

8/3/23 Thursday

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Trump Enters Not Guilty Plea to Four Criminal Charges in Election Interference Case

The indictment is the third federal indictment against former US President Donald Trump. He was previously charged with falsifying business records in an alleged attempt to cover up hush money payments to adult film star Stormy Daniels, as well as his alleged mishandling of classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate.

Former US President Donald Trump submitted not guilty pleas to all four criminal charges stemming from the third indictment tied to alleged efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election.

The latest indictment charges that the former president, along with six unnamed co-conspirators who have not yet been charged, worked to overturn election results in Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, New Mexico, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin by organizing a group of "fraudulent slates of electors" in those states.

Trump was charged with 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 the right to vote.

The judge informed Trump that he could face up to five years in prison for the first account; 20 years for the second charge; 20 years for the third charge and up to ten years for the fourth. Trump appeared before a federal magistrate Judge Moxila Upadhyaya in Washington, DC, on Thursday, answered basic questions from the judge and was informed about the charges against him before filing his plea.

The magistrate judge set the first hearing for August 28 at 10 a.m. local time, which will be presided over by Judge Tanya Chutkan, who has recently gained a reputation for being tough on defendants from the January 6, 2021 riots.

The other two days initially offered by the magistrate were August 21 and August 22. The first GOP presidential primary debate is scheduled for August 23.

Upadhyaya informed the government it has seven days to set a trial schedule. Trump's legal team will then have an additional seven days to respond to that schedule. A trial date is expected to be set during the August 28 hearing.

Trump was not required to post bail and was released on his own recognizance, under the conditions that he does not violate any federal or state laws, appears in court when required and does not communicate about the case to anyone he knows to be a witness except through counsel.

In the fall of 2021, Chutkan ruled the House Select Committee investigating the January 6 riots could access a trove of evidence including call logs, memos, internal strategy papers and more from Trump's advisors as part of the investigation.

Much of that evidence was referenced in the indictment Trump plead not guilty to on Thursday.

Special prosecutor Tom Windom asked for a speedy trial, something the Trump team objected to saying it needed time to review the evidence; however, the judge only stated the court will ensure a "fair trial" but did not elaborate on the timing.

As was the case in the previous indictments, the former president was fingerprinted and provided personal information to the court but he was not placed in handcuffs and did not have a mugshot taken.

Hours before he arrived in Washington DC, Trump made light of the situation on his Truth Social account, [posting Thursday morning](#) that he needed "one more indictment to ensure my election!"

Before boarding a plane leaving Washington, Trump told media the indictment is something that "when you look at what's happening, this is a persecution of a political opponent. This was never supposed to happen in America."

Trump added that it was "a very sad day for America."

"If you can't beat them, you persecute them or prosecute them, we can't let this happen in America," Trump told reporters at Reagan National Airport after making a point to note that he is leading Biden in polls by "a lot."

Outside the courtroom, shortly after the arraignment proceedings came to a close, an individual who had been present inside the courthouse told media that Trump appeared "very humble" during the hearing. They added that the normally boisterous Trump "didn't say much unless he was asked a question by the judge."

Trump remains the odds-on favorite to win the GOP nomination for the 2024 presidential election.

Thursday's proceedings mark the third indictment over a period of just a few months:

In March, Trump was charged with falsifying business records in a Manhattan federal court over allegations that he improperly accounted for hush money payments made to adult film star Stormy Daniels meant to keep her from talking about an alleged affair she had with Trump prior to the 2016 election cycle.

Then in June, Trump was charged with 37 additional felony accounts related to his alleged mishandling of classified documents, including attempts to conceal evidence, at his Mar-a-Lago estate.

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Scientists to World Leaders: Eliminate Your Nukes 'Before They Eliminate Us'

In January, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists moved the hands of the doomsday clock to 90 seconds before midnight, the closest it has ever been, citing the special operation in Ukraine, threats from emerging technologies, climate change and biological threats.

More than 100 medical journals issued a joint call in a rare show of unity on Thursday, calling for the urgent elimination of nuclear weapons while calling the threat of nuclear catastrophe "great and growing."

The editorial, simultaneously published in major medical journals that typically compete for exclusives, including National Medical Journal, Lancet, JAMA, and New England Journal of Medicine, among others, calls on the “nuclear-armed states” to “eliminate their nuclear arsenals before they eliminate us.”

The call comes during growing tensions between Russia, China and the West as well as multiple missile tests by North Korea.

Titled “Reducing the Risks of Nuclear War,” the editorial warned that even “a ‘limited’ nuclear war involving only 250 of the 13,000 nuclear weapons in the world could kill 120 million people outright and cause global climate disruption leading to a nuclear famine, putting two billion people at risk.”

It adds that a large-scale war between the United States and Russia “could kill 200 million people” shortly after it starts while ushering in a nuclear winter that could kill “5-6 billion people” and threaten humanity’s very existence.

The editorial also contends that a limited nuclear confrontation could quickly escalate to full-blown nuclear war. The authors further urged nuclear-armed states to adopt a no-first-use policy, take their nuclear arsenals off of hair-trigger alert and for all nuclear-armed countries currently involved in conflicts to pledge “publicly and unequivocally” they will not utilize nuclear weapons in those conflicts.

The authors also underscored that nuclear-armed countries must work towards a “definitive end” of the nuclear threat by supporting the “urgent commencement of negotiations” to “eliminate their nuclear weapons.”

Last year, the review of the UN Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, considered the bedrock of nuclear disarmament, failed to pass after the principal countries failed to reach an agreement. “[O]ur world is increasingly wracked by conflicts, and, most alarmingly, the ever growing prospect of the unthinkable nuclear war,” Argentine Ambassador Gustavo Zlauvinen said at the time.

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Former AG Barr: Trump Will Not ‘Come Out Well’ If He Takes the Stand in Election Case

Former US President Donald Trump was indicted on Tuesday and pleaded not guilty on Wednesday to four charges related to his and his allies’ alleged efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election. The first hearing for the trial is scheduled for August 28.

Former US Attorney General Bill Barr said it will not “come out very well” for former US President Donald Trump if he decides to take the stand in the election fraud case that he pleaded not guilty to on Thursday.

Barr served as the US attorney general during the George W. Bush and Trump administrations. Barr was referring to Trump lawyer John Lauro’s plan to utilize an advice of counsel defense against the charges. The one-time AG said the defense likely won’t be used in the trial because it would require Trump to testify under oath on the stand.

“Also, I don’t think this defense of advice of counsel is going to go forward because I think the president would have to get on the stand and subject himself to cross-examination in order to raise that, and he also has to waive attorney-client privilege,” Barr said.

“I think it would not come out very well for him,” Barr said when asked how he thinks Trump would perform on the stand. “I think he’d be subjected to very skilled cross-examination and I doubt he remembers all the different versions of events he’s given over the last few years,” Barr added.

Lauro appeared on US media outlets in the hours after Trump was indicted on Tuesday, where he said Trump was acting on what he believed to be reasonable advice from his lawyer when he asked then-Vice President Mike Pence to halt Congress’ count of presidential electors.

“You have one of the leading constitutional scholars in the United States, John Eastman, say to President Trump, ‘This is a protocol that you can follow. It’s legal.’ That eliminates criminal intent,” Lauro argued.

While Eastman’s contention that Pence had the power to stop the electoral vote count has been widely disputed by law experts, Trump’s legal team would only have to argue that Trump was acting in good faith based on Eastman’s advice.

Trump remains the overwhelming favorite to win the Republican nomination for president. Previous polls taken after Trump’s other two indictments, seem to indicate they had little to no effect on the opinion of likely Republican primary voters.

After leaving court on Thursday, Trump called it “a very sad day for America” and argued that he is being prosecuted because he is current US President Joe Biden’s biggest political threat.

“When you look at what’s happening, this is a persecution of a political opponent. This was never supposed to happen in America,” Trump told reporters.

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The Frequent Indictment Club - Cartoon
By - Ted Rall

Former US President Donald Trump pleaded not guilty to his third indictment this year on Thursday, the latest one focusing on his alleged attempts to overturn the 2020 election and his role in the January 6, 2021 riot on the US Capitol.

Trump’s defense, according to comments in US media by his lawyer John Lauro, will argue the former president was listening to the advice of his lawyers and believed what he was doing was legal. That, combined with the assertion Trump truly believed he won the 2020 election, is creating an argument that the one-time commander-in-chief did not have criminal intent with his actions.

Trump was indicted twice earlier this year. One case, accusing Trump of falsifying business records, stems from hush money payments made to adult film star Stormy Daniels to prevent her from going public with claims that she and Trump had an affair years before the 2016 election cycle.

