

8/8/23 Tuesday

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AI-Based Asteroid Hunting Tech Spots First Dangerous Space Rock

An artificial intelligence algorithm designed to help astronomers spot potentially dangerous, potentially Earth-bound asteroids has made its first discovery.

The asteroid was spotted on July 18, 2023, and has been designated 2022 SF289. It is expected to pass within 140,000 miles of the Earth - well inside the Moon's orbit. At that range, it's been designated a Potentially Hazardous Asteroid (PHA). At 600 feet wide, if it impacted Earth it would hit with the explosive power of a 250-megaton nuclear bomb and leave a crater nearly 2 miles wide, [according to calculations](#) by Imperial College London academics.

Fortunately, its path doesn't seem to take it on a collision course anytime soon - nor does any known PHA for the next 100 years.

The discovery was made by Heliolinc3D, a program developed to aid the Vera C Rubin Observatory in Chile with its future Legacy Survey of Space and Time (LSST) mission. Since the observatory is still under construction, however, Heliolinc3D made the discovery using data from the ATLAS survey in Hawaii as part of its testing.

When it's deployed on the Rubin telescope, Heliolinc3D will help scan the entire sky of the southern hemisphere every three nights using a massive 3.2 gigapixel digital camera, bringing in colossal amounts of data about nearby space, including likely images of PHAs that human astronomers haven't yet spotted.

"By demonstrating the real-world effectiveness of the software that Rubin will use to look for thousands of yet-unknown potentially hazardous asteroids, the discovery of 2022 SF289 makes us all safer," Rubin scientist Ari Heinze, the principal developer of Heliolinc3D and a researcher at the University of Washington, said in [a news release](#).

According to a news release, the image in which Heliolinc3D spotted the PHA was taken on September 19, 2022, when it was still 3 million miles from Earth, meaning it would have given humans ample warning to prepare for - or possibly even prevent - a catastrophe if it was judged to be on an Earth-bound course.

The discovery was announced in the International Astronomical Union's Minor Planet Electronic Circular [MPEC 2023-O26](#).

Awareness of the terrible destructive power of asteroid impacts has risen since the 1980s, when scientists made their first concrete discoveries that an asteroid or comet impact had been the likely cause of the sudden [Cretaceous–Paleogene extinction event](#) 66 million years ago - an event now widely accepted by the scientific community as having been triggered by the impact of a 6-mile-wide object that [created the Chicxulub crater](#) in Mexico.

Several efforts have been mounted in recent years to devise programs and capabilities for destroying or deflecting asteroids on a collision course with Earth. Last October, NASA's DART mission [succeeded at altering](#) the course of an asteroid using a projectile - that is, they crashed a spacecraft into the rock. However, other approaches could include a "gravity tractor," or

putting a heavy object next to an asteroid to pull it onto a new course. However, all such approaches depend upon detecting the asteroid months or years in advance, and scientists say the greatest danger comes from “surprise” asteroids that weren’t previously spotted before zipping past the planet.

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CDC: New COVID-19 Omicron Subvariant ‘Eris’ Spreading Rapidly in US

According to health authorities in the US and UK, a new subvariant of COVID-19 Omicron known as EG.5, or colloquially as “Eris,” has become the dominant strain in both countries. The latest data from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [on August 5 showed](#) that EG.5 is responsible for between 14-21% of new COVID-19 cases in the US. While that’s not a majority, it’s the largest among a slew of other Omicron subvariants, including the XBB.1.5 subvariant that dominated the US outbreak in the spring of 2023.

The subvariant has been designated a variant under monitoring by the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO), but not yet marked as a variant of interest or of concern.

The WHO hasn’t given EG.5 an official name yet, either, but online users following an informal nomenclature have dubbed it “Eris,” named after the Greek goddess of strife and discord. The Omicron variant and [its many offspring](#) have dominated the COVID-19 outbreak globally for nearly two years thanks to their ability to evade immune system defenses and reinfect people who’ve suffered prior infections or been vaccinated.

One virologist and researcher, Stuart Turville of the University of New South Wales in Australia, told the media EG.5 was “a little bit more slippery” and “competitive” than other Omicron subvariants and able to “navigate better the presence of antibodies” produced by vaccines or prior infections.

Andrea Garcia, the American Medical Association’s vice president for science, medicine and public health, told US media last month that EG.5 doesn’t seem to cause any worse infection than prior Omicron subvariants and may be more susceptible to newer COVID-19 vaccines, including those expected to be rolled out by pharmaceutical companies in the coming months. Pfizer, Moderna and Novavax are all preparing vaccine boosters that specifically target the XBB-series of Omicron subvariants, in accordance with a June directive by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). According to experts, EG.5 shares enough common characteristics with the XBB-series subvariants that the vaccines should be effective against it as well.

The FDA hasn’t yet approved any of the boosters, so it’s unclear when they’ll roll out, but health experts are advising Americans to receive them alongside influenza shots and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), two other highly contagious respiratory infections expected to make a comeback during the colder months.

However, the Biden administration has backed off nearly all social restrictions aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19 or related viruses, including masking requirements in public settings, and an increasing number of employers are moving to end remote working and requiring workers to return to their offices.

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Think Tank: Gen Z Last Majority-White Age Cohort, US Projected to be Majority-Minority by 2045

Newly released data from the 2020 US Census has revealed major demographic changes underway in the US population, including a decisive shift in racial composition. According to an analysis of Census data [recently published](#) by the Brookings Institution, Generation Z will be the last generation of Americans with a white majority. Typically defined as those born between 1995 and 2012 (and thus between the ages of 11 and 28), Gen Z or “Zoomers” were recorded as being roughly just above 50% white. Identifying direct comparisons in the data presented in the report is difficult, since the age cohorts recorded by the Census Bureau don’t perfectly line up with the informal “Generation” definitions. However, what’s clear is that the younger generations are becoming steadily less and less white. Among those called Generation Alpha, or those born since 2012, white people constitute about 47% of the population. Among the younger age cohorts, the Latino population steadily increases as well as those identifying with two or more races, while the Black population stays about the same and the Asian population decreases slightly. For the moment, however, the white population remains in a firm majority, with the 2020 census reporting that 71% of the country self-identified as white or part-white, while 61.6% self-identified as only white.

Still, even those numbers are down significantly from the 2010 census, when over 72% of the population described themselves a white alone.

According to Brookings, by 2045, across the entire US population, non-Hispanic white people will constitute less than half of Americans.

The report also highlights how the US population is steadily aging, with the median age being 38.9 years old - the highest it’s ever been. Meanwhile, the birth rate has continued to decline at 1.64 births per mother. Much of the nation’s population growth has been through immigration, particularly by [younger immigrants](#) from Latin America. Among the US Hispanic population, the median age is just 31, while for non-Hispanic white people it is 43, according to the Census Bureau.

The shift is likely to have major impacts on the nation’s self-image as well as how it reckons with its past. Nationwide demonstrations in 2020 that were initially sparked by fury over police violence by white officers against black citizens also grew to include demands for the removal of statues and honorary names for social institutions that critics said glorified the Confederacy, a separatist movement from the mid-19th century that attempted to declare independence in order to preserve the enslavement of black people to work on white-owned plantations. The Confederacy failed and [slavery was abolished](#), but decades of [racist “Jim Crow”](#)

[laws](#) nonetheless followed, only being discarded after mass demonstrations rocked the country a century later, in the 1950s and 60s.

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'Cruel Realities' Await US Partners in Anti-China Semiconductor Trade Wars

A South Korean lawmaker and former executive at tech manufacturing giant Samsung has sharply criticized US attempts to push Asian partners into restricting their tech industries from trading with Chinese firms, warning it could not only disrupt the markets, but even backfire and turn countries against Washington.

"If [Washington] continues to try to punish other nations and to pass bills and implement 'America First' policies in an unpredictable manner, other countries could form an alliance against the US," Yang Hyang-ja, a member of South Korea's National Assembly and founder of the centrist Hope of Korea party, told a British business daily in [a Sunday interview](#).

"The US should abandon its current approach of trying to get something out of shaking and breaking the global value chain," she added.

The US has blacklisted dozens of Chinese tech firms in recent years, blocking US companies from trading with them and [pushing other governments](#) to adopt similar measures. South Korea, Japan, the Netherlands, and the government in Taiwan have especially been pushed to curb the exports of high-end semiconductors and microchips to China, as well as the advanced methods used to manufacture them. US lawmakers have also adopted [extensive subsidies](#) for US chipmakers as well as firms based in the above-mentioned partners who are willing to [move some of their operations](#) to US soil.

According to Washington, these measures are aimed at denying Chinese government and military-related firms access to tech on par with that used by the West, as well as securing supply chains from possible interference by Beijing, including the possibility that a future war between the US and China might disrupt the flow of tech products into Western markets. However, they are often sold to the public as attempts to crack down on China's supposedly "unfair" and "anti-market" practices by subsidizing its tech companies.

Professor Gary Hufbauer, a senior fellow and trade expert at the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington, DC, told Sputnik that while Yang's warning was "not a current reality, in a few years the pushback could get stronger. Over the long term, say five years, I am skeptical that Asian partners will follow strict US controls on trade with China." He described the perspective of HSBC Holdings public affairs chief Sherard Cowper-Coles, who criticized US policy as harmful to British business interests and criticized Downing Street for supporting it, as "a minority view" right now.

"But I expect it will gain strength if the US imposes sanctions on firms in allied countries," he added.

"The core message, especially to South Korea and Taiwan, is that they should align their own semiconductor trade and investment restrictions, with respect to China, to the US template," Hufbauer said.

The expert said that while so far the effect of restrictions on Asia's technological sector has been "limited," the effects will be more fully felt in the next two years.

"All fabs, chip designers, and equipment manufacturers are affected by US restrictions. All told, that's about a dozen firms outside of China. Given the huge capital costs to enter the industry, and the shortage of skilled personnel, I don't expect many new firms to emerge in the next few years."

Dr Victor Teo, a political scientist who specializes in the International Relations of the Indo-Pacific, told Sputnik there had already been "a broad increase" in tech prices across Asia, but it was unclear if the cause was US policies or the near-global inflation of recent years.

