk in St. Lawrence Lowlands

WASHINGTON, August 1 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government will invest C\$1.48 million (\$1.1 million) over a four-year period to preserve and restore habitats of endangered species along the St. Lawrence River, Environment and Climate Change Canada said on Tuesday.

"Today, the Honourable Steven Guilbeault, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, announced funding of \$1.48 million over four years for the Nature Conservancy of Canada to support the protection and restoration of habitats frequented by numerous species at risk along the St. Lawrence River. This investment is in addition to the \$250,000 granted between 2020 and 2023 for the first phase of this project," the ministry said in a statement.

This investment is part of the ongoing cooperation between the federal government, provinces, territories, and indigenous people to mitigate and restore the loss of biodiversity in the country, the statement said.

The funds will be invested in the St-Lawrence Lowlands in the Province of Quebec to protect suitable core habitats for species at risk, in particular through conservation planning activities, the development of partnerships, or land acquisition and to connect them by ecological corridors, the statement added.

Some 21 species will benefit from the conservation efforts, including the Bobolink, the Short-eared Owl and Victorin's Gentian.