The second case, part of the official special counsel investigation, resulted from Trump's alleged mishandling of classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate and alleged attempts to destroy evidence.

Trump has plead not guilty in all three cases and has claimed that they are politically motivated witch hunts.

The first hearing for Trump's third indictment is scheduled for August 28.

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Expelled 'Tennessee Three' Democratic Reps Win Special Election to Secure Seats

Tennessee Democratic State Representatives Justin Jones and Justin Pearson were expelled from the State Legislature in April for participating in a gun control protest. Jones represents much of Eastern Nashville while Pearson represents an area encompassing large parts of Memphis and surrounding areas.

The two Tennessee state representatives who were expelled from the state House of Representatives for their participation in a gun control protest were officially reinstated on Thursday following special elections in their districts.

Reps. Justin Pearson and Justin Jones were expelled by the Republican-controlled legislature last spring after they, along with fellow Democratic State Rep. Gloria Johnson, joined thousands of Tennessee constituents who were protesting on the House floor days after a school shooting in Nashville left six dead, including three children.

Johnson, who is white, narrowly avoided expulsion, while Jones and Pearson were expelled by the predominantly white and Republican State House. The three were nicknamed the "Tennessee Three."

Local officials quickly [reinstated](#) Pearson and Jones, but only on an interim basis. A special election was held in each district to determine the status of their seats where Jones and Pearson won easily, according to unofficial results from Tennessee's Secretary of State's office. The elections come before state lawmakers are scheduled to return to Nashville to discuss possible changes to the state's gun laws. While Jones and Pearson's inclusion will not be enough to make a significant difference in the vote count – Republicans hold a strong supermajority in the state – their presence, especially in light of their overwhelming electoral wins, will add some intrigue to discussions.

The expulsion, which briefly left two predominately Black districts without representation in the state government, led to a massive increase in campaign donations for Pearson and Jones. The two representatives, who were elected last year, received more than \$2 million combined from across the country. That amount of campaign fundraising is unheard of for two rookie state representatives who are part of a minority party.

Jones defeated a Republican candidate, Laura Nelson, who had received significant backing from the Republican party and raised more than \$34,000. Pearson defeated independent candidate Jeff Johnson, who reportedly only raising \$400 for his campaign.

One other state seat was up for election on Thursday. Republican Timothy Hill defeated Democrat Lori Love in Tennessee's Republican-leaning District 3, which came open after Rep. Scotty Campbell resigned in April amid ethics complaints.

Meanwhile, in a Democratic primary held the same day, community organizer Aftyn Behn defeated interim Rep. Anthony Davis who took over after Rep. Bill Beck died in June. Davis will serve the rest of the special session before the general election in September when Behn will take on Republican David Hooven.

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Six-Month Truce Begins Between Colombian Gov't, National Liberation Army Insurgent Group

Gustavo Petro, Colombia's first leftist president, ran for office on a platform of reversing many of the country's most hated policies, including the decadeslong war against Marxist rebel groups that left hundreds of thousands dead.

A six-month truce between the Colombian government and the National Liberation Army (ELN) began on Thursday that could lead to a more permanent peace agreement. The deal allows the group to defend itself if attacked.

Colombian Defense Minister Ivan Velasquez said on Wednesday that the deal will protect the "civilian population that has been so affected by the actions of the illegal armed organizations." "Hopefully it will bear fruit," said Petro, himself a former guerrilla fighter with the now-defunct 19th of April Movement militia. "It will depend more on them than on us."

Indeed, top ELN commander Antonio García urged his roughly 5,800 fighters to abide by the ceasefire in a video circulated earlier this week, explaining that further discussion with the "participation of society" would push ahead, aiming "to make Colombia a fairer, more democratic and inclusive country."

The ELN is the country's second-largest rebel group after the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), which is in [its own ongoing peace talks](#) with Bogota. It is designated a terrorist group by the United States, which is a close ally of the Colombian government and has supported its counterinsurgency efforts.

The Marxist-Leninist ELN and FARC were both founded in 1964, part of the ongoing fallout of the period of political violence known in Colombian history as La Violencia. Decades of warfare have flared since, not just between the communist groups and the government, but also a plethora of right-wing militias as well.

A Colombian effort to register the victims of this civil war had recorded 9.2 million as of April 2022, including 220,000 deaths - 177,307 civilians and 40,787 fighters. According to the United Nations, just 12% of the civilian deaths are attributed to the FARC and ELN, while 80% were caused by right-wing paramilitary groups; the remaining 8% are attributed to the Colombian military and police, the latter of whom are also paramilitarized.

Various efforts at peace talks and demobilizations have been attempted over the years, with [various degrees of success](#). One attempt to reach a deal with the ELN collapsed in 2018 after

the newly-elected President Ivan Duque rejected the efforts of his predecessor, Juan Manuel Santos, and canceled the talks being hosted by Cuba.

After the war resumed, the ELN delegation remained in Havana over fears about their ability to safely return to Colombia, and the United States used the opportunity to claim Cuba was harboring terrorists and put the socialist state on the State Department's [List of State Sponsors of Terrorism](#).

After Petro won the 2022 presidential elections and Duque left office in early 2023, the peace talks were relaunched, with Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Cuba, Venezuela and Norway acting as guarantor countries in the negotiations.

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China Seeks to Limit Children to 2 Hours on Cell Phones Per Day

China's top internet regulator has proposed a new rule that would limit the amount of time minors can spend on cell phones each day.

The proposed rule was announced on Wednesday by the Cyberspace Administration of China and would require all mobile devices, apps, and app stores to include a "minor mode" that would limit users under the age of 18 to a maximum of two hours on the device per day - even less for younger age cohorts.

For children under age eight, that time would be just 40 minutes per day, while children between the ages of eight and 16 would get one hour of screentime; only teenagers between 16 and 18 would get the full two hours. All would get a popup reminder after 30 minutes about the importance of resting their device.

In addition, no users under 18 would be able to access their devices between the hours of 10pm and 6am under the new rule.

All the restrictions would be able to be overridden by parents, and they would not restrict access to emergency services, either.

Finally, the regulator encourages tech makers to create content that "disseminates core socialist values" and "forges a sense of community of the Chinese nation."

The public has until September 2 to comment on the new rule proposal.

One mother who spoke with US media said the rule proposal was a smart move, since children have trouble with self-control and it makes parents' jobs easier. Others simply pointed out that children will try to use their parents' accounts instead.

Some Chinese tech companies have already adopted their own "teenage modes" on their apps, such as ByteDance, Bilibili and Kuaishou, which limit time on their apps for younger users.

Similar proposals have been made in the United States, [such as Utah](#), which passed a law earlier this year requiring children to get parental approval to use social media. It has been opposed by critics who say it limits free speech and is ultimately unenforceable.

The rule proposal has come amid a rise in internet addiction among children as well as concerns about the impact of social media on the mental health of users, especially children.

Chinese media have also voiced fears that too much screen time is responsible for a rise in nearsightedness and a lack of exposure to sunlight.

"Excessive and problematic use of social media can harm children and adolescents by disrupting important healthy behaviors," said a US Department of Health and Human Services [report on mental health](#) and social media use among youth.

"Social media platforms are often designed to maximize user engagement, which has the potential to encourage excessive use and behavioral dysregulation," it noted, adding that according to one recent model, "nearly a third (31%) of social media use may be attributable to self-control challenges magnified by habit formation."

That can have an especially negative impact on girls, 32% of whom a 2020 study by Meta* found they felt worse about their bodies due to using the company's Instagram app. The company also tracked an increase in suicidal thoughts among teens who used the app. The studies were published in US media in a report that noted the company then used that information to make a concerted push to bring in new younger users.

Indeed, news of China's proposed new rule set off [stock losses among numerous](#) Chinese tech firms, including Tencent, Wechat, Bilibili, Kuaishou, and Weibo. China has a little over 1 billion internet users, one-fifth of whom are under the age of 19.

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Raging Canadian Wildfires Account for 25% of Global Carbon Pollution

Worldwide, record-high temperatures have been shattered this year and the planet recently experienced its hottest days in the last 120,000 years.

In the first seven months of this year alone, the raging wildfires in Canada have pumped out twice Canada's entire pollution amount last year, [according to Europe's](#) Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service (CAMS). The center also found that the fires account for one-quarter of all carbon emissions on the planet this year.

According to CAMS, the wildfires in Canada have pumped some 90 megatons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere since January 1.