"I think most of the major chipmakers, alongside the Netherlands companies who supply China with chip-making machines and tools, are very concerned. Putting in measures to restrict China might slow Beijing's access to the advanced chips, but at the same time has spurred a techno-nationalistic response from Beijing instead as it doubled down its efforts to spur its domestic chipmaking capabilities. While it is not clear to what extent the Chinese have caught up (this depends on how we define the term "catching up"), the open consensus is that the Chinese are closing the technological gap with Korean and Taiwanese producers."

"The recently announced export control of critical materials for semiconductors, such as gallium and germanium, will, in the same spirit of reciprocity, create problems for the United States and its allies. This would mean that Chinese domestic companies would gain an advantage to become peer competitors to the existing chipmaking giants, even as the latter would lose access to the Chinese market. The profits from China that are instrumental for the innovation and research and development (R&D) in the development of the next generation of chips would no longer be available."

"In the long run, unless these existing chip making companies can overcome this problem, there will also be consequences for the United States and its allies."

Teo noted that as a semiconductor expert, Yang was "principal" in Samsung's rise, and that she feels that US policies will "hollow out" Samsung and the ability of Korean industries as a whole to compete with China in the future, to say nothing of their existing rivals like Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) that are relocating to the US.

"Yang feels that it is in South Korea's interests to counter this trend to ensure Korea retains this indigenous capability. There are signs that Japan is also becoming very vested in investing and building up its indigenous capability."

"I do not think there will be an anti-US club forming amongst the US allies as the elites in these countries are mostly very pro-America," Teo said. "The question is if more of these elites would wake up to the possible cruel realities of alliance politics and calibrate these costs against their national interests to make better judgment in their national policies."

Turning to Cowper-Coles' criticisms, Teo called it emblematic of a divide that exists in many countries between the business community and firms tied to politics and the military-industrial complex.

"Across the board, it is likely that those who are interested in businesses are more likely to stand on the side of globalization and better bilateral relations than those whose job is to engage in nationalistic politics or strategic planning which often involve defining enemies, real or imagined," he noted.

Dr. Kiyul Chung, a political analyst, editor-in-chief at The Fourth Media, and a retired Professor of Tsinghua University, told Sputnik that Washington's anti-Chinese tech policies were typical of its "bully, imperial, or gangster-like" behavior since its formation.

"The US literally corrals or forces 'other Asian partners' to dare not to go out of that '[rules-based international] order', which means 'you better join the US to isolate and eventually impede, weaken, or kill the Chinese semiconductor industry,'" he said.

Chung predicted that the chip industries in Taiwan and Japan could soon befall the fate of South Korea.

"That can happen at any moment. Even 'a century-long pro-West' and pro-US vassals such as Japan and Taiwan can be also targeted at any moment if any of them is not in line to strictly follow the orders coming from Washington. As is well-known, none of the above-mentioned three Asian Chip powers are politically, economically, militarily, and even culturally independent thereby sovereign at all."

Chung characterized Yang's "extraordinarily independent-minded and strong-willed" behavior as "a genuine act of political revolt, daring to challenge her colonial master."

The former professor said that the "defiant, undeterred, and anti-imperialist positions, stances, or principles" of Russia and China could create room for Asian politicians and companies to stand up to Washington.

"If Russia and China stay the course, Ms. Yang's courageous challenge can be interpreted as a signal or sign that her sentiment is not an isolated act. It'd be a broadly-shared dissatisfaction among the global corporations such as Samsung and other big corporations in Seoul with regard to their survival as a business. However, her political revolt can be eventually subdued or dismissed if she doesn't or won't be able to generate sociopolitical support enough within South Korean society."

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White House Blasts McCarthy for Floating 'Lies' Over GOP's Biden Impeachment Inquiry Push

Talks of a potential impeachment inquiry against the US president have been swirling for weeks, with lawmakers pointing at its necessity amid allegations that Biden received any kickbacks from foreign business dealings hatched by his son Hunter.

The White House hit back on Tuesday after House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, yet again, floated the notion that US President Joe Biden would fall under an impeachment inquiry.

McCarthy, citing two whistleblowers from the US Internal Revenue Service, said prosecutors dragged their feet on an investigation into Hunter Biden's tax law violations, and alleged that millions in foreign finances were transferred to the Biden family and their associates through [shell companies](#).

"When Biden was running for office, he told the public he has never talked about business. He said his family has never received a dollar from China – which we prove is not true," McCarthy said during an appearance on Fox News with [Sean Hannity](#) on Monday night.

"We've only followed where the information has taken us. But, Hannity, this is rising to the level of impeachment inquiry, which provides Congress the strongest power to get the rest of the knowledge and information needed."

By [Tuesday](#), Ian Sams, a spokesperson for the White House, blasted McCarthy's comments and claimed the GOP lawmaker was "lying" about the US president in order to prompt the "extreme far right's" stunt.

"Last night on 'Hannity,' House Speaker Kevin McCarthy continued lying about President Biden — making a series of plainly false, widely debunked attacks in order to promote the extreme far right's baseless impeachment stunt that even some members of McCarthy's own caucus are expressing concerns about pursuing," Sams [said](#).

During the Monday interview, McCarthy also compared the Biden White House to that of the Nixon administration, saying the former used the "government much like [former US President] Richard Nixon used [it] by denying us to get the information that we need."

Sams called the comparison both "bizarre" and "demonstrably false," adding that the GOP-led House Oversight Committee that handled the investigation was given access to records by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the US Treasury Department.

"Their own witnesses testified POTUS wasn't involved. Subpoenaed records they obtained show no link to them. In-depth independent reporting has proven many of their claims false. Yet, the House Republicans won't let facts stand in the way of abusing their power to smear him," Sams said.

"Speaker McCarthy has decided the truth should not get in the way of his and House Republicans' relentless efforts to smear the president. They are prioritizing their own extreme, far-right political agenda at the expense of focusing on what really matters to the American people: working together to make their lives better," Sams said Tuesday.

"That is, after all, what the American people sent their leaders to Washington to do."

Sams' commentary marks just the latest example of the Biden camp going in on the defensive mode ahead of the 2024 election cycle. In light of the ongoing investigation into business dealings involving the Biden family, the US president has repeatedly had to shoot down claims of political misuse.

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NASA's 2022 Asteroid Test Proved Successful But Caused Deadly Boulder Storm

Experts have suggested that a newly-discovered pack of space boulders could carry an impact as strong and deadly as the force of the atomic bomb used on Hiroshima during the Second World War.

The US space agency NASA accidentally forced the emergence of a swarm of boulders around the asteroid Dimorphos after testing the Double Asteroid Redirection Test (DART) spacecraft, it was recently revealed.

In fact, the boulders were [shaken loose](#) by NASA last September when the organization carried out tests for its DART mission, which is focused on establishing a concrete planetary defense method.

However, astronomers believe the boulders may have already existed on Dimorphos' surface and that the DART spacecraft simply knocked them free once the test saw the vessel crash into the asteroid and redirect its trajectory.

In total, the group of scientists from at the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA) pinpointed 37 boulders that range in various sizes from 3 feet to 22 feet in width, and are traveling at a speed of 13,000 miles per hour through space. Researchers noted the total weight of the debris is estimated to be at around 1,000 tons.

David Jewitt, a professor at UCLA, says the boulder storm is “like a cloud of shrapnel expanding from a hand grenade.”

“Because those big boulders basically share the speed of the targeted asteroid, they’re capable of doing their own damage,” added Jewitt, who went on to explain that a 15-foot boulder hitting Earth, at a typical impact rate, could deliver as much energy as the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima during World War II.

While the DART mission proved a success, the asteroid chosen for the test is six million miles from Earth and is unlikely to ever pose a threat to Earth in the near [future](#).

Looking to future experiments, experts hope to use the Hubble Space Telescope to track down the trajectories of any future boulders.

“If we follow the boulders in future Hubble observations, we may have enough data to pin down the boulders’ precise trajectories,” added Jewitt. “And then we’ll see in which directions they were launched from the surface and figure out exactly how they were ejected.”

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Ron DeSantis' 2024 Team Undergoes Third Campaign Shuffle This Month Amid Growing Concerns

Shortly after DeSantis’ biggest donor pulled back on funding the Florida governor, a second campaign shakeup has resulted in what has been an unpredictable month for the 44-year-old presidential hopeful.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis recently replaced his campaign manager in what has become a month of complete and utter political shakeups ahead of the 2024 election cycle.

DeSantis replaced his current campaign manager, Generra Peck, with James Uthmeier, while David Polyansky, a senior adviser to the pro-DeSantis super PAC “Never Back Down,” will become the deputy campaign manager to his campaign.

Uthmeier, the chief of staff from his state office, has been considered a trusted adviser to DeSantis for years and is expected to work alongside Peck, who is staying on as a chief strategist. Peck previously served as DeSantis’ campaign manager for his 2022 reelection bid, in which he won by [20 points](#).

“James Uthmeier has been one of Governor DeSantis’ top advisors for years and he is needed where it matters most: working hand in hand with Generra Peck and the rest of the team to put the governor in the best possible position to win this primary and defeat Joe Biden,” said Andrew Romeo, a spokesman for DeSantis.

The latest rendition of political musical chairs marks the third time DeSantis opted to reshuffle his 2024 campaign. In the first six weeks of his campaign, the Florida governor managed to burn through \$7.9 million of his campaign funds. Then, in mid-July, DeSantis fired about a third of his staff, axing to a total of 38 jobs.

Throwing a wrench into the campaign, it was also revealed late Sunday that DeSantis’ biggest campaign [donor](#) pulled back on his funding due to the governor’s “extremist” views, particularly on issues surrounding abortion.

According to a campaign insider who spoke to media on condition of anonymity, the shift in campaign managers was “no surprise” and “should have happened weeks ago.”

Another person close to the campaign added that Uthmeier had the “trust” of DeSantis and his wife, and was well regarded by the campaign staff, while Peck had “lost [the] confidence” of the team. It was noted that while Uthmeier will take on the “CEO” role of the campaign, he will rely heavily on Polyansky as well as Marc Reichelderfer, an experienced political consultant from Tallahassee, Florida.

