

8/23/23 Wednesday

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Iran's New Mohajer-10 Drone Shows It's 'Achieved Deterrence Without Nuclear Weapons' - Expert

Long accused by the US and Israel of secretly seeking to build nuclear weapons, Iran has instead pioneered a host of new conventional weaponry, from hypersonic missiles to combat drones and air defense systems. But that closing of the technological gap between East and West is exactly what the West fears, an expert said.

Iran has unveiled a new long-range medium-altitude long-endurance (MALE) combat drone, [the Mohajer-10](#), which has the capability of flying as far away as Israel. It can carry both reconnaissance and ground strike payloads as well as radar-jamming devices.

The long range was made explicit by a poster released by the Iranian government depicting the Mohajer-10 soaring over Israel's Dimona nuclear facility with the words "Be ready to travel to the Stone Age" in Farsi and Hebrew.

Israel has long claimed Iran has a secret nuclear weapons program with which it intends to threaten Israel, and the Israeli government has threatened to launch a pre-emptive strike against Iran's nuclear facilities. Tehran says its nuclear program is for electrical generation and medical research, not offensive weapons, which Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has declared to be against the values of Islam.

Laith Marouf, an award winning broadcaster and journalist based in Beirut, Lebanon, [told Radio Sputnik](#) on Wednesday that despite Israel's claims, it's been in the field of conventional weapons that Iran has made its biggest technological advancements in recent years, Marouf pointed out that nuclear weapons have little practical value since "they are nothing but deterrence."

"Since the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, nobody has used nuclear weapons. They've just been that deterrence. And Iran, the Ayatollah, the head of the highest religious authority, has made a fatwa, a religious decree banning the use of nuclear weapons. And here we see Iran achieving deterrence without having to resort to nuclear weapons."

He noted that for most of human history, Europeans were on-par with other peoples of the world in terms of technology, which prevented them from conquering much of the world as they did once they achieved superior technology in the 15th century CE. Much of the West's anxieties about Iran and China threatening their rule of the world, he said, was about them developing new technologies that can equal or even exceed Western tech, threatening that gap that has allowed imperialism and colonialism to thrive for 600 years.

"Clearly right now Iran is at the cutting edge of military technology on a global scale. Many European countries that are part of NATO cannot even produce such weapons - they all depend on the United States to help them provide these drones and hypersonic missiles and what-have-you," he noted.

“So Iran right now is probably one of the top five countries in the world in terms of advancements in military technologies. And that is something that Iranians as a people should be proud of...”

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Tropical Treetops Are Getting Too Toasty for Photosynthesis, Study Says

A new study has found that an increasing number of tree leaves in Earth’s tropical regions are experiencing temperatures so high that photosynthesis, the process that turns carbon dioxide into life-giving oxygen, can no longer happen inside them.

Published on Wednesday in the journal Nature, [the study found](#) that the temperatures at the tops of rainforest canopies in several parts of the planet are getting dangerously close to the point where photosynthesis stops.

The researchers found that at the tops of rainforest trees in Brazil, Puerto Rico and Australia, 1 in every 10,000 leaves reaches 46.7 degrees Celsius, the critical temperature in question, for at least one day per year.

Moreover, the average temperature of those treetops is only about 4 degrees below the tipping point, threatening mass leaf dye-offs if global temperatures continue their rising trend.

“It’s pretty rare that these leaves will get that hot right now,” study co-author Christopher Doughty, an earth systems scientist at Northern Arizona University, told US media. “But it was actually surprising that any of them got to that point because it’s quite a bit above air temperature.”

However, researchers have noted that much is uncertain. Christopher Still, an ecologist at Oregon State University in Corvallis, told US media they may be overestimating leaf vulnerability by “assuming that when leaves hit this critical temperature, they die.” He noted it as one possibility, adding that another variable may be the length of time for which the leaf is that hot. Their research also found variances in temperature depending on the kind of weather, with wetter periods corresponding to higher temperatures and dryer periods corresponding to lower temps, with the dry-period average being as low as 34 degrees Celsius. They also found temperature gaps between the highest treetops, which are directly exposed to the sun, and the expansive understory that lay beneath, where sunlight is sparser.

The scientists arrived at their conclusions first by gathering the raw data using a mixture of sensors taped under leaves and overhead data gathered by the ECOSystem Spaceborne Thermal Radiometer Experiment on Space Station (ECOSTRESS), a sensor mounted on the International Space Station. Then, they built a computer model to project what might happen as temperatures continue to rise globally.

Climatologists have warned that due to a man-made influence on the climate caused by vast emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, [the Earth is rapidly warming](#) at a pace not seen in hundreds of thousands of years.

Estimates vary, but many predictions for the year 2100 expect the average global temperature to be at least 3 degrees Celsius higher than in 1880, when the industrial revolution was still

beginning and emissions were low; they have already warmed by about 1 degree so far. While governments around the globe have made commitments to curbing carbon emissions, even the most ambitious agreements don't aim to prevent more than a 1.5-degree temperature increase by the end of the century.

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'Erosion of Our Privacy': Giving Biometric Data to Tech Firms Can't Enhance Security

A number of incidents of technology companies getting worrisome control over the biometric data of users, such as photo IDs and even DNA, have hit US headlines in recent days. Two experts told Sputnik that while they're often sold as ways to enhance security, surrendering such data actually makes us less safe.

Police Browse Ancestry Research Database

In one US media report, it was revealed that GEDmatch, a database for a DNA-based ancestry research company, had been sharing its data with law enforcement agencies even when the users had checked a box opting out of their data being accessible by police.

Software engineer and a technology and security analyst Patricia Gorkitold Radio Sputnik on Wednesday it was a "criminal breach of privacy" and of contract for the company to do so, pointing out that even though it has led to the apprehending of criminals like the Golden State Killer, this trend represents a worrisome erosion of Americans' right to privacy under the Fourth Amendment.

"So this case of the police using the GEDmatch database is a violation of the terms of service. And this is not a civil offense or a criminal offense, it's really a breach of contract," she said.

"Which brings up these interesting questions of: here we have millions of people uploading the most sensitive data that they have possible - their own DNA - into the database of a private company who's created an entire portal and system for law enforcement and for police. And it's not just local police or state police, but also the FBI and other government agencies. And the changes that they made, the reason why they're even able to search specifically for people who've opted out - it's called a 'loophole', but in some ways, this really should be a criminal breach of privacy."

"When we upload our information into a system, we anticipate being able to use it for research, for learning more about ourselves, learning more about the world. But what this is really doing is creating a police database that cops all over the country can use to search and really violate our rights."

"We shouldn't" be celebrating the ability of law enforcement to cast such a wide net as these DNA databases allow them to, Gorki said.

"For every individual case that's highlighted as a triumph of some criminal going behind bars, what's really not being exposed is just that: the violation of [the rights of] how-many-millions of people in this country and around the world. And in a lot of ways there's a parallel here to the mass surveillance by the US government was revealed 10-or-so years ago when Snowden came out with the documents that he leaked showing how the US government spies on entire

populations, pulling up all of our email data, all of our phone call data. People know instinctively that this is wrong, but when it's under the guise of a private company, suddenly there is more of a disconnect where it's harder to see the damages. But this is a very real invasion of privacy," Gorki explained.