"In recent years we have seen significant wildfires in the Northern Hemisphere, but this year's fire activity in Canada is highly unusual," CAMS Senior Scientist Mark Parrington said in a news release. "The weather has played a part, with warm and dry conditions increasing the flammability of vegetation and increasing the risk of large-scale fires. We support users in mitigating the impacts through monitoring the fire activity and intensity, and the emitted smoke." According to Canadian [government statistics](#), the wildfires have consumed more than 32 million acres of land this year - an area the size of Portugal. Fire authorities are currently tracking 1,036 active fires burning across Canada, 663 of which are classified as "out of control." Firefighters have traveled from around the globe to aid their Canadian counterparts, but many experts say it may be impossible to tame the flames without cooperation from Mother Nature.

The smoke has traveled thousands of miles, obscuring skies in the United States and [degrading air quality](#), forcing people indoors. Even Europe has not been spared, as high-altitude winds

blow the smoke across the Atlantic, causing flight delays. The fires have mostly occurred in isolated areas, but have still forced tens of thousands of Canadians from their homes. Other wildfires have raged around the globe in 2023 as well, [including in Italy](#), Greece, and Russia, where hot and dry weather has fanned them. Record-shattering heat waves have gripped Europe and the United States for weeks, helping to bring the waters in the Gulf of Mexico up to jacuzzi-like temperatures, which [meteorologists have warned](#) could easily become fertile fuel for hurricanes passing overhead.

Such massive wildfires, including at such northerly altitudes, are one consequence climate scientists have warned could come from global warming. Since carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is the primary driver of the planet's "greenhouse effect," the massive blazes create a deadly feedback loop, worsening the phenomenon that is their cause.

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Advanced Microchips Should Be 'Shared Endeavor' to Fight Global Warming, Not Target of US-China Feud

An expert told Sputnik that the tit-for-tat between Washington and Beijing over microchip manufacturing techniques is taking place amid a far greater threat to both nations: climate change, which requires the proliferation of such advanced technologies in order to solve. In reply to a concerted effort to deprive China of access to some of the world's best microchips, the East Asian country has moved to restrict exports of some of the key minerals used to manufacture those chips.

New export controls on gallium and germanium kicked in on August 1, restricting the sale abroad of eight products containing gallium and six containing germanium - two metals [used to make semiconductors](#).

The move comes after the United States, Japan, and the Netherlands jointly agreed to [restrict the sale](#) of immersion deep ultraviolet (DUV) lithography technology to China, which has not yet mastered the process.

DUV and related lithography methods are used to forge the world's smallest and most advanced microchips necessary for high-end tech products, and are only made by a few companies located in the US, the Netherlands, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan.

Forced to import the technology for its massive tech manufacturing industries, the Chinese government has sponsored a massive effort in recent years to master advanced chipmaking itself. Within the last year, several [Chinese firms have unveiled](#) their own DUV and extreme ultraviolet (EUV) lithography machines, although they still lag behind the West's best techniques.

Dr. Ken Hammond, a professor of East Asian and Global History at New Mexico State University and the author of "China's Revolution and the Quest for a Socialist Future," told Radio Sputnik's Political Misfits on Thursday that the world's two largest economies should be cooperating on efforts to fight global warming by adopting advanced new technologies rather than sparring.

"We need to see the situation with chip manufacturing and that whole technology zone as one component of this broad spectrum offensive that the United States has launched to try to slow down China's development, derail their progress, things like that. The United States has taken a number of steps, a sequential development of this policy of increasing these efforts to thwart especially China's effort to develop the highest-level technologies in chips," Hammond said. "Now, we have China reacting to that with these restrictions. And of course, they're not total restrictions on the export of these minerals. What they are, are simply regulations that say companies that want to export these minerals need to get a particular export license," he explained. "So it gives the state the ability to restrict these exports in new ways, but it doesn't just automatically do that. So we'll see how this actually plays out as it goes forward." Hammond noted that references to the chip shortages earlier in the COVID-19 pandemic that delayed the delivery of automobiles, particularly electric vehicles, is "a very real-world kind of impact that this contention may have."

"It's very troubling because we need to be finding ways to improve cooperation over things like electric vehicles and other ways in which we can address issues like global warming and especially the summers we're all having, I think we need to start taking this a little bit more seriously," Hammond said.

"And yet, you have these kinds of controversies around chip manufacturing, which should be a shared endeavor and instead is turning into this sad kind of back-and-forth set of policies," he noted. "I find this to be a very troubling kind of scenario."

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GOP Presidential Candidate Chris Christie Makes Unannounced Trip to Kiev - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - Republican presidential candidate Chris Christie paid a surprise visit to Ukraine on Friday and met with Volodymyr Zelenskyy, ABC reported.

Christie's visit to Ukraine is his first since Russia began its special military operation in the country in February 2022, the report said.

During his trip, the GOP candidate toured several parts of Ukraine affected by the ongoing hostilities, including an alleged mass civilian burial site in Bucha, a collapsed bridge over the Irpin River, and a history museum in Kiev, the report said.

Christie was additionally briefed on the current states of the frontlines, Ukraine's energy security and ongoing US-Ukrainian cooperation, the report continued.

The candidate is an ardent supporter of the alliance between the US and Ukraine and the supply of F-16 jets to Kiev.

In June, another Republican hopeful, former US Vice President Mike Pence, made an unannounced trip to Ukraine.

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US Calls Lack of Accountability in Beirut Port Explosion 'Unacceptable' – State Department

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) – The US Department of State called the lack of accountability for the Beirut port explosion “unacceptable” on Friday, the third anniversary of the avoidable tragedy that killed more than 200 people.

“The lack of progress towards accountability is unacceptable and underscores the need for judicial reform and greater respect for the rule of law in Lebanon,” State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a release.

The explosion of hundreds of tons of ammonium nitrate is believed to have been set off by a fire. The chemicals, of uncertain provenance and ownership, had been improperly stored in a port warehouse since 2013.

Many Lebanese officials, including the prime minister and president at the time, were aware of their presence yet failed to take firm and decisive action.

A judicial investigation into the blast has been repeatedly stymied by political factions, with no officials held accountable thus far.

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Trump Calls for Supreme Court to 'Intercede' Following Third Criminal Indictment

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) – Former US president and 2024 presidential contender Donald Trump called Friday for the Supreme Court to “intercede” on his behalf, after being charged in a third criminal indictment this year.

“My political opponent has hit me with a barrage of weak lawsuits ... which require massive amounts of my time & money to adjudicate,” Trump wrote on his Truth Social account. “It is Election Interference, & the Supreme Court must intercede.”

Unsealed Tuesday, the latest indictment by the Department of Justice relates to Trump’s attempts to overturn the 2020 presidential election results to secure a second term, which culminated in the January 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol.

Trump was first indicted by the Manhattan district attorney in March in relation to hush money paid via his personal attorney to porn actress Stormy Daniels and others from August 2015 to December 2017.

Trump was indicted a second time in June. This was his first federal indictment, relating to his retention of classified government documents at his Mar-a-Lago resort.

In total, he faces 78 counts of various criminal charges across the three cases. He has said he is innocent of all charges.

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Nearly a Fifth of Biden's 2020 Voters May Not Support Him Again – Poll

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) – Nearly a fifth, 19%, of Americans who voted for US President Biden in 2020 are unsure if they will support him again or plan to vote for a candidate other than Biden or Donald Trump, according to a Reuters/Ipsos poll released Friday.

Six percent of Biden's 2020 voters said they would vote for Trump.

The shift in support for Biden may in part stem from concerns over the economy: 42% of his 2020 voters said the economy was "worse" than it was three years ago.

About half of them also said they had heard little to nothing about Biden's major policy initiatives to combat inflation or boost infrastructure spending.

The nationwide poll of 2,009 adults supports ongoing concerns about a lack of enthusiasm for a second Biden term among Democrats and independents.

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US Adds 187,000 Jobs in July in Below-Forecast Growth That Aids Fed's Inflation Fight

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - The US economy added 187,000 jobs in July, the smallest expansion of its kind in two and half years, according to Labor Department data that showed the Federal Reserve getting closer in its bid to bring inflation back to levels that existed before the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic.

Economists polled by US media had expected a jobs growth of 200,000 for last month, from a previously published 209,000 for June, which the Labor Department now revised down to 185,000. While the revision meant that jobs effectively grew by only 2,000 in July, it was also a sign that the labor market had begun cooling significantly from last month itself versus May's final figure of 306,000.

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US House Panel Urges Biden to Adopt 'Balanced' Rules on Outbound Investment in China

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - The US House Committee on the Chinese Communist Party has urged President Joe Biden to adopt "effective and balanced" restrictions on outbound investment in China.