However, it's reported the shakeup may scare off more of DeSantis’ backers. One fundraiser voiced concern with Uthmeier’s inexperience, according to one [report](#): “You've got to know the basics of politics, the speed at which politics goes compared to government. Two different worlds,” the fundraiser said.

“The timing is so bizarre,” they added, referring to DeSantis’ busy campaign schedule, as the governor was working his way through Iowa and New Hampshire around the same time as the campaign shift. “The campaign is sort of believing the narrative that others are saying, that we're not in a good spot. We're in a great spot. That's why this change today to me is [an] overreaction and it shows they're reading Twitter too much or following the insider beltway.” Even as former President Donald Trump battles three criminal indictments, with more on the way, DeSantis has struggled to appeal to both Trump loyalists as well as more moderate Republicans.

“I feel like Republicans want an alternative to Trump and DeSantis was sort of it — and then they made a summary judgment that, no, it's not him,” said [Rick Tyler](#), an experienced Republican strategist who once worked on presidential campaigns.

“[DeSantis] is clearly an intelligent person,” Tyler added. “But he has no idea how to run for president and no idea how to beat Trump because treating Trump as unexploded ordnance doesn't work. We know that doesn't work.”

A recent [poll](#) showed Republican voters view Trump, not DeSantis, as the stronger GOP candidate to face off against US President Joe Biden, and as the Republican candidate who is more likely to “get things done” once in office.

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CENTCOM Says 5 IS Operatives Killed, 30 Detained in Partnered Operations in July

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - The United States and partners killed five members of the Islamic State terrorist group (IS, banned in Russia) and detained 30 others during operations in Iraq and Syria in July, US Central Command said on Wednesday.

"During the month of July 2023, U.S. Central Command, along with coalition and other partners, conducted a total of 31 D-ISIS operations, resulting in 5 ISIS operatives killed and 30 detained," CENTCOM said in a statement.

In Iraq, the US and its partners conducted 20 operations, killing two and detaining 24 terrorists. Three IS operatives were eliminated and another six were arrested in 11 operations in Syria, it added.

The commander of the US-led coalition, Gen. Matthew McFarlane, pointed out a "dramatic reduction" in IS activity and effectiveness in the region.

The US remains committed to advising, assisting, and enabling its partners in the lead toward an enduring defeat of IS, the general said.

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Biden Falsely Claims He Declared National Emergency in Hawaii Over Wildfires

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden falsely claimed in an interview aired on Wednesday that he had already declared a national emergency in the US state of Hawaii.

"We've already done that," Biden said in an interview with The Weather Channel when asked if he was planning to declare a national emergency in the US state.

After clarifying the question, Biden apparently realized his mistake and said that the administration has declared a state of emergency "practically speaking."

On Tuesday, acting Governor of Hawaii Sylvia Luke declared a state of emergency over wildfires fueled by Hurricane Dora in Maui and Hawaii counties.

The Biden administration so far has not declared a state of national emergency in Hawaii.

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Australia Could Be Testing Ground for Hypersonic, Long-Range Arms Under AUKUS - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - The Pentagon is considering using Australia as a testing ground for its hypersonic missiles and several other long-range precision weapons as part of cooperation under the AUKUS pact, US Secretary of the Army Christine Wormuth told AFP.

"Australia obviously has a tremendous amount of territory where that testing is a little bit more

doable -- so I think that's a unique thing, as an example, that the Australians bring to the table," Wormuth said in an interview published on Wednesday.

She explained that a challenge is for the United States to "find open spaces" where they can test hypersonics or even some of long-range precision weapons.

The secretary noted that Australia has a vast amount of uninhabited territory where testing for hypersonic and long-range weaponry is more feasible, adding that Canberra's participation in and contribution to AUKUS does not necessarily need to be financial.

The Australian-UK-US defense partnership, also known as AUKUS, was created in 2021 primarily as a three-way agreement on the provision of nuclear-powered stealth submarine vessels to the Royal Australian Navy.

Beijing has been vocal against AUKUS as its creation happened amid growing confrontation between the US and China. Chinese authorities have pointed out the hypocrisy of the three countries on the issue of nuclear non-proliferation as nuclear-powered submarines are to be transferred to Australia under the pact.

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More Than Half of Americans Support Federal Regulation of AI - Poll

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - More than half of American voters prefer regulation of artificial intelligence (AI) by the federal government rather than tech companies, Axios reported on Wednesday, citing an exclusive poll commissioned by the Artificial Intelligence Policy Institute.

Fifty-six percent of the 1,001 voters polled July 18-21 by YouGov said they supported federal regulation, while 14% said they did not. In addition, 82% said they did not trust tech companies to regulate AI.

Underlying the desire for regulation was concern about the risks posed by AI. The majority of voters, 62%, expressed some level of concern – mostly or somewhat – about AI, compared to the 21% minority who were mostly or somewhat excited about AI.

Seventy-two percent favored slowing down AI development. Additionally, 86% believed AI could accidentally cause some type of catastrophe, with three quarters of Democrats and Republicans alike worried that AI could eventually threaten human existence.

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No Peace in Ukraine Until US, UK Abandon Goal of Destroying Russia - US Senate Hopeful

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - No peace initiatives on Ukraine will work until the United States and the United Kingdom abandon their goal to "destroy Russia," independent candidate for the US Senate from New York Diane Sare told Sputnik.

Several countries, including China and a group of African nations, have set out their road maps toward peace in Ukraine, but none has been approved by Kiev.

When asked whether she sees any of the proposed initiatives as a possible way forward, Sare stated, "I think so, with a giant caveat."

"Which is that the United States and Britain have to change their desire, the goal of the destruction of Russia," Sare said. "The United States and Britain, unfortunately, are capable of sabotaging anything. Somehow, we must shift the United States and so far the Congress hasn't gotten the message, but I think that is actually critical to getting this conflict to end."

Commenting on what a possible negotiated solution to the Ukraine conflict may be, Sare noted, "That is really not for me to say."

"I think that Putin has expressed very legitimate security concerns which were ignored at the beginning of the process," she said. "I think there was an agreement that they had nearly reached with the help of Turkey mediating in March - April of 2022. It might be wise to start from that position."

Sare believes certain outcomes would be inevitable, including that Ukraine would have to be neutral and not acquire nuclear weapons.

"I think Crimea has to be recognized as part of Russia," she said. "I'm not sure that the people of Donetsk and Lugansk want to return to anything like the Minsk accords, but that all has to be hammered out. That's not for me to say, you have to have Western leaders acting in good faith, not in the treasonous way that they did around the Minsk accords."

Saudi Arabia hosted Ukraine peace talks in Jeddah over the weekend, having invited representatives from some 30 countries, but not Russia. The Jeddah meeting is a follow-up to a similar conference held in Denmark in June. The Copenhagen meeting failed to produce any joint statements.

Moscow has said it is open to peace negotiations if Kiev recognizes the territorial gains Russia has made since the launch of its military operation in February 2022. Ukraine has banned its officials from engaging the Russian government in talks as long as President Vladimir Putin is in power.

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Freezing Russian Assets 'Theft' Prompting Others to Get Out of Dollar - US Senate Hopeful

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - The freezing of Russia's assets by the United States is an act of theft prompting other countries to get rid of the US dollar, independent candidate for the US Senate from New York State Diane Sare told Sputnik.

"We should unfreeze them. This is just theft," Sare said. "We've stolen 300 billion from the Russians. Then we say, 'Why do people not trust United States?' I mean, it's just theft. We should stop it. It's outrageous."

Sare said Americans should not wonder why people around the world want to eliminate their holdings and reserves of the US dollar given the US government's actions regarding Russia and Afghanistan, among others.

"You saw what we did to Afghanistan. First we occupied the place for 20 years. We prop up a guy who flees the country with the cash falling out of the helicopter. Then we say we don't know why the Afghan people didn't fight for such a person. Then we say we don't like the Taliban and we steal \$7 billion from their central bank," she said.

Sare also criticized the sanctions imposed by the United States and its allies on Russia, Cuba, Syria and other nations as being against international law.

"Unilateral sanctions should simply be abolished. They're against international law. A really cruel and outrageous policy. We shouldn't do sanctions," she said.

Sare, a candidate for the US Senate in the 2024 elections, said she would demand a review of every single one of the sanctions to determine whether they were necessary or made any sense.

After the start of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, Western countries imposed comprehensive sanctions against Russia, including the freezing of nearly half of the country's foreign currency reserves, amounting to about \$300 billion.

Moscow has repeatedly said that attempts to confiscate frozen Russian assets are an expropriation of property in violation of international law. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Sputnik that Russia would do everything possible to return the seized assets.

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US Congress Has Role to Play in Probe Into Nord Stream Attacks - Senate Candidate

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - The US Congress has a role to play in investigating the attacks on the Nord Stream gas pipelines because it was not consulted on them in violation of US law, independent candidate for the US Senate from New York State Diane Sare told Sputnik.

"They [Congress] were illegally not consulted. That's against the law," she said. "You're not allowed to do a top covert action and not brief the Congress. This is an act of war. The Congress has to give their approval and they were kept out of the loop. So they absolutely have a role."

Sare said she believes the US government was involved in the attacks on the pipelines because President Joe Biden announced on February 7, 2022, before Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, that the United States would end the pipelines.

"He didn't say blow up. He said it will end them," she noted. "So he announced our plan to destroy the pipeline in a public meeting."

The candidate also cited reports alleging that then UK Prime Minister Liz Truss sent a text to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken saying "it's done" just after the blasts.

Sare also referred to an article of investigative journalist Seymour Hersh regarding the deep sea diving equipment and remote explosive devices used to attack the pipelines, noting that only a few countries in the world have such capabilities.

"This is why I'm convinced that it's the United States, the United Kingdom, probably Denmark, Norway - that is what Seymour Hersh says. They all had a role in destroying these pipelines," she said. "I would hope that people would not let go of it. I think it's something that really has to

be answered. It's glaring. But that's our job. That's my job. That's the job of others to insist that the truth comes out."

The Nord Stream pipelines, built to deliver gas under the Baltic Sea from Russia to Germany, were hit by explosions in September 2022. The pipeline's operator said that the damage was unprecedented and it was impossible to estimate the time repairs might take.