"It's hard to say exactly just how DNA data could be used in in these different ways, but in terms of drawing connections, finding relationships between people and families or the ultimate base of networks, and as the US government in particular, through its different efforts to build up networks of people and identify the social networks, which is something that Facebook* does quite well, then you're really able to understand who are people around, what are their characteristics, what are the families that are there. But this is really paving the way for the continued normalization of the erosion of our privacy. And especially when we think about the fact that at the moment, our phone calls can be handed over to the US government, our emails." "And not just handed over, these companies actually have built-in backdoors to the government - Facebook. Google. And we know from recent memory how one woman in Texas is being prosecuted - her and her daughter - for seeking an abortion, for the right to have to have direction over her life. And that was pulled out from her Facebook Messenger account. And so we can be sure that this DNA data to draw connections with other people will be looped in with other data as well."

When asked about the potential for new legislation or regulation to rein in the potential for abuse of users' data by private companies, Gorki pointed out that "regulation depends on the regulators."

"We know that those who are the ones who are writing the laws have passed such laws as the Patriot Act. Our entire web browsing history - that was a recent addition in 2020 - can be viewed and words subpoenaed by the US government. There are many different ways that this kind of access could be limited. In a responsible society, where we actually had a Justice Department that really worked for the people, then yes, there could be ways to make sure that every single request was monitored and reviewed and approved," she said.

"But instead, what we have is actually this carte blanche access to all of our data by the same police officers that brutalize Black people in the streets, by the same security agencies that target Muslim people."

"And so the regulations themselves, you know, - it's important to push, of course, for privacy laws, many of which are actually on the books, and those could be enforced and should be enforced. And if anything, what should happen is that people should go to jail for exposing this level of sensitive information. But that's not going to happen now, while we have the likes of anti-privacy hawks like Biden and others in the government."

Another story in the media has been revelations that X, formerly known as Twitter, reportedly plans to require some users to submit a photo ID alongside a selfie photo to have one's identity verified by an artificial intelligence program. The data will reportedly be handled by a company connected to Israel's security apparatus.

X Might Use Israeli AI to Verify Photo IDs

Technologist Chris Garaffa, who is also co-host of the Covert Action Bulletin podcast, told Radio Sputnik that in addition to handing over user data to a company connected to a notorious security agency, the Shin Bet, X's purported verification plan also contains the potential for massive identity theft by malicious actors.

"We don't know if this is going to be a feature. What we do know is that a researcher named Nima Owji found this by poking around the Twitter app," Garaffa explained. "There are a lot of researchers out there who do this: they download the app, they poke around it. You know, you're just trying to find things in the app, or they go through technical processes to find pictures, or strings of text. They're looking to find, you know, what are the cool new features coming out or what are the terrifying new ones that are being tested. And this is one of those terrifying potential new features."

"What it would mean is that if you're on Twitter or X and you want to verify your account, you may be required to post a selfie and a photo of your ID to the service. Now, it wouldn't be posted publicly on your feed of course, but instead it would actually be sent to a third party company," they said. "This company is [AU10TIX](#). I believe they're going for 'authentics' or something like that and how they are spelling their name, but they call themselves an 'identity verification company.' And we should understand who this company is: they were formerly part of a company called ICTS International. Eye Suits is a Dutch company that was founded in 1982. It was actually founded by members of Shin Bet, which is the Israeli security agency, and also security staff at El-Al Airlines - of course, El-Al being an Israeli airline. They started AU10TIX as a subsidiary, they then moved on and it's now kind of its own company, but still very closely tied, of course, to the Israeli defense industry and surveillance industry."

"So what you would have to do to verify yourself is upload a selfie along with a photo that contains your ID in it. And this company based in Israel gets that photo. They have AI technology, they call it 'cutting-edge AI and machine learning technology', and they say that they can verify your ID in four to eight seconds, but they also would have human fallbacks if needed, which of course would probably take a little bit longer. So the idea of needing to upload your ID to a private company in the US that then sends that photo of your ID to another company that's tied to the Israeli surveillance industry - which will then hold your image, by the way, for 30 days. They say that they will delete the images that they're sent after 30 days. Really should actually be very scary to anyone."

"From what we know, this would be potentially optional for Blue users, so, subscribers to Twitter. That's what a Community Note that's currently on a tweet says. But again, we've had no confirmation from Elon Musk or Linda Yaccarino, the CEO of Twitter, of what actually this is what this is about," Garaffa told Sputnik.

"There's a history, though, that we should talk about, about the idea of having social media sites force people to verify their identity. Facebook at one point played around with it, and even today, if your Facebook account gets taken over or they think you're committing suspicious activity, you may be asked to upload your ID to Facebook in order to verify and unlock your account. Unfortunately, this could be very, very dangerous for many people in particular, you know, human rights workers who rely on social media, activists, sex workers are often, you know, targets of state repression or private repression by corporations or whoever, you know, it is they're they're working to expose. And so the idea of forcing any kind of identity verification on social media sites right now like this should really be chilling for anyone who's looking at it." Garaffa noted it was also "a really huge opportunity for scammers" because of the already-well-known experience of users being locked out of their accounts by Meta*, being required to submit an ID to the company to regain access, and never hearing back.

“I mean, go on Twitter or even Instagram and just say, ‘Oh, my Facebook account got hacked,’ and you know, within minutes at the most you will have responses and direct messages saying, ‘oh, contact this person, they helped me unlock my account.’ Those are all scams. No third party, random Instagram user with 500 followers - that they probably paid for - is going to be able to unlock your Facebook account if Facebook isn't doing it for you. But, they can ask you for money, they can ask you for personal details. They can ask you for a photo of your ID. And if you believe that X or Twitter or whatever or Facebook are, you know, that this is a legitimate part of their process, then people can be tricked into believing that, yeah, I should go send this random person on Instagram with ‘Facebook Community Support’ misspelled in their username - And I've seen this happen, you know - I'll send them a photo of my ID, which then leads to identity theft. So all around [they're] really not thinking about how this is going to negatively impact people.”

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Work on Export of Russian Grain, Fertilizers Continues, Problems Still Remain – Guterres

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) – The United Nations is working to resolve the remaining issues with respect to the export of Russian grain and fertilizers to the world market to resume the Black Sea Grain deal, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Thursday.

“A lot of things were done to facilitate the exports of Russian food and fertilizers. There are still problems that were not yet solved, but a lot of things have already been done and we are working to solve the remaining ones,” Guterres said during a press conference.

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Judge Denies Mark Meadows Request to Move Georgia Case to Federal Court

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) – A federal judge denied on Wednesday the emergency motion of former Trump chief of staff Mark Meadows to move his case from Georgia's Fulton County to a federal court, according to a court filing.

The ruling stated that Meadow's request was “incompatible with the statutory requirements of removal of a criminal case. Further, the defendant has failed to demonstrate he has suffered irreparable harm warranting federal intervention in his case and has cited no authority authorizing this Court to prevent his lawful arrest.”

It also stated found that Meadow was facing “hardship that was no different than any other criminal defendant charged with a crime, including his co-defendants” and the Superior Court of Fulton County had already issued a warrant for his arrest.

Meadows is among former US President Donald Trump's 18 co-defendants indicted in the criminal case related to their efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election in Georgia. The

deadline for the defendants to surrender to the Fulton County jail is Friday.

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UN Security Council Needs to Be Reformed, Members Recognize This Problem – Guterres

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) – The United Nations Security Council needs to be reformed as it is not 1945 anymore when it was created and all its members agree with this, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Thursday.

“We have institutions created after the Second World War; the world has changed. So, the Security Council, as other institutions, reflect the world of 1945 and they need to be reformed,” Guterres said during a press conference. “The good news is that I believe that for the first time this year, I saw everybody recognizing, including the permanent five members, that this problem needs to be solved.”