Biden is expected to sign an executive order restricting critical US technology investments in China by mid-August, Bloomberg reported last week. In a letter dated August 3, committee chair Mike Gallagher commended Biden for "taking on the vital issue" but urged him to consider several principles to ensure his order "meets the moment."

"As Congress debates competing approaches — including a so-called 'outbound CIFUS' and the imposition of aggressive sanctions against known PRC military companies — I urge you to

take meaningful first steps towards effective and balanced outbound investment rules in the interim," Gallagher said in the letter.

The lawmaker called for a full accounting of total US risk exposure and the final beneficiaries of US investment in China.

First, rules on outbound investment should address both private investments and public market investments, he said.

Second, they should restrict investments in sectors relevant to national security and central to the "Chinese Communist Party's technological rise," as well as those linked to alleged forced labor and "genocide," Gallagher continued.

Third, outbound investment rules should safeguard shareholder rights and hold Chinese companies to due diligence standards.

Forth, restrictions should give investors certainty and predictability and not be "burdensome" for the US private sector.

Fifth, allies and partners should be "consulted in advance and persuaded to follow suit with their own parallel restrictions," according to Gallagher.

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Half of Americans View Latest Trump Criminal Charges as 'Very Serious' - Poll

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - Just over half of Americans (51%) believe that the charges in the third criminal indictment of former US President Trump over his alleged efforts to overturn the 2020 election results are "very serious," according to an ABC News/Ipsos poll released Friday.

A similar number, 52%, agreed that Trump should have been charged with a crime in the case and 49% said he should suspend his 2024 presidential campaign. At the same time, 46% saw the charges against him as politically motivated while 40% did not.

The poll of 1,076 adults was conducted on Tuesday and Wednesday, after the latest indictment was unsealed.

In comparison, fewer Americans saw the charges in the first two indictments Trump is facing as "very serious," according to ABC News/Ipsos polls conducted in their wake. Thirty percent of Americans saw the first indictment – related to hush money paid via Trump's personal attorney to porn actress Stormy Daniels in 2016 – as "very serious" and 42% saw the charges in the second indictment – related to his retention of classified government documents at his Mar-a-Lago resort – as "very serious."

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US Appeals Court Allows Biden's Border Asylum Restrictions to Remain in Place - Filing

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - A US appeals court ruling will allow the Biden administration's asylum restrictions at the border to remain in place for now, court documents revealed.

The decision, made on Thursday by the San Francisco-based 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals, reverses a July 25 district court ruling that found the regulation in violation of the law by refusing asylum for migrants caught crossing the border illegally.

Although President Joe Biden reversed many Trump-era restrictions, a rule that went into effect as Title-42 expired in mid-May, has enraged rights groups. Biden's "Circumvention of Lawful Pathways" rule effectively refuses asylum to migrants who travel through a third country on their way to the US-Mexico border.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and other civil rights groups have tried to legally challenge the Lawful Pathways rule by reviving a similar case brought against the Trump administration.

In the July 25 district court ruling, Obama administration appointee, Judge Jon Tigar, argued that US law explicitly states that illegally crossing the border should not disqualify migrants from applying for asylum.

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Trump Pleads 'Not Guilty' to All 4 Election-Related Charges in DC Court

(Adds details in paras 7-10)

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump pleaded "not guilty" to all four charges stemming from the January 6 riot as he appeared in a Washington, DC court.

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

Obama-nominated District Judge Tanya Chutkan has been assigned to preside over the criminal case. Chutkan has spoken on numerous occasions against efforts to overturn the election and disrupt the transfer of power. Moreover, she previously ruled against Trump's efforts to prevent his White House records from being given to the January 6 committee.

Trump's first appearance comes not in front of Chutkan, but Magistrate Judge Moxila A. Upadhyaya.

This is Trump's third indictment this year.

While en route to the hearing, Trump posted on TruthSocial that he "needs one more indictment to secure the election." He also accused Democrats of an "unprecedented weaponization" of the judiciary against him, by far the Republican Party's leading candidate for the 2024 presidential race.

When Trump arrived at the E. Barrett Prettyman Courthouse in Washington an hour before the hearing, there were hundreds of people waiting to catch a glimpse and hundreds of media

reporters from all over the country reporting on a whopping 3rd indictment. Some waited in line overnight at the courthouse in order to report on the indictment first-hand.

Only 6 journalists were chosen, lottery-style, to sit inside the courtroom and the rest were directed to adjacent media rooms for the proceedings.

Inside the courtroom, Trump could be seen speaking with his attorneys, Todd Blanche and John Lauro, who flanked him at each side. Trump appeared at times to be bored and distracted, and during the proceedings, he appeared to catch and hold the eye of special counsel Jack Smith, who attended the proceedings as an audience member.

Over the course of an hour, all accusations, rights, and deals were disclosed over the keyboard backdrop provided by present media, and the next trial date was set for August 28.

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Nigerien President Bazoum in Op-Ed Says He's Been 'Taken Hostage' by Military Coup

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - The president of Niger, Mohamed Bazoum, said in an op-ed in the Washington Post that he has been taken hostage by the military coup in the country and called on the US and international community to help restore constitutional order.

"I write this as a hostage. Niger is under attack from a military junta that is trying to overthrow our democracy, and I am just one of hundreds of citizens who have been arbitrarily and illegally imprisoned," Bazoum said on Thursday.

Bazoum further said the military coup has no justification, and if it succeeds, it will have devastating consequences for Niger, the region, and the entire world.

The president of Niger called on the US government and the entire international community to help the country restore constitutional order. He claims the coup plotters falsely claim that they acted to protect Niger's security.

Moreover, Bazoum claimed that by an open invitation from the coup plotters and their regional allies, the entire central Sahel region could fall to Russian influence through the Wagner Group.

Earlier this week, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said the United States has not seen any indications yet that the Wagner Group is trying to exploit the situation in Niger.

White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Thursday that the United States believes there is still some time to resolve the situation in Niger through diplomacy.

On July 26, the Nigerien presidential guard overthrew Bazoum. On Sunday, the pro-Western 15-member Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) gave the coup leaders in Niger one week to reinstate the detained president or it would use all measures to restore order there.

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Pentagon Aims to Award Nearly \$40Bn in Contracts to Supply Ukraine, Refill US Stockpiles

(Updates with changes throughout, change in attribution)

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - The Pentagon is currently working to award nearly \$40 billion worth of contracts to continue supplying Ukraine with weapons and to refill stocks taken from the US inventory to aid Kiev's military efforts, data from the Department of Defense revealed.

The data showed on Thursday that the Pentagon is working on \$16.4 billion worth of contracts that will fall under the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, which can take months or several years to fulfill because it procures defense items directly from the defense industry.

Another \$20.5 billion worth of contracts would be used to immediately replace equipment sent to Ukraine from US stockpiles under the presidential drawdown authority, according to the data.

To date, the United States has already awarded nearly \$17 billion to refill equipment sent to Ukraine from US stockpiles and to fund the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, the data showed.

Russia has condemned foreign military support of Ukraine. Its foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, warned the West last year that all weapon shipments to Ukraine would be treated as a legitimate target for Russian forces amid the Russian military operation in Ukraine.

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US Official Confirms That US-Ukraine Security Guarantee Talks Started Thursday

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - US and Ukrainian officials met to begin talks regarding long-term security guarantees for Ukraine, a US official told Sputnik.

"Can confirm," the US official said on Thursday when asked if US and Ukrainian officials met earlier in the day for security guarantee talks.

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

US House Democrats Request Courts Publicly Broadcast Trump Legal Proceedings - Letter

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - A group of US House Democrats sent a letter to the Judicial Conference requesting that the body take steps to authorize the broadcasting of legal proceedings involving former US President Donald Trump, following three indictments with various allegations of criminal wrongdoing.

"We are writing to request the Judicial Conference explicitly authorize the broadcasting of court proceedings in the cases of United States of America v. Donald J. Trump," the letter said on Thursday. "We urge the conference to take additional steps, including live broadcasting, to ensure the facts of this case are brought forward, unfiltered, to the public."

Public access to the legal proceedings are critical given their "extraordinary" national importance to democratic institutions, the letter said. Transparency is also necessary for the public to accept the outcome of any legal proceedings, the letter added.

The letter is signed by members of Congress including Adam Schiff, Bennie Thompson, Dan Goldman and Barbara Lee.