Denmark, Germany and Norway have left Russia out of their investigations into the attack, prompting Moscow to launch its own probe on charges of international terrorism.

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Trump Indictments Backfiring, Only Serve to Enrage Voters - Candidate for US Senate

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - The indictments against former President Donald Trump have failed to achieve their intended objective and only serve to convince US voters that the Justice Department and FBI are weaponized, independent candidate for the US Senate from New York State Diane Sare told Sputnik.

"It seems to be making him more and more popular," Sare said. "Because so many Americans have had their own bad experiences in the kangaroo courts of the United States ... the indictments are only serving to get the voters enraged to believe that there is a weaponization of the Justice Department and the FBI. It's completely backfiring from the intended intention."

Sare pointed out that US voters see the disparity between the treatment of Trump and President Joe Biden and his son Hunter Biden.

"Here again, you see the double standard," Sare said.

Sare emphasized that the United States is in a period of great change filled with challenges and voters seek candidates that can speak the truth and stand on principles.

"The fact that Trump is the front-running candidate of the Republican Party in spite of the fact that they are indicting him and arresting him every five seconds, and that Robert Kennedy Jr. is the leading candidate of the Democratic Party even though the establishment is pushing a senile old man are indicative that it's an unpredictable situation, that Americans are looking for people with the courage to stand on principle and tell the truth," she said.

Sare explained that she decided to run again for the US Senate in 2024 and consequently declared and filed her candidacy with the Federal Election Commission.

"I still have to get on the ballot, but I am officially an independent candidate for US Senate in the state of New York," she said.

When asked about her agenda, Sare said her program consists of three main points.

"Number one, we have to renounce the possibility of nuclear war," she said. "We should stop sending weapons and funding to Ukraine and insist on a negotiated resolution to that crisis, which was largely provoked by the United States, the United Kingdom and NATO. And then I think we need a new security architecture which respects every nation equally, sovereignty, security, etc."

The second point is the US economy, which has been affected by a collapsing transatlantic system that is more bankrupt than the communist system was, she said.

"I think that's what's propelling the war. So we need a new international architecture with fixed exchange rates. We have to separate the banks with the Glass Steagall Act," she said.

The third point of her agenda is to restore a high standard of public education in the United States, Sare said.

"We are destroying our young people with insanity, and we've eliminated standards of reading and mathematics. There are no orchestras or choruses in many of the schools anymore," she said. "And if you don't care about your young people, then you are making sure that your nation and the planet has no future. So those are my priorities," she stated.

Trump faces a total of 78 counts of various criminal charges after the US government initiated a third criminal indictment against him last week, potentially facing a maximum sentence of 561 years in prison. The former president has said he is innocent of all charges.

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US Senate Candidate Says NATO 'Dinosaur of an Institution,' Should Be Dissolved

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - NATO is a relic and should have been abolished after German reunification, independent candidate for the US Senate from New York Diane Sare told Sputnik.

"I think NATO should be dissolved. I think it should have been dissolved when Germany was reunified," Sare said. "I think frankly, it's dead already. I mean, you know, there's so much dissent within NATO already as it is. It is a dinosaur of an institution. So I don't think it's really going to be around that much longer."

The future of the alliance depends on how long some of its members in Europe "who are bearing the brunt of the insanity of the current American and British leadership want to stick around and play that game having their economies destroyed," she continued.

The candidate declined to speculate on how the alliance would fall apart, but expressed belief that "it's simply not going to be able to continue" because "it's really a dead institution."

NATO has not stopped expanding since the dissolution of the rival Warsaw Pact and collapse of the Soviet Union, drawing the ire of Moscow. The relationship took a nosedive over a 2014 change of power in Ukraine and Crimea's accession to Russia.

In December 2021, Russia requested guarantees that the alliance would not expand eastward to include Ukraine and Georgia, but was refused. In February 2022, Russia launched a military operation in Ukraine.

NATO responded by deploying even more troops to the eastern flank. At the Vilnius summit in July this year, the alliance reaffirmed that Ukraine will become a NATO member and removed the requirement for a Membership Action Plan to accelerate its accession after the conflict with Russia ends.

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

Support for Ending Ukraine Aid Growing in US Congress, Society - Senate Candidate

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - Support for ending financial assistance for Ukraine is increasing among US lawmakers and the American people, independent candidate for the US Senate from New York Diane Sare told Sputnik.

"I have to tell you, it is shifting," Sare said. "I believe the support for ending this funding actually is growing and I would say in the American people, it's the overwhelming majority."

Sare noted that the recent vote in the Senate on having an inspector general for Ukraine aid also proves that.

While the amendment failed in a 51-48 vote, it nonetheless showed the increasing number of lawmakers who say they'd like to know where the money is going.

"That I find a major shift. You had the bill introduced by Marjorie Taylor Greene, that we should stop the funding and I believe it was 89 people in the House voted for it," she added. "You might say, well, it's only less than 25% since the House has 435 members, but 89 is a lot bigger than two or three, which is what it was a year ago."

When asked why many US lawmakers strongly support arming Ukraine, Sare said, "I think a lot of them don't have a clue."

"We had a famous - I forget which one, it was Congressman here in New York - who didn't even know where Donetsk was," she continued.

Sare stressed that the supply of US weapons to Ukraine should stop.

"This war of Ukraine, the arming of Ukraine - it's the most corrupt regime, maybe in the world. The weapons are turning up in the hands of Mexican drug cartels," she said. "We have a horrible crisis on our border, partly because we're supporting drug cartels all over the world. I think these are of a piece and if we could stop the funding of Ukraine, that would be a major step toward cleaning up a lot of corruption in our foreign policy."

Believing that Ukraine is going to win the war against Russia is a "fiction," and the US should stop "living in a fantasy," she stated.

"Ukraine is merely being used for a proxy war to destroy Russia," the candidate said.

A CNN poll published last week showed that 55% of Americans oppose Congress authorizing additional funding to support Ukraine in its conflict with Russia, while 45% disagree.

The US has committed more than \$75 billion in various types of assistance to Ukraine since February 2022. A major part, or nearly \$50 billion, has been spent on weapons and related military equipment.

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ICC Warrant for Putin 'Absurd' Threat to Head of Nuke Superpower - US Senate Hopeful

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - The International Criminal Court's arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin is "absurd" and is intended to create a dangerous security

situation for the head of a nuclear superpower, independent candidate for the US Senate Diane Sare told Sputnik.

"It's clearly absurd," Sare said. "It's designed to create a dangerous security situation for the head of state of a major nuclear superpower. And it's just indicative of what I was saying earlier. There is no standard of truth ... there is a double standard right now of justice. And apparently the rules-based order means that we make the rules but not only do we make the rules, the rules themselves are arbitrary and can be changed."

In March, the ICC issued an arrest warrant for President Putin and commissioner for children's rights Maria Lvova-Belova, alleging the unlawful transfer of children from Ukraine to Russia.

Russia denies any forceful transfer of children, saying it evacuates them from the front lines and places them in safe locations away from hostilities.

The country does not recognize the ICC's jurisdiction since it is not a party to the Rome Statute.

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Fear Keeps Japan, UN Silent on US Responsibility for Nuke Bombings - US Senate Hopeful

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - Japanese officials and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres avoid saying that the United States is responsible for the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki because they fear Washington's reaction, independent candidate for the US Senate from New York State Diane Sare told Sputnik.

None of the Japanese politicians who spoke at last week's memorial service for the victims of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima mentioned that the bomb had been dropped by the United States. Remembering the victims of the bombings, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres did not name the country responsible either.

"I think that's just fear. It's fear of the potential for the United States to respond or whatever leverage we can bring to bear," Sare said. "I'm happy to say the leverage we can bring to bear is less and less. Many leaders in the world, particularly in African countries, have figured that out. So, they are not behaving in such a cowardly fashion."

Sare pointed out that such countries have realized that it might be wiser to work with China and Russia, who actually work on bringing about economic development, rather than with a self-described ally who is willing to blow up pipelines, shut down food production and steal technology, among other measures.

"I think, obviously, people know it was the United States that dropped the atomic bombs, but I also think they are too afraid of offending the Caligula-like leadership we have right now," she said. "People do things that are irrational. That's what we're seeing, and maybe... the countries are hoping not to provoke us. I really don't know what the great benefit is of not telling the truth. Perhaps they also don't feel the world is in that much danger. But, I think having such a big gathering does indicate that they do realize the danger. So, maybe they think they're being subtle."

Sare also said US leaders should consider how the United States should be run.

"It was Caligula who said let them hate me, but let them fear me. I mean, is Caligula really a

good model for your nation, or your leadership?" she said.

The United States dropped two atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9, 1945. Some 140,000 people in Hiroshima and 74,000 in Nagasaki were killed as a result of the bombings, and the vast majority of them were civilians.

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US Army to Expand Patriot Missile Defense Force - Commander

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - The US Army is going to expand its arsenal of Patriot anti-aircraft and anti-missile weapons in response to growing operational demands, Space and Missile Defense Command chief Lieutenant General Daniel Karbler told reporters at the Space and Missile Defense Symposium in Huntsville, Alabama.

"We have a requirement to grow Patriot force structure," Karbler said on Tuesday as quoted by the Army Times. "We will grow Patriot force structure."

Karbler said US Army senior leaders recognize the demands on the Patriot force.

"We are addressing that through increasing our Patriot units that are out there," he added.

The US Army currently fields 15 battalions of Patriots in its active force and has current funding to build another one, the report added.

Over the past ten years Patriot battalions have experienced the highest operational tempo with more continuing demands than any other element of the Army, the report said.

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Blinken, Bulgarian Counterpart Discuss Need for Continued Aid for Ukraine - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with his Bulgarian counterpart Mariya Gabriel earlier in the day to discuss continuing assistance for Ukraine, the State Department said in a press release.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke with Bulgarian Foreign Minister Mariya Gabriel today, offering congratulations on her appointment," Blinken said in the release on Tuesday.

"Secretary Blinken and Foreign Minister Gabriel discussed the need for continued security assistance for Ukraine from Allies and partners and ongoing efforts to diversify energy sources toward cleaner, more secure supplies and technologies."

Moreover, the release said Blinken and Gabriel also discussed the "importance of EU enlargement to secure stability and prosperity in the region."