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Shooting in California's Orange County Leaves Four Dead, Six Wounded– Sheriff's Department

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) – A shooting that occurred at a bar in Trabuco Canyon, California has left four fatalities including the assailant, Orange County Sheriff's Department said on Thursday.

On Wednesday evening, law enforcement answered reports of an ongoing shooting at Cook's Corner, a bar in Trabuco Canyon Orange County.

“Deputies began providing lifesaving measures to multiple victims found at the scene. Three victims were pronounced deceased. The Orange County Fire Authority responded to provide additional medical aid and transported six additional victims to local hospitals,” the sheriff's department statement reads.

The statement said that upon arriving on the scene, deputies got involved in a shooting with the suspected who was later pronounced deceased, further adding that the motive behind the incident is currently unknown.

The identity of the victims and the suspect remains undisclosed pending official identification by the Coroner Division, the statement added, noting that further details would be provided as the investigation makes progress.

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China's \$2.2 Trillion Fossil Fuels Subsidies Become Largest in 2022 – IMF

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) – China’s fossil fuels subsidies exceeded \$2.2 trillion, becoming the largest in the world in 2022, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on Thursday.

“China contributes by far the most to total subsidies (\$2.2 trillion) in 2022, followed by the United States (\$760 billion), Russia (\$420 billion), India (\$350 billion), and the European Union (\$310 billion),” the IMF said in its working paper.

The total volume of China’s subsidies amounted to 12,5% of the country’s GDP, according to the document.

China’s explicit subsidies were \$270 billion, while implicit subsidies exceeded \$1.9 trillion, the IMF added.

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Russia’s Subsidies For Fossil Fuels Reach \$421Bln in 2022 – IMF

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) – Russia’s subsidies for fossil fuels reached \$421 billion, which became the third highest amount in the world in 2022, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on Thursday.

Russia was followed by China and the US, whose subsidies exceeded \$2.2 trillion and \$757 billion, the IMF said in its working paper

The subsidies Russia made into fossil fuels amounted to 23.6 percent of GDP. That includes \$71 billion of explicit and \$351 billion of implicit subsidies, according to the document.

“Globally, total fossil fuel subsidies amounted to \$7 trillion in 2022, equivalent to nearly 7.1 percent of global GDP,” the IMF said.

The fund also noted that East Asia and the Pacific account for nearly half of the global subsidy.

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US FAA Issues Georgia Flight Restrictions Ahead of Trump’s Expected Arraignment

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) – The US Federal Aviation Administration issued flight restrictions on Thursday in Fulton County, Georgia, presumably in anticipation of Donald Trump’s expected arraignment at the county jail.

The FAA website notes “temporary flight restrictions for VIP movement” from 6:45 p.m. EDT to 9:00 p.m. EDT on August 24.

Trump has said he plans to surrender at the county jail on Thursday, ahead of the Friday noon deadline, in response to his fourth criminal indictment.

Trump and 18 co-defendants face charges related to their efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election in Georgia.

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Trump Says Jan. 6 Was a 'Very Interesting Day', US Media Did Not Report It Properly

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) – Former President Donald Trump said that January 6, 2021, when a crowd stormed the US Capitol in Washington, DC, was "a very interesting day," and that US media "did not report it properly."

"January 6 was a very interesting day because they did not report it properly. I believe it was the largest crowd that I spoke to," Trump said in an interview with Tucker Carlson.

He expressed confidence that most people there were peaceful and patriotic, and only a "very small group went down."

"People in that crowd said it was the most beautiful day they had ever experienced. There was love and unity. I have never seen such spirit and such passion, and such love, and simultaneously from the same people such hatred, and what they have done to our country," Trump added.

Trump said he does not know if an open conflict is possible in the US. "There is a level of passion that I have never seen, and there is a level of hatred that I have never seen. And that is probably a bad combination," he said.

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Most Republican Candidates at Debate Vow to Support Trump Even if He's Convicted

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - Six of eight Republican presidential candidates at the party's first 2024 election debate said they would support former President Donald Trump if the latter is convicted.

The eight candidates on the stage included Florida Governor Ron DeSantis; businessman Vivek Ramaswamy; former US Vice President Mike Pence; US Senator Tim Scott; former US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley; former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie; Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson; and North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum.

"These are politicized indictments, we have to call out the truth," Ramaswamy said. "Let's just speak the truth. Okay. President Trump, I believe was the best president of the 21st century."

All candidates appeared to raise their hand in support of Trump except for Hutchinson.

Although he originally appeared to raise his hand, Christie said he was wagging his finger and explained why he would not support Trump.

"Someone's got to stop normalizing this conduct," Christie said. "Whether or not you believe that the criminal charges are right or wrong. The conduct is beneath the office of president of the United States."

Hutchinson said Trump was "morally disqualified from being president" because of the January 6 events.

Eight Republican Party candidates took the stage on Wednesday night during the first primary debate of the 2024 US presidential election cycle. Former US President Donald Trump skipped the debate and did an interview with Tucker Carlson instead.

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Florida Governor at Debate Says Would Treat Mexican Drug Cartels like Terrorist Groups

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - Florida Governor Ron DeSantis during the first Republican primary debate said he would support using force against Mexican drug cartels and treating them as foreign terrorist organizations.

"As President, would I use force, would I treat them as foreign terrorist organizations? You're darn right I would," DeSantis said Wednesday night.

DeSantis further said the US president must use all available powers as commander-in-chief to protect the United States, and that includes using lethal force against threats coming over the US-Mexico border.

Eight Republican Party candidates took the stage on Wednesday night during the first primary debate of the 2024 US presidential election cycle, although former US President Donald Trump will not be alongside them amid his lead in the polls.

The Fox News-moderated debate is taking place in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and is set to last two hours, during which time eight presidential hopefuls will attempt to rally support for their campaigns ahead of the primary season.

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Trump Says in Interview With Tucker Carlson That Biden is a 'Manchurian Candidate'

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump said that Biden is a 'Manchurian Candidate,' and afraid to stand up to China and Russia.

"He's a Manchurian Candidate. We have a Manchurian Candidate and he's afraid to tell Russia to get out of Cuba. He's afraid to tell China to get out of Cuba," Trump told Tucker Carlson during an interview that aired at the same time as the Republican debate.

He also stressed that the US "cannot let China be in Cuba."

Trump promised to push China out if he wins the 2024 presidential election. At the same time, he mentioned he had a good relationship with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

"He respected this country, he respected me," Trump said.

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Trump Tells Tucker Carlson That If Nominated He'd Like to Run Against Biden

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump said that if he were to win the Republican nomination he'd like to run against Joe Biden.

"You know, in many ways I'd love to run against [Biden], because his record is so bad," Trump told Tucker Carlson in an interview posted on the platform X, formerly known as Twitter.

"He's the worst president in the history of our country," Trump added, noting that both the President's physical and mental conditions seemed to be waning.

Trump's interview aired at the same time as the Republican Party's first presidential debate, which was held in Wisconsin.

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US Businessman Ramaswamy Only Candidate at Debate to Say Won't Support Ukraine Funding

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - American billionaire entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy was the only candidate at the first Republican primary debate who said he would not support providing additional funding to Ukraine.

"I would not and I think that this is disastrous that we are protecting against an invasion across somebody else's border when we should use those same military resources to prevent across the invasion of our own southern border here in the United States of America," Ramaswamy said Wednesday night. "We are driving Russia further into China's hands. The Russia-China alliance is the single greatest threat we face."

Eight Republican Party candidates took the stage on Wednesday night in Milwaukee, Wisconsin for the first primary debate of the 2024 US presidential election cycle.