The letter comes following an indictment released earlier this week, which charges Trump with four crimes linked to alleged efforts to overturn the 2020 US presidential election. Trump also faces legal problems linked to his handling of classified documents and purported hush-money payments to adult film actress Stormy Daniels.

On Thursday, Trump in a court appearance pleaded not guilty to all charges tied to the January 6 capitol riot. His next court appearance is set for August 28.

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APEC Economies Should Increase Climate Resilient Agricultural Innovation Space - Vilsack

SEATTLE, August 4 (Sputnik) - The countries of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) group should expand their research and climate resilient agricultural innovation space to help build sustainable agricultural sectors, US Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said during the Food Security Ministers Meeting.

"APEC economies should increase research and climate resilient agricultural innovation space," Vilsack said on Thursday. "They can contribute to building sustainable and resilient agricultural sectors."

Vilsack pointed out that these advances must be made accessible to producers of all types worldwide.

"Open markets and science driven regulatory regimes are also critical to innovative new technologies being available," he said.

Vilsack also said that the APEC countries must work to collaborate with other nations to share best practices in innovation on how to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Moreover, Vilsack warned that the consequences of failing to accelerate eco-cultural productivity growth could be dire.

High-ranking officials and ministers have gathered in Seattle this week to address food security matters as part of the third APEC senior officials' and ministerial meetings.

The APEC Economic Leaders' Week will take place in San Francisco in November.

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US Congresswoman Says Justice Dept. Committing Election Interference With Trump Charges

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - The Department of Justice is committing election interference by attempting to prosecute former President and 2024 presidential hopeful Donald Trump, US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene said in a statement.

"Biden's Department of Justice is actively participating in election interference by trying to put his top political opponent, President Donald Trump, behind bars," Greene said on Thursday.

Earlier in the day, Trump pleaded not guilty to four criminal charges brought against him by Special Counsel Jack Smith for allegedly attempting to overturn the results of the 2020 US presidential election.

Trump called the charges against him "persecution of a political opponent." Greene characterized the prosecution as "pure corruption."

The charges against Trump were announced amid his 2024 presidential campaign. Trump currently leads the pack of Republican candidates ahead of the debates and primary elections.

The charges also come as lawmakers in Congress investigate potential weaponization of the US government and its justice system.

On Wednesday, Congressman Matt Gaetz said lawmakers must demand an interview with Smith to provide information on his decision to charge Trump, as well as be willing to issue a subpoena and hold the special counsel in contempt of Congress.

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White House Says No Update on Whether Biden Will Approve Sending ATACMS to Ukraine

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby told Sputnik there is no update on whether President Joe Biden will approve sending the long-range Army tactical Missile System (ATACMS) to Ukraine.

"No updates on ATACMS," Kirby said on Thursday when asked if Biden continues to consider sending the ATACMS to Ukraine.

In mid-July, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said Biden and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy were still discussing the possible provision of ATACMS to Ukraine.

Sullivan said Biden will eventually make the ultimate decision on the matter.

Biden previously said that Ukraine already has an equivalent of ATACMS missiles and mainly needs artillery at present.

According to US media, the Defense Department has warned that its ATACMS arsenal is relatively small and the missiles are already deployed to other areas, including on the Korean Peninsula, and therefore their transfer to Ukraine would jeopardize US combat readiness in other regions.

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Trump Says After Court Hearing Election-Related Case 'Persecution of Political Opponent'

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said after his court arraignment on four election-related criminal charges that the legal case against him is a "persecution of a political opponent."

"When you look at what's happening, this is a persecution of a political opponent," Trump told reporters on Thursday. "This was never supposed to happen in America. This is the persecution of the person that's leading by very, very substantial numbers in the Republican primary and leading [President Joe] Biden by a lot. So if you can't beat him, you persecute him or you prosecute him. We can't let this happen in America."

Earlier on Thursday, Trump pleaded not guilty to all four charges, according to a Sputnik correspondent in the courtroom. Trump faces 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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SPUTNIK TOP STORY OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, August 4 (Sputnik) -

RUSSIA-AFRICA TALKS ON UKRAINE

* The leaders of seven African countries and Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed to continue discussing the peace initiative on Ukraine, according to the joint statement published by the office of South African President Cyril Ramaphosa on Thursday.

* The leaders of seven African countries and Putin urge to the international community to take concrete steps to remove the obstacles to Russian grain and fertilizer exports, according to the joint statement published by the Office of the South African President.

* Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Sputnik that the approval of the Russia-Africa joint statement on Ukraine required some editorial changes, and the document will be published on the Kremlin website on July 4.

TRUMP COURT CASE

* Former US President Donald Trump has arrived at the E. Barrett Prettyman Federal Courthouse to appear before a magistrate judge in the January 6 case, a Sputnik correspondent reported on Thursday.

* Trump said he is on his way to Washington to be arrested later in the day over federal charges accusing him of trying to overturn the 2020 US presidential election.

BLACK SEA GRAIN INITIATIVE

* The United States will help to ensure the safe export of Russian food and agricultural products through the Black Sea if Moscow decides to return to the Black Sea grain agreement,

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Thursday.

* Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Vershinin and Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister Burak Akcapar have discussed the Black Sea Initiative on the Safe Transportation of Grain and Foodstuffs from Ukrainian ports during a phone conversation, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

* Blinken told ABC he is hopeful that the Black Sea grain deal can be resuscitated.

* Russia remains a stable grain supplier and does not use grain exports to make importers dependent on it, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, commenting on EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell's remarks alleging that Russia supplies cheap grain to developing countries to make them dependent.

GLOBAL ENERGY MARKETS

* Saudi Arabia will extend its voluntary cut in oil production by 1 million barrels per day through September, the state-run Saudi Press Agency (SPA) said on Thursday.

* Russia will continue to voluntarily cut oil exports in September but this time by 300,000 barrels per day, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said.

NIGER DEVELOPMENTS

* There are no changes to the US military force posture in Niger during the departure of non-emergency embassy employees and their family members in the wake of the military coup in the country, Pentagon spokesperson Patrick Ryder said on Thursday.

* US forces stationed in Niger are largely remaining on military bases but continue to cooperate with Nigerien soldiers following a military coup in the country, Ryder said.

* Russian First Deputy Representative to the United Nations Dmitry Polyansky rebuked the United States, United Kingdom and France for spewing "benevolent slogans" but threatening to halt assistance to Niger after the coup in that country.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* The Pentagon is working to award about \$40 billion worth of contracts to supply Ukraine and resupply the US military, a Politico journalist reported on Thursday.

* The Russian forces have engaged in counterattacks in the Donetsk area where the Ukrainian military lost up to 380 soldiers in the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

* Russia has always been aware of Kiev's involvement in the attacks on the Crimean bridge, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, commenting on statements by Oleksiy Danilov, head of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council.

SITUATION IN SYRIA

* The US-led coalition drones breached deconfliction protocols 14 times in Syria over the past 24 hours, Russian Defense Ministry's Center for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in Syria deputy head Vadim Kulit said on Thursday.

* The leaders of illegal armed formations are increasing the number of gangs in the Idlib de-escalation zone in Syria, more militants are accumulating in training camps, Kulit said.

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

US Judge Says Trump Not Detained, Must Adhere to Certain Conditions to Be Released

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - A US magistrate judge on Thursday said former President Donald Trump will not be detained in connection to federal charges accusing him of trying to overturn the 2020 presidential election, but he must adhere to certain conditions to be released, a Sputnik correspondent reported from the courtroom.

Trump pleaded not guilty to all four election-related charges during his arraignment in federal court.

The condition of Trump's release include he must not violate state or federal law, must appear in court when required, must surrender if found guilty, must sign appearance bond, and he cannot communicate facts of case to those outside the case other than through counsel, according to the Sputnik correspondent.

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US Judge Sets Trump's Next Court Hearing in Election Case For August 28

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - A US judge set former President Donald Trump's next court hearing in his election-related case for August 28 at 10:00 a.m. EST (2:00 p.m. GMT), a Sputnik correspondent reported from the courtroom on Thursday.

Trump pleaded not guilty to all four election-related charges during his arraignment in federal court and he will not be detained but must adhere to certain conditions of release, according to the Sputnik correspondent.

Trump faces 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 Pleads 'Not Guilty' to All 4 Election-Related Charges in DC Court

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump pleaded "not guilty" to all four charges stemming from the January 6 riot as he appeared in a Washington, DC court on Thursday.

Trump faces 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.

Obama-nominated District Judge Tanya Chutkan has been assigned to preside over the

criminal case. Chutkan has spoken on numerous occasions against efforts to overturn the election and disrupt the transfer of power. Moreover, she previously ruled against Trump's efforts to prevent his White House records from being given to the January 6 committee.