Earlier in the day, US media reported that the White House is expected to ask Congress for an additional \$10 billion in supplemental funding for Ukraine next year.

The request is expected to test whether Republican lawmakers will side with the White House or seek to limit funding to Ukraine amid efforts to stabilize the US economy. Several

Republicans, including House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, previously vowed that Ukraine would not have a so-called blank check if Republicans took control of the House of Representatives.

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Judge's Ties to Burisma-Linked Law Firm, Hunter Biden 'Conflict of Interest' - Trump

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump said in a statement that US federal judge Tanya Chutkan's ties to a Burisma-linked law firm and Hunter Biden constituted a conflict of interest in his election-related case.

Chutkan is assigned to handle the criminal case Trump faces for allegedly trying to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election.

"The Obama appointed judge in the free speech indictment of me by my political opponent, crooked Joe Biden's Department of Injustice, shared professional ties at the law firm that worked for energy company Burisma, based in Ukraine, of which Hunter Biden and his associate were 'proud' members of the board, and were paid millions of dollars, even though Hunter knew almost nothing about energy. How much was the law firm paid? So horrible. This is a classic conflict of interest! 'Gateway Pundit'," Trump said on Tuesday.

Yahoo News confirmed that Chutkan and Hunter Biden were both employed by, or as partners of, Boies Schiller Flexner LLP (BSF) between 2010 and 2014.

BSF did work for the Ukrainian oil company Burisma through Hunter Biden in May 2014, the report said.

Chutkan reportedly worked for the BSF law firm from 2002 until June 2014, leaving when then-President Barack Obama appointed her to be a federal judge in Washington.

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

She has reportedly sentenced at least 38 individuals convicted on charges in connection to the events at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, most whom were sentenced to prison time even if prosecutors were not seeking such sentences.

Trump has denied any wrongdoing and argued that the newly unveiled indictment against him is the latest attempt by the "Biden crime family" and the weaponized US Justice Department to interfere in the 2024 presidential election.

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Trump Says Prosecutors May Bring Fourth Criminal Indictment Next Week

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump said during a rally that prosecutors may bring forth a fourth indictment against him to a grand jury for consideration next week.

"I should have four [indictments] by sometime next week," Trump said on Tuesday, when speaking about his legal issues.

Trump is already facing criminal charges brought in three separate indictments related to alleged hush money payments, handling of classified documents and efforts to overturn the 2020 US presidential election.

Prosecutors in the US state of Georgia may bring additional charges involving Trump's actions in the wake of the 2020 US presidential election to a grand jury next week, US media reported on Tuesday, citing two grand jury witnesses.

The two witnesses received subpoenas to appear before the grand jury, but were not instructed to appear within the next two days, the report said. The lack of notice to promptly appear could indicate that the case will not get brought to the grand jury until next week, the report said.

Fani Willis, district attorney for Fulton County, Georgia, suggested she would pursue a grand jury indictment against Trump in early August, the report said. Willis' probe into Trump examined his alleged efforts to retain power after the 2020 US presidential election.

Trump has denounced the charges against him as part of the weaponization of the US justice system against him ahead of the 2024 US presidential election, for which he is seeking the Republican Party nomination. Trump currently leads in primary polls despite the unresolved legal battles.

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Trump Lawyers Request Next US Court Hearing on January 6 Indictment for Next Week - Filing (Updates with more details in paras 6, 7)

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - Attorneys representing former US President Donald Trump filed a notice with the US District Court for the District of Columbia, requesting a hearing on Trump's January 6-related indictment next week.

The court directed Trump's lawyers and prosecutors to provide potential dates for a hearing before August 11. However, Trump's team is requesting a hearing on August 14 or 15 in order to facilitate the presence of both his lawyers, according to the filing on Tuesday.

"President Trump will not appear. However, he would like to have both his counsel John Lauro and Todd Blanche at the hearing... we would respectfully request a setting on Monday (after 12:00 pm) or Tuesday (all day) to allow for both Mr. Blanche and Mr. Lauro to be present," the filing said.

The government indicated that they are available any time on August 9, 10 or 11, the filing said. The hearing relates to Trump's indictment on four criminal charges, including conspiracy to defraud the United States and conspiracy against rights, tied to Special Counsel Jack Smith's probe of the January 6 US Capitol riots and related efforts to change the results of the 2020 US presidential election.

The court ultimately denied Trump's bid to delay his appearance, with Judge Tanya Chutkan scheduling a hearing for August 11 at 10:00 a.m. ET, according to an order filed later on Tuesday.

The order also waived the requirement for Trump to appear at the hearing as the defendant.

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US, Iraq to Form Higher Military Commission on Defense, Security Issues - Joint Statement

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - The United States and Iraq have decided to create a higher military commission that would focus on defense and security issues, the two countries said in a joint statement after the inaugural meeting of the Joint Security Cooperation Dialogue (JSCD).

"The United States and the Republic of Iraq intend to consult on a future process... to determine how the Coalition's military mission will evolve on a timeline according to the following factors: the threat from ISIS [Islamic State, banned in Russia], operational and environmental requirements, and ISF capability levels. The Iraqi and US delegations committed to form a higher military commission between the US and Iraq to evaluate the future process described above," the statement said on Tuesday.

The two sides, led by Iraqi Defense Minister Thabit al-Abbasi and US Assistant Defense Secretary Celeste Wallander, discussed a range of bilateral defense issues. The officials reaffirmed the bilateral commitments to Iraq's security and defense capabilities, the statement said.

They also exchanged opinions over the building of the Iraqi Security Forces through US military assistance and security cooperation programs, the statement said.

In addition, the officials discussed military education opportunities for Iraqi servicemembers and their participation in US-led military exercises, the statement added.

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Biden Claims Grand Canyon One of 'Nine' Wonders of the World in Newest Slip-Up

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden's most recent gaffe came Tuesday, when he erroneously proclaimed the Grand Canyon to be one of 'the nine wonders' of the world during an event at the Historic Red Butte Airfield in Arizona, where the President spoke about conservation efforts.

"Folks, it's not hyperbole to suggest that there is no national treasure — none that is grander than the Grand Canyon. The Grand Canyon — one of the Earth's nine wonders, wonders of the world, literally. Think of that. You know, it's amazing. An enduring symbol of America to the entire world," said Biden during his remarks.

Not only are there seven, not nine, wonders of the world, but the Grand Canyon isn't even among them.

However, the Grand Canyon is sometimes mentioned as one of the seven natural wonders of

the world.

Biden designated the area a new national monument on Tuesday before signing the proclamation and touring the Grand Canyon itself. The President is expected to wrap up his trip with stops in both New Mexico and Utah.

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US Wishes Russia Well With New Moon Probe, Appreciates Partnership - NASA Chief

WASHINGTON, August 8 (Sputnik) - The United States wishes Russia well with its upcoming Luna 25 space mission to the Moon scheduled to launch on Friday and continues to appreciate the two countries' 48 years of cooperation in manned space exploration and research, NASA Administrator Bill Nelson said.

"I wish Russia well with its current probe: We wish them well," Nelson said during a press conference at the Kennedy Space Center on Tuesday.

Nelson also said he did not think Russia was in a race to establish a permanent manned presence on the Moon against the United States and China.

"I don't think Russia will be ready to land cosmonauts on the Moon in the same time frame we will be. I don't think China will [either]," Nelson said

NASA is currently planning to return US astronauts to the surface of the Moon for the first time in more than 53 years in December 2025, Nelson added.

Earlier on Tuesday, the Russian space agency Roscosmos released photos of final preparations before the launch of its Luna-25 space mission on Friday, which is set to deliver a lunar lander to the Moon for the first time since 1976.

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NASA Artemis II Manned Flight in 2024 Won't Enter Lunar Orbit - Mission Commander

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - NASA's planned Artemis II first deep space manned flight of its new Moon Mission spacecraft is not planned to enter into any orbit around the lunar satellite, Mission Commander Reid Wiseman told reporters at Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

"I don't think we are going into lunar orbit on this one," Wiseman, the designated mission commander, told a press conference on Tuesday.

Artemis II is currently planned to make three ever more wide-ranging earth-orbiting flights including one that would take it beyond the orbit of the Moon, Wiseman acknowledged. But at no point would it make any on-course corrections to take it directly into orbit around the Moon, he said.

Artemis II is planned as a preparatory flight for Artemis III, which is scheduled to return US astronauts to the lunar surface in December 2025 for the first time in more than 53 years,

including the first female US astronaut and first US astronaut of color to walk on the lunar surface, NASA officials have previously said.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) -

NIGER DEVELOPMENTS

* Acting Deputy Secretary of State Victoria Nuland identified during her meetings with the military leadership in Niger the support for a return to constitutional order in the country that the United States will continue to press for, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.

* The French nuclear fuel cycle company Orano, which produces uranium in Niger, told RIA Novosti that operations in Niger continue without changes.

* The European Union will support any efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to resolve the situation in Niger and it believes there is room for mediation, EU foreign policy spokesperson Peter Stano said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* The shelling by Ukraine of Donetsk has resulted in the killing of three people and in the 11 others injured, Donetsk People's Republic acting head Denis Pushilin said on Tuesday.

* Ukraine has lost up to 210 soldiers in the Donetsk area over the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

* The Netherlands is exploring ways to further strengthen Ukraine's air defenses following a meeting in Saudi Arabia on the conflict resolution, Prime Minister Mark Rutte said.

US MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO UKRAINE

* US President Joe Biden approved a joint effort with European allies to train Ukrainian pilots to operate F-16 fighter jets, Defense Department spokesperson Sabrina Singh said.

* The United States is currently in the middle of talks with Ukraine about security guarantees and long-term support, with no date set yet for follow-up negotiations, State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said.

* The Biden administration is planning to announce another package of military aid for Ukraine later this week, Miller said.

GRAIN EXPORTS AGREEMENT

* Turkey continues to hold negotiations to resume the Black Sea Grain Initiative, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Tuesday, adding that Russian President Vladimir Putin is sensitive to the issue of Africa's food security.

BRICS SUMMIT

* Mexico is not planning to join BRICS, but welcomes the participation of other countries in this organization, President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said.