Former President Donald Trump, however, did not participate and instead did an interview with Tucker Carlson that was posted at the same time as the debate.

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US Left -Wing Extremists Are 'Savage Animals' - Donald Trump Tells Tucker Carlson

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - Left wing extremists in the United States are "savage animals" and "crazy," former President Donald Trump said in an interview with Tucker Carlson.

"They're savage animals: These people are crazy," Trump said in the interview, which was a podcast on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Trump differentiated most people in the Democratic Party, whom he praised from the left

extremists driving policy.

"Most people in the Democratic Party are fantastic ...[But] The left are lunatics: They play a much tougher game," Trump said.

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Trump Says He Did Not Know Everything CIA Doing in Tucker Carlson Interview

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) – Former President Donald Trump said that he did not know everything the CIA was doing when he was in the White House.

"No, I am not. It is a very interesting group of people," Trump said in an interview with Tucker Carlson when asked if he was confident that he knew everything about CIA activity.

Trump noted that the US killed many "very bad actors" using the CIA, including the Islamic State's (IS, ISIS, terrorist group banned in Russia) leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and Iranian commander Qasem Soleimani.

"It was really us that did that, and Soleimani was really us that did that, not so much CIA. But we did some really good work with the CIA," Trump said.

He also expressed confidence that al-Baghdadi was "bigger" than Osama bin Laden because "he was rebuilding ISIS."

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US Cable TV News Collapsing, Has Now Lost All National Credibility - Donald Trump

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - Cable television news is collapsing, CNN's viewer ratings are rock bottom and now Fox News is collapsing because they have all lost their credibility with the American people, former President Donald Trump said in a podcast interview with Tucker Carlson.

"I think cable (news) is down because it has lost credibility: It is corrupt news," Trump said in the interview which was podcast on X, formerly know as Twitter.

All the three main cable television news channels, CNN, MSNBC and Fox News are suffering from plummeting ratings because the American public has lost faith in their honesty, reliability and credibility, Trump insisted.

By contrast, Trump noted that his own ratings in opinion polls despite the repeated efforts now to indict him on various charges, were the highest they had ever been.

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Christie at Republican Debate Says Current US Spending Levels 'Robbing the Country'

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - Former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie said during the first Republican primary debate that the current levels of US spending is tantamount to robbing the country.

"We cannot sit by any longer and allow the kind of spending that's going on in Washington because every dollar they spend is one dollar that these people are not allowed to spend on their children and the grandchildren, it's robbing our country and it's wrong," Christie said Wednesday night.

Eight Republican Party candidates took the stage on Wednesday night for the first primary debate of the 2024 US presidential election cycle, although former US President Donald Trump is not alongside them amid his lead in the polls.

The Fox News-moderated debate is taking place in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

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Trump Says US Should Not Let China Control Panama Canal

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - The United States should not allow China to keep the Panama Canal under its control, former President Donald Trump said in an interview with Tucker Carlson.

"They [China] actually control the Panama Canal, they run it, they control it, and we should not let that happen," Trump told Carlson in an interview broadcast on Wednesday at the same time the Republicans held their national debate without the former president.

He also stressed that the US "cannot let China be in Cuba."

Trump promised to push China out if he wins the 2024 presidential election. At the same time, he mentioned he had a good relationship with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

"He respected this country, he respected me," Trump said.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry said in July that Beijing will further develop friendly relations with Panama and use the Panama Canal to encourage global trade. According to the ministry, China has already become the second-largest partner of the Panama Canal.

The Panama Canal, which was informally open to traffic in August 1914, is one of the two most strategic artificial waterways in the world, along with the Suez Canal.

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Burgum at Republican Debate Says China Buying Russian Oil at 20% Off Due to US Sanctions

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - China is benefiting from the prices on the Russian oil buying it at 20 percent off amid the US sanctions, Republican North Dakota Governor Doug

Burgum said during the first primary debate of the 2024 US presidential election cycle

"The Biden administration says, 'No, we're gonna put sanctions on Russian oil.' Well, we put sanctions on Russian oil. Well, then it's 20% off [and] who's buying it? China," Burgum said.

Eight Republican Party candidates took the stage on Wednesday night during the first primary debate of the 2024 US presidential election cycle, although former US President Donald Trump will not be alongside them amid his lead in the polls.

The Fox News-moderated debate is taking place in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and is set to last two hours, during which time eight presidential hopefuls will attempt to rally support for their campaigns ahead of the primary season.

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Trump Does Not Rule Out More Indictments Against Him, Says 'These People Are Crazy'

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump did not rule out more indictments during an interview with Tucker Carlson, when the host noted that the indictments weren't working, and that Trump's poll ratings were going up.

"Makes it look even more ridiculous," Trump said. "I mean the four indictments and maybe there will be more. These people are crazy."

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DeSantis at Debate Says US Economy Cannot Succeed When Congress Spends Trillions

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - Florida Governor Ron DeSantis said at the first Republican debate that the US economy cannot thrive when the Congress continues to approve trillions of dollars in government spending.

"We also cannot succeed when the Congress spends trillions and trillions of dollars," DeSantis said Wednesday night.

DeSantis said the United States is on a decline by choice, but it is not inevitable.

The candidate also said President Joe Biden's economic plan, often dubbed "Bidenomics," must be reversed so that middle class families have a chance to succeed again.

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UPDATE - BAE Systems Wins \$113Mln Order to Build More Bradley Vehicles For US Army - Pentagon

(Updates last para to change attribution to Russian Defense Ministry)

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - BAE Systems has won a more than \$113 million extension on its contract to manufacture more Bradley Fighting Vehicles for the US Army, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"BAE Systems Land & Armaments [at] York, Pennsylvania was awarded a \$113,072,578 modification... contract for M2A4 and M7A4 Bradley Fighting Vehicles," the release stated on Wednesday.

Work on the extended contract will be performed in York in the US state of Pennsylvania over the next 28 months with an estimated completion date of January 31, 2025, the Defense Department said.

In July, the US announced that 32 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicles were part of an \$800 million security assistance package to Ukraine.

Since the start of the military operation in Ukraine, Russian forces have destroyed over 20 American Bradley IFVs, according to the Russian Defense Ministry, along with over 15 German Leopard tanks and seven French AMX wheeled tanks, among other weapons and equipment.

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US State Dept. Says N. Korea Attempted Satellite Launch Violates UNSC Resolutions

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - North Korea's second attempted satellite launch that took place earlier in the day violates United Nations Security Council resolutions, a US State Department spokesperson said in a statement to Sputnik.

South Korean media reported on Wednesday that North Korea made a second attempt to launch a spy satellite that failed, but Pyongyang intends to make a third attempt in October.

"Space launch vehicles (SLVs) incorporate technologies that are identical to, and interchangeable with, those used in ballistic missiles, including intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs)," the spokesperson said on Wednesday. "Any DPRK [North Korea] launch that uses ballistic missile technology, which would include SLVs used to launch a satellite into space, violates multiple UN Security Council resolutions."

The United States continues to seek dialogue with Pyongyang without preconditions and urges it to engage in serious and sustained diplomacy, the spokesperson said. Meanwhile, the United States urges North Korea to refrain from further "threatening behavior," the spokesperson added.

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Lockheed Martin, Indonesia Ink Deal for 24 Black Hawk Helicopters - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - Indonesia has signed a strategic partnership to purchase up to 24 Sikorsky 5 Black Hawk helicopters, the company, a division of Lockheed Martin, announced in a press release.