Trump's first appearance comes not in front of Chutkan, but Magistrate Judge Moxila A. Upadhyaya.

This is Donald Trump's third indictment this year.

While en route to the hearing, Trump posted on TruthSocial that he "needs one more indictment to secure the election." He also accused Democrats of an "unprecedented weaponization" of the judiciary against him, by far the Republican Party's leading candidate for the 2024 presidential race.

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Ankara Remains Committed to Reviving Black Sea Grain Initiative - Turkish UN Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, August 3 (Sputnik) - Ankara opposes unilateral sanctions that have an effect on food security - including those which disrupt supply chains, the Turkish representative to the UN said on Thursday during a UN Security Council meeting on food security.

"Given our role in the launching and implementation of the initiative, Turkey remains committed to sustaining our endeavors to revive the initiative, as well as taking part in international efforts to mitigate the impact of the war in Ukraine on global food security," the Turkish representative told the Security Council.

On July 18, the Turkey-and UN-mediated Black Sea Grain Initiative, which provided for a humanitarian corridor to allow exports of Ukrainian grain over the past year, expired, as Russia did not renew its participation in the deal. Moscow emphasized that the deal's component on facilitating Russian grain and fertilizer exports had not been fulfilled, specifically with regard to reconnecting Russian banks to SWIFT and unblocking the Tolyatti-Odesa ammonia pipeline.

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No Sign Wagner Activity Near Poland Poses Threat to Cross-Border Operations - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The United States has seen no indications that the private military company Wagner Group's recent activity at the Polish-Belarusian border poses an imminent threat to cross-border operations, Defense Department spokesperson Patrick Ryder said on Thursday.

"I'm not aware of any imminent risk right now as it relates to cross border operations, but again, you know, when it comes to the Wagner group, I think, well, we all keep a close eye all the time," Ryder said during a press briefing.

Ryder said he is aware of the recent rhetoric displayed by Belarus and the Wagner Group as it

relates to the Polish border and added that there were no plans to change the US military posture in the region.

The United States is committed to NATO's security and the Defense Department leadership remains in close contact with their Polish counterparts, Ryder added.

On Saturday, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said more than 100 Wagner fighters had deployed near the Suwalki Gap - a narrow stretch of Polish and Lithuanian territory that separates Belarus from the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad. Morawiecki called the move an attempt to help illegal immigrants enter Polish territory.

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White House Says Has Info Indicating Russia Seeks More Military Cooperation With N. Korea

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Thursday that the United States has information indicating Russia is seeking to increase military cooperation with North Korea, especially through arms sales.

"Our information indicates that Russia is seeking to increase military cooperation with the DPRK, such as through DPRK sale of artillery munitions, again, to Russia," Kirby told a briefing.

The United States, Kirby said, remains concerned that North Korea continues to contemplate providing military support to Russia's military operation against Ukraine.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu visited North Korea from July 25-27 at the invitation of the North Korean Defense Ministry to participate in the 70th anniversary of the signing of the Armistice Agreement that ended the Korean War of 1950-1953.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said Shoigu briefed President Vladimir Putin on results of his recent visit to North Korea.

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US Forces in Niger Staying on Base, Continue to Cooperate With Nigerien Troops - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - US forces stationed in Niger are largely remaining on military bases but continue to cooperate with Nigerien soldiers following a military coup in the country, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said on Thursday.

"Our forces there in Niger continue to cooperate daily with Nigerien forces to keep base operations and services functioning," Ryder said during a press briefing. "For the most part, right now they're staying on the bases."

Last month, Niger's presidential guard removed President Mohamed Bazoum from power, with the guard's leader, Gen. Abdourahmane Tchiani, declaring himself the new head of Niger.

The military coup has prompted evacuations from the country and restrictions on aid, with the United States calling for a return to democratic rule in Niger. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has also threatened to get involved if Bazoum is not returned to

power.

There is no indication of imminent threats against US troops in Niger, Ryder said.

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Kirby Says Saudi Summit on Ukraine Not a Peace Negotiation, Not Expecting Deliverables

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - White House Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Thursday that the upcoming Saudi-hosted summit on Ukraine is not a peace negotiation, and the United States is not expecting any deliverables from the meeting.

"This is not a peace negotiation and I would not expect any tangible deliverables from it," Kirby said during a press briefing.

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Trump Arrives at DC Court for Initial Appearance in January 6 Case

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump has arrived at the E. Barrett Prettyman Federal Courthouse to appear before a magistrate judge in the January 6 case, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

Trump is facing four criminal charges related to alleged attempts to overturn the 2020 presidential election, including conspiracy to defraud the US, conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding, obstruction of an official proceeding, and conspiracy against rights.

Trump is expected to plead not guilty to all the charges.

This will be Trump's third indictment this year.

On June 13, Trump pleaded not guilty to 37 federal felony charges over his alleged "willful retention" of national security information after leaving the White House.

On April 4, the former president entered a not guilty plea to 34 criminal charges of falsifying business records in New York.

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Two US Navy Sailors Arrested for Allegedly Transmitting Info to China - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The US arrested two Navy servicemembers for providing sensitive security information to China, the Justice Department said on Thursday.

"In two separate cases in the Southern and Central Districts of California, two US Navy servicemembers were arrested for transmitting sensitive military information to the People's

Republic of China," the release said.

While both arrests occurred in California, they are not related to each other, the statement added.

A US Navy sailor, Jinchao Wei, also known as Patrick Wei, was detained at the Naval Base San Diego and was indicted for conspiracy to send national defense information to a Chinese intelligence officer.

According to the indictment, in March 2022 he sent photos and videos of the USS Essex, stationed at the base, described weapons, and disclosed locations of other vessels in exchange for "thousands of dollars." He also allegedly provided to the Chinese officer approximately 30 technical and mechanical manuals with export control warnings and other sensitive information about Essex and similar ships, it added.

Another Navy servicemember, Wenheng Zhao, aka Thomas Zhao, was arrested following an indictment by a federal grand jury, charging him with receiving bribes in exchange for transmitting sensitive US military information to a Chinese intelligence officer who posed himself as a maritime economic researcher.

If convicted, Zhao faces up to 20 years in prison, the release added, without providing details on possible penalty for Wei.

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US Mulls Placing Armed Troops on Civilian Ships Passing Through Strait of Hormuz - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The United States is considering placing armed troops on commercial ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz as a means to prevent any potential Iranian seizures, the Associated Press reported on Thursday.

The report, citing four unnamed US officials, said no final decision has been made, but the United States is currently in discussions with its allies in the Persian Gulf about this matter.

According to the report, US Marines and Navy sailors would only board commercial ships if their assistance is requested.

A US Central Command spokesperson declined to comment on this matter.

"We do not discuss future/on-going operations. We will provide additional information as it becomes available," the spokesperson told Sputnik.

The United States is increasing its military footprint in the Persian Gulf in response to Iran's activity in the region. Last month, the Defense Department announced the United States was sending two amphibious warships and thousands of Marines to the Middle East in response to Iran's activity towards commercial ships passing through the Persian Gulf region.

The United States has also sent F-35, F-16 and A-10 military aircraft to the Middle East to bolster security in the region.

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

Lichtenstein, Wife Plead Guilty to Charges in \$4.5Bln Crypto Scheme - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - Dual US-Russian citizen Ilya Lichtenstein and his wife Heather Morgan pleaded guilty to charges involving a \$4.5 billion cryptocurrency scheme, the US Justice Department said on Thursday.

Last month, according to court documents, Lichtenstein and Morgan reached a plea deal with prosecutors to settle charges, but details of that deal were not publicly disclosed and attorneys involved in the case declined to provide comment to Sputnik about it.

"A married couple from New York City pleaded guilty today to money laundering conspiracies arising from the hack and theft of approximately 120,000 bitcoin from Bitfinex, a global cryptocurrency exchange," the Justice Department said in a press release.

The release said Lichtenstein pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit money laundering, which carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison. Morgan pleaded guilty to one count of money laundering conspiracy and one count of conspiracy to defraud the United States, each of which carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison, the release added.

The Justice Department did not provide a sentencing date for Lichtenstein and Morgan.

Lichtenstein was born in Russia and emigrated with his family to the United States as a child to avoid religious persecution. Russian Consul General Sergey Ovsyannikov told Sputnik that Lichtenstein has not attempted to contact the Russian Consulate for assistance.