* Russian President Vladimir Putin and his South Africa counterpart Cyril Ramaphosa discussed over the telephone the upcoming BRICS meeting, trade relations and other issues, the Kremlin said.

RUSSIAN ECONOMY

* The Russian budget deficit for January-July amounted to 1.8% of the GDP or \$29 billion, the Finance Ministry said on Tuesday.

* Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed a decree on establishing a special procedure for settlements under foreign trade contracts for the supply of Russian agricultural products, according to the document published on the official legal portal.

* The share of the US dollar and euro in Russian exports dropped from 32% to 30% in June and in imports from 35% to 32%, the Bank of Russia said.

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NASA Chief Says Does Not Want to Find China on Moon Saying Keep Out

WASHINGTON, August 8 (Sputnik) - The United States does not want to return human astronauts to the Moon after 53 years in 2025 under the Artemis program and find that China has already beaten them to the South Lunar Pole and is then telling them to keep out, NASA administrator Bill Nelson said on Tuesday.

"I don't want China to get to the South Pole of the Moon first and say, 'This is ours: Stay out,'" Nelson said during a press conference. "You see what they've already done to the Spratly Islands [in the South China Sea]. ... You see the actions of the Chinese government on earth. I don't want China to get to the South Pole first and say, 'This is ours, stay out.'"

Nelson acknowledged that the Lunar South Pole was a major strategic prize because its abundance of deep craters, dark shadows and often poor light and heat conditions meant that significant reserves of water might be discovered there for use in long-term human settlement.

"The South Pole of the Moon is pock marked with deep craters. If we find water there in abundance we want to make sure it is available to all. We are in a space race with China," he said.

NASA was still on schedule to land a new team of US astronauts, including the first woman astronaut and the first US astronaut of color, on the lunar service in December 2025 with the Artemis III mission, Nelson added.

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Trump Says Will Impose Border Tariff on All Foreign Goods Once Re-Elected

WASHINGTON, August 8 (Sputnik) - Former US President and 2024 presidential hopeful Donald Trump said on Tuesday that he will impose a border tariff on all goods coming into the United States once he is back in the White House.

"I will impose a border tariff on all foreign-made goods coming into this country," Trump said during a rally in the US state of New Hampshire.

Trump also promised to quickly pass the Trump Reciprocal Trade Act, which includes trade relations with China, India, France and Germany.

The former president said it is not fair that Washington does not charge other countries tariffs when they do charge the United States.

In addition, Trump pledged to replace "the Biden economic bust" with "the historic Trump economic boom" and to immediately terminate every open border policy of the current administration.

Trump leads the pack of Republican presidential hopefuls, holding an average of 53.3% support as of August 3, according to the FiveThirtyEight primary poll tracker. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis is in second place with 14.3% support.

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US House China Panel Chiefs Request Info From FCC on Threat to Internet Devices - Letter

WASHINGTON, August 8 (Sputnik) - The leaders of the US House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party sent a letter to Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel to request the commission provide lawmakers with information on the potential threat posed by China to so-called Internet of Things (IoT) devices.

"We write to request information about the security risks posed by cellular connectivity modules provided by companies subject to the jurisdiction, direction, or control of the People's Republic of China or the Chinese Communist Party," the letter, dated Monday, said.

Connectivity modules are used by IoT devices to connect to the internet and are typically controlled remotely, the letter said. Such modules are used in a variety of products in the United States, including 'smart devices,' electric cars, and telecom networks, the letter said.

Chinese companies Quectel and Fibocom control 45% of the world's IoT module market, the committee said in a fact sheet. The Chinese modules could be used to collect intelligence and shut down devices in the US, the panel said.

Restricting Quectel and Fibocom's access to the US market would not undermine US telecommunications networks due to the presence of US and allied firms, the letter said.

The letter urged the FCC to address concerns regarding Chinese IoT modules in consultation with US national security agencies. The lawmakers request the FCC provide information on its assessment of possible security concerns related to Chinese IoT modules, the extent to which the modules are present in the US, and whether it intends to impose further statutory authorities to combat the threat.

The letter, signed by panel Chairman Mike Gallagher and Ranking Member Raja Krishnamoorthi, requests the FCC provide the information by August 21.

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Washington Councilmember Calls for Declaring Emergency in DC Due to Crime, Violence

WASHINGTON, August 8 (Sputnik) - The authorities of Washington, DC, must declare a state of emergency and should consider calling the National Guard to the nation's capital due to growing crime and violence, Councilmember Trayon White said on Tuesday.

"We must declare emergency regarding the crime and violence in our neighborhoods and act urgently," White said in a statement. "It may be time to call on the National Guard to protect the children and innocent people that are losing their lives to this senselessness."

White said the violence is out of control and getting worse by the day. The Capital area, according to the statement, has seen a "record number" of deadly shootings in the last several days.

White also pointed out that the authorities cannot solve the problem without the residents. In that regard, he urged the community to support efforts to respond to shootings.

Local media reported at least three deadly shootings in Washington in the last several days. At least six people were killed and seven wounded in these incidents, the reports said.

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Trump Lawyers Request Next US Court Hearing on January 6 Indictment for Next Week - Filing

WASHINGTON, August 8 (Sputnik) - Attorneys representing former US President Donald Trump filed a notice with the US District Court for the District of Columbia on Tuesday, requesting a hearing on Trump's January 6-related indictment next week.

The court directed Trump's lawyers and prosecutors to provide potential dates for a hearing before August 11. However, Trump's team is requesting a hearing on August 14 or 15 in order to facilitate the presence of both his lawyers, according to the filing.

"President Trump will not appear. However, he would like to have both his counsel John Lauro and Todd Blanche at the hearing... we would respectfully request a setting on Monday (after 12:00 pm) or Tuesday (all day) to allow for both Mr. Blanche and Mr. Lauro to be present," the filing said.

The government indicated that they are available any time on August 9, 10 or 11, the filing said. The hearing relates to Trump's indictment on four criminal charges, including conspiracy to defraud the United States and conspiracy against rights, tied to Special Counsel Jack Smith's probe of the January 6 US Capitol riots and related efforts to change the results of the 2020 US presidential election.

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Pentagon Says US Confident in Current Security Aid to Ukraine, When Asked About ATACMS

WASHINGTON, August 8 (Sputnik) - The United States is confident in the military capabilities it has already provided Ukraine forces, Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said on Tuesday, when asked where the Biden administration stands on the potential delivery of Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS).

"We're providing artillery, we're providing air defense, we continue to train Ukrainians at US bases and with our partners and allies around the world. So, I think we feel very confident in the equipment, the systems, the capabilities that we've been able to provide Ukraine," Singh said during a press briefing, when asked about the potential provision of ATACMS for Ukraine.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba urged US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to facilitate the delivery of ATACMS during a phone call on Monday. ATACMS are a long-range missile system capable of striking deep into Russian territory, prompting concerns about potential escalation upon their delivery.

Last week, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby told Sputnik that there have been no updates within the Biden administration on the potential provision of ATACMS.

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US Considers Niger Rebels Rejecting Nuland's Diplomatic Path 'Unfortunate' – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 8 (Sputnik) – The United States finds it “unfortunate” that Nigerien rebels have rejected a diplomatic path proposed by acting Deputy Secretary of State Victoria Nuland during her recent visit to the country, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.

“I think it's very unfortunate, and it is in keeping with the message that we heard from them [the rebels] yesterday when acting Deputy Secretary Nuland presented options for a diplomatic path forward and a negotiated process going forward, and they were not willing to take that path at this time,” Miller said during a press briefing.

The United States will continue to work to persuade the rebels to agree to a diplomatic solution to the situation in the country after a military coup, Miller added.

The acting Deputy Secretary of State became the first US official to visit the country since the military coup on July 26. Nuland specified on Monday that she met the rebels' leader, Moussa Salaou Barmou, and three of his colonels in Niger's capital, Niamey. She described the talks with them as “frank and difficult.”

On July 26, Niger's presidential guard ousted and detained Niger's president Mohamed

Bazoum. General Abdourahamane Tiani proclaimed himself the president of the caretaker Nigerien National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland-led government.

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Pentagon Says Biden Gave 'Green Light' to Training Ukrainian Pilots on F-16s

WASHINGTON, August 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden approved a joint effort with European allies to train Ukrainian pilots on F-16 fighter jets, Pentagon Deputy Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said on Tuesday.

"We have, and the president has, given the green light to allow and support the training to move forward, but I just don't have any further update at this time when it comes to specific pilots being trained," Singh said during a press briefing, when asked about the status of the training.

Last week, US media reported that the United States and Ukraine identified a total of 32 pilots to possibly participate in F-16 training, although fluency in English remains a barrier to starting.

A group of NATO countries led by Denmark and the Netherlands are set to begin training Ukrainians on F-16s as soon as a final training plan is developed and approved.

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Pentagon Will Not Comment on Supplemental Aid Request for Ukraine But Still Has Funding

WASHINGTON, August 8 (Sputnik) - Defense Department deputy spokesperson Sabrina Singh on Tuesday declined to comment on reports that the Biden administration is expected to request from Congress additional supplemental funding for Ukraine next year.

"In terms of any request for a supplemental, I'm just not gonna get ahead of any conversations that we're having right now," Singh said during a press briefing.

Earlier on Tuesday, US media reported that the White House is expected to ask Congress as soon as this week for up to \$10 billion in supplemental funding to continue providing assistance to Ukraine in 2024.

Singh pointed out that the United States has not yet run out of funding for Ukraine under the presidential drawdown authority.

The State Department confirmed during a press briefing earlier on Tuesday that a new aid package for Ukraine is expected to be announced later this week.

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US Supreme Court Rules to Allow Biden 'Ghost Gun' Regulations - Order

WASHINGTON, August 8 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court in a 5-4 ruling decided to allow the Biden administration to carry out new regulations that crack down on so-called ghost gun kits, a court order revealed on Tuesday.

Ghost guns are firearm kits that people can order online and assemble at home.

"The application for stay presented to Justice Alito and by him referred to the Court is granted," the order stated. "The June 30, 2023 order and July 5, 2023 judgment of the United States District Court for the Northern District of Texas, case No. 4:22-cv-691, insofar as they vacate the final rule of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, 87 Fed. Reg. 24652 (April 26, 2022), are stayed pending the disposition of the appeal in the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit and disposition of a petition for a writ of certiorari if such a writ is timely sought."

US Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Amy Coney Barret were the conservatives who sided with the three liberal justice in the majority vote ruling in favor of the restrictions.

The Biden administration issued the new rule on ghost guns last year that categorizes them as firearms under federal law, which authorizes the US government to regulate them the same way as other firearms.

The regulations require manufacturers and sellers of ghost gun kits to obtain licenses, label the kits with serial numbers, conduct background checks and maintain records.

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US, Ukraine in Middle of Talks on Security Guarantees - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 8 (Sputnik) - The United States is currently in the middle of talks with Ukraine about security guarantees and long-term support, with no date set yet for follow-up negotiations, State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.

"We are in the middle of those conversations, but there will be follow-up talks between Ukraine and the United States," Miller told a briefing, when asked about any existing security guarantees framework for Ukraine as it tries to move forward with NATO accession.

The bilateral conversations between the US and Ukraine are just one part of this process, he noted.

The other is bilateral conversations that other G7 members have with Kiev on how they can assure Ukraine's long term security, Miller added.

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Canadian Media Ask Competition Bureau to Probe Meta's Move to Block News

WASHINGTON, August 8 (Sputnik) - The Canadian Association of Broadcasters, News Media Canada and CBC/Radio-Canada on Tuesday asked the Competition Bureau of Canada to investigate Meta (banned in Russia as an extremist organization) over its decision to end access to news for users in the country.

On August 1, Meta announced an end to news availability on Canadian Facebook and Instagram in response to the country's new law that requires tech companies to compensate news outlets for using their content.

"News Media Canada, the Canadian Association of Broadcasters and CBC/Radio-Canada (the applicants) have applied to Canada's Competition Bureau to investigate Meta's abuse of its dominant position, as evidenced by its decision to block news content from its digital platforms in Canada," the joint statement said.

The applicants ask the competition watchdog to use its investigative and prosecutorial tools to protect competition and prohibit Meta from continuing to block Canadians' access to news content.

They accused Meta of seeking to "discipline" Canadian news companies, prevent them from participating in and accessing the advertising market, and reduce their visibility to Canadians on social media media.

Meta's decision, they said, is "anticompetitive" and will further strengthen the company's dominant position in advertising and social media distribution.

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US Lawmakers Urge Officials to Raise Concerns About Finland Targeting Christians - Letter

WASHINGTON, August 8 (Sputnik) - A group of US House lawmakers sent a letter on Tuesday to the Biden administration, urging diplomatic officials to raise concerns about Finland's persecution of Christians for their religious views based on so-called hate speech laws.

The letter comes following the prosecution of two members of the Finnish Parliament for religious activity that allegedly qualified as hate speech. The two lawmakers were acquitted of the charges, but prosecutors appealed the decision, with the retrial set to begin on August 22.

"Finnish Christians once again stand trial for simply being Christians," the letter said. "This prosecutor is dead set on weaponizing the power of Finland's legal system to silence not just a member of parliament and Lutheran bishop but millions of Finnish Christians who dare to exercise their natural rights to freedom of expression and freedom of religion in the public square."

The US lawmakers addressed the letter to US Ambassador at Large to the Office of International Religious Freedom Rashad Hussain and US Ambassador to Finland Douglas Hickey.

The letter urged Hussain and Hickey to raise concerns about the "legal harassment" of the Finnish members of parliament and publicly speak out on their behalf. The letter also expressed the members' own support for the two Finnish lawmakers.

The court case will have “worldwide ramifications,” the letter said. The case is an example of a “hostile takeover” of the West by secularists who are openly hostile to Christianity, according to the letter.

The letter was signed by members of Congress including Chip Roy, Michael Cloud and Anna Paulina Luna.

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Biden Says His Administration Invested ‘Historic Funding’ to Address Causes of Wildfires

WASHINGTON, August 8 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that the US government has invested a "historic" amount of funds to come to grips with the causes of wildfires.

"As wildfires have intensified in recent years, more and more firefighters have put themselves in harm's way to defend our families and communities from out-of-control fires. That's why my administration has invested historic funding to address the underlying causes of wildfires - like record droughts caused by climate change," Biden said in a statement.

Biden expressed condolences to the families of three California firefighters who died in a two-helicopter collision while extinguishing fires on Sunday.

"Every day, firefighters run toward danger, while everyone else runs the other way, because being a firefighter is not what they do - it's who they are," Biden said.

The US president vowed to do everything in his power to prevent wildfires in the future.

In July, the Biden administration announced a \$185 million investment to support wild-land fire management nationwide and assist land managers in planning wildfire management activities in fiscal year 2024.

CalFire Southern Region chief David Fulcher said earlier that three firefighters were killed after two helicopters collided while extinguishing a fire in California on Sunday. Fulcher identified the killed firemen as a division chief, air captain and contract pilot.

The incident occurred about 90 miles east of Los Angeles. Local media reported that the helicopters were one of six firefighting crews responding to the fire.

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US to Announce Additional Military Assistance for Ukraine This Week - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 8 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is planning to announce another package of military aid for Ukraine later this week, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.

"We continue to supply Ukraine with artillery, with a whole host of weapons. We have other announcements coming later this week about additional systems that we plan to provide

Ukraine [with]," Miller said during a press briefing.

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Nuland at Meetings in Niger Heard Support for Return to Constitutional Order - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 8 (Sputnik) - Acting Deputy Secretary of State Victoria Nuland during her meetings with the military leadership in Niger identified support for a return to constitutional order that the United States will continue to press for, State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.

"[Nuland] heard in [her] meetings that there is support in civil society for return to constitutional order so we will continue to press for that," Miller said during a press conference.

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Tech Industry Groups Back TikTok's Challenge to US State of Montana's Ban on App - Filing

WASHINGTON, August 8 (Sputnik) - Two tech industry groups filed an amicus brief with the US District Court for the District of Montana, supporting social media company TikTok's challenge to a Montana state law set to ban the application starting next year.

The brief, filed Monday, was written by NetChoice and the Chamber of Progress – groups that represent the tech industry and online businesses. Members of the groups include US tech companies Google, Amazon and Meta (banned in Russia). TikTok is affiliated with NetChoice but not the Chamber of Progress.

"By banning TikTok, Montana seeks to build a virtual wall that will prevent the flow of information both to and from internet users within the State. The harm of this type of platform-specific ban cannot be overstated," the filing said. "If Montana's TikTok ban is allowed to stand, it could also set a worrisome precedent. Other states seeking to control disfavored online fora may be emboldened to follow suit in the name of national security."

The filing calls for the court to enjoin the statewide TikTok ban from taking effect.

Earlier this year, Montana Governor Greg Gianforte signed a bill passed by the state legislature to ban companies from allowing TikTok to be downloaded off their application stores in Montana. The ban is set to take effect in January 2024.

The measure comes amid a number of other federal and state-level efforts to address privacy concerns related to TikTok and its China-based parent company.

Allowing the ban to proceed would foster a "patchwork" of state-level internet regulations, violate core principles of federalism, harm local businesses, chill innovation and disconnect

Montanans from the global community, the filing said.

"Montana's statewide ban on TikTok tramples on multiple constitutional rights infringes on the federal government's exclusive authority to administer foreign affairs, and hurts Montanans," the filing said.

NetChoice is backing TikTok's challenge to the ban as part of broader efforts to oppose government-imposed restrictions on online speech and commerce, the filing said. Chamber of Progress is backing the lawsuit due to its implications for partner companies, the filing said.

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UN Welcomes Syria's Decision to Allow Aid Operations Until November 13 - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, August 8 (Sputnik) - The United Nations welcomes the Syrian government's decision to permit the world body to continue its humanitarian aid operations via the Bab al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings until November 13, UN spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Tuesday.

"We greatly welcome the extension of permission by the government of Syria through a letter we received to the Emergency Relief Coordinator on the sixth of August, which will allow us to utilize the Bab al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings until the 13th of November," Haq said during a press briefing.

Syria has also responded to the United Nations letter regarding the Ban al-Hawa and the world body stands ready to resume its humanitarian aid operations through that border crossing as well, Haq added.

Earlier on Tuesday, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) praised Syria's decision to allow the use of the two border crossings for the purpose of humanitarian aid deliveries until November 13.

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US Credit Card Balance Above \$1 Trillion First Time Ever - Federal Reserve

NEW YORK, August 8 (Sputnik) - US credit card balances exceeded \$1 trillion for the first time as consumers in the United States spend the most since the end of the pandemic, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York said in a blog post on Tuesday.

"Credit card balances saw the largest increase of all debt types - \$45 billion - and now stand at \$1.03 trillion, surpassing \$1 trillion in nominal terms for the first time in the series history," the blog said.

The blog post was written by staff writers Andrew Haughwout, Donghoon Lee, Daniel Mangrum, Joelle Scally and Wilbert van der Klaauw.

After a sharp contraction in the first year of the coronavirus pandemic, credit card balances

have seen seven quarters of year-over-year growth, the blog said.

The second quarter of this year saw a brisk 16.2% increase from the previous year, continuing the trend, the blog said.

"Credit cards are the most prevalent form of household debt and continue to become even more widespread," the blog said, noting that there are now 70 million more credit card accounts open than there were before the pandemic in 2019. "While lending did take a dip during the first year of the pandemic, credit card issuances have been at somewhat elevated levels since."

The staff writers said some 69% of Americans had a credit card account in the second quarter of this year, up from 65% in December of 2019 and 59% in December 2013.

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US State of Massachusetts Declares Emergency Over Influx of Migrants – Governor

WASHINGTON, August 8 (Sputnik) – The US state of Massachusetts declared an emergency over a record number of migrants arrivals into the state and asked the federal government to expedite the resolution of related bureaucratic issues, Governor Maura Healey said on Tuesday. "I, Maura T. Healey, Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, do hereby proclaim that there now exists in the Commonwealth a state of emergency due to rapid and unabating increases in the number of families with children and pregnant people — many of them newly arriving migrants and refugees — living within the state but without the means to secure safe shelter in our communities," Healey said in a letter to US Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas.

At the moment, there are more than 5,500 families living in shelters, many of whom are migrants to Massachusetts, according to the letter.

According to Healey, the situation with the number of migrants has deteriorated sharply over the past six months. While the state received about 68 families a day in March, that figure skyrocketed to more than 100 families a day in July, more than four times its March 2022 figure.

At the same time, the cost of maintaining such shelters has grown to \$45 million per month, the governor added.

"We need federal partnership, federal funding, and urgent federal action to meet this moment and to continue to serve some of our most vulnerable families," the letter said. "I urge you to continue pressing Congress to take meaningful legislative action and ... use all available executive power to remove the burdensome barriers keeping people from getting work authorizations, address our outdated and punitive immigration laws..."

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Slim Majority of Likely US Voters Support Trump Indictment in January 6 Probe - Poll

WASHINGTON, August 8 (Sputnik) - A slim majority of likely voters in the United States support the indictment of former President Donald Trump on criminal charges linked to his alleged involvement in efforts to overthrow the 2020 US presidential election, a new Rasmussen Reports poll revealed on Tuesday.

Fifty-one percent of respondents said they approve of the indictment, including 39% who strongly approve, the poll said. Voters aligned with the Democratic Party overwhelmingly approved of the indictment.

Forty-six percent of respondents said they disapprove of the charges, including 38% expressing strong disapproval, the poll said.

The poll surveyed 1,164 likely US voters on August 3, 6 and 7 and maintains a margin of error of plus-or-minus three percentage points with a 95% confidence level.

Earlier this month, a grand jury indicted Trump on four criminal charges linked to Special Counsel Jack Smith's probe of the events at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, and related efforts to change the results of the 2020 US presidential election.

Trump faces charges, including conspiracy to defraud the United States and conspiracy against rights for his alleged role in the matter.

The indictment comes ahead of the 2024 US presidential election, in which Trump is making a bid for the Republican nomination. Trump has said he is innocent of all charges and has characterized the indictments as a continuation of the political witch hunt against him to prevent him from participating in the election.

Trump continues to lead in Republican primary polling despite the legal processes against him.

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White House May Request Over \$10Bln in Extra Ukraine Funding, US Disaster Relief - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 8 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration may ask Congress for more than \$10 billion in supplemental funding for Ukraine and domestic disaster relief as early as this week, Punchbowl News reported on Tuesday, citing five unnamed sources.

The amount and the date when the request will be submitted to Congress are still under debate, the report said.

The request will be a litmus test for US support for Ukraine, as Republicans increasingly express hostility toward additional funding.

Overall, Congress has authorized more than \$110 billion so far in spending for Ukraine, including direct military aid, economic and humanitarian support, and support for NATO allies.

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US Extends Sanctions Waiver to Allow Humanitarian Aid for Syria - Treasury

WASHINGTON, August 8 (Sputnik) - The United States is extending its sanctions wavier to ensure humanitarian assistance can flow into Syria, the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control said on Tuesday.

"The US Department of the Treasury remains committed to ensuring that humanitarian assistance flows to the Syrian people," the OFAC said in a press release. "To that end, the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) continues to authorize humanitarian support to the Syrian people by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the United Nations (UN), and the U.S. government, including the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)."

The sanctions waiver authorizing humanitarian relief to Syria was set to expire on Tuesday, but the release did not detail if a new deadline was placed on the renewed sanctions waiver.

Earlier in the day, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) praised Syria's decision to allow the use of two border crossings for the purpose of humanitarian aid deliveries until November 13.

The armed conflict in Syria has been ongoing since 2011, with various insurgent groups, including terrorist organizations, fighting the Syrian armed forces to oust the government of President Bashar Assad. Over 12 years, the Syrian crisis has placed an estimated 15.3 million people in dire need of humanitarian assistance, including 5.5 million refugees forced to flee Syria to neighboring states and 6.8 million internally displaced people, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

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Homicides in US Capital Up 28% Since Last Year, Robberies Up 60% - Police

WASHINGTON, August 8 (Sputnik) - Crime in US capital has risen compared to last year, with homicides and robberies particularly on the rise, the Washington Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) said on Tuesday.

Homicides are up by 28% year-to-date, from 126 in 2022 to 161 in 2023, according to statistics released by the department. Robberies rose by 60%, from 1,296 to 2,077, MPD said.

Moreover, cases of sexual abuse have risen by 19% and assaults with a dangerous weapon by 4%, MPD said.

Overall, violent crime in Washington has risen by 37% year-to-date, from 2,350 cases in 2022 to 3,216 so far this year, MPD said.

Property crimes in the nation's capital have also risen by 29% since this time last year, from 13,443 cases to 17,331, MPD said.

Cases of motor vehicle theft have more than doubled and arson is up by 300%, from two incidents to eight, MPD also said.

Combined crime in Washington is up 30%, from 15,793 cases to 20,547, MPD added.

The statistics are based on Washington's Code Offense definitions and are considered preliminary in nature, according to the MPD.

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Wall Street Firms to Pay \$289Mln in Fines Over Record-Keeping Failures - SEC

WASHINGTON, August 8 (Sputnik) – US regulators have hit 11 Wall Street companies with \$289 million in fines for widespread record-keeping failures stemming from their use of private messaging apps such as WhatsApp, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) said on Tuesday.

“The Securities and Exchange Commission today announced charges against 10 firms in their capacity as broker-dealers and one dually registered broker-dealer and investment adviser for widespread and longstanding failures by the firms and their employees to maintain and preserve electronic communications,” the SEC said in a statement.

The list of charged companies included Wells Fargo Securities, BNP Paribas Securities Corp., BMO Capital Markets Corp., and others, it added.

In total, all 11 firms agreed to pay penalties of \$289 million. They also have begun implementing improvements to their compliance policies and procedures to address violations. In particular, three firms linked to Wells Fargo agreed with a penalty of \$125 million, the SEC noted.

The SEC found that personnel from all 11 firms used “off-channel” communications for a long time. “The firms admitted that from at least 2019, their employees often communicated through various messaging platforms on their personal devices, including iMessage, WhatsApp, and Signal, about the business of their employers,” the statement said

All the companies failed to maintain or preserve the substantial majority of these off-channel communications, in violation of the federal securities laws, it added.

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UN Welcomes Syria's Decision to Extend Border Crossings Use Until November 13-
Spokeswoman

UNITED NATIONS, Aug 8 (Sputnik) - The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) welcomes Syria’s decision to allow the use of the two border crossings for the purpose of humanitarian aid deliveries until November 13, OCHA spokesperson Eri Kaneko told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"We greatly welcome the extension of permission by the government of Syria to utilize the Bab al-Salam and Al Ra'ee border crossings until November 13th," Kaneko said.

In July, the Syrian mission to the United Nations sent a letter to the UN Security Council members informing them that the government granted the world body permission to use the Bab al-Hawa border crossing for an additional six months.

Also in July, the UN Security Council members did not agree on extending the use of the Bab

al-Hawa border crossing for aid deliveries to Syria. Russia had proposed extending the use of this border crossing for six months, but it did not garner enough votes for the proposal to pass. Western countries have said they seek an extension of nine months.

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UNITED NATIONS, Aug 8 (Sputnik) - The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) welcomes Syria's decision to allow the use of the two border crossings for the purpose of humanitarian aid deliveries until November 13, OCHA spokesperson Eri Kaneko told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"We greatly welcome the extension of permission by the government of Syria to utilize the Bab al-Salam and Al Ra'ee border crossings until November 13th," Kaneko said.

In July, the Syrian mission to the United Nations sent a letter to the UN Security Council members informing them that the government granted the world body permission to use the Bab al-Hawa border crossing for an additional six months.

Also in July, the UN Security Council members did not agree on extending the use of the Bab al-Hawa border crossing for aid deliveries to Syria. Russia had proposed extending the use of this border crossing for six months, but it did not garner enough votes for the proposal to pass. Western countries have said they seek an extension of nine months.

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West Increasingly 'Sober' About Ukraine's Ability to Retake Territory - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 8 (Sputnik) - Ukraine's Western allies are increasingly "sober" about Kiev's ability to retake significant territory from Russia as the counteroffensive is going slower than expected, CNN reported on Tuesday citing senior US and Western officials.

According to a senior Western diplomat, it is "extremely, highly unlikely" that Ukraine will be able to change the balance of the conflict and make some progress.

"Our briefings are sobering. We're reminded of the challenges they face," Rep. Mike Quigley, an Illinois Democrat who recently returned from meetings in Europe with US commanders training the Ukrainian armed forces was quoted as saying. "This is the most difficult time of the war."

Another senior Western diplomat is skeptical that Ukrainian forces would break through Russian defense lines as they have not been able to do so over the past eight weeks since the beginning of the counteroffensive, the report said.

A senior US military official notably said that the failures of Ukrainian forces on the ground are

the main reason for the increased frequency of strikes inside Russia, which are meant to shift the focus and expose the alleged vulnerability of Russia.

Ukraine launched its much-touted counteroffensive in early June after multiple postponements. The Russian Defense Ministry has repeatedly said that Ukrainian troops are trying to advance in the South Donetsk, Bakhmut, and Zaporizhzhia directions, but without success. Western media also noted the weak results of Kiev's counteroffensive, with Volodymyr Zelenskyy admitting that the progress is "slower than desired."

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US House Republicans Back Lawsuit Against White House's Social Media 'Censorship' - Jordan

WASHINGTON, August 8 (Sputnik) – House Republicans have backed a lawsuit against the Biden administration for allegedly colluding with social media companies to censor free speech, Judiciary Committee Chairman Jim Jordan told Fox News on Tuesday.

“The extensive investigation of the House Judiciary Committee and the Select Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government has uncovered smoking gun documents showing how Big Tech and Big Government worked together to stifle free speech online,” Jordan said.

Republicans on the House Judiciary's Subcommittee on Government Weaponization, which Jordan also chairs, filed an amicus brief on Monday in the Missouri vs. Biden case, along with the “smoking gun documents” that allegedly show the Biden administration coercing Facebook into censoring information related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The states of Missouri and Louisiana are suing the Biden administration for allegedly violating free speech by requesting social media companies remove misinformation.