"Sikorsky announced today the signing of an agreement with Indonesian aerospace firm PT Dirgantara Indonesia (PTDI) to enter into a strategic partnership to pursue a sales agreement of up to 24 Sikorsky S-70M Black Hawk helicopters for the Republic of Indonesia," the release said on Wednesday.

The agreement was finalized during Indonesian Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto's visit to the United States to meet with defense and industry officials in support of Indonesia's military modernization and interoperability efforts, the release said.

"This agreement demonstrates our mutual interest with PTDI to provide S-70M Black Hawk helicopters to serve Indonesia's security needs," Sikorsky Vice President of Global Business Development Jeff White said in the release.

The S-70M Black Hawk is built at Lockheed Martin's PZL Mielec facility in Poland and has multi-mission versatility and military-grade airworthiness capable of operating in extreme weather conditions, day or night, the release added.

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Sullivan Discussed Wagner Group Chief Prigozhin With Putin's Advisor in June - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan discussed the situation regarding the private military company Wagner Group leader Yevgeny Prigozhin with Russian presidential advisor Yuri Ushakov, the Wall Street Journal reported, citing US officials. Prigozhin was in a private airplane that crashed in Russia's Tver Region on Wednesday, the Federal Air Transport Agency Rosaviatsia said.

Earlier on Wednesday, the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations said the Embraer Legacy airplane en route from Moscow to St. Petersburg crashed in the Tver Region, killing all ten people on board.

The telephone conversation between Sullivan and Ushakov, who had served as Russian ambassador to the United States, took place right after Prigozhin's alleged mutiny attempt, the report said.

Sullivan conveyed to Ushakov that the United States played no role in the mutiny and considered the events as Russia's domestic matter, the report said.

Sullivan's goal was to distance the United States from the situation and avoid any further escalation, the report added.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) –

BRICS SUMMIT

* BRICS countries should increase the settlements in national currencies, as well as the cooperation between banks, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Wednesday.

* India fully supports the idea of the BRICS expansion, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said.

* Russia is ready to work together with the BRICS countries at key international platforms, including the UN, Putin said.

* Russia will chair BRICS next year and will host the summit of the leaders in the city of Kazan in October, Putin said.

AIRPLANE CRASH IN RUSSIA

* A private plane en route from Moscow to St. Petersburg crashed in the Tver Region on Wednesday in which all ten people onboard the aircraft died, Russia's Ministry of Emergency Situations said.

* The Russian Federal Air Transport Agency, Rosaviatsia, said that an investigation has been launched on the private plane crash in the Tver Region.

* Private military company Wagner Group head Yevgeny Prigozhin was listed among passengers, Rosaviatsia said.

NORTH KOREAN TEST-MISSILE LAUNCH

* The Japanese Defense Ministry said on Wednesday that North Korea test-fired presumably a ballistic missile.

* The North Korean missile flew above Japanese territory toward the Pacific Ocean, the Japanese government said.

* Japan lodged a protest to North Korea over the missile launch, Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* Russia's actions in Ukraine are meant to put an end to the war that was unleashed against civilians by Kiev and supported by the West, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Wednesday.

* Moscow will not leave unanswered Kiev's attacks on civilian objects in Russia, the Russian Foreign Ministry said, commenting on the recent drone attacks.

* Russian troops destroyed a Ukrainian radar station for detecting and tracking air targets near the city of Zaporizhzhia, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

* Brazil is ready to join the measures that will contribute to a ceasefire in Ukraine, as well as to a just and lasting peace, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said.

NEW SANCTIONS ON RUSSIA

* Canada has imposed new Russia-related sanctions on four individuals and 29 entities related to the Russian military and other key sectors, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Wednesday.

* The sanctions announced by Trudeau are targeting several Russian financial institutions including the Russian Regional Development Bank and Rosbank, Global Affairs said.

INDIA'S MOON MISSION LANDING

* India becomes the first in the world to successfully land a spacecraft - Chandrayaan-3 module with a lunar rover on board - on the South Pole of the Moon, according to the footage broadcast by the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) on Wednesday.

* Russian President Vladimir Putin has congratulated Indian President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the successful landing of the Indian lunar mission on the South Pole of the Moon, the Kremlin said.

* Russia's space agency Roscosmos congratulated India on the successful moon landing, adding that the research of its mission is important for the whole humanity.

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US in Talks With Venezuela About Providing Temporary Sanctions Relief - Source

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The United States is in talks with Venezuela about potentially providing temporary sanctions relief, a source familiar with the matter confirmed to Sputnik on Wednesday.

Earlier in the day, US media reported that the Biden administration is in talks with the government of President Nicola Maduro about potentially temporarily lifting sanctions imposed on Venezuela in exchange for Caracas holding fair elections.

According to the source, the Biden administration informed the Venezuelan opposition about its plan but they rejected the idea, claiming the Maduro government has not offered any concessions.

However, the pressure from the European Union is strong to lift the sanctions, the source said. The source estimates that the United States may follow through with its plan by January or sooner.

The United States partially lifted sanctions it imposed on Venezuela after the government released seven US citizens from prison and resumed talks with the opposition that resulted in reaching an agreement to address the humanitarian crisis in the country and to continue talks focused on holding elections in 2024.

The Biden administration has repeatedly said it would provide additional sanctions relief if Venezuela took other significant steps, such as holding free and fair elections.

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UPDATE - IMF Board Approves Reviews of Argentina Program, Paving Way for \$7.5 Billion Disbursement

(Updates with details in paras 3-5)

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – The International Monetary Fund's Executive Board has approved two reviews of its \$44 billion loan program for Argentina, paving the way for an immediate disbursement of approximately \$7.5 billion, the IMF said in a statement on Wednesday.

“The Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) completed today the fifth and six reviews of the extended arrangement under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) for Argentina. The Board’s decision enables an immediate disbursement of around US\$7.5 billion (SDR 5.5 billion), bringing total disbursements under the arrangement to about US\$36 billion,” the statement said.

The Board assessed that key program targets were missed through the end of June 2023 on account of the historic drought along with policy slippages. The situation required the approval of waivers of nonobservance, the statement added.

“In addition, the Board approved waivers of non-observance associated with the introduction of temporary measures that gave rise to introduction or intensification of exchange restrictions and multiple currency practices,” it said.

The IMF also insisted on the importance of continued strong policy implementation to safeguard stability and strengthen medium-term sustainability.

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

McCarthy on House Freedom Caucus Funding Concerns: Nobody Wants US Government Shutdown

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy said on Wednesday that nobody in Congress wants a government shutdown due to lack of funding, amid opposition to a continuing resolution by the House Freedom Caucus.

Earlier this week, the Freedom Caucus released a statement expressing opposition to a potential stopgap funding bill that fails to address government spending. The group also said they would oppose any "blank check" for Ukraine in any supplemental appropriations bill.

"I don't think anybody wants the government shutdown," McCarthy said during a press conference when asked about the Freedom Caucus' statement.

McCarthy encouraged lawmakers to continue working on appropriations bills and then hold a conference between the House of Representatives and Senate. McCarthy said he would be open to a "small extension" to allow such work to finish and avoid a government shutdown.

Earlier this month, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said that he and McCarthy agreed to work on a continuing resolution to extend government funding beyond the September 30 deadline to avoid a potential shutdown.

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Biden Says Unaware What Caused Russian Plane to Crash in Tver Region But 'Not Surprised'

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden said on Wednesday that he was not sure what exactly happened to cause an airplane likely carrying private military company Wagner Group chief Yevgeny Prigozhin to crash in Russia's Tver region, but added he is not surprised by the news.

"I don't know for a fact what happened but I'm not surprised," Biden told reporters.

The Russian Federal Air Transport Agency said it is assumed the crash has claimed Prigozhin's life.

When asked if he thought Russian President Vladimir Putin could be connected to the matter, Biden said he lacked too many facts about the incident to know the answer.

Earlier on Wednesday, the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations said the Embraer Legacy private airplane en route from Moscow to St. Petersburg crashed in the Tver Region, killing all ten people aboard. The airplane is said to have been a property of the Wagner Group.

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Trump Lawyer Giuliani Surrenders to Authorities in Georgia, Bond Set at \$150,000 - Filing

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - Former Trump attorney Rudy Giuliani surrendered to authorities in Fulton County, Georgia, over his alleged role in efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election in the state, jail records revealed on Wednesday.

Giuliani was booked into Fulton County jail earlier in the day on 13 charges related to the alleged election interference scheme, but court records show he was released on a \$150,000 bond.

Former President Donald Trump on Thursday is expected to surrender to authorities at the Fulton County jail and be released after being booked, as an Atlanta judge on Monday agreed to release him on \$200,000 bail, but restricted him from speaking with co-defendants and witnesses about the case.

A Fulton County grand jury indicted Trump on 13 felony counts related to his alleged attempts to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election.

Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis told reporters that the grand jury had issued arrest warrants for Trump and 18 co-defendants named in the indictment, and they all have until August 25 to voluntarily surrender.

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Alleged Pseudonymous Biden Email Address Hosted by Pentagon Agency - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The pseudonymous email address allegedly used by then-US Vice President Joe Biden to discuss matters related to Ukraine with his son Hunter Biden was hosted by a Pentagon information technology unit, Newsmax reported on Wednesday.

Earlier this month, the US House Oversight Committee requested information from the National Archives on an email address for Robert Peters, which is allegedly a pseudonym used by Biden. The domain for the email address was hosted by the US Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA), the report said, citing intelligence community sources.

DISA assists the US Defense Department with information technology operations to “enable lethality” across the Pentagon, according to the agency’s website.

The report and congressional request for information on the email address come as part of a probe by House lawmakers into alleged criminal activity by the Biden family, including foreign bribery and influence peddling.

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White House Says Aware of Reports About Plane Crash With Yevgeny Prigozhin Onboard

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – The White House is aware of reports about a plane crash in Russia with Wagner Group private military company (PMC) leader Yevgeny Prigozhin said to be among passengers, National Security Council Spokesperson Adrienne Watson said on Wednesday.

“We have seen the reports. If confirmed, no one should be surprised,” Watson said in a tweet commenting on a CNN report about the crash.

Earlier in the day, the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations said that the Embraer Legacy private plane en route from Moscow to St. Petersburg crashed in the Tver Region, killing all 10 people aboard. The Russian Federal Air Transport Agency, Rosaviatsia, said that Prigozhin was listed among the passengers of the crashed plane.

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Canada Imposes Russia-Related Sanctions on 4 Individuals, 29 Entities - Trudeau

(Updates with more details in paras 3-7)

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - Canada has imposed new Russia-related sanctions on four individuals and 29 entities related to the Russian military and other key sectors, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Wednesday.

“Today, Canada is announcing further sanctions on 4 individuals and 29 entities from Russia's military, industrial, financial, and nuclear sectors. These measures are designed to pressure Russia to exit all of Ukraine, including Crimea. Canada will continue to stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes,” Trudeau said at the Third Summit of the Crimea Platform.

Global Affairs Canada said in a separate statement that the sanctions are part of the so-called Special Economic Measures directed at those individuals and entities allegedly involved in Russia's special military operation in Ukraine,

Today's sanctions targeted a colonel from the Russian military who had been found guilty by the Hague's District Court of downing the Malaysia Airlines MG17 flight in July 2014, the statement said.

In addition, Canada sanctioned companies involved in the development of civilian and military products, notably in the aviation, marine and nuclear sectors. They include Promtekhlogiya LLC, which produced weapons allegedly used by the private military company Wagner Group during the special military operation, the statement said.

Canada is also sanctioning four Russian financial institutions - Bank Uralsib, Bank Zenit, Rosbank and the Russian Regional Development Bank. The banks are alleged to have direct ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin and have previously been designated by other G7 member countries, the statement added.

The sanctions on the nuclear sector on subsidiaries of ROSATOM build upon those announced in July and are in line with Canada's commitment to hold Russia accountable for its alleged disregard of international nuclear standards.

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Biden Briefed on Crash of Plane Said to Be Carrying Yevgeny Prigozhin – White House

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden has been briefed on a crash of a plane said to be carrying Wagner Group private military company (PMC) leader Yevgeny Prigozhin in Russia's Tver region, the White House said on Wednesday.

"The President has been briefed on the reported plane crash in Russia," the White House said in a press release.

Earlier in the day, the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations said that the Embraer Legacy private plane en route from Moscow to St. Petersburg crashed in the Tver Region, killing all 10 people aboard. The Russian Federal Air Transport Agency, Rosaviatsia, said that Prigozhin was listed among the passengers of the crashed plane.

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US State Dept. Says Seeking 6-Month Extension of US-China Science, Technology Agreement

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The United States is seeking to extend the US-China Science and Technology Agreement for six months as the document is set to expire on August 27, a State Department spokesperson said on Wednesday.

"The Department of State, in coordination with the interagency, is seeking a six-month extension of the US-PRC Science and Technology Agreement (STA). The agreement, originally signed in 1979, and extended most recently in 2018, is due to expire on August 27," the spokesperson said in a statement.

The short-term extension will provide the United States with time to seek authority to start negotiations to amend and strengthen the terms of the agreement while it does not commit Washington to a longer-term extension, the statement said.

However, the United States remains "clear-eyed" to the challenges posed by China's strategies on science and technology and the threat they pose to US national security, the statement added.

The news comes after in June, a group of Republican lawmakers sent a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken requesting him not to renew the agreement.

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US Looks Forward to Working With New Thai Prime Minister to Further Boost Ties - Blinken

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The United States is anticipating working with the new Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin to further strengthen bilateral relations, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement on Wednesday.

"The United States congratulates Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin on his selection as Thailand's next prime minister," Blinken said. "We look forward to working with the Prime Minister to build on last year's U.S.-Thailand Communiqué on Strategic Alliance and Partnership and to further strengthen the enduring alliance between the United States and Thailand. We will collaborate closely with the new Thai government to continue advancing our shared values and a free and open, connected, peaceful, and resilient Indo-Pacific region."

Thavisin from the Pheu Thai Party was elected as the new Prime Minister of Thailand by a joint vote of the lower and upper house of the parliament on Tuesday.

The results of the vote were announced by the vice-speaker of the Thai Parliament, Pichet

Chuamuangphan, who presided over the meeting, according to the broadcast of the Thai PBS channel.

The vote took place after a five-hour debate on the candidacy of Thavisin, who headed one of the largest real estate firms in the country before entering politics. His opponents made claims to the candidate related to his business in the past, but they failed to convince those deputies and senators who decided to support Thavisin.

As a result, Thavisin was supported by deputies of the lower house from 11 parties of the coalition created the day before, led by the Pheu Thai party, and a significant portion of the Senate.

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Biden, Costa Rica President to Take Steps to Deepen Ties At Meeting Next Week -White House

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden and Costa Rican President Rodrigo Chaves Robles will take steps aimed at strengthening bilateral ties between the two nations during their meeting next week in Washington DC, Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said in a statement on Wednesday.

"On Tuesday, August 29, President Biden will host President Rodrigo Chaves Robles of Costa Rica for a bilateral meeting at the White House," Jean-Pierre said. "During the meeting, President Biden and President Chaves will take steps to deepen and strengthen our cooperation on a range of key issues to deliver for our people."

Jean-Pierre added that Biden and Robles will also discuss how the United States and Costa Rica can build out inclusive and sustainable economies, advance democratic values in the region, and promote safe and orderly migration.

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US Oil Production Revised to 3-Year Highs for Third Week in Row

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - US oil production has been revised to three-year highs for a third week in a row, the Energy Information Administration (EIA) revealed in its Weekly Petroleum Status Report on Wednesday, due to more crude flow estimated from rigs actively drilling for oil and as exporters try to fill global demand shortages caused by Saudi-Russian output cuts.

US crude production was projected at 12.8 million barrels per day during the week to August 18, the EIA said in what is the agency's highest estimate since the record 13.1 million barrels produced daily before the coronavirus outbreak in March 2020.

Over the past three weeks, the EIA has constantly raised production estimates for US oil by 100,000 barrels each week under a new reporting method that accounts for oil potentially

flowing from oil wells other than those that are drilled and uncompleted (DUC).

“Earlier this year the EIA revised the number of drilled but uncompleted wells in the top US shale basin, adding several years’ worth of unreported DUCs,” Phil Flynn, energy analyst at Chicago brokerage group Price Futures Group, said.

Flynn said the revisions imply that drilling-rig productivity has been higher than past estimates despite the US oil rig count having fallen by more than 15% this year.

“[The EIA] believes active drilling rigs were about 10% more productive in 2021–2022 than previously estimated”, Flynn added.

The revisions to the EIA’s reports also come as global oil supply sees shifts from Saudi and Russian efforts to slash production and exports amid slower buying by top oil importer China, which is facing an economic crunch.

Higher drilling efficiency aside, US oil producers also seem to be pushing for volume now based on the sheer escalation in exports from the world’s largest producer of the commodity - ostensibly to feed demand coming from markets that could be underserved by the Saudi-Russian cuts.

The EIA report for the week ended August 18 also showed a staggering 10.544 million barrels per day of exports of both crude and fuel oils from a total crude production of 12.8 million. That means just 2.256 million barrels of crude per day were for domestic consumption, with the balance 82% going towards exports.

“It looks like US energy companies are really stepping up to the plate to ostensibly make up for some of the vacuum in oil supplies resulting from the Saudi-Russian cuts,” John Kilduff, partner at New York energy hedge fund Again Capital, said.

Saudi Arabia, which has been producing oil at well below its capacity for more than a year now, announced an additional million barrels per day reduction in July that it said will carry through to September at least. Cargo tracking data by Kpler also suggests that Russian exports may fall by as much as one million barrels per day this month as the Kremlin seeks to tighten production.

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Canada Sanctions Russian Regional Development Bank, Rosbank, Bank Uralsib – Global Affairs

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – The sanctions announced by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Wednesday are targeting several Russian financial institutions including the Russian Regional Development Bank and Rosbank, Global Affairs said.

Earlier today, while intervening at the Third Summit of the Crimea Forum, Trudeau announced that Canada would impose sanctions on four individuals and 29 entities from Russia.

Among the twenty-nine sanctioned institutions, the updated sanctions list includes four banks: Bank Uralsib, Bank Zenit, Rosbank, and the Russian Regional Development Bank.

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

US Charges Russian, American Tornado Cash Founders With Money Laundering - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – US prosecutors charge Russian national Roman Semenov and American citizen Roman Storm, the co-founders of the cryptocurrency mixer Tornado Cash, for their roles in a money laundering and sanctions evasion conspiracy involving North Korea, the Justice Department announced on Wednesday.

“[US investigators] announced today the unsealing of an Indictment charging Roman Storm and Roman Semenov with conspiracy to commit money laundering, conspiracy to commit sanctions violations, and conspiracy to operate an unlicensed money transmitting business,” the department said in a press release.

It is alleged that the defendants facilitated over \$1 billion in money laundering transactions and laundered hundreds of millions of dollars for the sanctioned Lazarus Group, a North Korean cybercrime organization, the release said.

US prosecutors believe that Storm, 34, and Semenov, 35, were two of the three founders of the Tornado Cash service who played a key role in its creation and operation, and made millions of dollars in profits on this mixer, the release said.

More importantly is that in April-May 2022, Tornado Cash was allegedly used by the Lazarus Group to launder hundreds of millions of dollars in hacking proceeds and both defendants knew that their service was violating the sanctions regime on North Korea, according to the release.

Storm is currently in US custody after being arrested earlier in the day in the state of Washington, while Semenov is at large, according to the release.

Storm and Semenov are each charged with one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering, one count of conspiracy to violate sanctions regulations, and one count of conspiracy to operate an unlicensed money-transmitting business and face a total of up to 45 years in prison each, the release added.

In parallel with the start of criminal proceedings against these two individuals, the US Department of the Treasury also announced the imposition of sanctions against Semenov on the same grounds.

In April 2022, the United States designated the Lazarus Group for its alleged link to North Korea and its role in stealing \$620 million in cryptocurrency.

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US Expands Sanctions on Myanmar, Designates Jet Fuel Sector - Treasury

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The United States is expanding sanctions on Myanmar to further crack down on the country's jet fuel sector, the US Treasury Department said on Wednesday.

The Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) is authorizing sanctions on

any foreign individual or entity that operates in Myanmar's jet fuel sector, the Treasury Department said in a statement.

"By expanding the use of our sanctions authority to target an additional sector critical to the military regime, we are able to further deprive the regime of the resources that enable it to oppress its citizens," Under Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian Nelson said in the statement.

The military of Myanmar increasingly relies on airstrikes to repress its population, the statement said. More than 3,900 civilians are estimated to have been killed by the government since the military took power, the statement said.

In addition to the OFAC determination on Myanmar's jet fuel sector, the US also sanctioned two individuals and one entity linked to the procurement and distribution of jet fuel to the military of Myanmar, as well as two entities tied to the persons, the statement said.

The US will continue to seek ways to deprive Myanmar's military of resources that enable its alleged oppression of its population, US State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a statement on the sanctions.

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Fox News Bans Hosts From Mentioning Trump-Carlson Interview Ahead of GOP Debate - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - US media network Fox News has banned its hosts from mentioning an interview between former President Donald Trump and former Fox News commentator Tucker Carlson, which is set to be presented at the same time the network hosts the Republican Party primary debate for the 2024 presidential election, The National Pulse reported on Wednesday.

Fox News anchors are "literally banned" from talking about or mentioning the interview, the report quotes a Fox News source as saying.

On Wednesday evening, Fox News will host the first primary debate of the 2024 election cycle with eight Republican presidential hopefuls, including Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and businessman Vivek Ramaswamy.

However, Trump opted not to participate in the debate, instead preparing an interview with Carlson to counterprogram the event. Trump currently leads the pack of candidates in early polling.

"President Trump has already won this evening's debate because everything is going to be about him," Trump Campaign Senior Advisor Chris LaCivita said in a statement. "In fact, we will be tallying the number of times President Trump's name is brought up, and his total 'speaking time,' even though he is not in attendance."

The event ought to be considered an "audition" to be part of a potential second Trump administration rather than a debate, the statement added.

The Republican primary debate and Trump's interview with Carlson are set to air at 9:00 p.m.

ET on Wednesday evening.

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Police Responding to Active Shooting in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania - Public Safety Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - Police are responding to an active shooting situation in the Garfield neighborhood of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the city's public safety department said on Wednesday.

"This is an extremely active situation with shots continuing to be fired. Please avoid the area at this time," Pittsburgh Public Safety said in a statement via social media.

Hundreds of rounds were potentially fired in the incident, which was sparked by police serving an eviction notice, a local CBS News affiliate reported.

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US Health Officials Say Detected New Coronavirus Variant, Assessing Severity of Cases

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said in a statement on Wednesday that it detected a new variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in the United States and in other countries and is assessing the potential severity of the cases.

"CDC has detected a new SARS-CoV-2 variant labeled BA.2.86. CDC is continually monitoring for new variants and studying their potential impact on public health," the statement said.

The variant has "notable" genetic differences from previous versions of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the statement said. However, existing tests and medications for COVID-19 appear to be effective with the variant, the statement said.

It is too soon to determine whether the variant causes more severe illness compared with previous ones, although there is currently no evidence pointing toward a higher severity of cases, the statement said.

The new variant may be more capable of causing infection in people who had COVID-19 or received COVID-19 vaccinations, the statement added.

There have been nine cases of the new variant reported globally, including three infections in Denmark, two in South Africa, two in the United States, one in the United Kingdom and one in Israel, according to the statement.

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US Sanctions On Syria Will Remain Until Minimum Progress Toward Political Solution Made-UN

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - Washington's sanctions against Damascus will remain in place until at least minimum progress is made towards reaching a political solution to the ongoing conflict in the country, US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said on Wednesday.

"US sanctions will remain in place until at minimum there is concrete measurable progress toward a political solution," Thomas-Greenfield said during a UN Security Council meeting on Syria.

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Russia Supports Holding Next Session of Syrian Constitutional Cmte. in Oman - Polyanskiy

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - Russia supports holding the next session of the Syrian Constitutional Committee in Oman, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said during a meeting of the UN Security Council on Wednesday.

"We are convinced of the need to continue the intra-Syria dialogue - the primary platform for which has been and remains the Constitutional Committee. At the same time, we continue to believe that fundamental decisions on the modalities of the further work of the Constitutional Committee and the venue for the next round of consultations should be made by the Syrians themselves without external interference," Polyanskiy said. "We support the Special Envoy's proposed option to hold such meetings in Oman."

Earlier in August, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said that the next meeting of the Syrian Constitutional Committee may take place in Oman and the Syrian government is ready to accept the sultanate's invitation.

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. In January 2018, the Russian city of Sochi hosted a congress of the Syrian National Dialogue, the first such attempt since the beginning of the conflict to bring together an inclusive pool of Syrian political forces. The main outcome of the congress was the decision to create a constitutional committee, which will operate out of Geneva and whose main task will be to prepare for constitutional reform in Syria.

In June 2022, Russia suggested that a new venue should be chosen for meetings of the Syrian Constitutional Committee, expressing concerns that Switzerland had lost its impartiality and neutral status.

In June 2023, Russia's special presidential envoy for Syria Alexander Lavrentyev said he had discussed with UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen options for holding Syrian Constitutional Committee talks in another country.

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US Approves \$500M Sale of F-16 Infrared Systems to Taiwan – DSCA

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – The US Department of State approved on Wednesday \$500 million worth of F-16 Infrared Search and Track (IRST) systems and related equipment to Taiwan's de facto embassy in the United States, according to a release from the Defence Security Cooperation Agency.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States of F-16 Infrared Search and Track (IRST) systems and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$500 million. The Defense Security Cooperation Agency delivered the required certification notifying Congress of this possible sale today," the release stated.

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Pedersen Informs UNSC He Spoke With Syrian Foreign Minister, Contacted Regional Officials

UNITED NATIONS, August 23 (Sputnik) - UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen said on Wednesday that he spoke with Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad and had contacts with senior Saudi and Turkish officials of over past several days.

"Earlier today, I spoke with the Syrian foreign minister as well as with the head of the Syrian negotiations commission, and I look forward to continue these discussions," Pedersen said during a meeting of the UN Security Council.

The special envoy emphasized that he continues to seek facilitating consensus to overcome the existing issues that have prevented the Constitutional Committee from meeting in Geneva and to assure that it resumes its work and makes credible progress.

Pedersen also said he welcomes increased regional attention on Syria, pointing out that he spoke over the past several days with the foreign ministers of Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia and had contacts with senior Turkish officials.

The special envoy added that he continues to work with the Arab, Astana and Western actors that have contributed to toward supporting the Syria-led process.

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Republican Candidate Burgum Injures Leg, May Not Stand at First Primary Debate - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - North Dakota Governor and 2024 Republican US presidential candidate Doug Burgum injured his leg ahead of the first primary debate, causing

uncertainty about whether he will be able to stand on the debate stage, Fox News reported on Wednesday.

Burgum injured his leg in a game of basketball with staff on Tuesday evening, the report said, citing his campaign. Burgum went to the hospital and was later discharged, the report added.

It is "unclear" whether Burgum will be able to stand on the debate stage Wednesday evening, the report said.

Burgum is set to be one of eight Republican presidential hopefuls on the stage at the debate, which Fox News will host at 9 p.m. ET (13:00 GMT). The North Dakota governor is polling behind other candidates on the roster, including Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and businessman Vivek Ramaswamy.

However, all candidates on the stage trail former US President Donald Trump in the polls. Trump is opting to skip the debate amid his lead, instead airing an interview with former Fox News host Tucker Carlson at 9 p.m. ET as counter-programming.

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US Emphasizes 'Yemeni-Yemeni Dialogue' to Resolve Conflict - Special Envoy

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking said on Wednesday there is a need for "Yemeni-Yemeni dialogue" and a peace process to resolve the conflict and humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

"The truce is great, but it's not enough," Lenderking said during a press briefing. "We need to see a durable ceasefire and the elements that go into supporting that, and secondly, we need to see the Yemeni-Yemeni dialogue, because it's through that dialogue, which gets Yemenis around a table together that the issues ... can be addressed."

Lenderking said progress had been made since the a truce was established in April 2022, which resulted in the discontinuation of cross-border attacks, an increase in commercial flights at Sanaa airport and a reduction of bureaucracy in moving oil and other commercial supplies into Yemen.

The special envoy credited the active United Nations-led diplomatic efforts, supported by the United States and the regional partners like Saudi Arabia and Oman, for the achieved progress. Lenderking also said the only way to "durably resolve" the crisis was through a "comprehensive Yemeni-Yemeni peace process."

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US 'Looking Very Closely' at Iran's Commitments to Saudi Arabia – Special Envoy for Yemen

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – The US is "looking very closely" at whether Iran honors its commitments to Saudi Arabia under the two countries' agreement to normalize ties, US

Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking said Wednesday.

“We welcome this agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia,” Lenderking said at a press briefing. “What we need to see is Iran follow through on the commitments that were made to Saudi Arabia – no smuggling of lethal equipment or war equipment into Yemen to the Houthis, and a commitment to support a political resolution of the conflict.”

“We’re looking very closely to see whether those commitments from the Iranians have been made,” he added.

Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed to restore ties under a Chinese-brokered agreement in March.

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Canada Imposes Russia-Related Sanctions on 4 Individuals, 29 Entities – Trudeau

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – Canada has imposed new Russia-related sanctions on four individuals and 29 entities related to the Russian military and other key sectors, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Wednesday.

“Today, Canada is announcing further sanctions on 4 individuals and 29 entities from Russia’s military, industrial, financial, and nuclear sectors. These measures are designed to pressure Russia to exit all of Ukraine, including Crimea. Canada will continue to stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes,” Trudeau said at the Third Summit of The Crimea Platform