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Oil Rally Likely to Run Into 6th Week as Saudis Again Add to Production Cuts

NEW YORK, August 3 (Sputnik) - The rally in oil prices was looking likely to extend for a sixth straight week after major producer Saudi Arabia announced that it would extend its July-August production cut of one million barrels per day to September as well.

In a development reported a day after crude prices fell sharply for the first time since the oil rally began in late June, an official at the energy ministry in Saudi Arabia was quoted saying by the kingdom's state news agency SPA that the production cuts would not only be extended but also deepened if necessary.

"This additional voluntary cut comes to reinforce the precautionary efforts made by OPEC+ countries with the aim of supporting the stability and balance of oil markets," the energy ministry official was quoted saying.

OPEC+ groups the 13-member Saudi-led OPEC, or Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, with 10 independent oil producers steered by Russia.

With 30 minutes to Thursday's settlement, US West Texas Intermediate, or WTI, crude was up \$2.04, or 2.6%, to \$81.53 per barrel. In Wednesday's session, the U.S. crude benchmark lost 2.3%. Week to date, WTI was up more than 1%, after a near 16% gain through July.

London-based Brent crude was up \$1.90, or 2.3%, to \$85.10. For the week, the global oil

benchmark gained 0.3%, after running up nearly 14% for July.

Wednesday's 2% slump in oil marked the first meaningful decline on the market since the rally in oil began a month and a half ago. It came despite the Energy Information Administration reporting an epic drop of 17 million barrels in US crude stockpiles last week after the agency had cited for weeks paltry inventory changes despite the production cuts supposedly carried out by the Saudis.

The EIA report aside, there was also a story suggesting the Saudis might be selling unaccounted oil to the so-called PNZ, or Partitioned Neutral Zone, region it shared with Kuwait that escapes the radar of the broader market.

"Saudi Arabia has a long history of doing this, so it's no surprise that it's looking to increase its oil sales through extra production from the PNZ [Partitioned Neutral Zone] shared with Kuwait], particularly as the area's so off the radar, and Russia has been doing the same with its oil for months," OilPrice.com quoted a senior source in the European Union energy security complex as saying.

According to that source, although a joint statement by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait on 9 July said that accelerated efforts to complete joint oil projects in the PNZ are to meet local energy demands, they also provide Saudi Arabia with off-the-radar - or 'dark inventory' - oil that it can sell through various backdoor methods at currently inflated prices, without being seen to break its official OPEC+ quota.

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US Sets August 25 as Launch Date for Next ISS Crew Mission With Cosmonaut - NASA

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - NASA has delayed the launch of its next manned crew mission to the International Space Station (ISS) until August 25, the US space agency announced in an official blog statement on Thursday.

"The target launch date for NASA's SpaceX Crew-7 mission to the International Space Station now is 3:49 a.m. EDT [Eastern Daylight Time] Friday, August 25," the blog said.

Additional time was needed for engineering teams to complete pad readiness after SpaceX's recent Falcon Heavy mission lifted off from NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida, the blog said.

NASA astronaut Jasmin Moghbeli, European Space Agency (ESA) astronaut Andreas Mogensen, Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) astronaut Satoshi Furukawa and Roscosmos cosmonaut Konstantin Borisov will launch on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket in their Dragon spacecraft on the new date, the blog added.

The crew will then dock at the ISS around 2:45 am EDT on Saturday, August 26, according to the blog.

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Russia Rebukes US, France for Ending Assistance to Niger After Coup - Deputy Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, August 3 (Sputnik) - Russian First Deputy Representative to the United Nations Dmitry Polyansky on Thursday rebuked the United States, United Kingdom and France for spewing "benevolent slogans" but threatening to halt assistance to Niger after the coup in that country.

"Despite all of their benevolent slogans, donor assistance from Western states is not selfless and always comes with political preconditions," Polansky said during a UN Security Council session on famine and conflict-induced global food insecurity. "Another example is the threats we're hearing now from Josep Borrell, as well as the leadership of the UK, France, and the US to stop helping Niger. Did people suddenly stop starving there after the coup?"

Polyanskiy said the Western states do not take into consideration the needs of the population in developing countries, in keeping with their unchanged colonial nature and habit of using aid as a control tool.

Some African countries have firsthand experience with conditional Western aid whereby they lost their sovereignty and political independence as a result of accepting it, he said.

Russia understands the necessity of having uninterrupted supplies of food to African states for their socio-economic development and political stability, highlighting Moscow's focus on delivering several types of grain to the countries in need.

On July 26, Niger's presidential guard removed President Mohamed Bazoum from power. The guard's commander, Gen. Abdourahmane Tchiani, proclaimed himself to be the new leader of Niger.

The United Kingdom announced soon after that it was halting long-term development assistance to Niger. The European Union and France followed suit shortly after, while the United States said its aid to the country was at stake.

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US Still Gives Foreign Aid to Russia, China Amid Strategic Competition - Government Data

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The United States is still providing hundreds of thousands of dollars in foreign aid to Russia and China despite engaging the two countries in strategic competition, according to US government assistance data.

The US has \$110,000 obligated to Russia and \$240,000 obligated to China for Fiscal Year 2023, the State Department and US Agency for International Development said in a joint foreign aid tracker.

The funds provided to Russia focused on conserving the Amur tiger in the country's eastern regions, the tracker said. The money is managed by the US Interior Department.

Much of the funds obligated to China were also focused on protecting Amur tigers in northeast China, the tracker said.

The aid continues despite the US labeling Russia as an acute threat and China as its pacing challenge in its latest national defense strategy. The US continues to back Ukraine against Russia's special military operation, as well as bolstering the defense of Taiwan against unilateral reunification.

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Blinken Says US Supports ECOWAS Efforts to Free Niger's Bazoum

UNITED NATIONS, August 3 (Sputnik) - The United States supports ECOWAS efforts in freeing Nigerien President Bazoum and a restoration of order in Niger, the US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said on Thursday.

"We believe it is vitally important that what ECOWAS has called for actually takes effect and that is the freeing of President Bazoum and a restoration of the constitutional order in Niger," Blinken told a press briefing. "We support the efforts ECOWAS is making."

The United States, which presides over the UN Security Council during the month of August, organized Thursday's meeting with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken chairing it.

On July 26, Niger's presidential guard removed President Mohamed Bazoum from power. The guard's commander, Gen. Abdourahmane Tchiani, proclaimed himself the country's new leader. The French Foreign Ministry said that French 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.

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China Opposes Unilateral Sanctions That Impact on Food Security - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, August 3 (Sputnik) - China opposes unilateral sanctions that affect food security and that includes those sanctions that disrupt supply chains, Chinese Ambassador to the United Nations Zhang Jun said on Thursday.

"We must firmly oppose unilateral sanctions and actions that affect international food security and global cooperation, such as decoupling and disrupting supply chain, disrupting market order or suppressing enterprises from other countries," Zhang said during a meeting of the UN Security Council.

China urges the "relevant country" practicing sanctions to stop such practices, Zhang added. The United States, which presides over the UN Security Council during the month of August, organized Thursday's meeting with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken chairing it.

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US Military Classified Army Soldier Who Fled to North Korea as 'Embarrassment' - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The US military classified Army private Travis King as an "embarrassment" to the United States prior his departure for North Korea, The Messenger reported on Thursday.

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

US Forces Korea listed King as an "embarrassment to the United States" before he fled to North Korea, the report said, citing military officials and documents.

The Defense Department has said King entered North Korea on his own volition and without authorization.

North Korea has been communicating on the matter through the UN Command.

King had received multiple disciplinary infractions from the military before fleeing to North Korea, including for assaulting a Korean national, according to US media reports. King was set to face further administrative action upon returning to the United States, the reports said.

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US Defense Giant Opens New Plant to Produce 'Beyond Mach 5' Hypersonic Weapons - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - Northrop Grumman has opened a new facility to develop advanced propulsion solutions to power hypersonic glide weapons faster than Mach 5, the company announced in a press release on Thursday.

"Northrop Grumman has opened a Hypersonics Capability Center (HCC) in Elkton, Maryland to produce advanced propulsion solutions that can power hypersonic missiles beyond Mach 5," the release said.

The HCC will set up the infrastructure and capacity necessary to cost-effectively produce hypersonic propulsion on a scale that can support the Department of Defense's growing demands for long range, rapid response weapons, Northrop Grumman said.

"The HCC is the first US facility designed specifically for large-scale manufacturing of air-breathing propulsion which includes ramjet and scramjet propulsion," the release added.

The facility will support the US Air Force's Hypersonic Attack Cruise Missile development and production and will use digital engineering while consolidating engine manufacturing processes to reduce costs and increase production, the company said.

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Climate, Economic Crises Must Be Addressed to Prevent Famines - UN Official

UNITED NATIONS, August 3 (Sputnik) - Climate and economic crises must be addressed first in order to prevent famines and achieve lasting peace, UN Famine Prevention and Response Coordinator Reena Ghelani said on Thursday.

"And for lasting peace and famine prevention, we must address the climate and economic crises," Ghelani said during a meeting of the UN Security Council.

However, adequate humanitarian funding is needed to achieve these goals, Ghelani added. The United States, which presides over the UN Security Council during the month of August, organized Thursday's meeting with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken chairing it.

Some of the briefers in addition to Ghelani included Edesia CEO Navyn Salem and International Rescue Committee CEO David Miliband.

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Blinken Says Extended Invitation to Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Meet

UNITED NATIONS, August 3 (Sputnik) - The United States extended an invitation to Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and expects an opportunity to meet, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said on Thursday.

"I have in fact extended that invitation to Wang Yi who is now serving as a foreign minister. We don't have a response yet but we just extended that invitation. I would expect we will have an opportunity to see each other and to continue the important conversations that I had in Beijing," Blinken said.

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Blinken Says US Will Help Ensure Food Exports From Russia if Moscow Returns to Grain Deal

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The United States will help to ensure the safe export of Russian food and agricultural products through the Black Sea if Moscow decides to return to the Black Sea grain agreement, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Thursday.

"In the event of a return to the agreement, of course we'll continue to do whatever is necessary to make sure that everyone can export their food and food products freely and safely, to include Russia," Blinken said during a press conference, when asked about Russia's concerns about insuring and shipping its products.

However, it is on Russia to decide whether to return to the Black Sea grain agreement, Blinken said.

Last month, the Kremlin declined to renew the agreement due to alleged non-implementation of

some of its guarantees regarding Russia.

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Trump Says Heading to Washington to Be Arrested Over Election-Related Charges

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump said on Thursday that he is on his way to Washington to be arrested later in the day over federal charges accusing him of trying to overturn the 2020 US presidential election.

Trump is expected to appear in person at the US District Court of the District of Columbia at 4:00 p.m. ET to hear the four criminal charges against him and to enter his plea.

"I am now going to Washington, DC, to be arrested for having challenged a corrupt, rigged and stolen election," Trump said via Truth Social. "It is a great honor, because I am being arrested for you. Make America great again!!!"

Trump faces 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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Fitch Downgrade of US Credit Rating 'Historic Failure of Leadership' - Senator

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The credit rating downgrade of the United States by Fitch Ratings is a "historic failure" of leadership in the country, Senator Joe Manchin said on Thursday.

"The downgrading of America's credit rating by Fitch represents a historic failure of leadership by both political parties and the Executive branch," Manchin, a Democrat from West Virginia, said in a statement.

Manchin pointed out that Fitch specifically cited the decline in governance, erosion of cooperation in the federal government and ballooning national debt as reasons for its decision to lower the US credit rating.

On Tuesday, Fitch Ratings announced that it downgraded the credit rating of the United States from AAA to AA, citing fiscal deterioration over the next three years. The rating agency also said that it found troubling the debt limit standoffs between the two major political parties in Congress and their last-minute resolutions to avoid a debt default.

Manchin said Fitch's decision is a "stark warning" and its signal must not be ignored. The senator also emphasized the necessity to fund the government and address the national debt, otherwise the United States could lose its superpower status and the confidence of its allies.

The senator said September will be a crucial month for solving the problem because the

deadline to fund the federal government is approaching and urged lawmakers to take the necessary fiscal and budgetary steps to restore the US credit rating.

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Blinken to UN Security Council: Famine, Starvation Must Not Be Used as Weapons of War

UNITED NATIONS, August 3 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Thursday told the UN Security Council (UNSC) that famine and starvation must not be weaponized and urged countries to sign a new draft communique committing to ending said practices as weapons of war.

"Nearly 90 countries, including the United States, have already signed a new joint communique that we drafted and circulated, committing to end the use of famine, starvation and food as weapons of war. Hunger must not be weaponized. I urge all member states to join this communique," Blinken said during a meeting of the UN Security Council.

Blinken noted that the UN Security Council is charged with preserving international peace and security and that task goes hand-in-hand with strengthening global food security - a goal for which all states share a common responsibility.

The secretary of state made the comments in relation to the increasing number of people facing extreme food deprivation due to armed conflicts and that number stood at 171 million in 2022.

Sudan, Myanmar and Yemen are among the most affected countries while Burkina Faso, South Sudan and Somalia could also face famine next year unless the world decides to act, Blinken said.

Blinken called on countries to significantly increase the assistance aimed at fighting extreme hunger and prevent famine.

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Nearly 70% of Republicans, Allies Believe Biden 2020 Election Win Illegitimate - Poll

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - Sixty-nine percent of registered Republicans and sympathetic independents believe that President Joe Biden's election victory in November 2020 was not legitimate, according to a CNN poll published on Thursday.

The figure marks an increase from the 63%, which was recorded earlier this year and through last fall.

Among Republican-aligned adults, the share who believe there is solid evidence proving the election was not legitimate stands at 39%, while 30% said they just suspected that Biden did not win legitimately. Only 29% of Republicans and other supportive voters believed Biden's election was legitimate, the poll found.

The results of the poll, fielded throughout July, come as former US President Donald Trump is

set to make an initial appearance in a Washington DC court on Thursday on charges related to efforts to overturn the 2020 election.

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US Official Admits Not All Grain Exported Under Black Sea Deal Went to Poor Countries

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - US Agency for International Development (USAID) Deputy Administrator Isobel Coleman admitted on Thursday that not all grain exported from Ukraine under the UN-brokered Black Sea Initiative went directly to poor countries facing food insecurity.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said in July that a total of 32.8 million tonnes of cargo was exported from Ukraine when the Black Sea Initiative was in effect, with more than 70% going to high-income countries mainly in the European Union.

"We have to remember that all of the food exported from Ukraine serves a critical role for the world's poor, even if it doesn't go directly to food insecure areas because it calms markets and mitigates against price spikes and key commodities," Coleman said.

Russia's statements that the wealthiest countries benefited from the grain exports agreement are a lie, Coleman also said.

"In fact, nearly two-thirds of Ukraine's wheat exports through the Black Sea Grain Initiative have gone to developing countries and almost 20% have gone to the very least developed countries," she said.

However, Coleman did not explain where the rest of the Ukrainian grain exports ended up.

Putin said in July that Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia and several other food-insecure countries accounted for less than 3% of total exports or less than 1 million tonnes. He confirmed Russia's commitment to supply grain to African countries commercially and free of charge and specifically 25,000-50,000 tonnes of grain to Burkina Faso, Mali, Eritrea and other African countries.

When asked what the United States is doing to send more than 20% of the Ukrainian grain to the poorest countries in the world, Coleman said she does not know that Washington has a specific percentage as its goal and food products are globally sourced and globally priced.

"We should not get overly focused on what percent is going to which countries," Coleman added.

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Blinken Says US Committing \$362Mln to Bolster Food System Resilience in Haiti, Africa

UNITED NATIONS, August 3 (Sputnik) - The United States is committing \$362 million to address food insecurity in Haiti and 11 African countries by bolstering food system resilience,

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Thursday.

"Today, I'm also announcing \$362 million more to tackle the drivers of food insecurity and to enhance resilience in Haiti and 11 African countries," Blinken said in remarks to the UN Security Council.

The efforts include getting food to pregnant women and helping farmers grow hardier and more diverse crops, Blinken said.

The US will look to other governments, companies and philanthropists to help invest in nutrition and resilient food systems, Blinken added.

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Trump Slams 'Unprecedented Weaponization of Justice' Before Court Appearance

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump slammed Democrats for an "unprecedented weaponization" of justice ahead of his initial court appearance on Thursday in the January 6 case.

"The Dems don't want to run against me or they would not be doing this unprecedented weaponization of 'Justice,'" Trump wrote on his Truth Social account.

He blamed, without providing evidence, US President Biden for instructing the attorney general to charge him, a leading Republican contender for the 2024 presidential election, "with as many crimes as can be concocted so that he is forced to spend large amounts of time & money to defend himself."

The indictment by the Department of Justice, which was unsealed Tuesday, relates to Trump's alleged attempts to overturn the 2020 presidential election results to secure a second term, which culminated in the January 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol.

It accuses Trump of one count each of four crimes: conspiracy to threaten or oppress someone exercising a constitutional right; conspiracy to defraud the US; corruptly obstructing an official proceeding; and conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding.